Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Research questions

Based on the structural perspective of social anthropology, Victor Turner (1974b, 1978) was the first to propose a theory of pilgrimage, stressing such features as liminality and *communitas*. However, other research studies have not supported his research theory (cf. 1.2). What other theoretical approaches apart from Turner’s exist in the social anthropological study of pilgrimage today? The main purpose of this thesis is to explore the theoretical significances of pilgrimage by analysing a case study from Taiwan.

Turner focuses on the homogeneous feature of *communitas*, whereas I regard this so-called homogeneity as problematic. Adopting the constructive perspective and taking into consideration the recent discussion on community, I argue that the meaning of community can be constructed in different ways by different agents, and that multiple connotations of community can exist in the pilgrimage context. As the thesis will show, the Taiwanese pilgrim group is organised on the basis of a territorial cult,\(^1\) although participation does not exclude pilgrims from other territorial units. How then can we define a religious community for the purpose of pilgrimage? And, how can we account for the non-resident participants who emigrate from or lack kin relations with the territorial cult community holding the pilgrimage, and who claim to belong to or play an important role in the pilgrim group? As Appadurai (1998) points out, the disjuncture between place and culture (people) in the present world is rooted in the de-territorialised cultural phenomenon caused by migration and globalisation. Obviously, we cannot merely define community as a place-bounded unit. Community can also be seen as a concept (Amit 2002) that takes people’s assertions of shared belonging in different social contexts into account (Olwig 2002, cf. 7.1). In this sense, the multiple connotations of community in pilgrimage implies the existence of manifold identities.

While the pilgrimage provides people with a sense of belonging, it does not necessarily signify a consensus of shared meaning among the pilgrims. Pilgrimage must be seen as a

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\(^1\) According to Sangren (1987:55), “a territorial cult coalesces around worship of a deity who is conceived as having jurisdiction over a certain spatial territory: … Territorial cults are concretely constituted in communal rituals, [in which]…community members congregate and act as a corporate body. …[A]lthough territorial-cult shrines and temples stand as permanent symbols of ritual community, a shrine or temple does not itself constitute a territorial cult”.
cultural repertoire interpreted and practiced individually by different agents. In other words, diversity prevails within the unity of the pilgrim group. Hence, the study of pilgrimage cannot leave out the aspect of arena (Eade and Sallnow eds. 1991). By examining people’s disparate perceptions of pilgrimage and their conflicting interests in the power arena, I will investigate why people fight with each other, how conflict and discord is resolved, and how arena and community can co-exist in the Taiwanese pilgrimage. Moreover, I view the ritual aspect as indispensible to understanding religious pilgrimage in its specific social and cultural contexts. Secondly, the pilgrimage example discussed in the thesis comprises a series of rituals. What functions do these rituals have in the pilgrimage? Does ritual practice play a vital role in constructing common pilgrim sentiment and local cult community? Secondly, the pilgrimage journey, devoid of a fixed route, contains a specific palanquin performance (cf. 5.3 & 5.4), a ritual requesting the oracle to lead the pilgrim march on the trail. In particular, the palanquin performance is believed to be the result of divine intervention. Can the performance therefore affect the perception of the pilgrims and their journeying experience of pilgrimage? What function does this particular type of performance ritual serve and what is its effect? And lastly, the decisive ritual is performed at the pilgrimage destination. To achieve this religious aim, pilgrims suffer the hardship of transcending their physical limitations in the course of the walking journey, crossing geographical boundaries to reach their destination. What other boundaries does the pilgrim group transcend? Does the transcendence of different boundaries contribute to constructing pilgrimage communities?

1.2 Anthropological pilgrimage studies
Pilgrimage is a complicated and synthetic phenomenon, the peregrination of which includes distinctive religious traditions and cultural-social contexts. Although the popularity of pilgrimage practice has continued over centuries, it was considered eccentric as a topic in the academic field up to the 1970s. This was due to a lack of theoretical insight on pilgrimage, as well as to the inadequacy of the research methodology in approaching the phenomenon (Bowman 1985, Preston 1992). In particular, pilgrimage entails travelling a considerable geographical distance, usually beyond the realm of the small community where conventional anthropological fieldwork is carried out.

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2 Gross (1971), for instance, shows the significance of ritual in pilgrimage by focusing on the individualised relationship between a person and his saint. This relationship reflects earthly social structures and reinforces the existing social order in northern Brazil (ibid: 143, 145-6).
Victor Turner was the first to propose a theory of pilgrimage research. His theoretical concern was to view the social world, with its dynamic quality of social relations, as a changing process (1974a: 24). Based on van Gennep’s analysis of the rites of passage in tribal societies, Turner (1969) views the historical pilgrimage as a social process that comprises the liminal phenomenon. Unlike the social obligation involved in tribal rites, pilgrimage is a voluntary choice made by the pilgrims and should be termed “liminoid” (Victor Turner and Edith Turner 1978: 34-35, 231-232, 253-254). The significance of the liminal period, almost like a threshold, lies in the formation of a specific ethos characterised as “communitas”, a temporary bond of comradeship and brotherhood-like relationship between the pilgrims. Focusing on egalitarian relations, Turner regards communitas as a state of anti-structure contrary to the differentiated roles and statuses in society (structure). Communitas functions as a form of social critique that questions established social structural rules and suggests new possibilities. In this sense, pilgrimage exemplifies the dynamic relations between communitas and structure (1969: 94-97, 1974a: 202-208).

Turner’s theory of pilgrimage was the source of considerable criticism. His core concern of communitas-type relations in pilgrimage has not been corroborated by other academic research. According to Morinis (1984: 260-1), the Turnerian communitas merely stresses the emotional satisfaction of the pilgrim, but ignores other relevant aspects of pilgrimage (such as its intellectual, spiritual and social institutional dimensions). Bowman (1985:4) is of the opinion that pilgrimage cannot be placed in a social topography simply by looking at communitas. He suggests expanding the realm of research to other facets of belief and ritual practice in a wider social network. Moreover, Turner’s analysis of communitas is based on parallel dichotomies, the validation of which has been assessed in studies on regional cults in Africa and South America (Werbner ed. 1977). Sallnow (1981, 1987) points out that the concept of communitas is either inadequate or dispensable. His study on the Andean pilgrimage in Peru shows a tangled interplay of contradictions that cannot be fully comprehended with the simple dichotomy between structure and communitas. Van der

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3 Arnold van Gennep’s (1908/1960) research of tribal rites of passage involves the three stages of separation, limen and re-aggregation.
4 Turner defines communitas as “a direct, immediate confrontation or encounter between free, equal and total human beings, no longer segmented into structurally defined roles” (1974b: 307). See also 1978: 252.
5 The absence of communitas-type relations in pilgrimage is discussed in the following research: Eickelman’s (1976) book on Moroccan Islam, Pruess’s (1974) thesis on the Buddhist pilgrimage in Thailand, Pfaffenberger’s (1979) study on Sri Lanka, and Morinis’s (1984) research on three Hindu pilgrimage sites in Bengal.
6 Turner’s (1969) analytical model of dynamic structural relations juxtaposes parallel dichotomies, e.g., structural vs. anti-structural, heterogeneity vs. homogeneity, centrality vs. peripherality, and so forth.
7 Sallnow’s study (1987) shows the existence of competition and conflict within the community-based pilgrimage, which is indeed a mosaic of egalitarianism, nepotism and factionalism.
Veer’s research (1984, 1988) on the Hindu pilgrimage to Ayodhya also rejects the dichotomy between structure and anti-structure, and indicates the existence of an arena among the different groups of religious specialists at the pilgrimage centre. Anthropologists have attempted to explore other theoretical significances of pilgrimage. Functionalists regard it as a social integrator that contributes to the creation of group solidarity at the level of national consciousness (Wolf 1958, Obeyesekere 1966, Cohn and Marriott 1958) or of regional or tribal identity (Spiro 1970, Rabinow 1975, Marx 1977, Wood 1992). Not unlike Turner, the functionalists tend to “interpret pilgrimage as either supporting or subverting the established social order” (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 5). Both the Turnerian and the functionalist approaches focus on the coherence of pilgrimage and are viewed as following the mode of Durkheim (1915) (cf. ibid: 4). However, Baumann’s (1992:115) ritual research points out the “misplaced concreteness” of applying Durkheim’s insight to the focus of empirical studies. He (ibid: 112) suggests viewing the Durkheimian community (singular form) as the multiplicity of constituencies. Similarly, due to the many pilgrimages based on supra-local religious cults, Eade and Sallnow (1991: 3) suggest treating pilgrimage “as a crucial operator which welds together diverse local communities and social strata into more extensive collectivities”. Thus, pilgrimage is seen as “local cult writ large” that can lead to a wider and more inclusive participant identity.

Moreover, recent research interest maintains and reinforces social boundaries and distinctions in the pilgrimage context, regardless of the features of communitas. Revising the Turnerian fallacy of simplistic dichotomy, Eade and Sallnow (1991: 5) propose researching pilgrimage “not merely as a field of social relations but also as a realm of competing discourse”. While pilgrimage may comprise a multitude of communities, it cannot at the same time leave out the aspect of arena (Eade & Sallnow eds. 1991, Van der Veer 1988, Sax 1991).

Several symposia on the topic of pilgrimage have been exploring this phenomenon in different religious and cultural contexts from different perspectives since the 1980s. Most of the research concentrates on ritual practices in the area of India and South Asia (Morinis ed. 1992a, Jha ed. 1985, Jha ed. 1990, Dubey ed. 1995). One anthology approaches pilgrimage in the Islamic tradition, which also indicates other reasons for Muslim travel (Eickelman and Piscatori eds. 1990). The book edited by Eade and Sallnow (1991) presents deconstructive approaches in the Christian pilgrimage tradition, while another symposium on Latin American pilgrimage (Crumrine and Morinis eds. 1991) displays a holistic and

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historical perspective on these overtly Catholic shrines that can interlace different identities.⁹ A recent collection (Swatos and Tomasi eds. 2002) explicates the close relationship between pilgrimage and tourism.

The sacred site has become a key topic in the anthropological study of pilgrimage. Bowman suggests investigating how the sacred place is formed and publicised, and how “the religious power is articulated with other forms of power in the society” (1985: 8). Stating that the sacred site is not intrinsically holy, Preston (1992: 33) suggests the notion of “spiritual magnetism” to explore the power inherent in the sacred centre that attracts pilgrims.¹⁰ From the deconstructive perspective, anthropologists have elucidated how the sacred centre can contain disparate meanings to different people (Eade 1991, Dahlberg 1991, Bowman 1991, 1992, McKevitt 1991, Stirrat 1991). Similarly, the complex interplay of the historical and cultural factors of pilgrimage sites can imply the ethnic identity of the pilgrims, just as Christian shrines are associated with Andean miraculous sites and indigenous cosmology in Peru (Sallnow 1987, 1991), the Catholic pilgrimage to a mission shrine continues the Indian ceremonial gathering in Canada (Morinis 1992b), and the Maori pilgrimage to a particular tree mixes with Christian religious practice in New Zealand (Sinclair 1992).

The analysis of pilgrimage sites reveals the significance of geographical characteristics.¹¹ Linking topographic features to other factors (such as chief deities, the caste composition of the pilgrims, and the purpose and frequency of the pilgrimage), Bhardwaj (1973), a cultural geographer, creates a hierarchy of sacred places in India.¹² His findings on the ranking of these pilgrimage sites, however, have been criticised for ignoring regional and cultural variation in India (Morinis 1984: 235-6). Fartacek (2003) adopts a constructive approach in studying pilgrimage sites in the peripheral areas of Syria. In order to understand the constructions of meaning (ideellen Konzeption or Bedeutungs konstruktionen) of sacred sites, he observes, and interviews pilgrims and custodians about their beliefs, activities, and ritual practices. He concludes that many sacred sites contain specific topographic features and corresponding mythological figures and legends. These legends not only explain the meaning of the topographic features, but also connect them to other religious

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⁹ These two symposia (Morinis ed.1992 and Crumrine & Morinis eds. 1991) are the result of a conference entitled “Pilgrimage: The Human Quest”, held at the University of Pittsburgh in May 1981.

¹⁰ Preston defines spiritual magnetism as: “the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees”. According to him, spiritual magnetism can reveal people’s values and their concepts of the sacred site, which are closely related to the specific historical, geographical, social, and cultural contexts. (1992:33).

¹¹ One symposium (Stoddard and Morinis eds. 1997) on the sacred place was based on the geographical perspective.

¹² See also Morinis’s (1984:234-6) discussion on Bhardwaj’s work.
symbolisations (ibid: 204). In fact, the notion of topography can also be applied to the analysis of the pilgrimage route (Schlee 1992), which will be discussed in the sixth chapter.

Spatial movement or travel is an essential motif in pilgrimage. Morinis (1992c) suggests researching the journey, whereby he focuses on the experience itself and the psychological aspects of pilgrimage performance. Thus, pilgrimage research can account for the motivation and action of pilgrims, as well as for the impact of their journeys. Stanley (1992) states that experiencing the hardship of the journey is an indispensable element of the great Maharashtrian pilgrimages in Pandharpur and Alandi. Gold (1988) describes three patterns of pilgrimage journey and motivation in India. She shows that pilgrim concern with ghosts, bones, and the road ahead (wandering) was interlaced with ideas about death and birth. For her, pilgrim journeys reveal the theme of reproduction, which has more to do with home than with journeying (ibid: 305). While researching the Nandadevi (a Hindu goddess) pilgrimage in the Himalayan area, Sax (1990, 1991) discovered that participants had different perceptions of the journey and experienced it differently. He concludes that pilgrimage supports virilocality and a hegemonic male ideology, reproducing social relations of male domination and female subordination (1991: 205-6).

Pilgrimage is an activity that involves crossing boundaries, both in the religious (from the profane to the sacred realm) and the geographical sense (towards a destination). Eric Cohen (1992) examines the differences between pilgrimage and tourism. According to him, the pilgrim journeys towards the centre of his world, whereas a tourist travels away from the centre to a periphery of that world (ibid: 59). In contrast, Dube (2001) questions the need to make a separation between pilgrimage and tourism, structure and process, and religion and politics. Her research on the journey to Puri and the temple of Jagannath in India shows the participation of different agents from distinctive fields: pilgrims and tourists, temple servants and kings, priests and administrators. For Dube, the entire spectrum of pilgrimage purposes, perceptions, meanings, and expectations should be taken into account.

In sum, the pilgrimage phenomenon is a rich mosaic of religious imagination, ritual

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13 Gold (1988:307) states that the fruitfulness of these journeys lies in the return, which focuses on the fulfilment of the pilgrims’ purpose, such as to achieve a state of health and harmony, to beget sons and avoid affliction by the restless spirits of the dead, to obtain divine beneficence, and even the release of the human spirit from round-trip cycles.

14 Dubisch (1995) focuses on the gender perspective with reference to a Greek pilgrimage. She states that women present their own self-image through ritual performance.

15 Stanley’s (1992) research shows that pilgrimage takes pilgrims away from home and leads them across physical and metaphysical boundaries. Glazier’s (1992) research reveals that the destination of a Trinidadian pilgrimage is of little consequence to participants. What was really important was not the location of a particular pilgrimage but the identity of its organizers (ibid: 145-6).
practices, and different social institutions and identities. Anthropologists have focused, on the one hand, on general relations between pilgrimage and society, and have shown, on the other hand, the specific tradition of each pilgrimage, in which certain religious features in terms of sacred site, journey and institution cannot be ignored. This thesis will include both general theoretical considerations on the topic of pilgrimage and the particular religious context of the Taiwanese pilgrimage.

1.3 The history of the Mazu cult and the Taiwanese pilgrimage

1.3.1 Legends about the Goddess and the formation of the cult

The goddess Mazu\(^ {16} \) is a popular deity in Taiwanese folk religion. She is known as Mazu in the Hokkien language in Taiwan and Fujian (a province of southeast China), and is called Tin Hau in Cantonese in Hong Kong. Apart from several other local names, she is mostly referred to as Tianhou (“Empress of Heaven”), alluding to her most honorific title (see below).

Literary legends about the goddess have been produced and reproduced since the twelfth century.\(^ {17} \) According to one widespread legend, *Tianfei Xiansheng Lu* (The Cycle of the Divine Miracles of Tianfei, TF),\(^ {18} \) Mazu is said to have been born a female by the name of Lin Mo in Meizhou, Putian in the province of Fujian in 960 AD.\(^ {19} \) Unlike other girls, she revealed a talent for acquiring Buddhist knowledge in her early teens. At the age of thirteen, she learned the magical arts from a Taoist master, and at sixteen, having obtained a bronze charm by looking into a well, comprehended the mystery. By drawing charms and reciting chants, she could avert disasters and save people at sea, and as a result of her magic powers was said to be a *wu* (female shaman), capable of helping people during her lifetime.\(^ {20} \) Unmarried and childless, she died in 987 AD in her late twenties.\(^ {21} \)

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\(^ {16} \) Depending on the phonetic transcription, Mazu can be written *Ma-tsu* or *Matsu*.

\(^ {17} \) Historians have examined historical literature to identify Mazu's name, place of birth /death, and life stories. See the Chinese texts of Li Xian-zhang 1960, 1961, 1963, 1990; Xia Qi 1962a; Cai Xiang-hui 1989; Shi Wan-shou 2000.

\(^ {18} \) Wädow (1992) analysed the *Tianfei Xiansheng Lu* (TF) text and translated it into German. The original text first appeared around 1637 (Li Xian-zhang 1990:299), but Shi (2000:14) regards it as religious fabrication that cannot be proved as historically authentic.

\(^ {19} \) Li (1960:13-16) and Xia (1962:3-7) claimed that Ningha was the birthplace of Mazu, whereas recent studies prove that Meizhou is her genuine place of birth (cf. Shi Wan-shou 2000, Li Lulu 1995, Cai Xiang-hui 1989, Wang and Li 2000).

\(^ {20} \) Cai Xiang-hui (1989:130-4) considers Mazu to be a female Manichean shaman, whereas Shi Wan-shou (2000:26-31) rejects his argument. According to the latter, Mazu is neither a female shaman in folk belief, nor in the Manichean tradition.

\(^ {21} \) The popular legend of Mazu in Taiwan is based on two literary legends: the TF and the *Tianshang Shengmu Yuanliu Yinguo* (The Karma of Mazu, TS). See Chen Min-hwei 1984:14-16. Li Lulu (1995)
According to the Chinese ideology of patriarchy, a woman devoid of marriage or male descendants becomes a homeless ghost after her death. This type of ghost spirit is usually regarded as malicious, but can be transformed into a powerful spirit if properly propitiated (cf. Harrell 1974). Due to her merciful virtues and good deeds, Mazu was worshipped as a deity after her death, which greatly altered her potentially yin status (referring to ghost) to that of yang (referring to deity) (Chen Min-hwei 1984:11-12). Apart from hagiographical legends, the goddess is also surrounded by genealogical legends. Despite being a female, Mazu is depicted as the chief ancestor of the Lin lineage in Taiwan and Fujian (cf. Chen Min-hwei 1984:28-30; Chang 1993:53; Xu 1994, 1996).22

According to the first records in 1150, Mazu was already a cult figure in the area of Putian. In fact, the cult dedicated to Mazu accommodated the Chinese traditions of three teachings, i.e., Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Mazu is said, for example, to be a transformation of Guanyin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy; she is assimilated to a Daoist deity in the Daoist canon;23 and she is regarded as a “filial maid” associated with the Confucian values of filial piety, chastity and motherhood (Chang 1993: 60-66, Chen Min-hwei 1984:18-27). Being a water deity, Mazu is usually confused with other female water deities in southern China (Watson 1985:298-9).24 Initially her divine features were closely related to the lives of fishermen and seafarers. As the cult spread, her divine competence was also associated with river transport, rice transplantation, female fertility, and even the suppression of social disorder. Thus, Mazu is not only a sea goddess for the coastal people, but also a patron goddess for territorial peasants (cf. Watson 1985, Li Lulu 1995).

1.3.2 State intervention and the development of the cult

The development and spread of the Mazu cult has been accompanied by state intervention since the twelfth century (cf. Watson 1985). Whenever the goddess’s miraculous protection was claimed, she was conferred with honorific titles by the imperial emperors.25 Her first title, Linghui Fujen (lit. “Divine Kindly Lady”), was bestowed in 1156.26 She obtained the

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22 The genealogy of Mazu is not necessarily an authentic historical record, which is usually the basis for prestige and the integration of the lineage (cf. Chen Min-hwei 1984: 29).

23 Boltz (1986) analyses a Daoist canon that includes Mazu in the Daoist tradition.

24 Watson’s research (1985) reveals a case, where indigenous belief in the local water deity Sand River Mother was replaced by the Tianhou (Mazu) belief.

25 Thirty-nine prominent titles were conferred on the goddess from the twelfth to nineteenth century (Shi 2000:37-94).

26 According to Watson (1985:299), the title was bestowed in response to a request by an imperial emissary, who claimed that the goddess had guided his fleet safely through a storm. Though this was not supported by
slightly higher title of Linghui Fei (Fei means “Imperial Concubine”) in 1192, when after a request for help she conquered drought and an epidemic. During the Song Dynasty (960-1279AD), the prominent titles of the goddess reflected her multiple divine functions, such as preventing natural disasters and quelling rebellions or pirates. In the Mongol era (1280-1368), the higher title of Tian Fei (“Celestial Concubine”) was bestowed on the goddess five times in response to her contribution in protecting maritime travellers and assisting in river transportation. Following international emigration trends and the development of maritime commerce, state promotion of the goddess’s status continued during the period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). This refers in particular to the seven famous adventurous maritime journeys undertaken by the imperial emissary Zheng He, whose marine peregrination was claimed to depend on the goddess’s protection. When state control of the coastal provinces became more crucial in the Qing period (1644-1911), the Mazu cult was largely promoted and appropriated by the government. The highest title conferred upon the goddess was Tianhou (“Empress of Heaven”) was a response to her assistance in conquering Taiwan in 1684.

In addition, official temples dedicated to the goddess were founded at government expense in the Qing period. The Mazu cult was formally integrated into the official cult in 1720, and government functionaries have periodically worshipped the goddess in spring and autumn since that time. Approved and sponsored by the state, the official Mazu cult was separated from other popular cults, albeit the goddess was still widely worshipped by the people. State promotion of the cult also resulted in its Chinese cultural integration, whereby religious culture made no great distinction between the elite class and the illiterate peasants, as Watson (1985) pointed out (cf. Seiwert 1985: 199-248).

Worship dedicated to Mazu has been popular in southeast China since the latter period of the Ming Dynasty. Indeed, the distribution of the cult was originally confined to the province of Fujian, where legends about the goddess emerged. Up to the seventeenth century, the spreading of the cult concentrated on areas in the maritime provinces or the riversides of inland China. This also explains how the function of the goddess was usually associated with water or the sea. Following the movement of the maritime travellers and overseas emigrants since the seventeenth century, the Mazu cult spread to pan-Chinese

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27 Kublai Khan first promoted the goddess’s status by conferring on her the title of Tian Fei in 1281.
28 Mazu had already been worshipped by government functionaries in specific cases before the Ming period, and official worship had taken place occasionally since the end of the sixteenth century (cf. Wang & Li 2000:20-3).
29 Yang (1961:145-6) points out the distinction between official and popular cults in the Chinese religion.
cultural areas, such as Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and other overseas Chinese societies in Southeast Asia, North America… and so on (Xia 1962b, Bosco 1999:11-2).

1.3.3 The cult and the pilgrimage in Taiwan

Worship dedicated to Mazu embraces both official and popular cults in Taiwan. On the one hand, the Han people of southern Fujian, the Minnanese, had begun to migrate to the island in great numbers since the seventeenth century. Landing on the island via the sea, the Minnanese emigrants brought with them the image of Mazu as a protector. They continued to worship her and even built new temples to house her, in an effort to acclimatise themselves to living in the new settlement. The Qing functionaries, on the other hand, appropriated the religious symbol of worshipping the goddess to legitimise their regime and control the islanders. They not only attributed their success in quelling rebellions to the goddess’s assistance, but also set up official temples to house her and “civilise” the Taiwanese frontiers. Nonetheless, only three out of thirteen Mazu temples were classified as official cults up to the year 1722, and the spread of the cult reflected the distribution of the early Minnanese migrants, who mainly resided in southern Taiwan or the northern plain of the Danshui River (Shi 2000:221). While the number of Mazu temples totaled approx. 320 in 1918, it increased rapidly after the colonial era (1895-1945) from, for example, 381 in 1966 to 515 in 1983 (cited from Chang 1993:69, cf. Xia 1962b). Today, the number of Mazu temples in Taiwan totals almost 1300 (Wang & Li 2000:57).

1.3.3.1 The religious meaning of the pilgrimage

Contrary to the Mazu cult in other areas, pilgrimage is a specific religious expression of Taiwanese believers. In fact, pilgrimage is embedded in the migrant history of the Minnanese to the island. During the first phase of the settlement from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century, people of the same worship shared the same background in terms of ethnicity or mainland home town. The significance of ethnicity largely declined under Japanese colonial control, while the place of residence became the new principle in forming religious organisations during the second settlement phase in the early twentieth century (Wang Shih-ching 1974:92). For a long time people’s ethnic background and home town origins were important to the religious congregation, which is probably why the temples built in Taiwan were regarded as branch temples of the mainland. The Taiwanese

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30 The Mazu cult reveals distinctive local features in different areas. The huapao competition, for example, is a religious activity specific to Hong Kong (Liu Tik-sang 2000)

31 Shen Gui-sheng (1987:131) claims that the reason why temples in Taiwan are viewed as branch temples of
pilgrimage journey originally referred to visiting the root temple, albeit the destination may have varied in accordance with changing historical conditions (cf. 1.3.3.2).

Lighting incense (xiang) is a vital element of worship in folk religion. The Chinese term for pilgrimage is “jinxiang”, which means to visit a specific temple and present incense to the deity. The main concern of a pilgrimage is to visit temples with the highly reputed ling or lingyan (“manifestation of ling”) of the deity. Both ling and lingyan refer to divine efficacy or the magical power to grant a worshipper’s request or favour. The purpose of the journey for the pilgrims is to experience and manifest the ling of the deity. Chang Hsun (1993) uses the Chinese notion of qi (vapour, energy, or force) to explain the pilgrimage, and emphasises that a popular understanding of religious peregrination is to obtain the good quality of qi, coming from the deity or the communal journeying occasion. Although the concept of qi is far too general and can be used to refer to everything in and beyond this world, I regard the combination of the two notions, ling and qi, as understandable in the pilgrimage context, which focuses on the significance of divine efficacious power.

The Taiwanese pilgrimage usually includes two levels. On the one hand, individual pilgrims journey to the pilgrimage centre to ask for divine protection and bring home ritual paraphernalia denoting the magic power of the deity, such as paper charms, talismans or oracle poems. In the pilgrimage context, ritual paraphernalia refer particularly to the incense ash and sacred water dedicated to Mazu, as well as the paper spirit money after contact with her palanquin (cf. ch4. no. 29 & 8.1.4.1). Pilgrims frequently use these ritual paraphernalia as a cure or to practice exorcism, or to worship at their domestic altars. On the other hand, the pilgrim group is organised by people who practice the same worship in a temple. Periodically they journey to the root temple to renew or add to the efficacious power (ling) of their deity, as ling can be imparted from an older or more popular deity. More significantly, they perform the ritual of “dividing incense” known as “fenxiang” or “fenling” (“dividing efficacious power”) in the root temple, and from whose censer they scoop out incense ash to place in the incense burner of their own temple. Combining incense ash from the root temple with that of the branch temple symbolically reinforces the magical power of the deity housed in the branch temple. At the same time, the branch image is passed through the smoke of the root temple’s censer during the ritual in order to reinforce or rejuvenate its

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divine power.\textsuperscript{35} Nowadays, the destination of the pilgrim itinerary is not necessarily to return to the root temple, and can vary with different considerations.\textsuperscript{36} Generally speaking, there are two possible destinations (Li Xian-zhang 1967 part III: 292). The primordial choice is to return to the original place in order to reinforce the ranking relationship in terms of temple genealogy (root and branch temples) (cf. Chang 1999). The second choice is to visit a temple with a long history or reputed deity’s magical power, and that is widely recognized as a pilgrimage site. Apart from the aim of reaching their destination, pilgrims can visit other temples en route in order to establish or reinforce temple relations.

1.3.3.2 The change in the pilgrimage and its social meaning
For many Taiwanese believers, incense burned in the original Mazu temple in Meizhou is believed to contain the goddess’s most efficacious power. In order to reinforce divine efficacy, some of the Taiwanese Mazu temples conducted pilgrimages to the root temple during the Qing period.\textsuperscript{37} However, journeying to Meizhou was not easy to accomplish in those days. It is highly probable that economic circumstances compelled most pilgrims to visit the highly reputed temples of Taiwan instead of returning to the Meizhou temple. In fact, temple organisations and religious associations (\textit{shenminghui}) centred on worship dedicated to Mazu were established all over the island between the seventeenth and late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{38} Meanwhile, for specific reasons (i.e., official sponsors, long history, or divine efficacy) several Mazu temples developed into cult centres, such as those in Tainan, Anping, Luermen, Beigang, Xingang, Lugang, Dajia, Guandu, …and so on (see map 1-1). The Caotian Gong temple in Beigang, which became a popular pilgrimage site as a result of its reputed divine efficacy, was a particular attraction for thousands of pilgrims in the mid-nineteenth century (cf. Wang & Li 2000:38-9).

Social unrest and rebellion against Japanese control in the early stages of the colonial period forced many religious festivities to come to a standstill.\textsuperscript{39} Some Mazu temples were taken over by colonial governors for military use or for the purpose of medical care and education.

\textsuperscript{36} Sung (1971), for example, provides a case where the destination was a temple of repute rather than a root temple, the result of following divine direction as revealed in a séance and the difficulty of tracing the original temple.
\textsuperscript{37} People from the Tianhou Gong temple in Lugang, for instance, constantly made the journey to the Meizhou temple in the mid-nineteenth century (Wang and Li 2000: 39).
\textsuperscript{39} Wang and Li (2000:43-53) provide a historical overview of the Mazu during the colonial era.
Mazu pilgrimage activity revived between 1898 and 1936, when the colonial regime had become more stable. The pilgrim congregation contributed to the commercial activities of the pilgrimage centre in Beigang. The religious journey from Taiwan to Meizhou also experienced a renaissance. Not only did Taiwanese pilgrims return to the Meizhou temple, but several Mazu images were brought from the original temple to the island.\(^40\) However, Taiwanese religious activities were largely repressed by the colonial assimilation policy that prevailed from 1937 until the end of the Second World War. As a result, native worship customs and Mazu festivities were abolished, and some temple organisations and religious associations forced to dissolve.

Mazu worship gradually revived when Taiwan was returned to the Chinese nationalist government (ROC) in 1945, although most officials from the mainland regarded the religious customs of the islanders as uncivilised, extravagant or mere superstition.\(^41\) Pilgrimage journeys to the mainland ground to a complete halt in 1949, when the ROC government led by Jiang Jie-shi (Chiang K’ai-shek) was defeated in the Chinese Civil War and forced to retreat to Taiwan. Nonetheless, the Mazu cult and pilgrimage activity grew more and more popular on the island, as did other religious festivities. This was due to a general improvement in standards of living following the economic prosperity that emerged in the 1960s. Apart from an increase in Mazu temples, several highly reputed cult centres dedicated to Mazu attracted numerous devotees. Nowadays, about four million pilgrims visit the Chaotian Gong temple in Beigang each year.\(^42\)

Why is the Mazu pilgrimage so popular in Taiwan? While the Mazu cult represents the immigrants’ previous home town identity from the early stages of the settlement,\(^43\) Sangren (1987:91-2) argues that current Mazu pilgrimage symbolises identity for the “Taiwanese”, the Minnanese descendants on the island. Ahern (1981a) views the Taiwanese ritual as a protest against the dominant mainlanders, who are mostly from other provinces of China and came to the island between 1945 and 1949. However, Sangren (1988:692) claims that the Taiwanese/mainlander division could result in a disregard for the complexity of local political rivalries, which usually relate to religious behaviour. Moreover, tension between the “Taiwanese” and the mainlanders was largely attenuated in the 1980s.\(^44\)

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\(^{40}\) Eight Mazu temples organized the pilgrimage trip to Meizhou, and four images were brought back to Taiwan from the original temple (Wang & Li 2000:49-50).

\(^{41}\) See Wang & Li (ibid: 54-6).

\(^{42}\) See the temple record (Cai Xiang-hui 1995:170), and cf. Wang Jian-chuan 2000.

\(^{43}\) Various terms refer to the goddess worshipped by early immigrants from different areas of Fujian, such as the Wenlingma from Quanzhou, the Yintongma from Tongan, and the Meizhouma from Meizhou.

\(^{44}\) Sangren (ibid: 691, no. 20) also notices that the relationship between the Minnanese and the mainlanders is indeed a tricky one.
Min-hwei (1984) pointed out, the particular Mazu image of each township temple is a symbol of identity for local residents. Discussing the disputes between several famous Mazu temples, Sangren (1988) states that the Taiwanese Mazu cult not only unites people from the same locality, but also distinguishes them from other township residents (ibid: 692-3, cf. 1987: 187-206). According to him, the Taiwanese Mazu cult implies multiple levels of social identity, which can be appropriated according to context.

Martial law was abolished in Taiwan in 1987, thus permitting religious communication between the two sides of the strait in the following year. This meant that Taiwanese pilgrims were now able to return to the goddess’s original temple in Meizhou. As a result of different social conditions, the Mazu cults in Taiwan and China varied. Many of the temples in China were either completely destroyed or closed down during the ten-year Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s; since 1988, the re-establishment of the Mazu cult, especially in Meizhou, has been largely dependent on the sponsorship of Taiwanese pilgrims. In contrast, the Taiwanese Mazu cult achieved prosperity in the 1960s, and temples with historical exhibits or antique architecture were put under a national preservation order. Regional identity and pride have meanwhile swayed Taiwanese believers into establishing a temple hierarchy among the different Mazu cults (Chang 1993:71, 202-212; 1999, cf. Huang Mei-yin 1994:84-97). Today the journey to Meizhou implies the possibility of changing the existing temple hierarchy in Taiwan; temples of a lower rank can improve their status by journeying to Meizhou to establish a direct relationship with the original Mazu temple. The temple committee of the Zhenlan Gong temple in Dajia, for instance, was successful in achieving this aim. The people of Dajia had journeyed annually to the Caotian Gong temple in Beigang before 1988, which explains why their temple was subordinate in status to the destination temple. After a pioneering pilgrimage to Meizhou and the bringing back of the Mazu image from the original temple, the Dajia people not only advanced the reputation of their own temple, but also circumvented its subordinate status to the Beigang temple.

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46 The dispute, for example, over historical authenticity between two Mazu temples (Tianhou Gong and Shengmu Miao) located in the old port city of Luermen in southern Taiwan gained considerable public attention in the 1950s. Similar discord flared up between the Mazu temples in Beigang and Xingang. The recent quarrel between the township residents of Dajia and Beigang was caused by the pilgrimage. cf. note 49.
47 Sangren (1988: 292) points out that ethnic differentiation also includes the Hakka versus the Minnanese, and that local identity in terms of residence can refer to the township, village, or neighbourhood level, etc.
48 The largest Mazu pilgrimage activity in Taiwan is carried out by the people of Dajia. The estimated number of pilgrims today is approximately one hundred thousand (Huang Dun-hou 2000:11).
49 The people of the Dajia temple focused on promoting the status of their temple after visiting Meizhou in 1987. In 1988, they suggested changing the name of the pilgrimage to Beigang from “yezu jinxiang” (‘pilgrimage to pay homage to the mother temple’) to “raojing jinxiang” (‘inspection and pilgrimage’), thereby ignoring the juxtaposition of the conflicting meanings of pilgrimage and inspection. Whereas people
In concluding this section, the Taiwanese Mazu pilgrimage denotes people’s multiple identities. By analysing a particular case, I will explain how pilgrimage, based on a local cult writ large, accommodates pilgrims and believers from all over the island. Multiple identities emerge as a result of differentiation within the territorial cult dedicated to Mazu, and the accounts of emigrants and believers from other places. The appropriation of religious symbols is indeed dependent on the context, where different levels of identity can be asserted to serve the purpose of integration or separation.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Whereas the introductory chapter deals with my research questions and theoretical concerns, the research methods adopted are described in the second chapter. The research design will explain my ethnographic fieldwork strategies, with reference to the fact that research during an annual pilgrimage is subject to constraints. It also includes the reflexivity of the research. The third chapter introduces the ethnographic setting of Baishatun. A general account of the area provides the background to ethnicity, the political districts, economic conditions and social organisations. By examining the ritual landscape in terms of communal worship, I will explore the local context of the pilgrimage. Why is the pilgrimage organised by the Mazu temple? What are the relations between the various temples and religious associations in the area? The religious setting cannot, however, leave out the translocal influence of emigrants or visitors who attend local festivities. Participation in the pilgrimage is not confined to local residents only.

The fourth chapter deals with the pilgrimage itself, and can be divided into three parts. Firstly, what preparations are made for the pilgrimage journey to be carried out on foot? Apart from the Mazu temple, are there any other ritual institutions involved in organising the pilgrimage? Secondly, a series of rituals that constitute a vital element of the pilgrimage. Focusing on the religious resource in the folk religion context, I intend to explain how pilgrims are motivated to participate in the journey. Thirdly, pilgrimage plays an important role in constructing the ritual community centred around the Mazu cult in Baishatun. Why are several nearby villages included in the cult? Also, what relations exist between the

from a temple of lower rank make the pilgrimage to one of higher rank, inspection is carried out in the opposite direction. The suggestion made by the Dajia people was a source of irritation to the temple committee members in Beigang. Because they were unable to reach a compromise, relations between the two temples broke down (cf. Guo Qing-wen ed. 1993, Guo Jin-run 1988:105-19). The Dajia people then changed the destination of their pilgrimage to another famous temple in Xingang, which was at the time in the throes of a feud with the Beigang temple, and replaced the ritual of dividing incense with the ceremony of celebrating the goddess’s birthday.
different units within this cult?

The fifth and sixth chapters analyse the pilgrimage journey. I will adopt the performance-oriented ritual perspective to analyse the palanquin performance in the fifth chapter. Because there is no previously planned route or timetable for the journey, the selection of the path and resting places depends on the palanquin performance, the result of which is regarded as the goddess’s decision that the pilgrims should follow. How was the performance displayed on the trip? Who are the protagonists? Does the performance contain represented meaning for the pilgrims? Or, does the performance persuade the audience? Stressing the physical experience of the performance and the journey on foot, I attempt to elucidate the significance of the corporate experience of the pilgrimage odyssey.

The analysis of the pilgrimage routes of more recent journeys is the topic of the sixth chapter. Quite apart from the destination, why does this pilgrim group undertake the journey without a pre-fixed route? By examining the routes selected in recent years, I will shed light on their patterns and motives. The ritual topography of the journey reflects the social map of the pilgrim group. I will clarify why the journey has taken place in this manner, and the social meaning attached to it. The pilgrimage involves crossing boundaries, as pilgrims endeavour to transcend physical constraints and complete the journey on foot. While journeying to the destination means crossing geographical boundaries, I will explore what other boundaries the pilgrim group transcends in the particular ritual and social contexts.

The seventh and eighth chapters contain the main theoretical concerns of the thesis. The common journeying experience is what forges the pilgrimage identity indispensable to creating the “we group” or what Turner (1974a, b, 1978) called *communitas*. The seventh chapter will clarify how different notions of “community” can coincide with people’s assertions of belonging to Baishatun in different social contexts. The pilgrimage journey of 2001, where pilgrims followed the goddess’s palanquin and waded across a river, will be highlighted as the climax of forging pilgrimage identity. This event resulted in the preservation of pilgrimage culture and local place-making projects in Bsaishatun. However, the construction of “Baishatun community” is not solely confined to local residents. Many Baishatun emigrants and believers from other places are also involved. In addition, three web sites about the pilgrimage and Baishatun were established on the Internet from 2000, and two pilgrimage films were made in 2001. Does “Baishatun community” have the same meaning for these people? Despite the common assertion of shared belonging (even in the name of the goddess’s arrangement), what do people really share in these disparate social contexts?

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50 My analysis of *communitas* (community in Latin), however, is based on the constructive perspective, which differs from Turner’s theoretical concern in terms of structural vs. anti-structural.
contexts? Indeed, multiple connotations of “community” can denote people’s manifold identities in different contexts.

The eighth chapter will explore the pilgrimage arena. Because some ritual positions and privileges are not completely institutionalised, eligible agents may compete for these ritual advantages. My concern in this chapter is to address the following questions: What arenas occur in the pilgrimage? Who is involved in the contest? How can problems be solved when discord or conflict emerges? And what effect does this competition have on the pilgrimage? Moreover, pilgrimage representation in writing can also become a battlefield. A struggle for power in the arena where who speaks for whom and who controls the instrument of representation is crucial. The final chapter will conclude the main findings of the thesis.