Chapter 6
Ritual topography and boundary-crossing: an analysis of pilgrimage routes

The pilgrimage journey from Baishatun to Beigang does not have a scheduled route. Its path varies annually. Why are certain routes taken by the pilgrimage in favour of others to reach the destination? Is there a pattern to the routes selected in previous journeys? Why are some places visited en route and others are not? And, what social meanings are attached to these unfixed routes? These are the questions that concern me in this chapter.

I will begin by examining the different routes taken on recent journeys, in order to establish a pattern. Secondly, drawing on the notion of ritual topography (Turner 1974b; Schlee 1990, 1992), I will explore the social map of the pilgrim group by analysing how pilgrimage bonds are formed, and how they alter. Finally, Bauman’s (1992) notion that “ritual implicates others” sheds light on the interpretation of pilgrimage ritual topography. I will discuss how pilgrimage presents local identity, and how it implies the socially transcendent power (cf. Sangren 1993) that involves boundary-crossing in the social and ritual context.

6.1 The pilgrimage routes

The pilgrimage passes through four counties and more than twenty townships each year before reaching its destination. Devoid of a fixed route, the pilgrimage march relies on Mazu’s palanquin oracles for the selection of paths and rest stops (cf. 5.3). My purpose in this section is to find out how many routes the pilgrimage takes to reach its destination, and whether they are selected conventionally or form a pattern.

Apart from my own records of three journeys, I also take account of other data on pilgrimage routes, such as the journeys in 1985 and 1986 (Luo 1992), as well as those from 1991 to 2002 (Chen 1992; BGZZ 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998; Chen 1995, 1996; You 1996; Liang 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). Generally speaking, these pilgrimage routes can be divided into two patterns, the first of which are the conventional routes confined to the reach of the Baishatun Mazu cult and the destination town, and the second the flexible routes that connect the domain of the Mazu cult to the pilgrimage centre.
6.1.1 Conventional pilgrimage routes and rest stops

Some routes and rest stops on the journey are more or less fixed. The first fixed category refers to places and paths restricted to the ambit of the Baishatun Mazu cult. The pilgrimage route begins on the main village path at Gongtian Gong temple and leads to Baishatun train station (Map 3-2). At the end of this village path lies the neighbourhood of Ciatau. Not unlike the pilgrimage convention on the journey itself, Mazu’s palanquin is carried to this neighbourhood for the palanquin performance display, the represented meaning of which is the goddess’s inspection of the place prior to selecting it as a rest stop for her return journey. The place examined by the Mazu palanquin, either in the vicinity of the train station (in Baixi Li) or in front of the post office (in Baidong Li), is the final rest stop on the return journey of the pilgrimage to the village. Conventionally, Baishatun residents entertain pilgrims to lunch at this rest stop. They prepare offerings to worship Mazu and hire a professional group to perform Taiwanese opera in celebration of Mazu’s return from the journey.

One of the key meeting places for departure is the roadside of Province Road Number One (PR1) on Baishatun’s southern border. As a rule, members of the head-flag brigade at the van of the pilgrim’s procession wait here for the Mazu palanquin and then set out towards the south. The southern village border is also the terminus where residents who stay behind say goodbye to the pilgrims. Various carriers of palanquins and divination chairs bearing deities from nearby temples and shrines perform the etiquette in front of Mazu’s palanquin to wish her a successful journey before they leave.

The journey begins on the PR1, which connects Baishatun to several southern villages of the Mazu cult. The route of the pilgrimage from here to Tongwan is also the traditional route taken on return to the village, when the pilgrimage parade escorts Mazu’s palanquin to her temple. Two spots on the PR1 roadside are usually visited by Mazu’s palanquin on the departure journey. The first is the empty space in front of the house of the village head in Neidao. On the return journey it is generally chosen as a rest stop, where village residents worship Mazu and dedicate an opera performance to her. The second is the empty space near Qioumao Park in Xinpu. The ritual of changing Mazu’s palanquin and the rite of competing the first incense (cf. 4.2.4.2) are held here when pilgrims return. Both rest stops are on the opposite side of the road to the departure point. Despite busy traffic, members of the palanquin brigade are obliged to cross the province road to display the palanquin performance, which is said to represent the goddess’s inspection. Another conventional rest

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1 In very rare instances the march takes the beach path, which also leads to Neidao, Xinpu and Tongwan. The PRN1 is a main north-south arterial road but currently not as popular as the freeways.
stop is the activity centre in Tongwan. Since the 1980s, this has been the final overnight stop on the return trip.²

The second fixed category represents the ambit of the destination town. Before pilgrims approach the pilgrimage centre, Mazu’s palanquin rests in the space in front of the Beichen Police Station in Beigang. This conventional rest stop is also the collection point for the pilgrimage procession that leads to the destination temple. The parade route is more or less fixed and passes through several main streets of the town before taking Zhongshan Road to the Chaotian Gong temple.³

6.1.2 Flexible selection of pilgrimage routes

Outside the domain of the Baishatun Mazu cult, the pilgrimage can take several different routes to reach the destination in southern Taiwan. The potential routes are divided into inland and coastal lines. The main pilgrimage routes shown on Map 6-1 coincide with the traffic connections in Taiwan’s western plain (cf. Map 6-2).

Province Road Number One (PR1) is the main artery of the inland line. Pilgrims can reach Tongxiao by travelling south along PR1, after which they pass through Yuanli on the border of Miaoli County. It is also possible to take PR1 and pass several townships of Taizhong County, reaching Zhanghua City by crossing the Dadu Bridge. If pilgrims continue along PR1, after passing through several townships such as Huatan, Dacun, Yuanlin and Xizhou, they reach the Zhuoshui River. Meanwhile, two other paths are frequently taken in the area of Zhanghua County. The first is Province Road Number 19 (PR19), which begins in Zhanghua, continues up to the Zhuoshui River and also leads to the destination. Both PR1 and PR19 are the usual routes taken, and are connected via small county or village roads between Pitou and Xizhou. The second is County Road Number 141 (CR141), which converges with PR1 at Yunlin and leads the pilgrimage to Ershui in the southeast of Zhanghua County. The most frequent method of crossing the Zhuoshui River is to take the old Xiluo Bridge leading to Xiluo. Another possibility is to go to Erlun over the Ziqiang Bridge. Pilgrims reach the destination in the Yunlin area by taking either County Road Number 145 (CR145) through Huwei or PR19 through Lunbei.

² In fact, the firm selection of these rest stops still leaves room for variation. In the past (about 50 years ago), the final overnight stop was in Wubei Li in Tongxiao, where the ritual of changing Mazu’s palanquin was performed. This changed in the 1960s when the rest was held in the centre of Xinpu up until the conflict. The place for the changing of the palanquin was then moved to the vicinity of the salt company in Neidao, and finally to where it is today.
³ However, there is still a possibility of deviating from this route. Mazu’s palanquin carriers took other streets at the back of the temple in 2000, for instance, and arrived at the front door to the temple. However, to a large extent Baishatun people regard this deviation as an exception and unacceptable.
The coastal line (Map 6-1) refers to Province Road Number 17 (PR17) or 61 (PR61). These routes are seldom chosen, probably because the number of believers in the coastal area is infinitely smaller than that of the inland areas. I was informed that the coastal line was first taken in 1985. The longest coastal line emerged on the return trip in 1996, when pilgrims primarily took PR19, PR17 and PR1 to return to Baishatun. If at all, the coastal line is taken between southern Taizhong County and Lugang of Zhanghua County, where it connects to the PR19 inland line in Puyan.

Having examining the records of thirteen journeys, I mark out three main lines shown in Map 6-1, namely PR1, PR19 and CR145. However, this is only the main route connecting different townships on the journey. Mazu’s palanquin carriers often deviate from this route and take local county roads or village paths to enter a town or village. Frequent visits are paid to several villages near the Zhuoshui River, such as Lujia, Santiao, Sanjun, Wucuo and Yuliao. Meanwhile, Mazu’s palanquin is also carried to places that are inaccessible to ordinary traffic roads and can only be reached by walking across farm lands or wading across rivers.

In brief, while some rest stops and routes are conventionalised in the home and destination areas, most of the journeys are devoid of fixed routes or pre-arranged rest stops. Yet, the various main routes the pilgrimage takes are based on the traffic connections between Baishatun and Beigang, and reflect the social map of the pilgrimage group.

6.2 Ritual topography and the bonds of the pilgrimage

There are several other ways of reaching the destination apart from the routes mentioned above. Why are these particular routes taken by the pilgrims? And, why are certain places visited more frequently on the journey? Apart from geographical limitations, what are the reasons for selecting these routes and resting places?

I will attempt in this section to discover the cultural reasons behind the specific selection of pilgrimage routes. By examining the social relations between the pilgrimage group and those visited, I will explore how pilgrimage bonds are forged. In fact, the pilgrimage journey passes through several areas with renowned Mazu temples, and Baishatun pilgrimage routes in the western plain of Taiwan usually overlap with those of the largest pilgrimage group, which journeys from Dajia to Xingang (near Beigang) (cf. 1.3.3.2 and Map 6-1). Under these circumstances, forging Baishatun pilgrimage bonds must account for.
the influence of other Mazu cults and the Dajia pilgrimage. I will also discuss why pilgrimage bonds with several townships or villages have been reinforced in recent years, and why others have declined in significance.

6.2.1 Ritual topography as the social map of the pilgrimage group

Turner (1974b:183) contends that the topographical perspective, defined as “the representing of certain ritual features of the cultural landscapes on maps”, is important in pilgrimage studies. Reviewing the ritual topographies of several African societies, he argues that the spatial distribution of sacred sites can possess other cultural connotations, in which shrines connected to other cults constitute overlapping or hierarchical relations (ibid: 184-85). Examining pilgrimage centres in Mexico, he writes: “the landscape itself is coded into symbolic units packed with cosmological and theological meaning” (ibid: 210). In his research on the jila pilgrimage journey of the nomadic Gabbra in the Kenyan/Ethiopian borderlands, Schlee (1992) uses the notion of ritual topography to explain the meanings attributed to holy sites and pilgrimage routes. According to him, these physical landscapes are prescribed with cultural meaning and ritual action that relate to lineage history and myth, and contribute to the symbolic constitution of social identities.

Although the Baishatun pilgrimage belongs to a totally different cultural context, I will adopt the notion of ritual topography to explain the various pilgrimage routes. My concern is to identify the features that contribute to maintaining the flexible selection of pilgrimage routes and rest stops. In particular, the pilgrimage journey passes through the western plain of the island, where the Mazu belief is popular. Generally speaking, each town or city possesses its own Mazu temple, sometimes even two or three. Several Mazu temples of renown are located on the way, such as those in Dajia, Lugang, Zhanghua, and Xiluo. In this respect, it is not easy for the Baishatun Mazu cult at village level to compete with eminent Mazu cults at town or city level in the western plain. The pilgrimage group from Baishatun may encounter barriers to spreading the reputation of its Mazu on the journey. While there are several ways of reaching the destination, selected roads and rest stops are by no means random choice. As soon as Mazu’s palanquin rests, the interaction between

4 The western plain also constitutes a large ritual topography of Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan. However, my concern here is to discuss the topography of the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage.

5 The Dajia pilgrimage is the largest and most famous in Taiwan. Two Mazu temples in Lugang are also renowned for their histories: the Xinzu Gong temple, built in the early Qing dynasty and known as an official temple; and the Tianhou Gong temple, which is claimed to be a branch temple of the original temple in Meizhou. There are three Mazu temples (Tianhou Gong, Nanyao Gong and Laodama) and about ten Mazu associations in Zhanghua. Two temples in Xiluo (Fuxing Gong and Guangfu Gong) are usually visited by pilgrims from Dajia and Baishatun.
pilgrims and local residents begins. For the most part, local believers prepare offerings to worship the goddess from Baishatun and entertain her pilgrims with free food and beverages, or even lodgings in the case of an overnight stay. Hence, the relationship between the pilgrimage group and local residents must be taken into account in selecting the rest stop.

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The rest frequency¹ in different townships on the journeys from 1985 to 2001²

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¹ The rest frequency also includes overnight stops.
² Data is based on the journey records I collected. The journey in 1992 is not included, because the record of return trip is missing. These pilgrimage journey records kept by various people throughout the years do not correspond in detail, so that some rest stops may have been left out.
³ This figure applies to rest stops.

Despite discrepancies in journey records, Table 6-1 proffers a general overview of the rest
frequency for the last twelve journeys. According to the figures in the table, the highest rest frequency is shown for the ambit of Zhanghua County, which is where most Baishatun Mazu devotees live, e.g., in Zhanghua City and Xizhou. The average rest frequency for the twelve journeys gives no indication of a great distinction between the other three counties. However, rest stops are usually chosen in areas where there are a great deal of devotees. Sometimes a rest is taken on the journey for practical reasons. For example, pilgrims usually rest at the Mazu temple in Xihu or Pitou, where the coastal and inland lines of the pilgrimage route converge. Both sides of the Zhuoshui River, Xizhou and Xiluo, are often selected as rest stops. On the eve of reaching the destination, pilgrims usually rest in Huwei or Lunbei, or in Yuanzhang, which is close to it.

Most of the rest stops are places with numerous devotees of the Baishatun Mazu. Choosing these places as rest or overnight stops is based on common Mazu belief or relations between pilgrims and local believers (see below). In other words, the selected routes and rest stops reflect the social map of this pilgrimage group. Many devout believers en route devote themselves to the pilgrimage. They not only worship Mazu and entertain her pilgrims, but also become pilgrims themselves by joining the journey. However, it occasionally occurs that Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin rests at sites that are rarely visited or do not have many believers. This is interpreted as the intention of establishing relations with the hitherto unknown local residents.

Indeed, the absence of a pre-scheduled route does not imply a complete absence of rules in choosing paths or rest stops. The geographical sites of the various rest stops, prescribed with pilgrimage ritual features and social relations with Baishatun, constitute the ritual topography of the journey. Similar to its improvised routes, the ritual topography of the pilgrimage journey shows no evidence of rigidity.

6.2.2 Forging pilgrimage bonds

Countless believers support the pilgrimage en route as a form of gratitude for Mazu’s protection. Devotees are organised into groups and devote themselves collectively to the pilgrimage. When Mazu’s palanquin arrives, they come to worship her and entertain her pilgrims with great enthusiasm. The annual journey forms a pilgrimage bond between the devotee group of an individual place and the pilgrim group from Baishatun. Although

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6 Mazu’s palanquin rested in front of the Zhuifen Police Station in 2000 and the Zhuifeng Station in 1996. Both spots belong to Dadu Township, which has relatively few goddess devotees. Pilgrims usually regard the halt in this township merely as a rest stop after a long period of walking.

7 Many local devotees offer pilgrims food and beverages along the way.
different devotee groups can also interact with each other through the pilgrimage (Quintero 2002: 146, no.5), I consider the direct pilgrimage bonds between Baishatun and the respective local group as more prominent and more significant. Nevertheless, what is the reason behind forming a pilgrimage bond?

I maintain that the social relationships between the pilgrim group and those visited form the basis for the forging of pilgrimage bonds, and are an elementary pre-requisite. Social relations (*guanxi*, cf. Jacob 1982) in Chinese society usually involve “the exchange of gifts, favours and banquets; the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness” (Yang 1994: 6). What kind of relationships exist between pilgrims and devotees in the course of the pilgrimage journey? Do they have other relationships (such as kin relationships)? Although a relationship based on the pilgrimage can develop into a long-lasting one, my concern here is to explore how social relationships develop into pilgrimage bonds.

Forging pilgrimage bonds depends to a great extent on the mutual interaction between the pilgrim group and the local group visited. As mentioned in the fifth chapter (cf. 5.3.1.2), devotees of visited groups usually entertain pilgrims to food and drink free of charge. They consider it their religious duty to Mazu to play the role of host to visiting pilgrims. For the Baishatun pilgrimage group, the cultivation of social relations is indispensable to forging the pilgrimage bond. Members of the TAC present gifts to hosts of rest spots on behalf of the Baishatun Mazu temple as a sign of gratitude to the devotees for their generous reception. They also donate incense money to temples they visit or pass by (without halting to rest). 8 Presenting gifts is a way of showing the giver’s intention of cultivating a relationship with the gift receiver. Moreover, the TAC usually invites devotees and temple people they encounter en route to the Mazu temple banquet in Baishatun on the day of return, where residents of the cult domain entertain believers and pilgrims from outside at the celebration. Some entrepreneurs of the cult area organise a voluntary group to receive and look after guests when Mazu returns from the journey.

This sub-section will explain the different ways of forging pilgrimage bonds. I will first examine the emigrants of the cult domain, since they play a key role in supporting the pilgrimage and spreading the reputation of the pilgrimage group. Secondly, by reviewing several Mazu pilgrimage legends, I will investigate the role these stories play in absorbing believers en route. It seems that pilgrimage bonds can be formed wherever devotees

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8 Incense money is given as a sign of appreciation for the entertainment provided by the host. In contrast, no money is given to individual families, since the host reception is regarded as religious devotion to the goddess. Incense money given to temples that are passed is usually less than that donated to temples actually visited.
congregate. Finally, I will explore whether a temple relationship can develop into a pilgrimage bond.

6.2.2.1 Spreading the pilgrimage reputation through emigrants

Pilgrimage bonds can be formed by emigrants who originally resided in the area of the Baishatun Mazu cult. People are compelled to migrate to earn a living due to poor conditions for planting and fishing in their home area. Most emigrants move to larger cities, such as Taipei, Taizhong or Zhanghua. Regardless of where they settle, emigrants continue to worship the deities of their home villages. To them, Baishatun Mazu is still the most significant patron goddess. They either take part in the journey as Mazu pilgrims, or play the role of host to pilgrims from their home villages.

In fact, the Mazu palanquin rest frequency in the primary emigrant areas of Zhanghua (city) and several townships in Zhanghua County is not as high as in other devotee areas. Although pilgrimage visits by Mazu’s palanquin are quite rare, most emigrants still maintain a strong home village identity. Not only does the Mazu pilgrimage activity bind emigrants significantly to their home villages, but they in turn play an essential role in spreading the reputation of the Baishatun Mazu.

One large family in Zhanghua has provided pilgrims along the journey with free beverages for several years. With forty family members made up of four generations, this family moved to the city of Zhanghua in 1959, because of inadequate water supplies and planting difficulties in Beikeng (the northern village of the Baishatun Mazu cult). Whereas the family was originally involved in subsistence agriculture, third generation family members are now engaged in enterprises such as managing quilt production and running a chemical company. Mazu’s palanquin chose to use this family’s residence as a rest stop in 1995 and 2001. The family head is over 80 years old. He and his late father used to participate in the journey in the past. One of his sons mentioned that they worship Mazu whenever the pilgrimage arrives in the city, in the hope that Mazu’s palanquin will pay their home a visit. One grandson explained their involvement in the pilgrimage:

“My mother and my wife love joining the pilgrimage journey as walking pilgrims. Usually, we drive a lorry with free beverages for the pilgrims on foot. It is really hard for them. They usually walk on narrow paths or to villages where it is difficult to find a shop. We think that beverages are what they need. So we are simply providing them with a small convenience. It’s

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9 Mazu’s palanquin has rested in some emigrant areas in Zhanghua, such as on Zhanhe Road in Zhanghua City in 1993, on Jinma Road in Zhanghua City in 1995 and in 2001, and on Zhongshan Road, Dacun in Zhanghua County in 2000.
nothing really and not worth mentioning. Mazu’s pilgrimage is only once a year, and we just
do what we can to thank her for her protection. Indeed, we do the same as the Mazu pilgrims
who take care of each other on the way” (Guo-liang).

In fact, the Mazu belief is very popular in Zhanghua, which has several renowned Mazu
temples and associations whose fame extends even to nearby townships (Lin 1989). Although
this family moved to the city more than forty years ago, they still worship the
Baishatun Mazu at home. They told me how they maintained worship dedicated to the
Mazu of their home village:

“Our domestic altar contains Mazu images from Gongtian Gong temple in Baishatun. In order
to get the one-year permission to worship Mazu’s image from the temple, we participated in a
believers’ competition for buahbue [casting the divination blocks] every year [cf. 3.2.1.3 & no.
47]. Fortunately, we have won the permission to worship for the last eight years. … We also
go to Baishatun to worship Mazu in the ordinary time, mostly on the first and the fifteenth
day of each lunar month. My wife is skilled at arranging flowers, and we dedicate fresh
flowers for six pairs of vases to the temple shrine twice a month. One time when she was too
busy to prepare flowers, Mazu appeared in a dream to remind her to bring flowers to
Baishatun. We are happy that we can dedicate flowers to Mazu as a sign of gratitude for her
protection. … Actually, many of our friends and business companions also worship Baishatun
Mazu, because they know our Mazu’s ling [divine efficacy] from us. Some of them even join
us on the journey” (Guo-liang).

Apart from kin ties with relatives in Beikeng, the meaning of the home village to this family
is mainly Mazu worship and her pilgrimage. According to the grandson, Baishatun Mazu is
their real patron goddess, who has the semblance of a mother taking care of her children no
matter how far they are from home.

Other emigrants I spoke to expressed similar feelings towards the goddess. Not unlike the
family mentioned above, many emigrants from the Baishatun Mazu cult domain maintain
pilgrimage bonds, due to the strong connection with their home villages. They participate in
the journey annually or support the pilgrimage by donating money, entertaining pilgrims or
hiring performance troupes for the celebration. They are also important transmitters of the
reputation of the pilgrimage, albeit their influence is usually confined to the individual
level.

6.2.2.2 Mazu’s pilgrimage legends and the increase in devotees

As mentioned in the fifth chapter, the second type of palanquin performance gives rise to
the boundless production of Mazu pilgrimage legends (cf. 5.4). Despite miscellaneous
versions, the leitmotif of these legends centres on Mazu’s mercy and her magic power (ling,
or efficacy, cf. 1.3.3.1). These oral stories are widespread among pilgrims and believers; they are also recorded in written narratives. Further, pilgrims experience situations similar to those described in the legends, e.g., when Mazu’s palanquin leads them to places mentioned in the stories, or when the palanquin performance repeatedly occurs on the same occasion as on previous journeys. Therefore, Mazu pilgrimage legends play a vital role in spreading the reputation of the pilgrimage, and those describing the goddess’s ling are the best form of propaganda in absorbing believers. Areas where Mazu pilgrimage legends are prevalent are more likely to form devotee groups and, by the same token, forge pilgrimage bonds.

How can Mazu pilgrimage legends attract more believers and even lead to the formation of pilgrimage bonds? The Chinese saying “jin miao qi shen” expresses resident indifference towards the deity enshrined in their own temple. Contrary to this saying, most Baishatun people are of the opinion that their Mazu is worshipped far beyond their own village, as described in the Minnanese saying “Mazo hang quaking”. Why does the Baishatun Mazu have so many devotees from other places? The most likely reason is said to be Mazu’s efficacy. One former TAC member of the Gongtian Gong temple gives his answer:

“Our Mazu is also called “siann-ma” [efficacious Mazu, see also 8.2.1.1]. There are many stories about our Mazu’s ling [efficacious power] in helping believers. This is why so many of them come from outside to worship our Mazu. Actually, there is no written record about our Mazu, and the guanli-weiyuanhui [TAC] does not propagate our Mazu. It really our Mazu’s own work. She finds believers from outside by herself. She has such linggam that many people donate money to our temple and receive our pilgrimage group during the pilgrimage” (Fu-lu).

According to Table 6-1, the areas along the Zhuoshui River, such as Xizhou and Xiluo (cf. Map 6-1), are visited regularly by Mazu’s palanquin. Both places contain numerous miraculous pilgrimage legends about Mazu. One renowned legend describes how Mazu led pilgrims safely across the river. Before the construction of the first bridge in the early 1950s, people were forced to wade across the river. According to several senior residents who made the journey in those early days, they relied for their safety in crossing the river on Mazu’s protection. A seventy-year old Baishatun resident told his story:

“The river was up to my chest! To tell the truth, the river was so deep that I could not see the

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bottom. But we relied on Mazu to get us across. … We tied our personal belongings to our shoulders and waded through the river behind Mazu’s palanquin. Before we got to the river, Mazu’s palanquin [palanquin] swung so violently that we could hear the xia-xia-xia sounds from it. As soon as the carriers took Mazu’s palanquin down to the river, we immediately followed. Some took hold of Mazu’s palanquin, others held on to the hands or shoulder of the person in front of them. We formed a chain behind Mazu’s palanquin, so that it seemed as if there was a path on the water for us cross on. Actually, we were all drawn by Mazu to cross the river. As a matter of fact, we all relied on Mazu’s pulling to get across the river safely. … There were many people on both sides of the river, such as from Santiaojun [old village name of today’s Santiao and Sanjun in Xizhou] and Xiluo. They wanted to see us wading across the river. I imagine that some of them doubted our Mazu’s ling [efficacious power]. When we all got across the river safely, they clapped their hands and set off firecrackers to welcome our Mazu. Our reputation grew: “Baishatun Mazu zin linggam” [Baishatun Mazu is very efficacious]. Today, the people of Santiaojun and Xiluo are very excited when our Mazu arrives” (Fu-yuan).

Legends referring to Mazu’s protection while crossing the river are still very popular, albeit frequently rife with exaggeration. In fact, both Xizhou and Xiluo were significant rest stops in those days, when pilgrims were forced to wade across the river. Although this is now pilgrimage history, Mazu’s palanquin still frequently visits Xizhou and Xiluo, where Mazu devotees and pilgrimage legends abound. Indeed, the residents of Xizhou and Xiluo have forged a bond with Baishatun. Many local residents are familiar with the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage legends. For instance, one resident in Santiao (part of the old Santiaojun village) told me two other Mazu legends from the village:

“Many Baishatun Mazu stories took place in our village. For instance the one about Mazu’s palanquin passing through a door that was narrower. It happened to a family surnamed Liao in Sanjun [the neighbouring village]. … Mazu’s palanquin had visited a small hut on the riverbank of the Zhuoshui River. A young couple from our village lived there with their small children. It was claimed that because Mazu’s gianggiau [palanquin performance] had warned them to keep away from there, they followed Mazu’s direction and moved away. Several months later, the river burst its banks as a result of heavy rain. The small hut was destroyed by the flood. You see, Baishatun Mazu saved that family. I know the young couple personally, so I know this story well. …It is true. Baishatun Mazu is very linggam [efficacious]. This is the reason why so many of our villagers worship her. … Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin rested in my house twenty years ago” (A-yong-a).

Another legend depicts Baishatun Mazu’s theophany, telling the story of how her palanquin was carried through a door narrower than the palanquin itself. According to written reports (Wu, 2001:107, Lue 1997: 40-41; Lue 1998: 7-8, 19-20), this story first appeared in 1979 in Yuliao, Xiluo. It has been repeated several times on other journeys, such as in Sanjun (see
above), in Yuliao again in 1981, and in Yuanli in 1997. While I noticed with regard to this
legend in 1997 that some overstated Mazu’s magic power to make the impossible work,
others praised the successful performance of the palanquin carriers. These stories with
slightly different versions focus on depicting the goddess’s magical power. Regardless of
exaggeration, many believers enjoy discussing and creating their own narratives.
Most Mazu pilgrimage legends are stories of supposed miracles witnessed by families,
whose houses were visited by the goddess’s palanquin. Baishatun Mazu is regarded as a
goddess of great mercy in possession of efficacious power, who takes care of people in this
world even on the pilgrimage procession.\textsuperscript{11} It is believed that the visited family will be the
recipient of the goddess’s special protection or of good fortune (cf. 5.3.1.2, 5.3.1.3 & 5.4.1).
Unlike procedures of other pilgrimage groups in Taiwan, Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin
usually rests in the private houses of believers, instead of in temples en route.\textsuperscript{12} In fact,
choosing private houses as rest stops provides pilgrims and believers with the opportunity
of testifying to Mazu’s efficacious protection, and can lead to the production of new
pilgrimage legends. Once Mazu's efficacious protection has been proved, the miraculous
story is spread rapidly, including its exaggeration. In 1997, for instance, Mazu’s palanquin
was put to rest in the small house of an aged couple in Yuanli, to the great surprise of the
pilgrim group. Contrary to this host family who was unprepared for the worship of Mazu,
their neighbours, who had been expecting Mazu’s palanquin, set off fire crackers and made
offerings in front of their large house. The sharp contrast between the visited family and the
neighbours primed for the visit is said to be a manifestation of Baishatun Mazu’s ability to
take care of poor people. The hostess, who had been ill in bed for years, was said to have
been cured when she knelt down to worship Mazu. News of the miracle cure spread like
wildfire in the town.\textsuperscript{13} In fact, Yuanli has become an important rest stop on recent journeys,
the significance of which is underlined by this legend.
Similarly, miraculous stories associated with Mazu’s efficacious power have also appeared
in Zhanghua, which has a large population of Mazu devotees. Frequent visits were paid to
some of the shops on Zhongshan Road in recent years, where the shopkeepers tell their
\textsuperscript{11} The goddess is usually depicted as showing great mercy by looking after people. Her palanquin has been
carried to kindergartens, traditional markets and supermarkets. These visits are interpreted as the goddess’s
inspection of the various human activities of her believers.
\textsuperscript{12} Most Taiwanese pilgrim groups choose temples as rest stops on the journey in order to avoid pollution. (cf.
4.2.2.2). However, Baishatun pilgrims claim that their Mazu never chose to rest at the house of an “unclean”
family where someone had died.
\textsuperscript{13} According to the record for the journey in 2002 (BFO 2003: 45), this family was visited again by Mazu’s
palanquin. Mazu’s palanquin arrived on precisely the day after a one-year funeral period. The hostess had died
the previous year.
respective stories about Mazu’s protection. They have also organised a voluntary group to support the pilgrimage, thereby forging a pilgrimage bond. Meanwhile, many of these devotees visit the Baishatun temple at ordinary times to pray to Mazu. Some of them worship Mazu’s image divided from Baishatun at home. More importantly, once the pilgrimage bond is formed, devotee support is ensured in the long term.

However, belief in Baishatun Mazu’s protection can be interpreted in alternate ways, as the following case will show. A pious Buddhist family on Zhongzhen Road was first visited by Mazu’s palanquin in 1958. Thereupon, nearby residents began to pay attention to the pilgrimage group, and a growing number of local people came to worship Baishatun Mazu when her palanquin arrived. The house of the family head and those of his married daughters were visited by Mazu’s palanquin several times. The 72-year old family head, who has no relatives in Baishatun, recounted the following:

“I knew about Baishatun Mazu through a relative. I followed his suggestion to worship Mazu with offerings when she arrived in our city. To my surprise, Mazu’s palanquin was put to rest at my business place in Minshen Market. I owned a selling table there of about four square metres, and Mazu’s palanquin rested directly on it. Since the pilgrims arrived at noon, myself and the other vendors cooked lunch to entertain them. There were only about 100 pilgrims at that time [in 1958], and it was not difficult for us to prepare food for them. After this visit, the reputation of Baishatun Mazu circulated in our city, and many people began to worship her when her palanquin arrived. …Mazu came to visit my place again three years later. Because my business had failed at that particular spot, I changed over to a nearby corner. I was very surprised when Mazu found me again and rested in my small business place. When I rented another place on the same street three or four years later to make ritual paper objects, Mazu came to my place for the third time. When I worked in Cishen House [on the same road], Mazu visited twice and pilgrims donated money to this charity organisation. It was really strange! I had no connection to Baishatun before Mazu’s visit. Wherever I move, Mazu comes to visit me. … I usually get up around 4.30, and my daily lesson begins with dedicating incense and tea to Mazu’s image on my domestic altar. Although I am always busy and seldom get the time to visit Baishatun temple, I worship Mazu at home every day. To tell the truth, I do not pray to Mazu that I will earn more money, but for peace and health for my family. In fact, my business did not go well after Mazu’s first visit. People asked why Mazu had not brought me good fortune? But it was not like that. I am really grateful for Mazu’s protection because everyone in my family is healthy and happy” (Ding-lu).

6.2.2.3 Establishing temple relationships through the pilgrimage

Three temples on the pilgrimage route maintain a special relationship with the pilgrimage group from Baishatun. The palanquin performance that took place in these temples was understood by the pilgrims as Mazu’s intention to establish relations with the visited deities. This popular interpretation of the performance developed into yet another Mazu pilgrimage
legend, legitimising the temple relationships and forging pilgrimage bonds.

The first case is Zhennan Gong temple in Qizu Li (originally known as Yuliao) in Xiluo in Yunlin County. Up until 1996, there were only about 35 households in the area, and no temple. When the people of Yuliao suggested building a temple to house several deities worshipped at private altars, they encountered the difficulty of finding a piece of land on which to build. By coincidence, Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin visited the village in 1993, where the palanquin performance took place on private farmland. The performance was subsequently interpreted as Mazu’s suggested location for the temple. In the end, the landowner donated his land for this purpose.\(^\text{14}\) Since Baishatun Mazu was instrumental in finding land for the temple and her pilgrimage legends were renowned in the area, the people of Yuliao enshrined a Mazu image divided from Baishatun when their temple was complete. Thus a special temple relationship between Baishatun and Yuliao was established, with the result that whenever Mazu’s palanquin appeared in this village, the residents welcomed the pilgrims with great enthusiasm.

Similarly, Baoan Gong temple established a temple relationship with Baishatun after the latter’s pilgrimage visit. The construction of the temple, which was located in a coastal village called Wenzai in Xianxi, was assisted by the Baishatun Mazu palanquin performance in the 1980s. This temple is chiefly dedicated to Mazu, and thus regarded as a branch temple of Gongtian Gong temple in Baishatun. The temple relationship based on the pilgrimage visit was reinforced by further visits on subsequent journeys (see Table 6-2). In particular, the palanquin performance was displayed around the temple in 1997 for one hour, which was considered to be a manifestation of the special relationship between these two Mazus. Once relations between the deities were recognised, the pilgrimage bond between Baishatun and Wenzai was formed. Indeed, this temple constituted an important rest stop when the coastal pilgrimage route was selected.

The third case is Nantian Gong temple, located in Zhangcuo, Xizhou. Unlike both temples mentioned above, which were established in recent years, this temple is claimed to be over a hundred years old. Only the Baishatun temple is slightly older. When the palanquin performance was displayed here during its reconstruction in 1991, the performance was interpreted as Baishatun Mazu’s assistance to the visited deity in rebuilding the temple. Again, the asserted relations between the deities confirmed the relationship between both temples, thereby forging the pilgrimage bond between Baishatun and Zhangcuo.

\(^\text{14}\) The story is engraved on the wall of the temple.
Table 6-2 Comparison of the pilgrimage rest frequency at temples in Yuliao, Wenzai and Zhangcuo ¹

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<th>Name of temple, village</th>
<th>Year of journey (rest in the temple)</th>
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¹ Data from my own records and other journey records since 1985.

As Table 6-2 shows, the frequency of pilgrimage visits is higher in Yuliao than in the other two villages. Baishatun has a much older relationship with Yuliao, which has a large Baishatun Mazu following, than with the other two villages. Also, having begun between pilgrims and Mazu devotees, the pilgrimage bond later developed into a temple relationship with Baishatun, as the case of Yuliao has shown. In the case of Wenzai and Zhangcuo in contrast, the pilgrimage bonds were based directly on the temple relationship with Baishatun. Generally speaking, the rest frequency on recent journeys was higher in temples than in private houses, a direct result of the growing number of pilgrims. In this respect, the Baishatun Gongtian Gong temple had no choice but to establish relationships with other temples in the course of the journey.

In brief, the cultivation of social relationships is fundamental to forging pilgrimage bonds. Emigrants from the Mazu cult area undoubtedly maintain pilgrimage bonds with their home villages. The Mazu pilgrimage legends depicting the goddess’s efficacy to protect people and the relations with other temples are the most effective means of propagating the pilgrimage group. The more Mazu pilgrimage legends are produced and dispersed, the greater the possibility of forging pilgrimage bonds.

6.2.3 Changes in pilgrimage bonds

Some devotee groups and temples have maintained pilgrimage bonds with Baishatun for years. On behalf of various localities, these devotee groups support the pilgrimage by preparing food and beverages for the pilgrims, even though Mazu’s palanquin has not visited or rested at their places. My concern in this sub-section is to explore the change in pilgrimage bonds on recent journeys. How is the bond reinforced in certain areas? And why has it fallen into decline in others?

6.2.3.1 The reinforcement of the pilgrimage bonds

Pilgrimage bonds are strengthened by the Mazu palanquin visit, although it is impossible to accomplish the latter annually. Wherever her palanquin rests, numerous devotee groups come to worship Mazu and entertain her pilgrims, such as Meian Gong temple in Jianan,
Bitian Gong Zhongyi Tang temple in Yongjing, Yuliao Zhennan Gong temple in Xiluo, and devotee groups from Zanghua city, Santiaojun villages (in Xizhou), as well as Huwei and Beigang. Specific local conditions and the changes in the Dajia pilgrimage route have resulted in reinforcing the pilgrimage bond with Baishatun in three areas, as the following cases will show.

6.2.3.1.1 The competition for devotion on the pilgrimage

According to Table 6-1, the rest frequency in Zanghua city is highest. Believers of this city usually pray fervently in the hope that Mazu’s palanquin will pay them a visit. Apart from burning incense and preparing offerings, many devotees kneel down on the roadside to worship Mazu when her palanquin arrives. Some of them cry when they are praying, with the intention of inducing the palanquin to stay at their houses. The frequent local competitions in which believers compete to invite Mazu’s palanquin to their places explain why the palanquin performance to choose a place to rest or stay overnight takes place quite often in this city and lasts much longer.

City devotees organised a voluntary group to provide Mazu pilgrims with food and drink over the years. They regard it as a way of showing reverence to the goddess. The organiser of the devotee group is a shopkeeper on Zhongshan Road, whose house was visited several times by Mazu’s palanquin. He told me how he became a goddess devotee and why he organised residents to cook for pilgrims:

“I first heard about Baishatun Mazu in 1985. I just followed my wife to worship Mazu on Zhongzhen Road at that time. Though I had heard about the ling [divine efficacious power] of Baishatun Mazu, I said to myself that I would not believe it unless Mazu paid a visit to my house. To my surprise, Mazu’s palanquin was carried to my house. I got a real shock! … My wife has a tumour but doesn’t suffer too much pain as a result of Mazu’s protection. I suffered from lumbago and could no longer walk before the operation. I was able to walk again after the operation because my wife prayed for Mazu’s protection. Indeed, Baishatun Mazu is very ling. I became her believer because she protected my family. I have also worshipped her image at home since 1990. … I usually go to Longquan Si temple to learn Buddhist lessons or chant Sutras. …When Mazu’s palanquin rested in our vicinity [Zhongshan Road], several shopkeepers and I used to donate money to Mazu’s temple. Later on we decided to cook for pilgrims and bring them food when they rested near our city. We usually collect funds each year and dedicate the money to Mazu’s temple in Baishatun on the day of kuilo [the fulfilment rite of the pilgrimage, cf. 4.3.4]” (Ding-wang).

In fact, many devotees in Zanghua city are also Buddhists. The pilgrimage bond can extend to the Buddhist organisations Mazu’s believers belong to. For instance, the local devotee group organised by the above informant to cook for Mazu’s pilgrims usually

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15 The Mazu belief entails three Chinese teachings: Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism (cf. 1.3.1).
includes his Buddhist companions from the Longquan Si temple. Meanwhile, these Buddhists come to Gongtian Gong temple to make snacks (rice glue pudding) for the celebration when the pilgrimage fulfilment rite is performed in Baishatun. Moreover, devotee competition for the rest stop and devotion to the pilgrimage has become a unique phenomenon. Since the large number of believers in the city makes it difficult to choose rest stops, the palanquin performance has a very high frequency there. According to the journey record (U theatre 1992: 79), Mazu’s palanquin rested at an empty space on Zhongshan Road in 1991, so that worshippers’ expectations were neither satisfied nor disappointed. Often talked about and praised as a fair decision by Mazu, this seems to be the best solution if a loss of believers is to be prevented. While local believers compete for devotion to the pilgrimage, the reputation of Baishatun Mazu is spread widely throughout the city. Hence, believer competitions act as a stimulus to attract more and more people to pray to the goddess from Baishatun and, in this sense, reinforce the pilgrimage bonds.

6.2.3.1.2 The influence of other groups in strengthening relations

In 1945, the village of Santiaojun became the two villages of Santiao and Sanjun. Residents of both villages have a close relationship with the Baishatun pilgrims, and some even worship Mazu’s image divided from the Baishatun temple. Moreover, both villages used to be the lunch stop for the large pilgrimage group from Dajia. In 1978, the Dajia temple changed the stop to Houtian Gong temple in Xizhou (Guo 1988: 127), so that residents no longer had the opportunity of offering food to the Dajia pilgrims. The impact of this alteration on each village was different.

Despite the change, the Dajia Mazu palanquin still visits the Sanjun village temple (Sanqia Gong) today. One villager with a good relationship to the pilgrimage groups from both Baishatun and Dajia compared the two groups:

“When we prepared food for Dajia pilgrims in the past, the Dajia temple people paid our expenses. Baishatun people, on the other hand, are so polite that they do not let us spend much money on cooking for them. While Dajia pilgrims eat vegetarian food, Baishatun pilgrims do not keep a vegetarian diet on the journey. In fact, whether from Dajia or Baishatun, we worship both visiting Mazus and receive any pilgrims who come to our village” (A-de).

As a result of frequent visits, Sanjun villagers maintain a pilgrimage bond with Baishatun. The above informant explained how some villagers worship the Mazu from Baishatun:

“As soon as Mazu [her palanquin] arrives in our village, the first thing we usually do is dedicate incense money to Mazu for fear of losing the opportunity. The reason is very simple.
Most of us have hequan [making a vow for the goddess’s help], such as praying for the sick or bringing up a small child. We dedicate incense money to Mazu to thank her as hingsuan [to thank god when the vow is fulfilled]. It is true that Baishatun Mazu is very ling [divine efficacious power]. ... Besides worshipping Mazu, some of our villagers even join the pilgrimage” (A-de).

Mazu’s palanquin used to rest either in Santiao or Sanjun in the past, which was the source of permanent competition between the two villages. In order to alleviate the tension, Mazu’s palanquin took to resting in Santiao Primary School as of 1993. Baishatun pilgrims regard the rest in this school, which serves both villages, as the fairest solution to both, whereas the residents themselves still make clear distinctions with regard to the reception. Since the school is located in the domain of Santiao, Sanjun villagers have had less opportunity to receive pilgrims in recent years. Nonetheless, the village temple of Sanjun maintains a good relationship with the Mazu temple in Baishatun, and people of both temples exchange visits during the festive time. Moreover, there is real friendship between Sanjun and Baishatun:

“Our villagers have been friends with some of the Baishatun people for a long time. We receive them when they journey to our village. They show us hospitality when we visit them. They are always sending me wild herbs from Baishatun to make wine because they know that some of us make medical wine. They are really nice to us, and we are still good friends today” (A-de).

In contrast, the alteration to the Dajia pilgrimage rest stop has had a negative impact on the village of Santiao. Because the village has no temple, the Dajia Mazu palanquin does not rest here. Consequently, relations with Baishatun pilgrims have taken on greater significance for Santiao villagers, whereas receiving Dajia pilgrims has to a large extent lost its value. One resident told me why Santiao villagers receive Baishatun pilgrims with great hospitality:

“Because we all worship gods, we naturally worship Baishatun Mazu. There is no guesthouse in the vicinity, so we love to offer pilgrims food and somewhere to sleep. Normally speaking, every family invites three or four pilgrims home. … We provide Mazu’s pilgrims with this convenience; it is also our way of paying respect to Mazu. And, it is a good thing for us. Mazu’s palanquin rests in our village and crowds of people come here. It is better to have guests than no visitors at all” (A-yong-a).

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16 Local residents only have a communal shrine dedicated to a water god. Since there is no temple in the village, Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin visited a resident’s farmland several times in the 1990s. It is said that Mazu selected this particular spot of land to help a devotee, who worships her image at home, to build a Mazu temple in the village. However, the problem of the land remains, and building plans for the temple have been suspended.
He went on to talk about reinforcing the relationship with Baishatun:

“We always visit Baishatun the day Mazu returns to her temple. … Also, I usually go to Baishatun on the 15th day of the 12th lunar month [the day for choosing the pilgrimage date] or in the first lunar month. I used to buahbue [cast divination blocks] to ask Mazu to visit our village during her pilgrimage. However, I won’t do that anymore now. Mazu once gave me the positive response to visit our village, but it never happened. Hence, we don’t ask Mazu any more. … It seems that Mazu comes to visit us whenever she likes. In fact, they don’t have a fixed route, which makes our preparation very difficult. But as soon as Mazu’s palanquin rests in our village, we immediately organise the cooking to entertain the pilgrims. … Actually, I know the Mazu temple’s weiyuan [TAC members] personally. They always come to our village to paste the hiunndiao [incense information, temple announcement] before the pilgrimage. But they are so polite that they come without telling us in advance, and always refuse our invitation to eat” (A-yong-a).

Both Santiao and Sanjun villagers have maintained close relations with Baishatun pilgrims for a long time. Located in a river-bank area, both villages have become an important passageway for pilgrims on foot. Relations between Dajia and both villages have deteriorated, whereas the bonds with Baishatun have been reinforced. The latter seems to compensate for the loss of the former. In other words, the diminishing ties with the Dajia group have contributed to strengthening the pilgrimage bond with Baishatun.

6.2.3.1.3 The changing relations with the destination
Similarly, as a result of the clash between the Mazu temples of Beigang and Dajia (cf. 1.3.3.2 & ch.1 no. 49), pilgrimage bonds between Baishatun and Beigang were strengthened. The dispute had a tremendous impact on the Baishatun pilgrimage. On the one hand, the Beigang temple committee began to establish a closer relationship with Baishatun temple. In order to reinforce the relationship, the chairperson of Chaotian Gong temple came to Baishatun to participate in the ceremony to launch Mazu’s palanquin on the eve of setting out, and also escorted Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin on the pilgrimage procession as the pilgrims arrived at the Beigang temple. The pilgrim group from Baishatun has taken over the status of the large Dajia pilgrimage group and been given the privilege of occupying the main hall in Beigang temple to perform the ritual of dividing incense. To reciprocate the host’s hospitality, TAC members handed over a large amount of incense money as a gift on behalf of Baishatun temple.

On the other hand, the dispute between the Mazu temples in Beigang and Dajia resulted in rivalry between the residents on both sides, as the Mazu belief is closely related to people’s local identity (Sangren 1987, Chen Min-hwei 1984, cf. 1.3.3.2). Many Beigang people who
had previously received Dajia pilgrims felt hurt and disappointed after the quarrel. In order to compensate for this feeling of loss, they switched to receiving Baishatun pilgrims. Living in the renowned Mazu pilgrimage centre, one Beigang resident in his thirties expressed his unhappiness with the Dajia people and his reasons for entertaining Baishatun pilgrims:

“As a Beigang person, I felt a sort of a loss when the Dajia people broke up with us. It is really a pity that the number of pilgrims declined so much after the event. Our Mazu temple was a famous “sacred site” for all Mazu believers, and I found the loss of pilgrims unbearable. Indeed, being a Beigang person, I cannot let the reputation of our Mazu temple fall into decline. Since Baishatun is famous for its long pilgrimage on foot, I made up of my mind to do something to promote the relationship between Baishatun and Beigang. So I organised a hui [religious association] to serve Baishatun pilgrims in the hope of reviving pilgrimage activity in my home town” (A-biao).

In fact, almost all Beigang residents worship Mazu, and about two-thirds of the town’s religious associations (shen ming hui) are primarily dedicated to Mazu (Zhen & Kong 1988).\(^{17}\) It is a local custom for Beigang people to be part of a religious association, and many of them are members of several at the same time. Mazu worship is so important and so popular in the town that many Beigang residents are involved in pilgrimage activity, such as receiving pilgrims from outside. They understand the latter as a component of their religious practice, where they devote themselves to serving pilgrims in the name of Mazu. According to a female resident, they prefer not to make distinctions between different Mazus from different areas, for fear of striking up discord again. She stated:

“To tell the truth, we Beigang people concentrated far too much on the people from Dajia, so that when they betrayed us by going to Xingang, our disappointment was great. Indeed, no one from Beigang closed their doors when the Dajia pilgrims arrived in our town in the past, and many of us were very tied up with receiving them. But the way they treat us today really hurts. ... Although the Dajia temple changed their destination, a few Dajia pilgrims still visit our Mazu temple. Some of us cook for them and transport the food to Xingang. Actually, this is our attitude. …Because we regard all Mazus as one, we do not distinguish between Beigang Mazu, Dajia Mazu and Baishatun Mazu. We don’t like the separation, and we serve pilgrims no matter where they come from. It is because of our reverence to the singvior [Heavenly Sacred Mother, Mazu]. There is only one Mazu for us and we don’t like making differences between the various groups” (Ci-xin).

Three main groups are devoted to the Baishatun pilgrimage. The first is the Third Mazu Association (Sanma hui), with about 160 members. After the conflict with the Dajia people,

\(^{17}\) McKevitt’s study (1991) has shown that residents of the pilgrimage centre do not get involved in pilgrimage activities. Beigang residents, on the contrary, are local believers of the Beigang Mazu temple. They not only participate in local ritual festivities dedicated to Mazu, but also play a key role in spreading their Mazu legends of her divine efficacy (cf. Chen Min-hwei 1984).
its members became involved in the Baishatun pilgrimage, donating firecrackers to add to the festive atmosphere. Firecrackers are used on key occasions, such as the eve of departure, before setting out, after the ritual of dividing incense, and on leaving Beigang. Meanwhile, the association takes part in the launching rite in Baishatun and accompanies the goddess’s departure journey as far as Tongxiao. When pilgrims arrive in Beigang, members of the association take part in the pilgrimage parade to accompany pilgrims on their way to Beigang temple. They also escort Baishatun Mazu’s return trip as far as the border of the town. The devotion of the association members caught the attention of other residents, many of whom donated money to assist them. Annual expense for firecrackers is around 100,000 NT dollars (about EUR 2,500).

The second group devoted to the Baishatun pilgrimage is the *Hehe Association*. Its volunteers have been giving money and time to cook for Baishatun pilgrims since 1996. The core group numbers about twenty people, but others appear spontaneously. Whenever help is needed, other volunteers are found easily. Since pilgrims usually arrived at the town early in the morning, the volunteers (mostly in their sixties) in Yuanzhang stayed up all night cooking. The cooking area was moved to the vicinity of Beigang temple in 2000. While chatting with the volunteers, many of them spoke of Mazu’s efficacious power to bring them peace and health. Grateful for Mazu’s protection, they are more than happy to offer their services to Baishatun pilgrims.

The third group is the *Association for Beigang and Baishatun* (ABB), which was first organised in 2000. Most members of this group belong to the younger generation, and many of them participate in other religious associations simultaneously. Before this association was founded, some of its members had already been engaged in looking after pilgrims over the years. Its purpose is to promote local social and religious activities that focus on maintaining Beigang’s reputation as one of the most celebrated Mazu pilgrimage centres in Taiwan. In the initial period, they attempted to offer other services to Baishatun pilgrims, such as providing them with bread and beverages on their arrival in the town in the early morning and their departure at night. The emergence of this third group shows local residents’ explicit devotion to pilgrimage activity.

Apart from these groups, many residents burn incense to escort Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin when it leaves the town at night. A lorry with loud Buddhist music and strong lights is driven by Beigang people to accompany Mazu’s palanquin and her pilgrims on the trip at night. In fact, many residents regard serving pilgrims as religious devotion to Mazu that is not worth mentioning. The pilgrimage bond between Beigang and Baishatun was
undoubtedly reinforced after the dispute between Beigang and Dajia.

6.2.3.2 The decline of pilgrimage bonds

While Mazu’s pilgrimage visit has the power to reinforce pilgrimage bonds between Baishatun and the visited group, these can come to grief if the visit falls short in any way or local devotee expectations are not fulfilled. Apart from the pilgrimage visit itself, Baishatun temple TAC members play a significant role in upholding relations. Three cases of faltering relationships with the Baishatun temple will be discussed in the following.

6.2.3.2.1 The predicament caused by believers’ disappointment

Fengtian Gong temple, located in Wacuo in Xizhou, is a small private shrine dedicated to Mazu divided from Baishatun. In 1995, villagers prepared a rich banquet in anticipation of the pilgrims’ arrival (You 1996: 220-221). The spirit medium of the shrine had visited Baishatun temple in advance to pray for Mazu’s visit. He motivated his village companions to present an opulent banquet, asserting that Mazu would definitely rest in their village on her pilgrimage journey. The shaman went to Pitou, where the pilgrims were resting around noon, to worship Mazu. He then escorted (and induced) Mazu’s palanquin to his village. However, regardless of pious praying and a well-prepared banquet, and after a palanquin performance of more than 30 minutes, the decision was taken against Mazu’s palanquin resting in the village.18 Although Mazu’s palanquin visited and rested in this temple several times in the following years, local residents never recovered from their disappointment. On the journeys in 1997 and 2000, I noticed that apart from the host family almost no villagers came to worship the visiting Mazu during the rest period.

The pilgrimage bond with this village has obviously fallen into decline. The apparent reason is a deep disappointment experienced in 1995. Discussing the event, which seems to have left an indelible impression on people’s memory, some palanquin carriers insisted that they followed Mazu’s pulling force in the performance that year, whereas others claimed the decision was wrong and a result of human intervention. At the time, the highly enthusiastic preparation of the Wacuo villagers to receive the pilgrims was ignored, to the extent that most of them lost interest in the pilgrimage. The fact that Mazu’s palanquin visited the village in subsequent years did little to change this.19

18 According to You (1996:220-1), the village was claimed to have been an unclean place in the past, such as a cemetery or execution site. Otherwise staying in the village would not have been a problem.
19 There are two explanations for this event according to pilgrim accounts, although both involve a self-circulative logic (cf. Sangren 1991). The first confirms Mazu’s pulling force as shown in the palanquin performance and rejects the notion interference by a human force. The second account addresses the divine
As the case above illustrates, relying on Mazu’s palanquin oracle performance to choose a rest stop runs the risk of damaging pilgrimage bonds. In fact, this particular event occurred in a rare and difficult situation, and the palanquin performance seemed the only solution to the dilemma. Although Wacuo village was well prepared at the time, competition emerged in the form of the Santiao and Sanjun villages, both of which had strong pilgrimage bonds with Baishatun. Choosing a rest stop in Wacuo to absorb new believers or in Santiaojun (Santiao and Sanjun) to reinforce the relationship was indeed a difficult decision to make. The outcome was a loss of believers in Wacuo but an underpinning of the relationship with the villages of Santiao and Sanjun. Consequently, the pilgrimage bond between Baishatun and Wacuo suffered an inevitable decline based on unfulfilled expectations.

6.2.3.2.2 The predicament caused by unsuccessful temple relations

The second and third cases deal with declining temple relationships, a potential threat to the pilgrimage bond. On the whole, TAC members of the Baishatun Mazu temple are supposed to cultivate social relationships with temples on the pilgrimage route, in the interests of which they take part in various temple festivals or present gifts at festivities outside of the pilgrimage. If the mutual exchange of gifts and visits fails to materialise, the breakdown of temple relationships is inevitable.

The second case concerns Tianhou Gong temple dedicated to Mazu in Lugang. This temple is reputed for its history and has numerous branch temples all over the island (cf. 1.3.3.2). Baishatun Mazu’s palanquin rested at this temple in 1997, occupying the main entrance. The temple’s custodian requested the palanquin carriers to move it, so that the entrance would remain accessible. In response to this demand, divination was performed to seek Mazu’s approval of lifting up her palanquin after resting. To the surprise of many pilgrims, the palanquin was then carried running from the temple to a marketplace close by, where it rested at noon in the empty square. This was claimed to be an affront to the pilgrims from the coastal village of Baishatun by the people of the renowned host temple. In addition, the behaviour of the host temple custodian was thought to be impolite. Although representatives of the host temple visited Baishatun after the event to apologise, there has been little or no improvement in the relationship between the two temples. The fact that the host temple has a more prominent reputation than Baishatun temple seems to be the root of the quandary and the obstacle to creating a more favourable mutual relationship. The third case is Fuan Gong temple in Shengang, which is often chosen as a rest stop when the coastal route is

character of the goddess. Baishatun Mazu is said to dislike putting a burden on her believers, preferring to rest with a family unprepared for her visit.
taken. In 2001, the host temple treated the pilgrims somewhat indifferently. Not only did the people from the host temple fail to appear to greet them or give a reception; the lodgings in the temple guesthouses had neither clean beds nor warm water. I was informed that this attitude was a direct consequence of Baishatun temple ignoring the host temple’s invitation to their jiao festival held prior to the pilgrimage. None of the Baishatun people paid a visit or sent gifts to the host temple. Under the circumstances, the indifferent reaction of the host temple to the Baishatun Mazu pilgrims was understandable. From the perspective of mutual temple relations, Baishatun’s absence at the host temple’s festival was perceived as an unfriendly gesture or an unwillingness to maintain the relationship. Thus, the newly-established relationship with the host temple as a result of the pilgrimage visit encountered a setback, for which there was no easy solution.

In short, the pilgrimage visit paid by Mazu’s palanquin was essential to maintaining the pilgrimage bond. Reinforcing bonds can be the result of specific local conditions, such as devout believers competing for devotion to the pilgrimage, or the influence of the pilgrimage group from Dajia. Pilgrimage bonds are difficult to maintain when expectations are not met or temple relationships fail to weather a storm.

6.3 A discussion on “ritual implicates others” and boundary-crossing

After reviewing the bonds between Baishatun and other places en route on the journey, my concern here is to find out why the pilgrimage journey is carried out without a fixed route. And, what social meanings can be read into the ritual topography of the pilgrimage journey? I will first explain why the Baishatun Mazu cult is the religious symbol for local identity. This will be followed by a discussion on the function pilgrimage plays in the Mazu cult. Finally, I will explore the boundaries that pilgrimage transcends.

6.3.1 The Mazu cult as a religious symbol of local identity

Generally speaking, the worship dedicated to Mazu relates to the Minnanese identity (cf. 1.3.3.2). Sangren (1987, 1988: 691-93) considers it to contain multiple social identities that can be broken down into different contexts, including ethnic or sub-ethnic backgrounds and different levels of the spatial “nested hierarchy” of territory-cults in terms of township, village and neighbourhood (cf. 4.4.1).

The ethnic distinction is of little significance in the pilgrimage, albeit it is still observable.
In line with the territorial principle, the Hakka people who reside within or close to the cult area were traditionally excluded from the ambit of the Baishatun Mazu cult (cf. 3.1.1, 4.3.1.1 & 4.3.1.2). However, Mazu believers are not confined to the Minnanese or residents of the cult domain. A small number of pilgrims, for instance, belong to the Hakka people, who come from the northern and southern villages of the Mazu cult, as well as from other nearby areas, such as Xihu and Yuanli. They come to worship Mazu and join the pilgrimage journey because it is their personal religious belief. Several young pilgrims from theatre companies in Taipei are descendents of mainlanders (wai sheng ren), who came from other provinces of China. They come to experience the pilgrimage journey and to understand the religious culture of Taiwan. In spite of different ethnic backgrounds, most pilgrims can speak good Minnanese and Mandarin, and there is no separation involved on the journey. Although the Mazu cult is a religious symbol for the Minnanese, non-Minnanese are not excluded even if they are only a tiny minority. Indeed, non-Minnanese pilgrims share the same worship and journeying experience as the Minnanese on the trail.20

Geographically, the Gongtian Gong temple in Baishatun at village level distinguishes itself from the two Mazu temples at township level in nearby Houlong and Tongxiao.21 Lacking a subordinate relationship to both temples, the Baishatun Mazu cult deviates from the “nested hierarchy” of local territorial cults (cf. 4.4.1). Chen Min-hwei (1984: 55-56) points out that a local temple can afford “a collective image of the local community”.22 The Gongtian Gong temple is a small local Mazu cult centre (not at township level) that unites the Baishatun people with several nearby villages to undertake the pilgrimage together. The Mazu temple therefore serves as a religious symbol of the cult community, whose territory is composed of six villages (li) only (cf. 4.4.2).

For residents of this cult area, Mazu is the most important patron goddess, and her pilgrimage is its most significant religious activity. Apart from the goddess’s pilgrimage legends, residents tell numerous miraculous stories about their Mazu’s lingyan (or ling, divine efficacy or magical power, cf. 1.3.3.1). The goddess is not only said to assist these coastal villagers in solving various problems in life, but also to protect their locality, such as lessen the damage done by American bombs during the Second World War. Viewing Taiwanese worship “as an idiom of self-construction”, Sangren (1991: 74) contends that

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20 Non-Minnanese pilgrims also take part in the Dajia pilgrimage. Although all pilgrims share worship and a very poor life, Chang Hsun (1993:170-171) regards that this non-Fujianese minority is not in a position to access the power centre of the pilgrimage.
21 Similarly, the Baishatun accent differs slightly from nearby township people’s accents to the north and south (Luo 2001, cf. 3.1.1 & ch.3. no. 12).
22 By analyzing legend narratives, shrine allocation and religious activities, Chen Min-hwei (1984: 54-97) found out that the Mazu cult in Beigang serves as a collective image of its own community.
devout worshippers seldom fail to find evidence of divine intervention in their lives. Not only is Mazu worship embedded in residents’ daily lives, but the Mazu temple itself becomes an important symbol of these people’s local identity. In particular, the Baishatun pilgrimage group always emphasises its own name, as it carries its goddess on the journey to the pilgrimage centre

6.3.2 The pilgrimage journey and the spreading of Baishatun’s reputation

Generally speaking, the religious goal of the pilgrim group is to perform the ritual of dividing incense for the purpose of rejuvenating the ling of their branch image at the destination. While most pilgrimages in Taiwan focus on achieving the religious purpose only, the Baishatun pilgrimage is famous for the length of its walking journey, which is just as important to the pilgrims as its religious aim. The pilgrimage journey, devoid of a fixed route, is claimed to follow the outcome of Mazu’s palanquin oracles, which indicate the routes to be taken and show signs for halting the proceedings or ending the day’s journey (cf. 5.3). Why do Baishatun pilgrims go on such a journey?

Sangren (1991:78-79; 1993:569,573) states that the Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan usually involves testifying to divine intervention (xianling), which reifies “the denotation of pilgrimage as sacred time” (1993: 573). It is only on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage that Baishatun pilgrims are permitted to carry their Mazu image on an odyssey. As mentioned in the fifth chapter, the palanquin performance is perceived as being caused by the goddess’s pulling force, and gives rise to the belief in Mazu’s theophany (cf. 5.3 & 5.4). Similarly, pilgrim’s physical experience of walking contributes to their belief that divine intervention (Mazu’s protection) helps them to complete the difficult journey (cf. 5.5). The journey provides pilgrims with an opportunity to manifest their belief in the goddess, on the one hand; more significantly, pilgrims can testify, on the other hand, to the goddess’s magical power. As a result, pilgrims never fail to find evidence to authenticate divine intervention on the journey.24

Moreover, the pilgrimage contains “an engagement in a legend-telling session” (Chen Min-hwei 1984:42). Hence, pilgrims who are not acquainted with one another can simply

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23 Sangren (1991) claims that individual testimony of divine power in response to requests can increase the reputation of a particular cult image (ibid: 78).
24 Many pilgrims believe that Mazu will take care of the pilgrims who follow her on the journey. Hence, they often view their journeying experience as brought about with Mazu’s help or protection. For instance, I lost my wallet in a shop on the journey. The shopkeeper informed the pilgrim group later on, and I got my wallet back. However, people claimed it was due to the goddess’s assistance. Similarly, a female pilgrim on foot lost her telephone card on the journey. When she needed to make a call, she found another one that someone had left in a public telephone box. According to her, her luck is because of Mazu’s assistance.
begin a conversation by introducing stories about Mazu’s magical power to protect or help them. The pilgrimage affords pilgrims the opportunity of sharing personal stories associated with Mazu’s protection. In particular, the interpretation of the second palanquin performance category (cf. 5.4) is open to negotiation, so that pilgrims can easily produce and reproduce miraculous stories about what they have seen and experienced on the journey. Some pilgrims prefer to walk with Mazu’s palanquin, in order to witness its visit and to find out the miraculous stories related to the palanquin performance. Indeed, pilgrims are always keen on discovering miraculous stories about their goddess’s ling.

Baishatun pilgrims strongly emphasise their Mazu’s magical power on the journey. How can the Baishatun pilgrimage journey serve this function?

In search of an answer to this question, Baumann’s (1992) argument about “ritual implicates others” is inspiring.25 He states that ritual usually involves different modes of participation, including participants and different “others” as the cultural referents (ibid: 109-110). Also, the function of ritual is to “negotiate the different relationships of its participants with these ‘others’”, so that cultural values and self-knowledge can be reformulated in the ritual process (ibid: 99, 112-113). Although the pilgrimage does not involve the cultural cleavage of Baumann’s research, it shows the difference between the Baishatun pilgrim group and Taiwanese society as a whole. Thus, the pilgrimage includes distinctive insiders and outsiders, namely participating pilgrims (us) and numerous others (them), who can be either present (e.g., residents and worshippers en route, non-worshippers, other pilgrim groups, bystanders) or absent (e.g., other pilgrim groups, other Mazu believers, newspaper readers and television audiences). As Baumann (ibid: 113) points out, the definition of “us” and “them” is context dependent and dialectical. Accounting for the existence of these present or absent “others”, pilgrims clearly perceive themselves as the “we” group from Baishatun when they walk on the journey, arrive at the destination or encounter public comment from wider Taiwanese society. At the same time, the pilgrimage bearing the name of Baishatun and displaying the Baishatun Mazu’s ling addresses others. Despite several renowned Mazu cults on the western plain, Baishatun pilgrims present their Mazu’s magical power by displaying the palanquin performance and transmitting the goddess’s pilgrimage legends along the journey. Viewing the large Dajia pilgrimage group as their most important point of reference, Baishatun people endeavour to improve their own pilgrimage activity and thus spread the reputation of Baishatun through the pilgrimage journey.

Thus, the Baishatun pilgrimage has the function of spreading the reputation of the local

25 By using two domestic rituals (Christmas and children’s birthday celebrations) of Punjabi families in London, Baumann explains how ritual can define or redefine the relationship with “others”.

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Mazu cult and its locality. Although the fixed pilgrimage route taken by Dajia pilgrims overlaps with Baishatun’s main inland route, Baishatun pilgrims take different routes each year. This seems to be the only possibility of developing Baishatun’s religious niche, which is constrained by the influence of other well-known Mazu cults on the western plain of the island. Hence, the flexible selection of pilgrimage routes has the advantage of absorbing new believers and exploring probable alliances of the local Mazu cult.

### 6.3.3 Transcending ritual and social boundaries

The pilgrimage in other religious traditions highlights sacred sites as the embodiment of myth and history (Coleman and Elsner 1995). The Taiwanese Mazu pilgrimage, on the other hand, focuses on the locality of each pilgrim group, as different symbols elaborating distinctive groups are always emphasised (Sangren 1993).

The transcendence of local social structures is an important element of pilgrimage (Sangren 1993: 564). Apart from the agent’s pilgrimage representation that reveals physically transcendent power, as mentioned in the previous chapter, transcendence in the ritual context of Taiwanese Mazu cults also involves an encompassing level of social space-time. Sangren (1993:573) states that the pilgrimage affords the local Mazu cult the possibility of transcending the structural boundary of Taiwanese Mazu cults in terms of spatial nested hierarchy. The Baishatun Mazu cult is not restricted to the spatially nested hierarchy of local territorial cults (cf. 4.4.1), albeit the reason remains unclear. By journeying to the pilgrimage centre, the Baishatun people build up a direct relationship with the renowned Mazu temple in Beigang to renew the divine power (ling) of their goddess on behalf of their own local cult, which is independent of all temples at the local township level. Meanwhile, the destination temple in Beigang occupies a higher status in the temple genealogy of Taiwanese Mazu cults (albeit not in the top position) as a result of its long history, while the goddess housed in the temple is believed to possess tremendous magical power. Baishatun pilgrims believe that by performing the ritual of dividing incense their Mazu’s ling assimilated that of the goddess housed in the pilgrimage centre. Despite the absence of a straightforward temple history, the Baishatun Mazu cult transcends the limitations of temple genealogy and constructs pilgrimage bonds with the renowned pilgrimage centre directly. Hence, by performing the pilgrimage ritual at the destination, the local Mazu cult crosses

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26 Drawing on Terence Turner’s model of the “social context of ritual”, Sangren (ibid: 570-74) separates three forms of relations conceived as “transcendent”. The first is the transcendence associated with representations. The second is the transcendence found in the notion of an encompassing or higher level of social space-time. The third is structural-cum-logical transcendence, whose logical qualities Sangren considers related to ideology.
ritual boundaries in terms of the spatial and temporal hierarchy of Taiwanese Mazu cults. Moreover, the pilgrimage journey also involves crossing the geographical and social boundaries of the local Mazu cult. The people of Baishatun can only spread the reputation of their Mazu temple beyond the reach of the cult by means of the pilgrimage journey. The latter was widely reported by journalists in the 1990s. This was not merely because the pilgrimage had the longest walking distance and an abundance of religious customs, but also because the religious devotion of the pilgrims and the asceticism of the walking had attracted the attention of the public. Following the dispersal of local Mazu pilgrimage legends, the journey devoid of a fixed route serves to absorb Baishatun Mazu believers and explore possible pilgrimage bonds along the way. In this respect, the pilgrimage journey is a means of introducing the Baishatun Mazu cult to Taiwanese society at large and propagate the local Mazu cult. In particular, the coastal area of the Mazu cult is restricted to its marginal rural environment; the development of this area relies to a large extent on the religious activity of the Mazu cult. Regardless of the conventional territorial principle, the pilgrimage journey transcends the geographical and social boundaries of the local Mazu cult, whereby non-local believers from other parts of Taiwan are included.

**Conclusion**

The present chapter examined various pilgrimage routes taken on recent journeys. Viewing ritual topography as reflecting the social map of Baishatun pilgrims, I conclude that unfixed routes have the advantage of flexible selection that can lead to possible alliances or reinforcement of pilgrimage bonds on the journey. The flexible selection of routes is indispensable to the Baishatun people if they are to develop their own religious niche on the western Taiwan plain.

Apart from the religious purpose of emphasising the pilgrimage ritual at the destination, Baishatun pilgrims also focus on demonstrating their Mazu’s *ling* (efficacy or magical power) along the journey. The local identity attached to the pilgrimage serves to spread the reputation of this local Mazu cult. The pilgrimage journey is a unique religious way of crossing different boundaries of the local Mazu cult. Deviating from the spatially nested hierarchy of territorial cults, the Baishatun Mazu cult established immediate relations with the pilgrimage centre through the pilgrimage, whereby the boundary of the spatial and temporal structure of the Taiwanese Mazu cult is transcended. The pilgrimage journey has the power to transmit the reputation of the local Mazu cult beyond its geographical territory.
and social locality.

Once the pilgrimage transcends the spatial boundary of its local cult, it can include pilgrims from other places. Thus, how do we account for different pilgrim assertions of belonging to the pilgrimage group or to the “community”? This will be the topic of the following chapter.