Chapter 7
Constructing the Baishatun “community”: pilgrimage and the fields of shared belonging

This chapter will illustrate how “community” is constructed in the name of Baishatun and the pilgrimage. Unlike the Turners’ (1978) usage of *communitas*, I will explore the meaning of community from the constructive perspective, which includes disparate connotations of community. The Turners (1978: 71) regard the global *communitas* of the Marian pilgrimage as being subverted by various localisms, whereas the Baishatun pilgrimage case will suggest that the proliferation of community can also be produced in a local cult writ large.

Originally, the pilgrims were residents of the local Mazu cult, which formed a “territory-bound community” comprised of Baishatun and the neighbouring northern and southern villages. While the “Baishatun community” appears to be a bounded geographical space, many emigrants stress their home village identity and claim they are “Baishatun people”. At the same time, people from the northern and southern villages also claim to belong to Baishatun, in the sense of holding the same Mazu pilgrimage. Furthermore, the community of Baishatun Mazu believers go as far as accepting outsiders who come to worship the goddess, join her pilgrimage journey, or participate in the pilgrimage discussion on the Internet.

I will attempt to elucidate how multiple meanings of “community” are produced on the pilgrimage. The first part of this chapter will briefly review several ways of researching community relevant to my analysis. I will then explain why Baishatun people have reshaped the pilgrimage “tradition”, and how pilgrim identity is reinforced by participation in the journey. The last part will explain how the Baishatun “community” is constructed in different contexts, and how people claim a sense of shared belonging.

7.1 Exploring the community: from the territory-bound to fields of shared belonging

Before approaching the topic itself, the definition of “community” used in this chapter should be clarified. Reviewing the research on community, I will explain the concepts behind the use of this term in current anthropological research.

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1 According to the Turners (1978), the scale of the pilgrimage is “community-based”. However, “community” in this chapter is not used in the Turnerian sense.
The term “community” is applied extensively in sociology and anthropology, albeit its connotations are prolific. Analysing 94 definitions of community, Hillery (1955) found that overlapping was limited, and that “to deal with people” was the common denominator of meaning (ibid: 117). Meanwhile, three elements of community appear constantly in most definitions: i.e., area, common ties and social interaction (ibid: 118). From a traditional anthropological perspective (Rapport 1996:114-5), community is treated as a group of people residing in the same bounded locality, who share common interests and social structures. Thus, the term “community” is linked to a geographical space, regarded as a unit of analysis in traditional anthropology, where anthropological fieldwork is normally carried out. In fact, the connotation of community depends greatly on the respective theoretical concerns and research approaches (Hillery 1955, Bell and Newby 1971; Gusfield 1975; Rapport 1996; Chen Wen-te 2002, Lin Kai-shi 2002). Ferninand Tönnies (1987/Loomis1957) first proposed the dichotomy of community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*) as a social typology to indicate the social transformation of the former to the latter. He regards *Gemeinschaft* as the static, intimate and naturally developed forms of social organisation (such as kinship, neighbourhood and friendship), in which relations are constituted by blood, place or mind. Focusing on social evolution, Tönnies treats communities as types. Redfield’s (1955, 1956, 1962) folk-urban continuum follows this typology tradition (Bell and Newby 1971: 42-48). He characterises folk society as “small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous, with a strong sense of group solidarity” (ibid: 43), and postulates a continuum from rural to urban society. However, Redfield’s approach of separating the little from the great tradition has for the most part been criticised, although he regards the peasant community as part of the rural-urban continuum. Later studies refuted his exclusive continuum from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, contending that relationships of both types can co-exist in the same community (ibid: 51). The main weakness of his argument is to locate “social relationships in a specific locale”(ibid: 44).

The territory-bound community is generally regarded as an analytical unit in social atomistic research, which attempts to deduce a wider society or culture by researching a specific community within that society. Due to the limitations of this kind of research in explaining the relation between the part (community) and the whole (society), Barnes (1954, cf. Bott 1957) suggests the concept of “social network” to illustrate the relationship between the little community and its larger areas. Lin Kai-shi (2002) compares anthropological studies in South Asia and China, and comes to the conclusion that as a unit of analysis community is ineffective. According to him, “a unit of analysis should not contain a
theoretical presumption, but depend on the total social phenomena that the researcher intends to construct” (ibid: 353, my translation).

Hence, although the spatial dimension should not be overlooked, I will not view community merely as a territory-bound unit. Since participation in the pilgrimage is not confined to Baishatun residents, my analysis of the community in this chapter will adopt the following three theoretical perspectives.

Firstly, community can be treated as a symbolic dimension. Strathern’s (1982 a, b) study on the village of Elmdon in England shows that the kinship symbol, a cultural idiom in terms of openness and closure, relates to people’s idea of village and class, and shapes their attitude to the outside world. She illustrates approaching community in terms of key cultural concepts that connect different symbols. Cohen (1985:19) suggests viewing community as “repositories of symbols” and as human “mental constructs”, where “people attach meaning to it and make it a referent of their identity”(ibid: 118). To him, community is not purely locality but more significantly the construction of shared meanings. Adopting Barth’s (1969) notion of boundary, Cohen (1982a, b, c; cf. Larsen 1982 a, b) stresses that people become aware of their own culture when they encounter others. Apart from being aware of difference, people attribute values to their distinctiveness in the everyday practice that provides them with a sense of belonging to a community. Also, coming from the same intimate society, people share the public knowledge that shapes their behaviour towards each other. Following Cohen’s ideas, I argue that the Baishatun “community” can be constructed symbolically. The pilgrimage is therefore a symbolic marker whereby people can experience a sense of belonging and attach meanings to it, although these are not necessarily homogeneous.

Secondly, the disjuncture of place and culture is conspicuous in the present global world, which overturns the isomorphism of space, place and culture (Appadurai 1998; Gupta and Ferguson 1992/1997b, 1997a; Rodman 1992; Olwig and Hastrup 1997). Appadurai (1998, ch2 and 3) asserts that the global trend of migration has transformed traditional group identity, which is not necessarily based on the territorialised phenomenon. Referring to

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2 Cohen (1982:10) regards that “boundary can be drawn at various levels of society”, and that boundary is more of a cultural reality than an association with geographical space. He (2002:166-7) refutes both “the relativism of the boundary-focused thesis” (cf. Cohen 2000) and “the neglect of the community’s self-identity” (cf. Cohen 1994).

3 Cohen (1985: 20) points out that “the commonality, which is found in community need not be a uniformity. …It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members”.

4 Regarding the definition of space and place, Gupta and Ferguson (1997b:34) declare that “space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization is inscribed”. Hastrup and Olwig (1997:8) apply de Certeau’s (1984:117) notion that “space is a practiced place”. I will follow de Certeau’s definition.
changing ethnographic maps, Gupta and Ferguson (1997b: 35) point out the significance of dealing with cultural difference once the idea of localised culture has been abandoned. Since people and culture are not automatically anchored in geographical space, they suggest we examine how space and place are constructed (ibid: 47). A localised community should not be seen as naturally given, but the result of a process of formation (ibid: 36).\(^5\) Thus, a place defined as home can have different meanings for residents, migrants (Olwig 1997; Pørregaard 1997), and refugees (Preis 1997). Similar to Hastrup and Olwig (1997:8), who view the community as “a field of relations”, I will explore how the pilgrimage becomes a significant referent for cultural identification\(^6\) to residents and emigrants of the Baishatun Mazu cult. The latter in particular play a significant role in the religious activities of their home villages, despite the fact that they no longer live there.

Thirdly, Anderson’s (1991) book reveals the significance of imagination in approaching a community larger than the realms of face-to-face contact. He describes how nation-communities can be imagined from the cultural repertoire,\(^7\) and how communities vary with the styles by which they are imagined (ibid: 6). Appadurai (1998: 3-8) asserts that nowadays people are forced to enter the world of imagination as a result of mass migration and the rapid development of electronic communication. Unlike fantasy, he considers imagination as “part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people” (ibid: 5) and “the fuel for action” (ibid: 7). He compares collective imagination to a “community of sentiment”, in which people “imagine and feel things together”, such as the public comments that become an indispensable element in the production of mass media (ibid:8). However, Herzfeld (1997:6) points out that imagination must be grounded in the details of everyday life; otherwise we cannot understand, for example, why an ordinary citizen would die for his country. Amit (2002:8; cf. Chen Wen-te 2002:26-7) suggests combining Anderson and Herzfeld’s theoretical concerns: i.e., imagination (what is felt and claimed by people) must be socially realised. Hence, social contexts are vital for the imagined community. On the basis of the pilgrimage film from the 1990s and the three Internet web sites established since 2000, I will examine how believers from all over Taiwan become involved in the pilgrimage and how the “imagined” community of Baishatun was formed. The “imagined community” focuses on forming a virtual neighbourhood (Appadurai ibid, ch.9 see 7.3.3)

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\(^5\) For example, Baumann’s (1996) research on immigrant identity in Southall London shows how immigrant “communities” were formed according to their different migrant histories.

\(^6\) Olwig (1997:17) uses the notion of “cultural sites” or “cultural institution” to accommodate the interrelationship between global and local ties.

\(^7\) Anderson (1991) explores the nationalism of a rich cultural repertoire, such as collective cultural roots, national consciousness, a national print language, print capitalism, official history, census, maps, museums, memory etc.
and, although far from referring to the nationwide scale of Anderson’s research, certainly goes beyond face-to-face contact. Moreover, Amit (ibid: 3) claims that the study of community has shifted from exploring actual social relations (i.e., community as an actualised or a concrete social form) to emphasising the phenomenological category (i.e., community as an idea or concept of sociality, see Dawson 2002, Howell 2002). She asserts that the research of contemporary collectivities must re-embed community in a social and conceptual context (ibid: 10). Nevertheless, as Cohen (2002, cf. no.2) points out, if we view community as a conceptual category, we still need to overcome the uncertainty caused by the relativism and contingency of our own research. To sum up, drawing on Olwig’s notion of “shared fields of belonging” (Olwig 2002:124, Cohen 2002), I will explore the Baishatun “community” in the various contexts in which people’s common sentiment and identity are claimed. These multiple connotations of community include the territory-bound community, relational and religious communities, and finally the “imagined” community.

7.2 Forging identity with the pilgrimage

This section will discuss the forging of pilgrimage identity, which focuses on worship dedicated to Baishatun Mazu and provides pilgrims with a sense of belonging. First of all, I will illustrate pilgrim engagement in reforming the Baishatun pilgrimage in terms of its local “tradition” of emphasising the physical journey on foot and the associated values. I will highlight an event that occurred on the journey in 2001, when reshaped pilgrimage values reached a climax. A milestone in the forging of pilgrimage identity, the impact of this event will be discussed.

7.2.1 Reshaping the Baishatun pilgrimage “tradition”

Baishatun people look on their pilgrimage journey as a “tradition” (cf. 5.5.1) handed down from their ancestors over generations. However, so-called “tradition” can be reshaped in a

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8 Dawson (2002), for instance, made a study of clubs for the elderly in Ashington, a deteriorating coal-mining town in North East England. He views community as a cultural resource that serves to conceptualise the body and bodily experience. Thus, community refers here to the common bodily experience (getting old) of these elderly people, which is anchored in their common experience of mining life in the past. Howell’s research (2002) explores community based on the common experience of Norwegian parents adopting international children. Apart from their participation in meetings and other relevant activities, these parents have nothing in common.


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contemporary style (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983, Alonso 1988). While journeys in the past had to be carried out on foot because there was no alternative, today’s pilgrims have the assistance of cars. Baishatun pilgrims are encouraged by the TAC of the Mazu temple to walk the entire journey (cf. 5.5.2) in order to enhance its reputation. Why is walking, claimed as Baishatun’s pilgrimage tradition, so important on the journey? And, what is to be considered in reshaping the pilgrimage tradition of walking?

Owing to the absence of a suitable traffic system in the early 1950s, pilgrims were obliged to walk. When vehicles began to appear on the pilgrimage journey (such as bicycles in the 1950s, motorcycles and private cars in the 1960s), walking was still maintained, since the goddess’s palanquin had to be carried on foot. The reason for holding onto the walking tradition is said to be the result of following Mazu’s instructions, who has not shown a positive response to alterations if the divination blocks are to be believed. Thus, walking is regarded as unalterable. With the exception of the brigade members, the number of pilgrims on foot in the area of the Mazu palanquin and the head-flag usually exceeds 200, irrespective of heat or heavy rain. On the whole, the number of pilgrims who walk varies with weather conditions and the time of day. The largest number of pilgrims appears in the early morning, and dwindles somewhat around noon and when it rains. Nowadays, walking has become the most important element in reshaping the tradition of the pilgrimage.

The people of Baishatun are convinced that bearing the hardship associated with walking long distances is central to being a Mazu pilgrim. Many of them told me that the only way they could express their gratitude to Mazu for protecting them was to accompany her on the pilgrimage odyssey. These coastal people rely on Mazu’s protection to such an extent that their religious loyalty to her cannot be doubted. Despite physical suffering, pilgrims continue to sacrifice themselves by walking on the pilgrimage and following the guidance of the goddess’s palanquin. This has also become a religious testimony to the Mazu belief (cf. 5.5). Indeed, the most conspicuous cases of ascetic walking can be found among the members of two reformed pilgrimage brigades: the palanquin brigade and the head-flag brigade. As the goddess’s brave “bodyguards” and “vanguards”, most members of these two brigades walk the entire journey. While wading across rivers in the past was due to the absence of bridges, some pilgrims waded across the Zhuoshui River in 2001 to demonstrate their Mazu belief (see below). In this sense, walking on the journey embodies the strong will of the pilgrims and their religious loyalty to Mazu. It also gives them a feeling of being distinct from other pilgrimage groups.

The Baishatun people also attach values to the pilgrimage. Since the pilgrim group bears the
name of the cult’s locality, pilgrims are requested to behave properly in order to preserve the reputation of Baishatun. Some of the younger people in Baishatun (both emigrants and residents) are involved in reshaping their pilgrimage tradition for precisely this reason. Apart from upholding the foot journey, they emphasise religious loyalty to the goddess. In their opinion appropriate behaviour, such as mutual assistance and the expression of religious sentiment on the journey, are essential for a Mazu pilgrim. The pilgrimage is only possible because “those who can walk must wait for those who cannot continue to walk”, as one Baishatun resident declared (see 5.5.1 interview Yi-xiong). Indeed, mutual pilgrim assistance is crucial to the journeys of today. Pilgrims on foot, for example, rely on others to transport their personal belongings, buy food and drink or find lodgings for the night etc.

By and large, Baishatun pilgrims soon get used to solving problems of food and lodging on the journey. This is reputed to be typical of Baishatun pilgrims. As a result of the widespread reputation of the pilgrimage, more and more devotees provide pilgrims with free food, beverages and lodgings en route. While many Baishatun people prefer to stay at motels or buy their own food, a growing number of pilgrims from outside have become accustomed to the devotee receptions. Improper behaviour can be a cause for concern among those who want to preserve the pilgrimage tradition. In 2000, for instance, I heard several derogatory comments about improper pilgrim behaviour on the journey, such as fighting for food provided by devotees, or taking too much food only to throw it away later on. When I discussed this issue with Baishatun people (villagers and emigrants) after the journey, many of them expressed their concern about possible damage to the reputation of the pilgrimage. They were of the opinion that the ill-behaved were mostly non-Baishatun people. I was told that Baishatun people usually know each other or have met and would not dare to behave badly, as it would undoubtedly result in public condemnation and problems in the village (cf. Cohen 1982 a, b, c). Consequently, the Mazu temple pilgrimage information distributed to pilgrims in the following year contained hints on correct behaviour. This written information had a huge impact in 2001, where public comment played an important role in restraining improper behaviour on the part of the pilgrims. Information of this kind is in fact contrary to the pilgrimage principle of autonomy, albeit it attempts to uphold the pilgrimage reputation. Nevertheless, non-Baishatun pilgrims are requested in the name of their common Mazu belief to follow the suggestions related to the

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10 I did not witness any Baishatun villagers misbehaving on the journey, so that it is difficult to assess this conduct. However, Baishatun residents are obliged to prepare food for pilgrims from outside on the day of the return journey. I did hear some criticism of villagers who apparently ate food that was not intended for them.

11 At the request of a Baishatun emigrant in Taipei in 2000, I wrote a three-page draft that briefly introduced the pilgrimage and gave advice to pilgrims. This draft eventually became the temple’s pilgrimage information.
reputation of the Baishatun pilgrimage and stressing its value. Briefly, apart from upholding the principle of walking on the journey, the core concern in reshaping the pilgrimage tradition focuses on religious loyalty to the goddess and the value of mutual pilgrim assistance. Both are based on life experience in Baishatun, and have become the mainstay of the current reform. While pilgrims had no choice but to journey on foot in the past, the walking journey today has become a site for the manifestation of the embodied religious belief of the pilgrims. Mutual assistance was a prerequisite for completing the journey in the past, whereas it is now being emphasised as an integral part of being a Mazu pilgrim. As a result of their common Mazu belief, pilgrims beyond the Mazu cult domain also share reshaped pilgrimage values.

7.2.2 The climax of forging pilgrimage identity

This sub-section is about an event that occurred on one pilgrimage journey and caused a sensation in Taiwan. In pursuit of the Mazu palanquin, pilgrims waded across the Zhuoshui River in 2001, thereby highlighting reshaped pilgrimage values (cf. Wu ed. 2001). I view this event as the climax of forging pilgrimage identity as a result of its huge impact on pilgrims and believers, regardless of whether they were present on the occasion or not. More significantly, the event advanced to a news topic in the public media (VCD/video films, TV programmes and newspapers); as a result the people of Baishatun and the Mazu believers were highly motivated to engage in constructing the Baishatun “community” centred on the Mazu cult. I will first describe the event itself, and then discuss the reaction of the pilgrims and believers.

7.2.2.1 Wading across the Zhuoshui River on the journey in 2001

The pilgrimage from Baishatun to Beigang has to pass two rivers flowing westwards into the sea: the Dadu River and the Zhuoshui River. The riverbed of the former is full of small pebbles, whereas the latter is clogged with mud from upstream. The Zhuoshui River is the largest in central Taiwan and got its name from the muddy water, the level of which often changes during the typhoon season. Several elderly male informants described how they had waded across these two rivers in the old days, when pilgrimage legends emerged depicting how Mazu’s protection had led the pilgrims across the rivers safely. Indeed, many old Baishatun men enjoy recounting their experience of these events, albeit the details are exaggerated (cf. 6.2.2.2 interview Fuyuan.). A lively, if somewhat overstated description of
such an event was given by a 78-year old resident:

“To tell the truth, when we used to cross the river I never really knew how deep the water was. …I can still remember that it was almost up to my chest, and I don’t think I touched the riverbed. …We ran hand in hand behind Mazu’s duagiau (palanquin). We had to rely on Mazu at the time, otherwise we would not have got there safely. … It seems as if Mazu’s duagiau opened a path for us in the water. … It’s true, we couldn’t have done it without Mazu’s protection. … Many people who watched from the river banks at the time said that we seemed to fly over the water after Mazu’s duagiau” (A-sun).

After the construction of the bridges over both rivers, however, the imagined scene of pilgrims wading across rivers has almost become historical memory. The first bridge (the Xiluo bridge, 1 939 metres long), which spanned the Zhuoshui River, was completed in 1952; 1978 seems to have been the last time that Mazu persuaded pilgrims to wade across the river. Although wading across rivers has meanwhile disappeared from the pilgrimage landscape, legends abound. Apart from the annual repetition of these stories, there is a common expectation among Baishatun pilgrims to experience the scene depicted in the stories. Consequently, many pilgrims and believers would be deeply moved if the old tradition of wading across rivers were to be revived today.

A striking event occurred on 12th March 2001. The following description of it is based on my field observations and supplemented by a video film produced by one of the pilgrims present at the event:

The long lunch break was unusual for the first day of the return trip. The chairperson of the host temple prayed to Mazu to stay overnight in Xiluo, but after casting the divination blocks, his hopes were not met by a positive response from Mazu. In order to compensate for the chairperson’s disappointment, the Baishatun temple people took a long rest in the temple. After lunch, I chatted to several young non-Baishatun pilgrims. Two male Baishatun pilgrims joined us. One of them had served as a carrier in the palanquin brigade for many years. The other, an experienced pilgrim, began the conversation about where Mazu would lead us on the rest of the journey. Since the seven-day return trip was apparently easier than the two and a half days we had just completed to reach the destination, we were curious about the rest of the journey. He continued, “We don’t know if Mazu will lead us to wade across the river, since it has not happened for a long time!” One young non-Baishatun pilgrim replied, “How come? Today we have bridges, why should we ignore the bridge to wade across the river”?

Before we left the host temple at three o’clock, the camera crew appeared again. The pilgrims had been told to pay attention to their appearance because the cameramen had planned to film on the Xiluo bridge. When I followed Mazu’s palanquin on the way to the

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12 There is no consensus on the exact date of the last remembered river crossing, in this case the Dadu River. While some declare it was over twenty years ago, others insist it was over thirty. According to one person (Fa-cai), it must have been 1978 because he got engaged after the journey of that year.

13 These cameramen are from the Feyi Company in Taipei. Filming pilgrimage scenes is part of their work for a film about Mazu worship in Taiwan (cf. 7.3.3.1).
bridge, a few pilgrims were waiting there with members of the head-flag brigade. It was a hot sunny afternoon, and many pilgrims chose to drive across the almost two-kilometre long bridge. While the carriers displayed the palanquin performance to select the path just in front of the bridge, the head-flag brigade members and pilgrims waiting there began to march towards the cameramen, who were ready to film on the other side of the bridge. Much to everyone’s surprise, Mazu’s palanquin did not aim for the entrance to the bridge after the palanquin performance, but was carried to a small path. I heard someone nearby asking, “Where is Mazu leading us”? When the Mazu palanquin came down to the bridge, the palanquin performance was displayed again. There was a strange atmosphere as the gong resounded heavily beside the palanquin. No one knew why Mazu’s palanquin had led the pilgrims to this spot. I began to wonder if the somewhat joke-like expectation of wading across the river was about to come true.

When Mazu’s palanquin came to the riverbank around 15.25, it seemed as if wading across the river was a possibility. The gong sounded more and more dense, and Mazu’s palanquin swung continually on the riverbank. A TAC member used his mobile phone to inform the Mazu temple about the possibility of going down to the river, and then prayed beside Mazu’s palanquin for the safety of the pilgrims. Some pilgrims prayed to Mazu and began taking off their shoes and socks, while one woman from Beigang, worried about the possible danger of the undertaking, attempted to stop the preparation for wading across the river. One Baishatun woman declared “Don’t worry! If our Mazu leads us down the river, there is no problem”. Four male carriers, the woman who beats the gong, and six members of the palanquin brigade exchanged words with each other. It seemed as if they realised they were facing a crucial task. The brigade member with whom I had chatted at lunch seemed very anxious, reminding pilgrims to join hands walking behind Mazu’s palanquin. Subsequently, some paper spirit money (dedicated to the gods) was burnt in front of the palanquin, which swung more and more violently on the riverbank. It was quite obvious that the palanquin carriers were preparing to go down to the river. Pilgrims reminded each other to take off their shoes and tie their personal belongings to their shoulders. As a fieldworker, I did not stop to photograph what I saw at that moment. There were at least three other people with cameras and one with a camcorder on the riverbank apart from me. I also saw a pilgrim from Beigang, who was well equipped to take pictures above us from the bridge. While some of the pilgrims walking on the bridge ran back to come down to the riverbank to join us, members of the head-flag brigade, prevented by the taboo from turning back, could only witness the occurrence under the bridge.

In order to get a better view, two pilgrims and I stood at a distance from the Mazu palanquin and took as many pictures as possible. The first palanquin carrier slipped onto the riverbed, but was quickly supported by his brigade companions. The water came up to the thighs of the very tall carrier. However, this scene did nothing to frighten the other pilgrims. Through the lens of my small camera, I saw that the Mazu palanquin was raised up high by brigade members and some male pilgrims. Other pilgrims, mostly women, formed a chain in the river behind it. The videos made by a participating pilgrim on that occasion show pilgrims shouting “zin-lo! zin-lo! zin-lo” (cf. 4.2.3.3 and ch4 no.34). They also showed pilgrims frequently reminding each other to “watch out”, “walk hand in hand”, or “walk slowly”. When the goddess’s palanquin arrived the island in the river, which emerged in the dry season, I saw that several brigade members had turned back to help other pilgrims to get on the island. I stopped pressing the shutter when almost all pilgrims had gone down to the river. I went down to the river at the end of the pilgrimage chain with the help of others, to experience this dramatic moment. While pilgrims were still wading in the river, the palanquin performance continued on the
island. When I reached the island, I saw pilgrims kneeling down to pray to Mazu in front of her palanquin. The gong started another dense wave of sound, which introduced pilgrims to the second part of the river journey. This time several cameramen had come down from the bridge and were preparing to film on the riverbank. The distance was only about a hundred metres shorter than the first part of the river journey. We were then a little more than knee-deep in water. Albeit the riverbed was muddier, this second river journey seemed easier to the pilgrims. I saw a female pilgrim of about fifty suddenly fall, but she was soon pulled up by her companions. During the second river journey, the ritual shouting of “zin-lo! zin-lo! zin-lo” appeared louder than before and turned out to be a spectacular scene in the professional cameramen’s film. Several pilgrims automatically knelt down to pray to Mazu as soon as they reached the banks of the river. When all of the pilgrims had arrived at the riverbank, it was about 15.50. A simple collective worship took place, with pilgrims kneeling down to pray to Mazu and thank her for her protection.

As a historical event (cf. Sahlins 1981), this particular incident in 2001 successfully reproduced the values of the foot march, which highlighted the religious loyalty of the pilgrims to Mazu and their mutual assistance. Although the context of today’s walking is different to that of past journeys, the present reshaped pilgrimage “tradition” was effectively presented. Also, wading across the river demonstrated the embodied devotion of the pilgrims to the goddess Mazu, an experience that led to strengthening their belief in her protection.

7.2.2.2 The impact of the event on pilgrims and believers

Wading across the river in 2001 has been described by many pilgrims as the “great historical moment” of the pilgrimage. In what sense is this event the climax of forging pilgrimage identity? How did pilgrims and believers generally react to this event?

According to pilgrims I talked to, their embodied experience of wading across the river made them believe in Mazu’s protection. One 80-year old woman, who originally came from the southern village of the Mazu cult and had married into Baishatun, has participated in the journey for fifty years, albeit she and her family moved to Taipei more than forty years ago. As a pious Mazu believer, she always returns to Baishatun to ask Mazu’s help with the problems she encounters in life. She went on the pilgrimage journey in 2000, following the result of casting divination blocks for Mazu’s instruction and in spite of the fact that she had liver cancer. She expressed her gratitude at following Mazu across the river when I interviewed her in the following year:

“Actually, my sister and I were already on the Xiluo Bridge. Several minutes later, we saw Mazu’s palanquin going down from the bridge. We immediately ran back to follow Mazu’s palanquin. It was my good fortune to be able to follow Mazu to liauke [wade across the river].
I was very happy about that. … I was not at all worried about wading in the river. I held my sister’s hand on one side, and someone else’s on the other side. … We were being led by Mazu who was going to protect us. … I am small and the water level was up to my waist. But I grew up on the beach, so I’m not afraid of water. … I experienced liauke in the past. The river in those days was longer and wider than today’s. … Yes, we burned paper spirit money in the past, the same as we did this year. And we used to walk hand in hand, just like this time. … Mazu protected me when I was in hospital last year. Because of her protection, I was able to go to the zinhiumn [pilgrimage] this year” (Xiu-lian).

Why Mazu led the pilgrims through the river has been widely discussed. In the opinion of some Baishatun residents, places visited by Mazu’s palanquin always contain divine instruction or a prediction for the future. Therefore wading across the river may have implied the goddess’s warning of a possible flood. By coincidence, the coastal area was inundated by a typhoon in the summer after the pilgrimage, an occurrence that was claimed as proof of the divine prediction. Other typical interpretations of the event surrounding the journey across the river were expressed in the account of a Baishatun woman in her mid-thirties. Honest about her fear of going down to the river, she interpreted the event as being Mazu’s mercy in exorcising an “unclean” place for human beings, whereas her mother-in-law regarded it as ritual curing:

“I was really afraid of the water in the beginning, because I wasn’t sure if it was dangerous or not. And, I didn’t know whether I should take off my shoes, since I had no idea what was going to happen. But, I knew I had to wade through the river with the others, because people always said we had to do so if Mazu decided on it. … As soon as I went down the river, my feeling of insecurity was totally gone. … After we had finished liauke [wading across the river] we were told that a man had drowned there several days before that. I think the reason why Mazu led us to liauke was to exorcise the place. Mazu visited it because it was unclean and she exorcised it. … My mother-in-law did not participate in the journey this year because of her leg problem. She was very disappointed when she heard we had waded across the river. She said her leg problem could have been cured if she had waded through the river with Mazu” (A-xiang).

A-xiang’s brother, who came from a neighbouring village, has participated in the journey for several years. As a purely walking pilgrim, he pays attention to the events associated with the palanquin performance that occur on the trail. After wading the river, he was deeply moved by Mazu’s protection:

“It was really a very moving moment when we all knelt down to worship Mazu. I felt very grateful at that moment, because all of us had arrived safely. … I returned to the riverbank again the next day and the current of the river seemed to have changed again. Indeed, wading across the river is dangerous” (Di-di).
In fact, most of the pilgrims who waded across the river were women and non-Baishatun people. A female vegetarian in her early fifties took part in the journey for the first time and felt very happy about wading across the river with Mazu. She comes from a neighbouring town and enjoys visiting the Mazu temple in Baishatun, instead of praying to Mazu in the temple of her own town. Because Baishatun Mazu seems so peaceful and close to her, she is used to coming to worship her and consulting her about problems in her own life. She was enormously impressed by the event, which has reinforced her Mazu belief:

“I was really happy that I could follow Mazu wading through the river. I never thought that I would have this kind of luck, because I just joined the journey for the first time. … I didn’t take off my shoes when I waded in the river, and then one of my shoes got stuck in the muddy riverbed. When I tried to pick it up, an o-jii-san (Japanese term for elderly man) said, “Don’t pick it up, just leave it there! Mazu will bring you good fortune! If you pick it up, you’ll hold us all up”. Because we were wading the river together, I just followed his suggestion, although my Nike shoes were brand new. I had just bought them for the journey. … I had a car accident on the freeway a month after the journey. Fortunately, no one was hurt. In principle, it was my fault. I was supposed to pay damages because some guardrails and mile markers were destroyed. The traffic policeman, who had seen the charm and the amulet of Baishatun Mazu temple hanging in my car, finally dropped the fine. He was also a believer of Baishatun Mazu and simply said, “Be careful when you drive on the freeway next time” and helped me to leave the site of the accident. Indeed, my personal experience of wading through the river brought me good fortune. It’s true. Mazu protected me” (Jun-jun, part of the interview appears in BFO’s book, Wu 2001: 86).

Many people regretted that they had not taken part in the event involving the river in 2001. It was particularly bitter for Baishatun pilgrims who had taken part in the journey for years and even completed it on foot. When I chatted with villagers in Baishatun, many expressed their disappointment at a lost opportunity. Those who were not there always gave their reason for non-attendance. None of the head-flag brigade members waded in the river because the pilgrimage taboo prevented them from turning back on this occasion. As one member said, all they could do was sound the gong loudly on the bridge to display their willingness to follow Mazu. Only ten of the 21 palanquin brigade members were present on the occasion. Two of the members were assigned the task of booking rooms for the brigade members that night. In a burst of regret later on, one carrier even used lighted cigarettes to burn blisters on his feet.

Thanks to the cameras and camcorders that recorded this event, the pilgrimage reputation was greatly enhanced and spread extensively. These visual records produced by pilgrimage participants became vital resources for pilgrims and believers who were not present. The picture of pilgrim footprints on the riverbank (see plate 3) taken by a pilgrim from Beigang
is regarded as evidence of a miracle. Footprints should normally be pressed into the surface of the ground at the riverbank, but the picture shows footprints with their own shadows, so that they seem to be above the surface of the ground. Independent of the distorted visual image caused by the shadow of the footprints, the picture is overstated evidence of theophany, whereby Mazu is claimed to have saved the spirits that might cause harm to the human world. According to one popular interpretation, harmful spirits trapped in the river (unclean place) were said to be attached to the distorted footprint image, which Mazu was able to save by leading pilgrims into the river (cf. 5.4.1). This interpretation appeared in a newspaper (Chen 2001), and more than three thousand copies of the photograph were dispersed among the pilgrims and believers. Other pictures showing pilgrims wading across the river are also in demand. One palanquin carrier who was in attendance on that occasion was moved to tears when he saw the pictures afterwards. Some pictures are pasted on the Mazu temple information board. Further copies of these pictures are widely circulated in this area in order to cherish these particular scenes.

Similarly, the VCD/video of the river event enjoys great popularity. The pilgrim with the camcorder filmed the entire journey in 2001. The scenes of wading across the river on the original V-8 tape were first shown on the return trip. They then appeared on each household’s television through a private channel in Baishatun after Mazu was returned to her temple. Because of the great demand, the amateur film-maker turned the original V-8 journey record into a four-hour VCD/video film. Many pilgrims and believers wanted to have the video, so they could conjure up their experience at any time.

In short, not only was wading across the river a reminder of Baishatun’s past experience of pilgrimage but it was also instrumental in producing common pilgrim and believer sentiments. Focusing on religious loyalty to Mazu and mutual pilgrim assistance, this event played a key role in forging pilgrimage identity and blurring the division between Baishatun and non-Baishatun pilgrims (cf. Crain 1997: 301-2).

7.3 Constructing the Baishatun “community”
At the outset of my participation in the pilgrimage, I took the pilgrim assertion of “Baishatun people” or “belonging to Baishatun” for granted. In fact, neither claim indicated a pilgrim’s genuine place of residence. When I got to know the pilgrims better, I realised

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14 When I watched the film with the previous Mazu servant, he expressed tremendous regret about his absence on the journey in 2001. He had once followed Mazu across the river a long time ago. A Mazu servant for almost thirty years, he was unable to go on the journey that year due to illness.
that they either resided in Baishatun or had moved out more than thirty years ago but still called themselves “Baishatun people” when they met others on the trail. Meanwhile, pilgrims from the northern and southern villages also asserted their “belonging to Baishatun” in the sense of holding the same Mazu worship as Baishatun residents. Furthermore, I was very impressed by the expression “We’re nearly home” used by several Baishatun people (i.e., inhabitants and emigrants from the Mazu cult domain) towards the end of the journey. Here the “we” refers to all pilgrims and includes me as a quadelang (“non-resident” or “outsider”), devoid of all relationship with the Baishatun people, in the “we-group”. Non-Baishatun people also belong to the pilgrim group because of their common journey with the Baishatun people. Indeed, the distinction between insider and outsider is constantly blurred in the course of the journey.

The asceticism of the journey on foot and the reshaped pilgrimage values have done much to spread the reputation of the Baishatun pilgrimage group. This is not the most famous group, nor was it the first to wade across the river in the present day. Nonetheless, the pilgrims and the Baishatun people were so highly motivated after wading in the river that they began to construct the Baishatun “community”, regardless of different concerns.

The pilgrimage contains multiple connotations of “community”, all of which refer to assorted “fields of shared belonging” (Olivig 2002, Cohen 2002) in distinctive contexts, albeit “Baishatun people” or “Baishatun Mazu believers” always emphasise who they are. By focusing on the pilgrimage and its consequences, I will analyse the different connotations of “Baishatun community” in this section. Firstly, I will focus on how the pilgrimage results in constructing the territory-bound community with reference to the domain of the Baishatun Mazu cult. Secondly, I will explain how, on the basis of their relational ties with local residents, emigrants from this cult area claim to belong to the Baishatun community. In addition, I will explore how the common Mazu belief of outsider pilgrims results in the formation of Baishatun’s religious community. Finally, the Baishatun community is “imagined” by the distribution of pilgrimage films and communication via the Internet. Although these disparate communities bearing the name of Baishatun refer to different social contexts, the religious sentiments of the pilgrims and their sense of shared belonging are the common referents in the “community”.

15 According to Zhanghua residents, Nanyao Gong temple had waded across the Dadu river in 2000. However, I was told that the riverbed had been examined before allowing believers to walk on it.
7.3.1 The territory-bound community of Baishatun

The territory-bound community of Baishatun has two geographical referents: the place Baishatun (two political districts) and the domain of the Mazu cult (six administrative villages, cf. 4.3.3). My concern here is to illustrate how people from Baishatun and the peripheral area define the “community” that provides them with a sense of belonging (Cohen ed. 1982). Different units of the cult’s domain share common Mazu worship and the pilgrimage, albeit people’s conception of their own places can be influenced by the political mobilisation of the state (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997b:41), such as community development associations (CDA) organised by the *li*-office in each political administrative village.16 Since the two political districts and the Mazu cult domain are inconsistent, I will give details on three place-making activities that indicate the different levels of this territory-bound community: place-making projects in the political districts of Baishatun, cultural preservation work at the centre of the Mazu cult, and the *Baishatun cultural festival* held throughout the entire cult domain.

7.3.1.1 The motivation of the place-making projects in Baishatun

Two political districts (*li*) mark out the boundary of the political communities closely associated with the place-making projects in Baishatun. Although residents regard Baishatun as a village unit, the place-making projects sponsored by the government are implemented in two administrative villages only: Baidong Li and Baixi Li. The pilgrimage journey of 2001 was the turning point in the development of the local community. News of the Baishatun pilgrims wading across the river spread rapidly. On the day the pilgrims returned to the village more than thirty tour buses packed with tourists arrived in Baishatun to witness the pilgrimage activity. Aware of their distinctiveness, many Baishatun residents see the pilgrimage and their village as a tourist attraction. As a result of a series of place-making project ideas, natural and cultural resources that had hitherto been in decay were revitalised and adopted for local development.

As Gray (2002) suggests, place-making is an important dimension of community (cf. Kempny 2002). People from the Baixi Community Development Association (BXCDA) have been involved in local development for several years (cf. 3.1.4). Motivated by the event of wading across the river, they submitted several proposals for government funding in 2001 to promote the place-making of Baishatun. Implementation of these projects began

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16 These *li*-based CDAs play a central role in reinforcing local consciousness and could be a threat to the traditional village alliance for the pilgrimage centred on the Baishatun Mazu temple.
in 2002. According to the proposals, Baishatun is to be turned into a leisure area for tourists. Some renowned local products (e.g., watermelons, peanuts, stones, handicrafts, etc.) and religious activities (e.g., the Mazu pilgrimage and other religious festivities) are intended for commercial consumption, in the hope of improving local economic conditions. The most striking project is the reconstruction of the Baishatun fishing port. Implementation of the project is being supported by local volunteers, who are mostly members of a male fishing group and come from both Baidong Li and Baixi Li. Apart from environmental construction in the beach area, this mammoth project is accompanied by assistant projects and activities to motivate resident participation. For example, the BXCDA held several workshops to spread ideas about community construction and introduced activities to propagate the fishing culture of the past. These include teaching traditional handicrafts such as weaving, motivating residents to clean the beach and the village paths, designing a community logo with local school students, inspiring inhabitants to decorate the village path wall, and inviting theatre companies to perform and teach children, and so on.

The boundary of each district has taken on a special significance, since funding for place-making projects is based on political dimensions. Proposed by the BXCDA, the Baishatun fishing port reconstruction project is confined to Baixi Li at the moment, as most of the beach area is within its domain. However, there are plans to extend the project to include Baidong Li. It seems that the political boundary does not hinder residents from taking part in activities in the name of Baishatun. Sharing the same beach area, residents of both political districts are motivated to participate in the project of making their community. Moreover, the Mazu temple and the pilgrimage have become significant elements of place-making in Baishatun. The pilgrimage is defined as living cultural heritage in these projects, and the journey is advertised as a religious activity for outsiders. In fact, the Mazu temple is the religious centre shared by all the residents of Baishatun. As a common symbol of Baishatun, the Mazu temple contains local people’s life experience and religious culture, and its status cannot be replaced by political organisations or other local temples. The public

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17 I heard about these place-making activities and written proposals via email contact with the project planner, as well as through news reports and pictures shown on the Internet (such as the BFO and BMP web sites, see below).
18 Following in the footsteps of the U Theatre Company, actors and actresses from other theatre companies have joined the pilgrimage journey each year. In the place-making project, which includes presenting local culture, these actor- and actress-pilgrims (from outside) have become a place-making resource. See also 7.3.1.3.
19 While other research points out the significance of boundary in constructing community, Gray (2002: 56) focuses in his research on the core element in the process of place-making, such as what it means to be a hill sheep farmer.
activity centre is under construction by the Mazu temple committee (TAC) instead of by the two li-offices (political sector). Apart from the communal Mazu pilgrimage, there is almost no other activity that includes all Baishatun residents. In this respect, the pilgrimage is not only the pride of Baishatun people, but also a distinctive advantage they can use in the place-making of their village. Local residents love talking about the pilgrimage, which often crops up in their ordinary conversation. They usually call a new-born baby boy “the future palanquin carrier”, whereas a baby girl is referred to as “the future gong-player”. In this sense, the Mazu pilgrimage plays an important role in forging a common local identity that provides residents with a sense of belonging.

7.3.1.2 Cultural preservation in Baishatun

Before a cultural preservation organisation was set up, the younger generation in Baishatun had begun to reshape their pilgrimage tradition. The U Theatre Company (Chen Ban ed. 1992) from Taipei was the first to introduce the pilgrimage as a means of demonstrating folk religious culture in Taiwan. The Beigang Mazu Culture and Education Foundation (BMCEF) from the destination has published the pilgrimage’s annual magazine from 1993 to 2001. The contents of the magazine include the pilgrimage routes, Mazu legends, pilgrim stories and miscellaneous reports. Containing important information for new participants, it is usually distributed in the Mazu temple on the eve of departure.

The people of Baishatun were encouraged to write about their own pilgrimage culture, after the BMCEF encountered difficulty in publishing the magazine in 2000. The Baishatun daughter of second generation Taipei emigrants designed a web site called Baishatun Fieldwork Office (BFO) on the Internet (http://baishatun.ngo.org.tw) in the same year. Meanwhile, several outsider participants in the journey have become strong supporters and volunteered to write texts or collect data on the pilgrimage. This web site has become the main centre for collecting and distributing information to pilgrims and believers via electronic media (see 7.3.3.2). It plays an important role in introducing the pilgrimage and propagating the idea of cultural preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Baishatun. While many local religious customs have now fallen into decline, the web site endeavours to preserve the pilgrimage traditions and their meanings in the face of commercial religious activities.

After the occurrence of wading across the river, many Baishatun people and pilgrims from other places were highly motivated to propagate the pilgrimage. Apart from setting up the web site, several emigrants of Taipei suggested establishing an organisation for cultural
preservation in their home village. The BFO was established in March 2001 after casting divination blocks and receiving Mazu’s approval; it was transformed into a formal NGO in July 2003.\textsuperscript{20} The BFO began with three Baishatun emigrants\textsuperscript{21} living in Taipei, assisted by numerous volunteers (e.g., other emigrants in Taipei and pilgrims from other places, including myself). At first it was criticised as being outside intervention, i.e., outside Baishatun. In 2002, however, local residents praised BFO publications and an exhibition, which was in effect tantamount to recognition.\textsuperscript{22}

The task of BFO is to continue making annual records of the pilgrimage journey. It also includes preserving the natural environment, and the history and local culture of Baishatun, with special reference to the peripheral area of the Mazu cult. Responding to the expectations of pilgrims and believers, the BFO produced a VCD-/video film and published a book on the journey of 2001. The former includes scenes of wading across the river. The latter also focuses on this event, and contains photographs and writings that describe the experience and feelings of the pilgrims as they waded through the river.\textsuperscript{23} The annual \textit{Baishatun Magazine} edited by local schoolteachers was published by BFO for the first time in 2003. As a non-profit NGO organisation, BFO relies on donations from pilgrims and believers.

Following the establishment of BFO, more and more Baishatun people became involved in the cultural preservation of the village. Unlike BFO, which includes many outsiders, a second web site entitled \textit{Baishatun Mazu Xuli} (BMXL, \url{http://netcity7.web.hinet.net/UserData/cam/index2.htm}) was set up in 2002 and presented as having been initiated by genuine Baishatun residents. The web site gives no personal data on the founders\textsuperscript{24} and its content is similar to that of the BFO, making its intention quite obvious from the start. However, tension largely relaxed between the two web sites when BMLX presented its distinctive style more clearly in the following year. The third web site, \textit{Baishatun Matsu Po} (BMP, \url{http://www.lyun.com.tw/luo}), was founded by a Baishatun emigrant in 2003. He is a professional cameraman and film-maker in Taipei. His late grandfather used to be a professional cameraman and film-maker in Taipei. His late grandfather used to be a professional cameraman and film-maker in Taipei.

\textsuperscript{20} Since it lacked the requirements to enrol as a formal NGO, the BFO remained a small informal group until 2003.
\textsuperscript{21} Two of them have a very close relationship with their home village. Not only do their parents still live there, but they also belong to branch temples divided from Baishatun’s Wuyun Gong temple and Tiande Gong temple.
\textsuperscript{22} I was informed about this via email contact, telephone, news reports, and the remarks in the three web site guest books.
\textsuperscript{23} The editor of the book is the female gong player, who does not come from Baishatun but has been involved in the pilgrimage since 1990.
\textsuperscript{24} The main founder belongs to a neighbourhood temple in Baishatun. Concealing their real names is apparently related to the discord and competition between residents and their respective neighbourhood temples.
custodian of the Mazu temple. Based on his identification with his home village, this web site designer focuses on collecting visual and audiovisual materials about Baishatun and presenting them on the Internet.

Although Baishatun is the centre of the Mazu cult, preserving local culture and the pilgrimage cannot dispense with the participation of emigrants and people from the peripheral area of the cult. Regardless of diverse definitions of “Baishatun culture”, the core concern is the common worship dedicated to Baishatun Mazu and the communal pilgrimage that gives the participants a sense of shared belonging.

7.3.1.3 The Baishatun cultural festival

The significance of the peripheral areas of the Baishatun Mazu cult must be taken into account if the cult is to be considered as a whole in terms of cultural preservation. The Baishatun cultural festival is held in the name of Baishatun, but its implementation involved people from the entire Mazu cult domain.25

In order to promote local development, a member of parliament from Xinpu (the southern village of the Mazu cult) submitted a proposal to hold a large cultural festival in Baishatun in 2003. He had won his political campaign in 2000 as a result of the support from people in this coastal area. However, he claimed that his victory was due to Mazu’s assistance. In order to express his gratitude for the goddess’s help, he propagated the Mazu cult. As a member of the governing party (the Democracy Development Party, DDP), he successfully applied for state funding from central government (approx. 34 470 000 NT dollars, the equivalent of EUR 861 750) for the festival, apart from the normal budget distribution. Harsh criticism about the large sum of money involved came from politicians in the opposition (Li Jun-ping 2003). Notably, arrangements were made for President Chen Shui-bian (DDP) to visit the Mazu temple in Baishatun during the festival.26

Once the date of the cultural festival had been set, the pilgrimage date was selected for 5th - 15th May 2003. The BFO was delegated to write a proposal for the festival, and local political sectors at different levels (county/township/village) were involved in the preparation. According to the proposal, the festival was to be held in the reach of the Mazu cult (six administrative villages), and was to involve almost all local temples and community development associations, albeit Baishatun was to remain the focus.27

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25 Most of my data is based on electronic communication (e-mails, telephone and the Internet).
26 According to a report (Hu peng-sheng 18/05/03), the President visited the temple on the 17th of May.
27 I was told that participation in the festival was partly state-funded, so that many local temples and community development associations competed to join in the activities.
festival was separated into five stages in line with the pilgrimage. Firstly, educational activities dealing with culture and art were held throughout the area one month before departure on the pilgrimage journey. Baishatun’s two neighbourhood temples were selected as the location for village activities, such as painting lanterns and village fences beside the railroad. Secondly, celebrations were held in front of the Mazu temple on the eve of setting out, including several exhibitions (e.g., pictures and objects of the pilgrimage, miscellaneous folk art), multi-media shows, and assorted folk performances. Thirdly, programmes were added to the pilgrimage procession on the day of return and on Mazu’s inspection trip. Meanwhile, various exhibitions were held close to the Mazu temple, and certain rituals praying for peace and harmony were held in two other neighbourhood temples in Baishatun. Fourthly, while an art festival held by the upper county hall included an introduction to Baishatun, programmes to celebrate the closing of the pilgrimage journey continued in the village. And finally, along with other programmes, a Taiwanese opera was performed to celebrate the fulfilment of the pilgrimage and conclude the festival on the twelfth day after the pilgrims had returned. Nevertheless, the festival did not quite go according to plan, due to the threat of the SARS disease in Taiwan during the pilgrimage period. As a result, the festival was confined to Baishatun and limited to the period of celebration before the departure and after return from the journey, albeit people from the whole of the Mazu cult domain were involved.

Bearing in mind the close relationship between politics and religious activity in Taiwan, the presence of the pilgrimage and the cultural festival on the political stage comes as no surprise. DDP politicians supported the festival to increase their votes in the election campaign for president and parliament in the following year. Since the Baishatun Mazu temple is an important cult centre in the coastal area, the DDP impressed local believers with the generous government sponsorship of the festival, which was a perfect example of appropriating gratitude to Mazu for a political campaign. An old conflict had led to the exclusion of most of Xinpu from the Baishatun Mazu cult, although the relationship between Baishatun and Xinpu has meanwhile improved. The DDP politician claimed that the villagers of Xinpu still belonged to Baishatun in terms of a common pilgrimage history. Regardless of Xinpu’s old conflict with Baishatun and its exclusion from the Mazu cult, political considerations led him to support the Baishatun cultural festival. Despite the political implications, the Baishatun TAC largely depended on the assistance of this influential politician from Xinpu. The Baishatun cultural festival obviously had to rely on

28 By and large, votes for the DDP are usually low in the area of Miaoli County. However, most (over 70%) people in Baishatun voted for the DDP presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian in 2000.
the support of people from the peripheral areas of the Mazu cult.

Briefly, the reputation of the Baishatun Mazu cult has motivated people to participate in place-making projects and the cultural preservation of the coastal area. While the local community can refer to either the place Baishatun (the two political districts) or the territory-bound community of the Mazu cult (the six administrative villages), its common religious base is the Mazu worship and the pilgrimage, where people share a sense of belonging with a common geographical referent.

7.3.2 The relational community and the religious community of Baishatun
Similar to the phenomenon of the displacement of place and culture pointed out by numerous scholars (cf. 7.1), many pilgrims who claim to be “Baishatun people” are in fact not residents of Baishatun. They are emigrants who originally came from the Mazu cult area and have continued to come back for the pilgrimage for many years. Meanwhile, many “outsider pilgrims”, who come from beyond the domain of the Mazu cult, are pious supplicants of the goddess, coming to her temple to worship even at ordinary times. These quadelang (“non-resident” or “outsider”) who assert their belief in Baishatun Mazu get to know Baishatun villagers and become friends as a result of this belief. By examining the assertions of emigrants and outsiders, I will attempt to establish the connotations of the Baishatun community. Why do we view community as a concept when the Baisahatun community can be explained in the context of religion and social relations?

7.3.2.1 Emigrants’ home village identity and the relational community
In search of a better living, many people moved from the coastal area and settled in larger towns or cities in the 1960s. Although some have been working abroad in Southeast Asia or China since the 1980s, most emigrants from Baishatun are confined to the island of Taiwan. They still regard themselves as “Baishatun people” in the broad sense (referring to the Mazu cult) despite having moved away more than thirty or forty years ago. Generally speaking, the distance between the new place of residence and the coastal area is the key element in deciding the frequency of the emigrant’s return. Indeed, many emigrants retain their home village identity, that produces a sense of belonging upheld by relational and religious connections with their home villages (cf. Chang Hsun 2002b, Tung 2002). While some emigrants still own houses or lands in their home villages, others connect by
visiting relatives or participating in local religious festivities (mainly the Mazu pilgrimage). People rarely owned their own land in the past, and it was this poverty that compelled them to move to other places in search of work and a better standard of living. The Baishatun emigrants who return are mostly male. They work and reside with their wives and children in other towns or cities but return frequently to the village to visit their elderly parents or relatives, if they are still there. Some keep their family homes in the village for periodical visits after their parents or relatives have moved out or passed away.\(^29\) I lived, for example, in the house of a Baishatun emigrant. He and his family stay there mostly during the period of the Mazu pilgrimage or whenever they find time for a weekend or short vacation. In fact, there are many empty family houses in the village. They are usually locked up or looked after by relatives or neighbours. The most important part of the family house\(^30\) is the living room with the domestic altar, which comprises a religious painting of several celestial gods and the family ancestor tablet. Because daily worship in front of the domestic altar is demanded by Taiwanese folk religious custom, most emigrants have set up domestic altars in their new homes. If there is still a domestic altar in the village, the frequency of the emigrant’s return to hold family worship increases.

Local religious activities are another important link between emigrants and their home villages. This first of all involves the festivities held by four neighbourhood temples (\textit{gaktauvoir}) in Baishatun. As mentioned in the third chapter, emigrants usually worship gods from their home village, which are claimed to be their genuine gods of protection in their new settlement (cf. 3.3). For this reason, branch temples divided from Baishatun are found in places with a large number of Baishatun emigrants, such as Wude Gong temple and Tucheng Wuyun Gong temple in Taipei. In fact, each neighbourhood temple has several branch temples in other places (cf. table 3-2), and emigrants usually return to Baishatun to celebrate temple festivals. In this respect, maintaining the relationship between branch and mother temples is a means of sustaining the link to the emigrant’s home village, which is deeply embedded in his religious life.

The second, more significant religious activity is the Mazu pilgrimage. Unlike the neighbourhood temple based on voluntary association, Mazu worship is in principle a territorial cult shared by all Baishatun residents. Although emigrants do not live in the

\(^{29}\) In Olwig’s (1997) research, family land and the family house become important institutions for migrant cultural identification.

\(^{30}\) Lin Wei-bin (2002) approaches the spatial arrangement of the family house from the symbolic perspective, which is closely related to the Chinese concept of cosmology in terms of \textit{wuxing} and \textit{fengshui}. As a symbol, the family house can also be connected to people’s concepts of the village, the \textit{danggi’s} (spirit medium) body, and the imagined home in China.
village, they can be counted as members by giving dingkou money (household membership fee, cf. 3.2.1.3 and ch.3 note 40) for the pilgrimage, if their parents still live in the village. Changes in the household membership fee have done nothing to alter emigrant participation in the pilgrimage. In fact, the Mazu pilgrimage is the scene of Baishatun’s most important religious congregation, for which emigrants return to the village from all over the island.

Most members of the palanquin brigade do not reside in the area of the Baishatun Mazu cult. Identifying strongly with his home village, one Baishatun migrant in Taipei has participated in the palanquin brigade for more than ten years. Compared to the Chinese New Year or Moon Festival, he regards the Mazu pilgrimage as the more significant occasion for emigrants. He said:

“For our Baishatun people, neither the Chinese New Year nor the Moon Festival is an occasion for families to get together. But the Mazu pilgrimage is. Almost all Baishatun people [emigrant] return to the village for the pilgrimage. If they cannot join the journey wholly or even partially, they at least come on the day Mazu returns to the village. Each household invites guests to celebrate at a banquet. Indeed, the biggest festival in Baishatun is the day Mazu returns from the pilgrimage journey” (Da-ming).

In particular, many emigrants depend on Mazu’s protection to adjust to their new settlement. As mentioned in chapter six (cf. 6.2.2.1), one large family who moved to Zhanghua in 1959 still takes part in the Mazu pilgrimage today. As pious Baishatun Mazu’s believers, they usually provide pilgrims with free beverages along the journey, and return to worship Mazu regularly. Two women from this family waded across the Zuoshui River in 2001. In an interview, a third generation son claimed that the river was full of dangers and that the riverbed had not only been badly damaged by illegal pebble-digging but was covered in medical trash. Since residents normally never went down to the river, the older woman who had waded through the river took this as absolute proof of Mazu’s protection:

“We all came across the river safely because of Mazu’s protection. I can’t remember what really happened after we waded across. It was so strange. As people said, the riverbed was transformed by Mazu into a huge dragon for us to walk on. It’s true, it would not have been possible without Mazu” (A-Mei).

The pilgrimage seems like a rite of passage for Baishatun people (including emigrants), in which young men and women are encouraged to go on the journey after finishing military service or before getting married (cf. 4.1.2.4). However, it is not easy for everyone to escape from everyday life to take part in the whole journey, which usually takes nine to eleven days.
One Baishatun woman, who has lived in Taipei for many years, feels very confident about participating in the journey:

“I usually arrange my holiday to coincide with the pilgrimage. If it does not work, I apply for some days off to cover the journey. If my boss refuses, I will resign. As a Baishatun woman, I have to go on the journey with Mazu. We Baishatun people [emigrants] usually apply for pilgrimage leave or send in our resignation, in order to go on the journey. It’s nothing! We can always find another job after Mazu’s pilgrimage” (Ying-ying).

Hence, the Mazu pilgrimage constitutes an important base for emigrants to form the relational community of Baishatun. No matter how far away they live, or how long they have been away from the coastal area, identification with their home villages forces the emigrants to return. They are linked to their home villages through kin relations or local religious festivities. In particular, the Mazu pilgrimage provides migrants with an opportunity to repeat the experience of being “Baishatun people” by going on the journey or participating in the pilgrimage celebration on the day of return. While journeying with Mazu is essential to Baishatun people, emigrant home village identity is also reinforced by the pilgrimage.

7.3.2.2 The common Mazu belief and the pilgrims’ shared belonging

Many pilgrims and believers of the Baishatun Mazu, who have no other relationship with Baishatun, come from places beyond the reach of the Mazu cult. The common Mazu belief and the experience of the pilgrimage journey bring these outsiders into the religious community centred on the worship dedicated to the Baishatun Mazu.

The Gongtian Gong temple in Baishatun still maintains the conventional character of a territorial cult, although it does not exclude pilgrims and believers from outside. The significance of the territorial principle is to maintain residents’ privileges of participating in the temple organisation and their share in terms of ritual obligations and rights, as mentioned in the third and fourth chapters (cf. 3.2.1.3 & 4.3.3). However, the importance of the territorial cult is fading. As a result of rural-urban migration, conventional territorial cults have begun to lose parishioners, and several temples have been transformed into voluntary associations. Meanwhile, worship customs in Taiwanese folk religion are gradually changing from household membership to individual participation.

A universal attribute of the Mazu belief is the lack of restriction in terms of background, e.g., race, gender, culture, nationality, or region. In this sense, Mazu worship in Baishatun does not exclude believers beyond its cult domain. A Minnanese saying illustrates the character
of Mazu worship: “Mazo [Mazu] si dage e”, which means that everyone can pray to Mazu. This saying indicates the general principle of Taiwanese folk belief, whereby the gods can be worshipped by anyone irrespective of group or area. Indeed, people usually adopt this saying to justify their right to worship Mazu, one that I heard constantly during the pilgrimage journeys and on my fieldwork. According to some Baishatun people, for example, the withdrawal of most of the Xinpu villagers’ share of the cult is a result of human conflict and not of Mazu’s decision. To put it in their own words: “Mazu would love to be worshipped by anyone”, and “Humans make the distinction, not Mazu” (cf. 4.3.2.1 the second interview of Tian-mu). Since the goddess has numerous believers in Taiwan as a popular cult figure, worship dedicated to her in Baishatun cannot ignore the believers beyond the reach of the cult. In this sense, outsider-believers or outsider-pilgrims are included in the religious community based on common Mazu belief.

Renowned Mazu temples attract numerous believers from all over the island due to the efficacy of their goddess. Located in a small coastal village, the Baishatun Mazu temple enjoys the same privilege. The reason why many quadelangs (non-residents or outsiders) come to worship Baishatun Mazu and participate in the pilgrimage is claimed to be the goddess’s efficacy to protect and help them. In one Baishatun resident’s opinion (cf. 6.2.2.2, interview of Fulu), the wide recognition of Gongtian Gong temple is a result of the efficacious power exercised by Mazu in response to the pleas of her many outside-believers. The goddess’s palanquin performance is believed to bring divine providence to families visited on the journey, so that the pilgrimage serves the function of attracting believers beyond the actual domain of the Mazu cult.

The forming of relationships between Baishatun pilgrims is referred to by the Chinese term “yuanfen”, meaning a predestined connection. The term is often used by pilgrims in developing new relationships with other Mazu believers along the journey. As yuanfen suggests, the connection between pilgrims is said to be pre-determined, understood by pilgrims as Mazu’s arrangement to bring them together and make them friends. Pilgrims and believers thus apply yuanfen to take care of each other on the journey. As outsiders from central Taiwan, one couple had a strong feeling of being “in the same boat” or as “gang mia lang” (people with the same fate) with other pilgrims on the journey (cf. 5.5.2 Da-hua and his wife A-jiao). At the same time, many believers devote themselves to the pilgrimage by providing pilgrims with free food and lodging because of their common Mazu belief. Their devotion and voluntary service are explained in terms of yuanfen, which is said to come from Mazu.
The common journeying experience and religious sentiment paves the way for creating a sense of belonging to the pilgrim group. In spite of being outsiders, the aforementioned couple almost felt like Baishatun people after they had taken part in the pilgrimage journey for several years. They not only made friends with Baishatun residents, but frequently visited the village at ordinary times. In fact, many pilgrims from other places come to the Baishatun Mazu temple to pray to the goddess outside of the pilgrimage period. From my observations in the temple, outsiders mostly came to worship on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month. Despite there being several renowned Mazu temples in Zhanghua, one businessman stated why he preferred to come to Baishatun to pray to Mazu:

“Yes, we have several famous Mazu temples in Zhanghua. But I just like coming here [Baishatun] whenever I get the time. I usually come at weekends or on holidays, sometimes on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month. … This temple differs from others. It’s simple and without too many decorations. I was very impressed by the atmosphere here when I first came in. It was during the lunch-break, and I was the only one in the temple. It was so quiet and peaceful that I was moved to tears. I don’t know why. I was deeply moved by the atmosphere. It seems to me that merciful Mazu listens to me whenever I pray to her. …After my first visit, I worshipped her image at home, which is divided from the temple” (Kuo-hua).

Another female believer from Zhanghua regards the Baishatun Mazu as her protective goddess. She constantly asks for her help with divination blocks. Growing up in a Buddhist family, she learned of the Baishatun Mazu from her parents. She usually knelt down in the street to worship Mazu when the goddess’s palanquin arrived in the city, praying she would visit her house. She relies on the goddess’s direction and states that Mazu belief has always been part of her life:

“My sisters and I worshipped the Baishatun Mazu when we were children. We called her “ah-ma” (grandmother) because she helped us to solve problems. …. I don’t know the reason why we called her a-ma. Probably because she is so amiable and close to us, she seems like our own grandmother. …I always go to Baishatun to ask Mazu’s direction [through divination] whenever I have problems. For example, my buying a house and managing a coffee shop both were a result of her directions. …I always come to pray to Mazu when she arrives in Zhanghua. I could not help praying in tears on the street, because I was afraid she would not come to my place. It is very important for me to invite her to my house”! (Fen-fang)

While the common Mazu belief provides pilgrims and believers with a sense of belonging, different interpretations of the Mazu belief emerge. Baishatun people emphasise the unique character of their Mazu as distinct from other Mazus in Taiwan (cf. 8.2.1.1). In contrast, pilgrims from the destination (Beigang) argue that the different Mazus housed in different
places are in fact one and the same goddess (cf. 6.2.3.1.3, interview of Cixin). Many Beigang people avoid making distinctions between the cults dedicated to Mazu for fear of creating discord or damaging a relationship, all of which must be seen from the background of their damaged relationship with the pilgrimage group from Dajia. Paradoxically, emphasising the uniqueness of Baishatun Mazu can lead to an increase in the significance of the local Mazu cult, and thus threaten the superior status of the destination temple. In particular, the growing reputation of the pilgrimage group can be the cause of rivalry with the destination temple, as the case of Dajia has shown.

Irrespective of the numerous interpretations of the Taiwanese Mazu belief, its universal religious features ensure that believers are not confined to a specific group or territory. Indeed, the de-territorialized character of the Mazu belief leads to the inclusion of more and more pilgrims and believers from places beyond the conventional cult domain. Consequently, outsiders are brought into the religious community of Baishatun through the common pilgrimage experience and religious sentiment that provide a sense of belonging.

7.3.3 Toward an imagined Baishatun community

Appadurai (1998, ch9) makes a distinction between neighbourhood and locality, whereby locality (ibid: 182) is defined “as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects”. According to his definition, the pilgrimage discussed here not only has enormous impact on the Baishatun spatial neighbourhood, but contributes to the production of the Baishatun locality. Apart from the influence of the nation state and the global flows of migration, the production of locality cannot ignore the significance of the mass media and electronic communication that increase the disjuncture between spatial and virtual neighbourhoods (ibid: 189-199). Here, the virtual neighbourhood, in contrast to the spatial neighbourhood, is created by the sizeable adoption of new forms of electronically mediated communication, such as films, television, videocassettes, fax machines, electronic mail, and computer-mediated communication (ibid: 194-5). Following Appadurai’s concern, I will explain in this sub-section how the pilgrimage contributes to forming a virtual

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31 Appadurai (1998:179) defines neighbourhoods as “actually existing social forms”, which are “situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction”. He describes locality “as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial”, and “as a complex phenomenological quality”, which is “constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts” (ibid: 178). Briefly, neighbourhoods “as substantive social forms”, and locality as a phenomenological quality can be considered as a category or “as a property of social life”.

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neighbourhood. The filming of the pilgrimage since the 1990s and the three web sites set up on behalf of the Baishatun pilgrimage in 2000, 2002 and 2003 are key resources for the constitution of an “imagined” community beyond the realm of face-to-face contact (cf. 7.1).

7.3.3.1 The two pilgrimage films about the journey in 2001

Three films were made about the pilgrimage before 2001. The first, Mazu’s Southward Journey, is a 25-minute film showing the trip from Baishatun to Beigang in 1987. The Beigang Hehe Association produced the second film, a four-hour focus on the palanquin brigade and the journey process in 1996. The third is a 30-minute film entitled Seasonal Journey of Mazu’s Pilgrims and is a portrait of the village of Baishatun and the Mazu pilgrimage. It was produced by the Public Television Service Foundation and appears on Taiwanese television in 2000.

However, my focus here is to discuss two other films shot by cameramen on the pilgrimage journey in 2001. The difficulty of filming the journey was heightened by the pilgrim march, unscheduled as it was and without a fixed route. Unlike the pilgrims’ reaction on an Andalusian pilgrimage (Crain 1997:300), Baishatun pilgrims generally show no aversion to cameramen.

Wading across the Zhuoshui River was the first film to be produced by the BFO and was shot by a pilgrim from Zhanghua in central Taiwan. Participating in the walking journey, this pious Mazu believer not only took photographs and shot the film, but also bore the expenses for the VCD production. The film is four hours long and records the entire journey of 2001. Fifteen minutes of film show scenes of pilgrims wading through the Zhuoshui River, an event that made a lasting impression on pilgrims and believers. Lacking in professional quality, many nevertheless supported the production of the film by donating money to the BFO. In fact, it is in great demand. For those who were either present at the event or unable to participate, the scenes shown in the film were a historical moment that proved the goddess’s protective power. This film successfully evoked a sense of belonging in people who had once been in Baishatun or taken part in a pilgrimage journey, but were unable for one reason or another to attend. (cf. Preis 1997).

The distribution of the film was not confined to believers and pilgrims reached through relational networks and web sites on the Internet. It was also distributed to libraries, museums and related temples in Taiwan. It was even spread overseas, such as to individual

32 The entire pilgrimage journey of 1997 was filmed with a v-8 camcorder by the World Religions Museum in Taipei.
33 According to the BFO, this film was converted into 1 000 VCDs and 50 video cassettes in 2001. The latter were produced for people without access to VCD.
researchers, libraries, and museums in Hong Kong, Berlin, Marburg, and the USA. Moreover, scenes of pilgrims wading through the river became important resources for the propagation of Baishatun Mazu temple and the pilgrimage. During the pilgrimage period in 2002 and 2003, the film was shown repeatedly in front of the Gongtian Gong temple. The pilgrimage group was reported in the mass media, e.g., newspapers, television and the Internet. The physical suffering of the pilgrims and their struggle to complete the journey on foot was highly praised, while the river event caused a small sensation. Apart from evoking common pilgrim sentiments, the film about the journey also provided a resource for collective imagination when used in Mazu temple activities or mass media reports to advertise the pilgrimage.

Another professional documentary entitled *Matsu: Taiwan's Guardian Goddess* was produced by the Government Information Office. The purpose of this 25-minute film was to portray Mazu belief and the culture of Taiwanese folk religion. According to the film-maker, the film attempts to depict the strong character of the Taiwanese Mazu pilgrims, who endured tremendous hardship on the walking journey (guest book of BFO no. 283 Albert 05/05/02, [http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw](http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw)). The most striking part of the film is when the cameramen film Baishatun pilgrims following the Mazu palanquin across the river. Consequently, the Baishatun Mazu temple at village level, which was presented in the film with the two renowned Mazu temples of Beigang and Dajia, was greatly promoted.

Furthermore, this film won two prizes in 2002: a platinum award at the Houston International Film Festival, and a silver award at the Quested International Video Festival. It was then shown on overseas television on several channels in Dallas, Austin, and Houston during the Chinese New Year (guest book of BFO no. 263 25/04/02 [http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw](http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw)). At the same time, DVDs and videos of the film have been widely distributed in Taiwan. Both Chinese and English versions of the film have been accessible on the Government Information Office web site since 2003.\(^{34}\) Albeit the Baishatun pilgrimage is not the sole focus of the film, the distribution of the film does much to promote the reputation of the coastal village. It not only evokes the common sentiments of the Baishatun people and the pilgrims, but also serves the collective imagination of Mazu believers in other places, including the overseas Chinese.

In brief, both films successfully evoke people’s common religious feelings in terms of Mazu belief and pilgrimage. They also provide an opportunity to constitute the virtual neighbourhood (or imagined community) based on the collective imagination about

\(^{34}\) The film with an English voiceover can be viewed via the following web site address: [http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/av/sou_sig/sight04_31.htm](http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/av/sou_sig/sight04_31.htm).
7.3.3.2 The virtual neighbourhood created by electronic communication

Although not all Baishatun households have access to electronic-mediated communication, many people are driven to using computers and applying for Internet accounts as soon as pictures of the pilgrimage journey appear on the BFO web site. Obviously, Internet users are primarily young people, and households with computer users usually transmit the information shown on the Internet. My concern here is to examine how the communication produced on Baishatun’s three web sites results in the formation of the virtual neighbourhood (cf. Appadurai 1998: 194-5), which possesses the character of collective imagination.

As mentioned earlier, Baishatun’s three web sites (BFO, BMXL and BMP cf. 7.3.1.2) are engaged in preserving Baishatun culture and the Mazu pilgrimage. Generally, these web sites contain a miscellany of information on Baishatun, such as portraits of the village, the natural environment, local products, and various local religious festivities. While BFO and BMXL focus on illuminating Baishatun and the pilgrimage, BMP concentrates on activities and people in the village using visual data, such as pictures and video films. These web sites serve as local information stations, spreading news of local religious festivals (including the pilgrimage) and village place-making activities.

The most striking feature of these web sites is their guest books, which provide an opportunity for discussion, such as questions and answers, exchange of personal experience or opinions. There were more than 1,000 contributions in the three guest books at the end of 2003. The BFO web site had the largest number of messages (over 900), whereas the other two web sites were not as popular in terms of expressing personal opinions and feelings. While some use their real names in the discussion, others tend to use pseudonyms to escape recognition when it comes to launching controversial topics of debate. Apart from acquaintances exchanging e-mails or information via the guest books, most writers express opinions and describe feelings with regard to Baishatun, the Mazu temple and the pilgrimage.

The imagined community is comprised of heterogeneous elements. Apart from facts about Baishatun, the web site guest books contain information on other Mazu temples or cultural preservation organisations. Thus, the collective imagination as revealed on the Internet is de-territorialised and heterogeneous, and accommodates users from different areas with different opinions, albeit the spotlight is permanently focused on the pilgrimage and
Regardless of their diverse opinions, contributors to the guest books always express their common Mazu belief. When, for example, someone exaggerates that two BFO web site pictures show miracles, someone else refutes this by analysing the pictures from a different perspective. One person wrote:

I think both pictures are genuine. .... Or should I say both pictures force us to discuss our Mazu’s *ling* [magical power] and her pilgrimage. I think this is Mazu’s arrangement to make us advertise the pilgrimage. (BFO guest book 737 Aron 03/06/03, http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw).

Having experienced the pilgrimage journey with others, one guest book writer saw the relationship between pilgrims as similar to brothers and sisters:

We cherish each day of the journey that we can follow Mazu. We cherish *yuan* [predestined connection] that makes us travel together. No matter where we’re from, we are all Mazu’s followers, and we are like brothers and sisters (guest book, BFO, Ruanjiaofen 11/07/03 http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw).

Communication shown on the Internet serves to mobilise ideas, opinions, money, and social linkages (cf. Appadurai 1998:195-96). A daily report on the pilgrimage journey, for example, was recorded in the BFO guest book in 2002. Apart from mobile phones, participants provided the latest news about the journey in written form on the Internet, which helped believers to know the whereabouts of the pilgrimage so they could come to worship Mazu or join the trip at will. Furthermore, texts or pictures portraying the pilgrimage were discussed or revised via the discussion in the guest book. Indeed, the encouraging and useful comments in the guest book did much to support activities such as the production of the BFO film and book on the pilgrimage, or the preparation of exhibitions.

Moreover, the communication on the Internet has a considerable impact on Gongtian Gong temple affairs. Thirty-two messages concerning the Baishatun Mazu temple’s problems were written in the 2003 BFO guest book, and influenced the election of the TAC at the end of that year. At first someone suggested improving the lighting of the temple shrine in order to see better while praying to Mazu (Hongqingting 23/08/03, http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw). This suggestion was followed by a discussion on how to put it into effect (guest book, BFO 25/08/03-28/09/03, http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw). While some pointed out the difficulty of managing a temple, others criticised the incompetence of the TAC and proposed reforming the temple organisation. Some queried the legitimacy of the currently elected TAC members,
and the need for replacement of older TAC members was largely confirmed. A list of competent people (mostly under fictitious names) needed to reform the TAC was also recommended. In fact, though most writers used pseudonyms in the guest book, their real identity was nonetheless discernible in the discussion group. Intermittently the disparate opinions aired on the Internet led eventually to disagreement between the different camps. If some criticism sounded too harsh, however, it was followed by a request that all discussants as Mazu believers maintain a civil tone and carry on a reasonable dialogue. Although apparently confined to Internet users, the discussion obviously had an impact on the election of the TAC. As a result, several people from the younger generation were recruited as believer representatives to the temple, two of which were elected to the TAC.\textsuperscript{35} In this respect, the virtual neighbourhood on the Internet serves as an instrument of surveillance, and leads to the reformation of the real (spatial) neighbourhood of Baishatun.

7.4 Discussion: multiple connotations of pilgrimage community

The fact that the pilgrimage has the capacity to provide different resources for people’s identity leads to different ways of constructing the community centred on the Mazu cult. The relation between the different connotations of community is shown in Chart 7-1. The Mazu cult with its territorial, relational, and religious referents lies at the centre of people’s identity. When the geographical location of the cult is emphasised, residents claim their local identity. The latter refers to the cult’s territory-bound community, which distinguishes between the central and peripheral areas. Emigrants who originally came from the cult domain assert their identity with their home village, and are thus included in the relational community of the cult through kin relations and pilgrimage activity. Similarly, when common religious loyalty to the goddess is stressed, the religious community centred on the worship dedicated to Mazu is formed. Based on shared Mazu belief and pilgrimage experience, Baishatun Mazu believers constitute a sort of imagined community, where collective imagination is achieved through communication on the Internet or pilgrimage films. In this respect, the connotations of community are indeed multiple, and can refer to different meanings in different contexts.

\textsuperscript{35} I was informed about this through a telephone conversation with a Baishatun migrant. See also guest book, Congming 09/12/2003, \url{http://bishatun.ngo.org.tw}. 
In fact, the different communities overlap. While the territory-bound community stresses the geographical referent, how people affiliate with one another transcends the territorial boundary. Thus, community as a concept also indicates people’s different relational categories and stresses the relational bond between residents and emigrants, the religious worship common to the goddess’s believers, and the collective imagination of the Mazu cult and the pilgrimage.

**Conclusion**

Common religious sentiments and journeying experiences play a key role in forging pilgrimage identity and constructing “community” in the name of Baishatun. The pilgrimage has a direct impact on place-making in the local community bounded by Baishatun’s geographical territory. Due to the differentiation between the central and peripheral areas of the Mazu cult, constructing the territory-bound community depends on whether there is a need to focus on the central area or to extend to the periphery. Moreover, the connotation of community is not necessarily bound to a specific territory. Community can be used as a concept to refer to different ways of the human affiliation that provides
people with a sense of shared belonging. Thus, through kin relations and religious festivals, local residents and emigrants constitute the relational community of Baishatun. Considering their common Mazu belief, the Baishatun religious community takes outsiders (non-Baishatun people) from other places into account. Also, the pilgrimage provides important resources for collective imagination, such as the production of pilgrimage films and the communication via Internet. The collective imagination of the pilgrimage leads inevitably to the creation of Baishatun’s imagined community, which extends far beyond face-to-face contact.

Despite the common assertion of being Baishatun people or Mazu believers, the distinctions and contestations involved in the pilgrimage cannot be omitted from my discussion. I will turn to this topic in the following chapter.