

# Mazu Nation: Pilgrimages, Political Practice, and the Ritual Construction of National Space in Taiwan

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**Abstract:** In this article, I argue that folk ritual provides a privileged site for the creation of cultural intimacy in Taiwan, specifically during pilgrimages in honor of the folk goddess Mazu. Sharing cultural intimacy allows the participants to develop a framework of meaning with which they imagine – and put into practice – a community based on the geographical contours of the island. Following Sandria Freitag’s work on colonial India, I interpret pilgrimages as public arenas in which the participants experience a sense of their collective belonging and cooperate to sketch a vision of the national imaginary. Annual Mazu pilgrimages constitute the biggest and most popular of such spaces, which is one of the reasons for why they have become stages for political representation and contestation. After situating the Mazu pilgrimages in the trajectory of Taiwanese history, I will trace their progressive integration into political processes and community imagination on the island. Finally, I will draw theoretical conclusions regarding the production of the spatially imagined community through shared ritual experience.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, Pilgrimage, Nationalism, Cultural Intimacy, Public Space, Practice Theory.

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One pleasant afternoon, upon passing the gate leading up to one of Southern Taiwan’s major temples dedicated to the popular folk deity Mazu, Shengmumiao in Luermen close to Tainan, I caught sight of a large rock prominently placed by the temple gate. In bright red letters, this rock informed visitors that they were about to enter “Mazu’s new home” (*Mazu xin guxiang*; see photo). At the time, I innocently believed this to be a mere promotional strategy in the highly competitive field of Taiwanese popular religion, intended to attract pilgrims and donators. But the phrase also mirrors something larger, namely the Taiwanese experience itself, which for most families contains a (hi)story of making a “new home” on the island.

This paper intends to make a theoretical contribution to the literature on culture, popular religion, and politics, with particular regard to the spatial construction of a Taiwanese nation through ritual. My account synthesizes a social constructionist approach with attention to the embodiment of space in ritual.<sup>1</sup> With Benedict Anderson and Ernest

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1 Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

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Gellner,<sup>2</sup> I understand nations as socially imagined cultural projects. However, Anderson's and Gellner's theories remain vague on at least two fronts: For one, it is not entirely clear how different individuals come to develop a shared framework of national proportions. Second, the very basis of the process of imagination has been complicated by contemporary processes of migration and globalization, as well as the politics of the (post-)cold war world, which tend to de-territorialize the notion of (national) culture.<sup>3</sup> By the same token, these processes can lead to the creation of new nationalisms, as happened in the case of Taiwanese nationalism, which is largely a product of the 1970s and after. Ultimately, focus on transnational connections raised questions concerning the durability of the "territorial nation-state as a preconstituted geographical unit of analysis for social research."<sup>4</sup>

But nation-states and nationalisms new and old have withstood the relativizing presence of centrifugal and global forces, in part by relying on their citizenry to create a shared sense of "cultural intimacy" that ideally links individual experience with the state project.<sup>5</sup> In other words, contemporary states increasingly turn towards cultural sources of representation and identification, that is, to what Michael Billig has termed everyday or "banal" forms of nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Especially in East Asia, culture has – through the selective process of recognition as cultural heritage – become an important resource for state power.<sup>7</sup>



"Mazu's new home." © by the author.

The trend toward cultural governance affects Taiwan as well. Though officially a secular democracy, I argue that folk ritual provides a privileged site for the creation of cultural intimacy in Taiwan, specifically during pilgrimages in honor of the deity Mazu.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London; New York: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Updated Edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

3 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

4 Neil Brenner, "Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies," *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 40.

5 Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions*, Third Edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).

6 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

7 Tami Blumenfeld and Helaine Silverman, eds., *Cultural Heritage Politics in China* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013); Akira Matsuda and Luisa E. Mengoni, eds., *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia* (London: Ubiquity Press, 2016).

Cultural intimacy allows the participants to develop a shared framework of meaning that imagines – and puts into practice – a community based on the geographical contours of the island. Following Sandria Freitag’s work on colonial India,<sup>8</sup> I interpret pilgrimages as public arenas in which the participants experience a sense of their collective belonging and cooperate to sketch a vision of the national imaginary.<sup>9</sup> To this end, I will first situate Mazu pilgrimages in the trajectory of Taiwanese history. Then, I will look into their progressive integration into political processes and community imagination on the island.<sup>10</sup> Finally, I will draw theoretical conclusions regarding the production of the spatially imagined community in practice.

Following Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>11</sup> mass participation in the Mazu pilgrimages creates an enormous reservoir of symbolic capital, which in Taiwan’s democratic society can be tapped to generate and justify political authority. But his focus on the aspects of distinction and symbolic domination renders the integrative force of collective participation in the pilgrimage illusory or, at best, epiphenomenal. This may not be the best way to capture the socially productive power of ritual. In this paper, I follow Michael Herzfeld’s proposition that people and state create cultural intimacy even in the face of contradictory or multivocal experiences. Contradictions often concern formal aspects of ritual, but they also tie worshipers together when these worshipers recognize different experiences as a cause for external embarrassment. Participation in public ritual necessarily fosters an interpretive tension in the individual between personal experience and collective meaning. The point is, however, that the experience and its interpretation are framed in a bounded, spatial and temporal context. Said context determines the reference points for “imagining” and narrating one’s experience. Thus, the notion of cultural intimacy offers to integrate the Durkheimian notion of social reproduction with a postmodern recognition

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8 Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

9 Regarding the notion of public space, see Setha M. Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, 1st ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000); Setha M. Low and Neil Smith, eds., *The Politics of Public Space* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Anthony M. Orum and Zachary P. Neal, eds., *Common Ground? Readings and Reflections on Public Space, Metropolis and Modern Life* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

10 In their ability to transcend ethnic and religious cleavages, Mazu pilgrimages differ from the Indian processions studied by Freitag and further elaborated by Peter van der Veer, which highlight an exclusive-communitarian and confrontational mode of political interaction, cf. Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58; *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

of diversity and agonistic pluralism.

To be sure, pilgrimage ritual does not create uniform behavior or thought. In its saturated form,<sup>12</sup> ritual leaves room for a panoply of different interpretations, that is, it may serve to uphold or undermine social order.<sup>13</sup> In my case, Dajia Zhenlangong allows the political representatives of the Taiwanese state a central role in pilgrimage ritual, but it also uses the pilgrimage arena to challenge the government's policies. Notwithstanding differences of opinion, the arena nevertheless integrates both tendencies in one larger framework of meaning that validates the experiences of individual participants. Not all Taiwanese participate in the pilgrimage – even if many additional spectators can be said to participate virtually by watching it on television. But they all recognize the pilgrimage as something *specifically Taiwanese* which every Taiwanese is familiar with and, whether positively or negatively, identifies with Taiwan. In other words, this mutual recognition creates cultural intimacy.

### Taiwan – Mazu's New Home

Mazu, which literally means “maternal ancestor,” is a more colloquial term for a deity otherwise known by her official titles as *Tianhou* (Empress of Heaven) or *Tianshang shengmu* (Holy Mother up in the Heavens). According to legend, she lived during the late 10<sup>th</sup> century in Fujian on China's south-eastern coast. As a young girl, she developed mediumic abilities to detect and save people at sea. Even though she died at age 28 in a rescue attempt, she continued, now as a spirit, to help sailors in need. People started worshipping her locally, but when an official was saved from a storm by a wondrous female figure in the sky, he petitioned the imperial court to recognize the spirit, which started the procedure for adding a deity to the officially sanctioned pantheon. Subsequently, she became well-known for her extraordinary abilities, and the court bestowed ever-longer titles on her, *Tianhou* being the highest one awarded to any female (and hence non-bureaucratic) Chinese deity. In south-east China, Hong Kong, and south-east Asia, where Mazu worship is widespread, people usually know her under the more respectful official title, but in Taiwan everyone addresses her as Mazu, expressing an intimacy otherwise rivalled only by one's enatic grandmother.<sup>14</sup>

Like the Taiwanese people of Chinese descent, Mazu has a migration background. She

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12 Robert P. Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

13 David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

14 For historical introductions to Mazu, cf. Judith Magee Boltz, “In Homage to T'ien-Fei,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 1 (1986): 211–32; James L. Watson, “Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou (‘Empress of Heaven’) along the South China Coast, 960-1960,” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew James Nathan, and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1985), 292–324; Bodo Wiethoff, “Der Staatliche Ma-Tsu Kult,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 116, no. 2 (1966): 311–57.

first arrived in Taiwan with fishermen and settlers from Fujian. While the first temporary sojourners came as early as the Song or Ming dynasties, greater numbers started to immigrate in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> Most migrants came from the areas around Quanzhou and Zhangzhou on Fujian's southeastern coast. On their journey, the seafarers carried images of the sea goddess for protection against the dangers of the wild waters. The more famous Mazu temples in Taiwan thus claim that their oldest deity image, the "Mazu that opened Taiwan" (*Kai Tai Mazu*), was brought to Taiwan during those early days. This claim is significant insofar as it substantiates a temple's entitlement to a certain position in the contemporary hierarchy of temples, most of which compete for the same pool of pilgrims and visitors.

Temples are founded around a deity statue whose spiritual efficacy has been "divided" (*fen ling*) from a mother temple. Most of the one thousand Mazu temples in Taiwan stem from mother temples on the island, but the oldest dozen or so claim that they were directly divided from a temple in China. To recharge her power, the statue needs to return to her mother temple regularly. Local worshipers accompany her on this pilgrimage. Seniority in the logic of the Mazu cult implies more direct descent from the Ancestral Temple (*Zumiao*) in Meizhou, China, which is said to offer the best access to Mazu's divine power (*ling*). Temples considered older thus have a higher standing in the hierarchy of temples on the island and draw more visitors and their donations. At the same time, worshipers interpret the contemporary (social) success of a temple as a response to the efficacy of the temple's deity statue, which itself stands as proof of historical authenticity. Claims to precedence thus owe more to present-day popular lore (and circular reasoning) than historical record. In fact, pilgrimage is an important folk technique to justify contemporary relationships between temples in a historical jargon.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several famous temples in Taiwan engaged in disputes over historic primacy.<sup>17</sup> It is impossible to trace the truth value of these claims by modern historical method, but for the intended audience this is beside the point: What matters is the self-revealing evidence of large crowds attesting to the status of a given temple.

Folk ritual in Taiwanese society has spatial ramifications and thereby defines the identities of those who participate and those who do not. These identities are modelled on the ideal of the rural village. Household rites mark the boundaries of the domestic realm.<sup>18</sup>

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15 John Robert Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

16 Hsun Chang, *Wen Hua Ma-Zu: Tai-Wan Ma-Zu Xin Yang Yan Jiu Lun Wen Ji*, Chu ban (Taipei Shi: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan min zu xue yan jiu suo, 2003).

17 Xianghui Cai, *Mazu Xin Yang Yan Jiu*, Zhe Xue Zong Jiao (Taipei Shi: Xiu wei zi xun ke ji gu fen you xian gong si, 2006); P. Steven Sangren, "History and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy: The Ma Tsu Cult of Taiwan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 04 (October 1988): 674.

18 Stephan Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship in Taiwan," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 105–29.

They are also meant to uphold a hierarchical social order within the family. Theoretically, not being involved in domestic ritual marks one as an outsider to the family. One level up, communal ritual integrates the families of a settlement, that is, people in personal contact with one another. For example, birthday processions of the patron deity of a village or neighborhood delineate the territorial boundaries of a settlement.<sup>19</sup> The community temple is located in the center of the village, while shrines dedicated to the earth god and the five camps of spirit soldiers guard the borders against intruders.

Pilgrimages, on the other hand, differ from purely communal rites in that they connect and familiarize strangers.<sup>20</sup> Historically, the social and cultural integration achieved through pilgrimage resulted from the specific political liminality that marked Taiwanese society in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the absence of a strong state managing intercommunal affairs, different communities generated links with each other through ritual exchange relationships. As intercommunal strife and resource competition played out in the religious arena,<sup>21</sup> so did social cooperation. Pilgrimages started out between allied communities to strengthen their political ties; eventually, they also aligned with marriage patterns<sup>22</sup> and economic relations. In its early days, the famous Dajia pilgrimage – Taiwan’s biggest pilgrimage today – connected the farmers of the Taichung area with Beigang, the major cattle market in southwestern Taiwan.<sup>23</sup> Because people of different ethnic provenance worshiped her, the goddess Mazu was especially well-equipped for the integrative workings of pilgrimage. She thus became the focus of many intercommunal cults.<sup>24</sup> But Mazu not only transcended ethnic boundaries, she was also officially sanctioned and hence a safe choice for more exposed, supra-local cults.

As public arenas, pilgrimages facilitated between face-to-face relational communities and the ideological construction of a wider Taiwanese identity. Taiwan’s colonial integration into the Japanese empire (1895-1945) provided the historic occasion against which a pan-Taiwanese identity could first be conceived,<sup>25</sup> although the imagination of a

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19 Meirong Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*, Chu ban, Ren Wen 15 (Taipei Xian Luzhou Shi: Bo yang wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 2006), 27–56; P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 55–60.

20 Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*, 61–90.

21 Harry J. Lamley, “Subethnic Rivalry in the Ch’ing Period,” in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 282–318.

22 Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*, 15.

23 Ying-fa Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma: Zhan hou Ma zu xin yang de fa zhan* (Taipei Shi: Lan Tai, 2010), 38.

24 Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*; Fang-long Shih, “From Regulation and Rationalisation, to Production: Government Policy on Religion in Taiwan,” in *What Has Changed?: Taiwan before and after the Change in Ruling Parties*, ed. Dafydd Fell, Bi-yu Chang, and Henning Klöter, vol. 4, *Studia Formosiana* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 278; Jian-chuan Wang and Shi-wei Li, *Taiwan Mazu miao yue lan*, Chu ban edition (Taipei Xian Luzhou Shi: Bo yang wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 2000), 67–69.

25 Harry J. Lamley, “Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895-1945: The Vicissitudes of Colonialism,” in

national identity did not spread widely until the 1970s. Helped by a growing network of railroads which facilitated travel between different parts of Taiwan, Beigang Chaotiangong adopted the position of an island-wide center of pilgrimage for the faithful.<sup>26</sup> While travel across the Taiwan Strait to China was technically still possible, it was more difficult and much less desirable politically. Religious activity thus began to take the physical borders of the island of Taiwan as its frame of reference. Mazu, for example, took on a role of guardian spirit for the island, as evinced by popular stories after World War II according to which she had caught US American bombs in her gown.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Political Lives of Mazu Temples Under the KMT**

Taiwan's occupation in 1945 by the Chinese Nationalist Party Kuomintang (KMT), a party devoted to secularist ideology, forced local folk customs into opposition. Since communal ritual demarcates interior from exterior realms of the community, it offered a position to challenge the colonizing force of the KMT. The party sought to break the power of the old, landed elites and land-holding temples with land reforms and restrictive legislation.<sup>28</sup> For instance, the "Measures to improve popular custom in Taiwan province" (*Taiwan sheng gaishan minjian xisu banfa*) of 1963 reduced the number of annual festivals to one per temple, which seriously undermined the subsistence of religious specialists, such as performance and opera troupes. The new regulations also encouraged temples to register as professionally managed legal corporations.<sup>29</sup> In many cases, this ended the previous practice of rotating responsibility for the temple among the local community's elites. Contrary to the KMT's intentions, however, local communities found creative ways around these strictures and continued to participate in temple ritual.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, KMT rule had profound effects on popular temples. As an outside force, the KMT could not rely on popular appeal but maintained its grip on local politics through creating factions which it managed in a divide-and-rule style.<sup>31</sup> Through distributing favours and resources, factions were (and to some extent still are) able to control the

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*Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein, Second, expanded edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 201–60.

26 Elana Chipman, "Our Beigang: Culture Work, Ritual, and Community in a Taiwanese Town" (Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 2007), 72–105.

27 Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*, 45–46.

28 David K. Jordan, "Changes in Postwar Taiwan and Their Impact on the Popular Practice of Religion," in *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, ed. Stevan Harrell and Chun-chieh Huang (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 137–60; Gary Seaman, *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village* (Taipei: Oriental Cultural Service, 1978).

29 Wang and Li, *Taiwan Mazu miao yue lan*, 55–57.

30 Emily Martin Ahern, "The Thai Ti Kong Festival," in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), 397–425.

31 Joseph Bosco, "Taiwan Factions: Guanxi, Patronage, and the State in Local Politics," *Ethnology* 31, no. 2 (April 1992): 157–83.

voting behaviour of the rural electorate on behalf of the party in power. On their end, these local factions depended on local sources of legitimation and wealth to increase their political clout. In many places, factions took over the leadership of communal temples, especially after the 1963 legislation had opened them for professionalized management.<sup>32</sup> As temple managers, faction politicians were more invested in maximizing the resources of the institution than in following the government's secularizing provisions.

Taiwan's economic take-off in the 1970s and 1980s further transformed society and endowed a middle class with the means and motivation to invest in their spiritual advancement. Professional temple managers were in some cases now able to expand a temple's sphere of influence to include networks of individual *believers* who came from all over Taiwan. It effectively turned temples into cultural-economic enterprises, often at the expense of the temple's communal integrity.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the increasing importance of temples at the top of the religious hierarchy went hand in hand with the growth of pilgrimage activities, which bring people from outside the community to a temple, the focal point of the ritual. Participation in pilgrimage allows believers to express their individual devotion; as such, these ritual complexes are particularly well-suited to Taiwan's mobile industrial society.<sup>34</sup> Especially the weeks around Mazu's birthday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third lunar month, a time known in Taiwan as "Mazu craze" (*feng Mazu*), are packed with ritual events. In line with this, pilgrimage centers came to play a much bigger representational role in Taiwan's politics, a role which the central government soon started to recognize.

The 1970s saw a shift in the KMT government's appreciation of local culture as part of a larger "indigenization" (*bentuhua*) of national culture. Then-Premier Chiang Ching-kuo, son of President Chiang Kai-shek, developed an especial affinity for Chaotiangong and its "Nail of the Filial Son."<sup>35</sup> The later President (1978-1988) visited Beigang Chaotiangong for a total eleven times throughout the 1970s until 1981. In addition to showcasing his extraordinary filial piety, the visits also attested to his image as a "man of the people."<sup>36</sup> For the temple, and by extension the entire Mazu cult, the visits entailed an implicit recognition by the government. The annual Dajia pilgrimage to Beigang, which had been opened to the general public in 1974, then quickly developed into Taiwan's most popular

32 Chipman, "Our Beigang"; Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*; Seaman, *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village*.

33 Chipman, "Our Beigang"; Johanna Pennarz, *Mazu, Macht und Marktwirtschaft: die religiöse Organisation im sozialen und ökonomischen Wandlungsprozess der ländlichen Gesellschaft Taiwans* (München: Akademischer Verlag, 1992).

34 Pennarz, *Mazu, Macht und Marktwirtschaft*, 58–83.

35 D.J.W. Hatfield, *Taiwanese Pilgrimage to China: Ritual, Complicity, Community* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 47–80.

36 Ching-kuo Chiang, *President C. K. Chiang: Man of the People. Dedicated to Mr. Chiang Ching-Kuo on the Occasion of His Inauguration as the Sixth President of the Republic of China May 20, 1978*. (Taipei: China Publishing Company, 1978).

ritual complex. Today, it attracts more than 100,000 participants per year.<sup>37</sup>

In democratic Taiwan, high officials such as mayors, party leaders, and even the President participate in the mediatized rituals of Taiwanese temple religion. Before elections, temples like Zhenlangong in Dajia double as crucial campaigning battlegrounds for presidential candidates. The participation of office-seekers and holders has become part of established political procedure. In 1999, all four presidential candidates participated in the live-broadcast opening rituals of the Dajia pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup> Before the Presidential elections 2004, President Chen Shui-bian (Democratic Progressive Party, DPP), Soong Chu-yu (People First Party, PFP), and Wang Jin-pyng (KMT), speaker of the Legislative Yuan, attended the Dajia pilgrimage.<sup>39</sup> In 2007, KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou carried the palanquin together with DPP heavyweights Lu Hsiu-lien and Su Tseng-chang.<sup>40</sup> Fighting for the DPP bid, Su unsuccessfully tried to enlist the support of the Dajia-led Mazu Fellowship organization (*Mazu lianyi hui*).<sup>41</sup> Instead, the Mazu Fellowship publicly endorsed Ma Ying-jeou, the clear favorite and later winner of the elections. To thank for her assistance, Ma helped lift Mazu's palanquin on the start of the Dajia pilgrimage on 5 April 2008.<sup>42</sup> Since the pilgrimage occurred just days before Ma assumed office on 20 May, this act also served as an informal but popularly resonant means to "inaugurate" his presidency.<sup>43</sup>

As these examples show, the pilgrimage also figures as a public arena in which different ideas of the community of believers are presented and negotiated. Chen Shui-bian, for example, stood for a more Taiwan-centric politics that reflected the ongoing process of identity formation on the island. Ma Ying-jeou, on the other hand, ran on a platform of increasing economic cooperation with neighboring China. Yet, irrespective

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37 Hsun Chang, "Between Religion and State: The Dajia Pilgrimage in Taiwan," *Social Compass* 59, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 305.

38 Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*, 263–67.

39 Cheng-tian Kuo, *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 55. Chen later won the election against the combined ticket of Lien Chan (KMT) and Soong Chu-yu (vice-presidential candidate).

40 Jie-fan Chang, "Mazu Raojing. Dajia Ma Raojing Qijia Lü Su Ma Tong Tai Fujiao," *TVBS News*, April 22, 2007, <http://news.tvbs.com.tw/entry/327227>.

41 Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*, 273.

42 Xie-bing Chuang, "Mazu Raojing. Ma Qin Lin Shangjiao Dianli Zhenlangong Jin Fang Bianpao," *TVBS News*, April 5, 2008, <http://news.tvbs.com.tw/entry/165323>.

43 The prominence and media visibility of the Dajia pilgrimage affords the temple chairman, Yen Ching-piao, with enormous political influence as a power broker. Yen, a local faction politician with business interests in China and ties to organized crime, has his own agenda and uses Zhenlangong as his power base. Limitations of space do not allow me to go into detail here. For more on this issue, see Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*; Percival Santos, "Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in Taiwanese Society, 1991–2006." (Ph.D. Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007), <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/965/>; Jacob Friedemann Tischer, "The Invisible Hand of the Temple (Manager): Spiritual Capital, Corruption, and Political Power in Taiwan's Mazu Pilgrimages" (Article under peer review, 2018).

of their particular political message, both relied on the ostensibly neutral arena offered by temple ritual to sustain their popular appeal. The pilgrimage provides a condensed social space that enjoins political representatives and worshipers in the same symbolic realm, the house of the goddess Mazu. The ritual space of the temple provides political representatives with an opportunity to present themselves to the goddess – and to the wider audience, the people. In contemporary Taiwan, public expressions of one’s “love for Taiwan” and their practical implementation are expected of any candidate hoping to get elected.<sup>44</sup> What better way to show one’s identification with Taiwan than joining the common people in a public ritual dedicated to a deity who is popularly viewed as Taiwan’s guardian?

### **Producing Space and Spectacle in the Mazu Pilgrimage**

Mazu pilgrimages are annually repeated events of about one week’s duration. On their path, the pilgrims map out a particular, sacred spatial area. They visit temples along the way, where the local faithful welcome the palanquin of the goddess with fireworks and performance troupes. Each visit is inaugurated, celebrated, and ended with an elaborate set of ceremonial rites. Most participants of the massive eight-day Dajia pilgrimage nowadays take part only in a small portion of the whole ritual journey and travel by car or bus in between events. Many casual visitors come for the carnival-like atmosphere, for sightseeing, entertainment, and the night markets that inevitably spring up in front of temples. Others take the pilgrimage more personal and serious; they make the pilgrimage on foot, with only short bits of rest inside whichever temple Mazu stays at for a few hours that night. For participants in another large, annual pilgrimage, walking the entire distance of 350 km from Baishatun to Beigang and back becomes a source of pride. For nine or ten days, they walk for up to 16 hours per day. As I can attest from personal experience, the entailing fireworks and festivities do not permit much sleep during the time of rest, either. Sacrifice and transcending one’s physical limitations here become important validating factors for individual spiritual experience,<sup>45</sup> but they also let one join a larger community of participants.

Furthermore, the spatial orientation of Mazu pilgrimages in Taiwan reveals another peculiarity: The important pilgrimages all lead to the south. Of course, there are historic reasons for that; after all, the first Chinese settlements were established on the Chianan Plain in southwest Taiwan. Today, however, going on pilgrimage to Mazu temples in the

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44 Dafydd Fell, “Inter-Party Competition in Taiwan since the 1990s: Despite the Change in Ruling Party in 2000, Most of the Salient Issues of the 1990s Remain on the Political Agenda,” *China Perspectives*, no. 56 (2004): 3–13.

45 Mei-Huan Lu, “Ritual Construction of the ‘Community’ and the Arena: Multiple Identities of a Mazu Pilgrimage in Taiwan” (Ph.D. Thesis, Bielefeld University, 2005), 130–39, <http://bieson.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/volltexte/2005/696/container.tgz>.

south has the additional symbolic layer of paying homage to the roots of the Taiwanese experience of colonization and emancipation from it. The area around Chiayi, Yunlin, and Tainan is the “holy land” of the cult (*Mazu shengyu*) but is also associated most strongly with Taiwanese local culture and the quest for independence. The pilgrimage pattern thus reveals a postcolonial ritual geography whose central places lie on the periphery of the political geography with its metropolis in the north, Taipei, which in the south is mockingly called “Land of the Heavenly Dragon” (*Tianlongguo*), a reference to the Chinese imperial court in Beijing.<sup>46</sup>

That people from this “Chinese” north go on pilgrimage to the “Taiwanese” south reverses the established hierarchies of power on the island. But it also carries strong symbolic implications of national integration and reconciliation, especially since the civic Taiwanese nationalism of President Lee Teng-hui (1988-2000) included the “Mainlanders” (*Waishengren*) of old as “New Taiwanese” (*Xin Taiwanren*).<sup>47</sup> Ma Ying-jeou, for example, who had won the 1998 mayoral election in Taipei on his claim to be a “New Taiwanese,” also pushed his association with Mazu when he ran for president in 2008. Like him, the goddess had been born outside of Taiwan, and yet the Taiwanese had embraced her – much to their benefit, of course. He vowed to take care of every individual citizen, just like the goddess.<sup>48</sup> His opponent in the next elections, Tsai Ing-wen (DPP) used very similar language in 2011.<sup>49</sup> Both clearly appealed to Mazu as a forceful symbol to represent Taiwanese-ness.

For many younger people who were subjected to a China-centric curriculum in school, walking on pilgrimage is one form of exploring the notion of “homeland” and filling it with concrete, experiential content. Many urban youths identify with Taiwan but feel alienated from its past and rural culture. Pilgrimages are appealing in that they promise to connect individualized, cosmopolitan urbanites with Taiwan’s historic experience and traditional culture. The pilgrimage conjoins various forms of popular culture. Here, the rural cultural stereotypes collectively assembled in the term *Taike* routinely meet the educated attitude of believers who seek spiritual reflection and moral attainment. *Taike* culture refers to such activities as the lighting of vast amounts of firecrackers, enjoying shows of self-immolating spirit mediums and Techno-dancing gods, and displays of strippers for the

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46 Hsin-I Sydney Yueh, *Identity Politics and Popular Culture in Taiwan: A Sajian Generation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 224.

47 Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *Lee Teng-Hui and Taiwan’s Quest for Identity* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), xii–xiii, 90.

48 Zhong guo ping lun xin wen wang, “Dao jiao zong hui, Zhen lan gong chu mian ting Ma Chang mian shi fen sheng da,” China Review News, January 28, 2008, <http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1005/5/6/5/100556544.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=100556544>.

49 Zi you shi bao, “Xiao Ying: Zheng fu yao xiang Mazu zhao gu ren min,” Liberty Times Net, December 6, 2011, <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/576394>.

gods – in short, *renao* or “hot-and-noisy” spectacle.<sup>50</sup> For locals as well as visitors, this situation creates an ambiguous mix of embarrassed awareness of the “crudeness” of the cultural performances in light of Taiwan’s “modern” high culture in the north, but it also fosters the “assurance of common sociality” characteristic of cultural intimacy.<sup>51</sup>

Occasionally, the government directly sponsors pilgrimages to accompany and reinforce specific political occasions. In 1987, the central government enlisted the Beigang Mazu to conduct an official tour of inspection (*raojing*) around the island to celebrate the millennial anniversary of Mazu’s apotheosis.<sup>52</sup> This marked the first time that a pilgrimage mapped out the spatial borders of the island in the context of a national celebration – an early attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the government’s ideology as representing China, where Mazu was born, and the reality of its effective restriction to Taiwan. Coincidentally or not, 1987 also saw the end of martial law and the transition to the first Taiwan-born president, Lee Teng-hui (KMT). Again in 2011, the government sponsored an island pilgrimage for the centennial birthday of the Republic of China, the official regime on the island. Locally organized by Lin Bo-qi, a teacher from my field site, Hsinkang village in Chiayi County, a few hundred people walked the along the entire coast line for a total of 25 days.<sup>53</sup>

The changing organizational context of these two nation-wide pilgrimages reflect a broader shift in Taiwanese politics. Since the democratization and indigenization of Taiwan’s polity in the 1990s, the government has been reinventing the island as a nation of communities and their particular local cultures.<sup>54</sup> This model is intended to emphasize Taiwan’s difference from the PRC’s claim on the island, which is itself based on the assertion of cultural uniformity between China and Taiwan. Within the domestic context, however, acknowledging the importance of local traditions increases the visibility of localities in the government’s legitimation structure, while it simultaneously enhances competition among them for public funding. This incentivizes local actors to commodify cultural resources. Taichung county is a good example for heavily promoting its Mazu

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50 For a discussion of the term *Taike* see also Tung-hung Ho, “*Taike* Rock and Its Discontent,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009): 565–84; Jacob Friedemann Tischer, “Guest in One’s Own Home: The *Taike* as the Significant Other of Taiwanese Modernity” (2017), [https://www.academia.edu/35706101/Guest\\_in\\_one\\_s\\_own\\_home\\_The\\_Taike\\_as\\_the\\_Significant\\_Other\\_of\\_Taiwanese\\_Modernity](https://www.academia.edu/35706101/Guest_in_one_s_own_home_The_Taike_as_the_Significant_Other_of_Taiwanese_Modernity); Hsin-I Sydney Yueh, “When Localism Meets Racism: The Controversy Caused by the Music Video *Foreigner*,” *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2017): 215–30, [https://doi.org/10.1386/eapc.3.2.215\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/eapc.3.2.215_1); Yueh, *Identity Politics and Popular Culture in Taiwan*.

51 Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

52 Wang and Li, *Taiwan Mazu miao yue lan*, 163.

53 Pilgrims usually only walk on the island’s Western side, where most of the population lives and the historically significant temples are located. There are much less people and famous temples on the East coast. Lin claimed that, in total, about 100,000 people had participated in the event.

54 Hsin-yi Lu, *The Politics of Locality: Making a Nation of Communities in Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2002).

tradition, especially the annual Dajia pilgrimage.<sup>55</sup> Mazu has reached a level of popularity such that the DPP-led central government chose her pilgrimages as one of twelve religious events representing Taiwanese culture, designed in 2001 to increase domestic tourism.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, the goddess Mazu has become important symbolic currency in the local and national redefinition of Taiwanese culture.

To be sure, invoking a national community does not exhaust the range of interpretations borne in Mazu pilgrimages. Being claimed by the Chinese government makes Mazu a dubious ally for the Taiwanese national case, after all.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, that Dajia Zhenlangong lobbied intensely for the Taiwanese government to open direct travel and business links to China in 2000 points to Mazu lending her support for approaches to meaning-making beyond Taiwan.<sup>58</sup> Taiwanese pilgrimage to China has thus been variously interpreted as creating a pan-Minnan cultural identity or a transnational matrifocal space, both of which would transcend a purely Taiwanese national identity.<sup>59</sup> These approaches are problematic because the overseas activity of Taiwanese temples cannot simply be reduced to China: Beigang Chaotiangong, for instance, has established branch temples among overseas Taiwanese communities in South Africa, Brazil, and San Francisco in the United States.<sup>60</sup> What is more, Xingang Fengtiangong held a Mazu parade in New York in 2007, which aimed at generating support for Taiwan's then-application to become a member of the United Nations.<sup>61</sup>

Taiwanese Mazu temples are active beyond the confines of the national community. Still, the relevance of pilgrimages remains largely domestic, as by far most of the pilgrims travel only *within* Taiwan. And when temples create branch temples in other countries, they take on the proud role of harbingers exporting *Taiwanese* Mazu culture. After all, the Taiwanese temples introduce Taiwanese ways of worship and religious aesthetics even

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55 Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*.

56 Shih, "From Regulation and Rationalisation, to Production," 277.

57 Hsun Chang, "Multiple Religious and National Identities: Mazu Pilgrimages across the Taiwan Strait after 1987," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*, ed. Cheng-tian Kuo (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 373–96.

58 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 209–38.

59 Murray A Rubinstein, *The Revival of the Mazu Cult and of Taiwanese Pilgrimage to Fujian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, 1994); P. Steven Sangren, "Anthropology and Identity Politics in Taiwan: The Relevance of Local Religion," in *Religion and the Formation of Taiwanese Identities*, ed. Paul R. Katz and Murray A. Rubinstein (New York, NY; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 253–87; Yang, "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait."

60 Jonathan H. X. Lee, "Transnational Goddess on the Move: Meiguo Mazu's Celestial Inspection Tour and Pilgrimage as Chinese American Culture Work and Vernacular Chinese Religion" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009).

61 Chang, "Multiple Religious and National Identities: Mazu Pilgrimages across the Taiwan Strait after 1987," 386–90.

when they build shrines in China. Taiwanese abroad recognize Mazu as a symbol linking them back to their home. The matrifocal space created around the goddess is thus more aptly described as generating the image of a Taiwanese “motherland.” Annual pilgrimages in Taiwan map out this space and endow it with recurring factuality. Mazu shrines abroad remind one of Taiwan.

### The Ritual Production of Symbolic Space

Pilgrimage ritual in Taiwan connects an individual with a collective experience. Insofar as participation alludes to the autobiographical, spiritual work of the participant to produce meaning, it is an act of making the self, whether reflexive or predisposed, to the extent that it relies on symbols being reified into concrete, possessable entities, such as symbolic capital.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, this individual experience can only be realized in the presence of others – it is a product of social interaction – and is hence restricted by social structures, i.e., Bourdieu’s “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.”<sup>63</sup> In this vein, pilgrimage creates a community and social structure of pilgrims even though they each may be motivated by individual spiritual gains more than by the expectation of social conjunction. Both are intricately connected; the individual transformation achieved in pilgrimage is built on the capacity of a group of pilgrims to incorporate as well as transcend the individual pilgrim. Pilgrimages bring into close contact people who did not previously know each other. Their communally fashioned “social intimacy”<sup>64</sup> pervades the formation of roles or habitū as mediators between structures and individual practices.

Social intimacy does not automatically lead to the streamlining of individual experiences envisioned by Victor Turner when he coined the notion of *communitas* to describe the unifying effects of pilgrimage.<sup>65</sup> The Taiwanese pilgrims do not simply take a break from their ordinary selves; they do not even create a consensus of meaning concerning their religious experience. For example, pilgrimage ritual is conducted in the local dialect of Taiwanese Minnan and thus clearly separates its participants by dialect group, privileging Minnan speakers over non-speakers. Rather than bracketing the politics of social life, the pilgrimage provides a public arena of condensed social space and time in which the participants continue to pay attention to the structures, identities, and conflicting interests that pervade civil society in everyday life.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, the Mazu pilgrimage does not

62 Beverley Skeggs, “Exchange, Value and Affect: Bourdieu and ‘The Self,’” *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 75–95.

63 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

64 Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.

65 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1966 (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1969).

66 John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1991); Lu, “Ritual Construction of the ‘Community’ and the Arena.”

create a state of anti-structure outside everyday social experience, as Turner suggested; instead, it figures as an *extension* of social structures under particular circumstances, that is, in a sacred or festive spirit. Social structures and identities inform the different meanings the pilgrimage takes on for individuals. Of course, ritual events set serious pilgrims apart in time and space from everyday life. Pilgrimage for them becomes a transformative physical experience, indexed by blistered feet and collections of temple flags adorning the pilgrims' backpacks. Even so, the pilgrims continue to experience differences in status and identity that inform the meaning they give to their embodied experience.<sup>67</sup> Occasional visitors, while perhaps not as deeply immersed, engage pilgrimages as spectacular and fun (*hao wan*) events that promise a quick break from everyday routine. For local vendors, pilgrimages signal important economic opportunities. For politicians, they present occasions to take on a visible, representative role.

Precisely because all these interests and experiences coalesce in a single multivocal event (or series of events), ritual has world-building powers.<sup>68</sup> In the words of Clifford Geertz, it infuses symbols with such authority and actuality that they appear “uniquely realistic.”<sup>69</sup> This creative, reality-shaping tendency of ritual has important spatial ramifications, for space as a conceptual entity depends on the experience of boundedness translated into symbolic metaphors. These metaphors appear real to the individual to the extent to which they are affirmed by a reference group or institution. As mentioned earlier, identities in Taiwan extended progressively from family to settlement and ethnic community, as determined by shared language and cultural symbols, such as those that mark the differences between speakers of Minnan or Hakka. When these different communities jointly participate in ritual events, they create an additional layer of identification above the linguistic community, a layer which coincides with the territorial (or national) boundaries of Taiwan and which is symbolized by the unifying goddess Mazu.<sup>70</sup> Worshiping together has a long history of defusing longstanding ethnic antagonisms in Taiwan.<sup>71</sup> The symbol, Mazu, thus gained increasing authenticity through historic events being translated into “mythic” form: For example, Mazu protected Taiwanese soldiers fighting in the Japanese army – but not their Japanese combatants – and the entire island population during the Second World War when she caught bombs in her gown.<sup>72</sup>

The democratization of the political system since the 1990s has established a new

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67 Hsun Chang, “Incense-Offering and Obtaining the Magical Power of Qi: The Mazu (Heavenly Mother) Pilgrimage in Taiwan” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1993).

68 Adam B. Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

69 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 90, 118–23.

70 Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*.

71 Shih, “From Regulation and Rationalisation, to Production,” 278–79.

72 Lin, *Mazu Xin Yang Yu Taiwan She Hui*, 45–46.

political framework and allowed a more Taiwan-centered reading of Taiwanese history, one of emancipation from colonial domination. This localization of history, by affecting the cultural and political imagination of the island, is also a way of appropriating space: No longer a colony or province of an outside power, Taiwan is now claimed by a sovereign, liberal-democratic nation-state characterized by internal ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. In the face of mounting Chinese pressure, democracy has become one of the key legitimizing factors for Taiwan's continued independence internally and externally. Political power gains legitimacy by association with popular cultural symbols; in Taiwan, politicians try to connect their image with Mazu. This can be read as an act of appropriation, but in a democratic space where election to office depends on popular attitudes the goddess is not easily dominated by any single interpretation. In fact, in return for a prominent role on the ritual stage at the start of the Mazu pilgrimage, the state officials or election candidates must submit to the authority of the goddess – they have to ask for her permission to enter the temple and help in lifting her palanquin. And the audience-at-large of pilgrims certainly develop their own interpretation of the events that unfold before their eyes.<sup>73</sup>

But official endorsement and participation in the pilgrimage elevates the symbolic standing of the Mazu pilgrimage and ties it to political legitimation and the spatial reproduction of the state through democratic elections. Moreover, the state's promotion of culture creates an outward reflection of Taiwanese culture to the Taiwanese themselves, an image which centrally features the pilgrimages as one of twelve representative calendar events. That is, Mazu pilgrimages affect what it officially means to *be* Taiwanese. Furthermore, during election campaigning the main agents of Taiwan's representative democracy rely heavily on the visibility and popular appeal of temple ritual. In a democratic state that reproduces itself spatially and symbolically through national elections, temples as campaign stages and ballot-casting locations have a crucial part in the process. On the other hand, this inclusion in the democratic apparatus enables Mazu temples and their managers to carve out a space of sovereignty vis-à-vis the state. The managers of powerful temples become themselves highly influential political actors who take part in the negotiation processes of power and individual political distinction. The examples of Chiang Ching-kuo's visits to Beigang, presidential candidates' participation in pilgrimage ritual, and the temple manager's cooptation of Zhenlangong as his personal power base suggest that pilgrimages are multivocal stages for several competing interests and their renditions of space.

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73 Chang, *Wen Hua Ma-Zu*; Hung, *Jie du Dajia Ma*. For instance, some visitors voice criticism of the overt political instrumentalization of the temple by its manager, Yen Ching-piao, while downplaying their own political role in the ritual event.

## Conclusion

Despite their parochial interests, the political activities of the actors mentioned above have contributed to the proliferation of a national culture.<sup>74</sup> This national culture now includes the popular identification of Mazu pilgrimages with a spatial imagination of Taiwan as one ritually bounded community. In Michael Herzfeld's words, pilgrimages provide the common ground that dissolves the notion of power in modernity and lies at the heart of cultural intimacy.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, pilgrimages clearly play out in a spatial frame of reference that creates an arena for social interaction. The metaphor of the public arena as suggested by Sandria Freitag implies a space open for interpretive multivocality.<sup>76</sup> In Taiwan, the pilgrims may assign different meanings to their personal experience and role in the arena. But they all engage it as a space to negotiate the relationship of the self within the wider community of believers. Political arenas such as pilgrimages allow face-to-face interaction to cumulate into a larger, imagined community even when they do not create outright *communitas*. What is more, this conceptual openness for multiple meanings reflects in the setup of the nation itself, which consists of multiple local communities and their cultural manifestations.<sup>77</sup> That is, relying on a cultural form of nationalism shapes the ways in which the national community is imagined in democratic Taiwan.

In all this diversity, even a disaggregated form of nationalism necessarily relies on the unifying power of certain cultural symbols. I suggest that in democratic Taiwan the very institutionalization of multivocality in an arena like the pilgrimage is such a symbol of unity. The participation of democratically elected political representatives in ritual directly links the pilgrimage with other, secular rituals that contribute to making the nation, the most crucial of which in democratic Taiwan is casting the election ballot. In this context, it should not come as a surprise that temples often *are* the places where votes are cast. Institutionally as well as symbolically, Mazu temples and pilgrimages are among the most significant spaces in which the Taiwanese imagine and (re-)produce the nation-space.

In light of the theoretical literature on nationalism and public space, my discussion of the Mazu pilgrimages of Taiwan highlights three interrelated aspects. To begin with, it suggests the continuing governmental appeal of the power of widely recognized symbols to rally perceptions of cultural intimacy, perceptions which lay the common ground for imagining collective belonging in the nation-space. Secondly, and importantly, this spatial and symbolic production of national community is not purely ideational, that is, imagined, but requires to be actualized in practice, to be physically performed in public spaces which I here, following Freitag, call arenas.<sup>78</sup> This holds especially true in a lively

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74 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

75 Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

76 Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*.

77 Lu, *The Politics of Locality*.

78 John Parkinson, *Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance* (Oxford:

democracy such as Taiwan's, in which autonomous selves assert their sovereignty over a postcolonial, collective political body.<sup>79</sup> Thirdly, much of the scholarship on public space tends to emphasize urban, and even metropolitan, contexts,<sup>80</sup> and loses sight of rural and non-urban spaces. In Taiwan, though, a highly industrialized and urbanized nation, Mazu pilgrimages fill out the role of public spaces in which cultural intimacy and social imaginary are produced. Not only is this space not strictly secular, but neither is it based in urban areas. Mazu pilgrimages take place in rural environments and lead people from north to south, from the center of economic, cultural, and political power to the margins. This move pays homage to the origins of Han settler culture in Taiwan while adding a historical dimension to the spatial imagination of the nation. The modern democratic nation does not only manifest in the cosmopolitan metropolis, Taipei; symbolically and practically, it needs to reconnect with its historic root in rural Taiwan to become authentically Taiwanese.

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Oxford University Press, 2012).

79 David Gilmartin, "Rethinking the Public through the Lens of Sovereignty," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 371–86.

80 See, for example, Low, *On the Plaza*; Orum and Neal, *Common Ground?*; Parkinson, *Democracy and Public Space*.

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