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Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints

Mayfair Mei-hui Yang

The said "return of the religious," . . . is not a simple return, for its globality and its figures (tele-techno-media-scientific, capitalistic and politico-economic) remain original and unprecedented.

Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"

This essay examines complex interactions among the nation-state, popular religion, media capitalism, and gendered territorialization as these are inflected across the Taiwan Strait. Relations across the strait have been fraught with political tension and military preparations over the question of whether Taiwan is part

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of China or an independent state. Since the 1999 presidential elections in Taiwan, the new government there has been more vociferous about Taiwan independence, and mainland China's Communist Party has responded with more vigorous claims on Taiwan, including the launching of a warning missile over the island. Under these conditions, it is all the more remarkable that in recent years there has been an increasing number of religious pilgrimages and exchanges across the strait, and that, in 2000, one such pilgrimage by Taiwanese worshippers of the maritime goddess Mazu to her natal home in Fujian Province was broadcast live from China back to Taiwan via satellite television.

I conducted fieldwork on popular religion and media development in Taiwan for four months in 2000 and 2001 and traveled with Dongsen Television News Station (ETTV News) from Taiwan to China in July 2000, observing their reporters and technicians deliver live satellite television coverage of the historic



Map of Mazu Pilgrimage from Dajia, Taiwan, to Meizhou Island, Fujian Province, July 2000

religious pilgrimage.¹ In contemporary Taiwan, Mazu is the most popular cult deity: her temples are the most numerous, and it is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of Taiwanese worship her in some form. The pilgrimage in 2000 was organized by one of Taiwan's most prominent Mazu temples, Zhenlangong (Zhenlan Temple) in the central Taiwanese town of Dajia. This mediatized pilgrimage to a female deity propelled a record number of worshippers—most of them lower-middle-class and rural women—across the politically tense Taiwan Strait to the Mazu goddess cult's ritual center on Meizhou Island, part of mainland China's Fujian Province. It was a historic occasion and "media event" (Dayan and Katz 1992), in which the forces of popular religion engaged the largest ever contingent of Taiwanese media crews in order to solidify their national position and engage with the grassroots religious revival in China.

This mutual deployment of religion and the media took place against the larger historical backdrop of the emergence of the modern nation-state in China and Taiwan. It has often been observed that modern states are predicated on territoriality, the fixing and monitoring of populations, and the patrol of state borders (Anderson 1991).² Anthony Giddens draws a useful distinction between *frontiers* and *borders* when he writes that the frontiers of archaic empires or premodern states were marginal areas at the periphery, where "the political authority of the centre [was] diffuse or thinly spread," areas occupied by tribal communities not fully colonized by archaic states. Borders, however, are found only with the rise of modern nation-states and the global state system. They are sharply and clearly demarcated and, despite their location at the edges of the nation-state, convey a state presence (through border patrols, custom checkpoints, and media messages) equal to that of the political capital (Giddens 1987: 50).³ Modern state territorialities in both Taiwan and China have developed ways of excluding, containing, or rechanneling deterritorializing forces such as capitalism (Deleuze and

1. The English word *pilgrimage* is used to translate the Chinese term *jing xiang* (literally "presenting incense"). The Chinese term implies that by burning incense, pilgrims make contact with the deity in a temple far above them in the ritual hierarchy. See Naquin and Yu 1992 for a key introduction to the Chinese tradition of pilgrimage.

2. In the transition from archaic empires to modern nation-states, Benedict Anderson (1991) has noted a process of "flattening," in which a hierarchical, sacred court center fading out to indistinct peripheries gives way to a homogeneous space of egalitarian comradeship bounded by clear-cut national borders.

3. Anthony Giddens (1987) notes that even when walls were built by such empires as China and Rome, the walls did not divide a population or mark cultural boundaries, since often people on both sides of the wall continued to share a common culture without having to change their identities.

Guattari 1987), migration (Scott 1998), the transnational media, and, more recently, religious pilgrimage.

Television's power to promote cultural integration (Ang 1996: 5) has not been lost on nation-states, which have established or guided national broadcast systems and control media access, media importation, and programming to varying degrees. Whereas nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nationalisms relied on newspapers, now nation-states actively deploy television to construct what Benedict Anderson (1991) calls the flattened, homogenized, monolingual, and simultaneous space-time of the national imaginary. In the United States, we still see the role of the state in the federal government's ironic (perhaps cynical) use of the First Amendment to establish an internal cultural space of national identity by blocking local governments from creating regional media audiences and by limiting foreign media access to U.S. airwaves (Price 1994). The lack of cosmopolitanism in American television and other media served well in building popular support for the war on Iraq in 2003.

The advent of satellite and cable television and the Internet has disrupted the correspondence between state geographies and electronic communities (Morley and Robins 1995). Not only can satellite television disaggregate established audiences, it also creates new ones across and within national boundaries. Euro-American transnational media began using satellite broadcasts in the 1960s, and these media are still dominant today in terms of their global reach, services, and programming (Parks 2002). But in the twenty-first century, we also see the emergence of regional global satellite services that transcend nation-states and challenge the hegemony of Western global media. Increasingly, as Michael Curtin (n.d.) suggests, transnational cultural-civilizational media communities drive the *regional* production of media and challenge the dominance of Hollywood, currently the one production center that has truly global reach. An influential regional televisual medium is the Al Jazeera satellite news station operating out of Qatar and serving 35 million Arabic speakers in twenty-two nations (Ajami 2001; Salamon 2002).

In Asia, the conjunction of economic liberalization, transnational capital, and new satellite and cable technologies has also begun to reconfigure the space of nation-states and their terrestrial broadcast systems. As in Europe, both supranational and subnational electronic communities are emerging in Asia as alternative sites of allegiance (Morley and Robins 1995: 2, 34, 43–44; Yang 1997). Japan's Direct Broadcasting Satellite, BS-2A, launched in 1984, "first broke the link between the terrestrial broadcasting systems and national borders"; its footprint extended over several countries, like South Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia, whose governments responded by banning satellite reception hardware (Chin 1997: 86–89).

Seven years later, in 1991, Star TV began to broadcast in Asia. Owned by Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch, along with Hong Kong and Chinese companies, Star TV is now Asia's dominant satellite broadcaster, with 300 million viewers in fifty-three countries (Chan 1997). In the past decade, additional Chinese-language supranational and subnational electronic communities have emerged in the region, and this essay will examine such developments in the Taiwanese media (Chan 2003; Long 2000; Chen 1996; Lee 1996; Yang 1997). However, the global outcome of this process is not yet in sight, as nation-states mount different strategies to control access to satellite orbital slots above the equator (Price 1999), counter the creation of regional and local electronic communities of identity, and seek to implant state values in transnational media culture even as they cross political boundaries (Price 2001).

The relationship between modern nationalisms and religious traditions is a complex and multifaceted one. The secular foundation of modern Western liberal societies relies on the very category of *religion*, which reduces it from a way of life that cuts across social institutions to a matter of personal *belief* (Asad 1993, 1999). Around the world, postcolonial nationalist imaginaries have followed the Western model of shrinking and neutralizing the religious sphere and, through enforced modernization, police action, and public education, have banned or curtailed many religious practices from both public and private life. These represent explicitly modernist departures from the sacred temporality of an eternal past-in-the-present or from mythological deities and founding ancestors. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Prasenjit Duara (1995) have shown, modern nationalisms are inseparable from *History*, especially a secular, linear, teleological history that sacralizes modernization, futurity, and national strength. Where nationalisms override and displace "religion" with their own origin narratives, pantheons of national martyrs, and secular rituals, there may be virtually no domain of religion left even in the private sphere, as in Revolutionary China. Or, as in Guomintang-controlled Taiwan, religion may be relegated to marginal rural communities or to the domestic sphere.

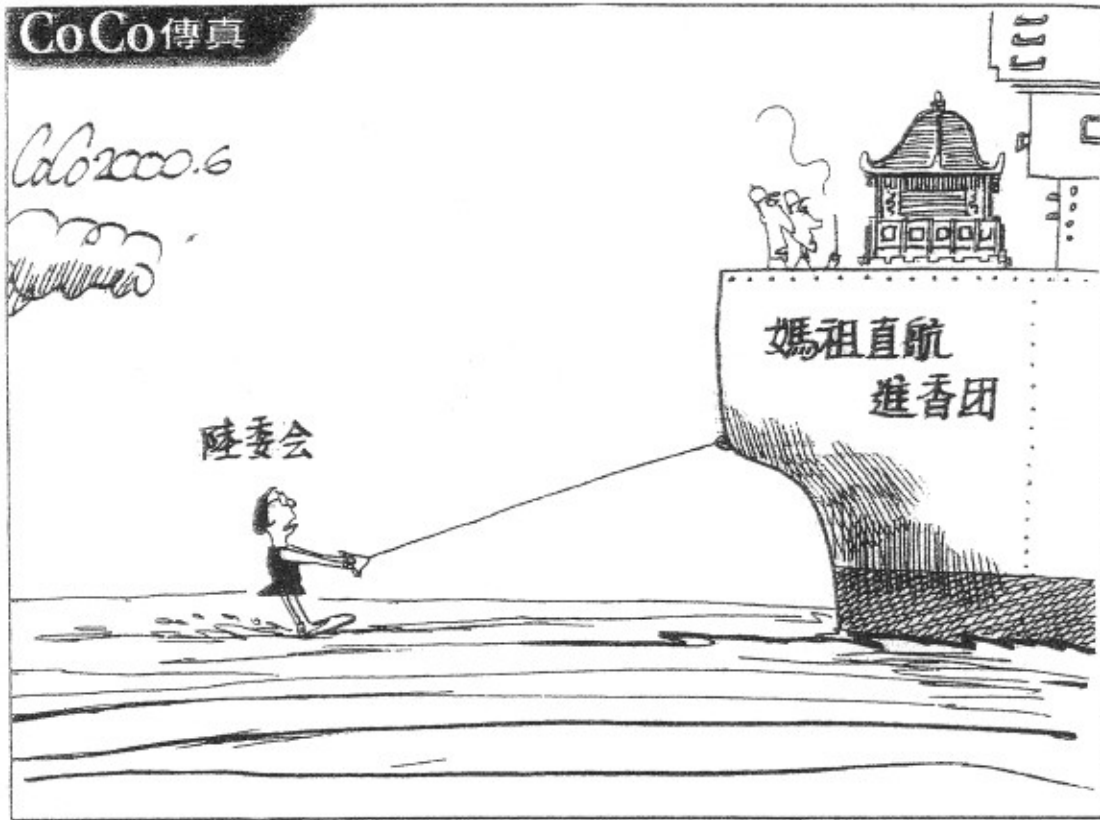
Critiques of economic, political, and colonial domination have too often been deaf to the language through which subaltern classes and cultures in Asia establish counterpublics through religion (Chakrabarty 2000). We need to pay more attention to how subaltern or other forces express themselves through religious discourse in confronting the secular nation-state. Those perspectives which *do* recognize the inextricability of religion, polity, and media focus on the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions (De Vries 2001; Derrida 1998; Lefort 1988), whose monotheism and patriarchy lend themselves to the needs of the nation-state. This

essay will explore the political significance of a very different tradition, the cult of the goddess Mazu, in a polytheistic Chinese religious tradition that is patriarchal but has strong matrifocal undertones.

In the age of mediatization, any culture or subculture that does not receive media attention—especially from the electronic media, with their enormous power of attraction and geographical encompassment—operates at a severe disadvantage. But in national media systems, it is often the case that minority groups, religious communities, indigenous peoples, and oppositional groups are excluded from the mediatized public sphere (Ginsburg 1999). Even as China today allows a huge infusion of popular consumer culture from Asia and the United States into its media, it has not welcomed the broadcast of popular religion. By contrast, the insistent voices and images of popular religion have gained entry to Taiwanese televisual space over the past decade, albeit amid a deluge of entertainment and consumerist messages and an endless parade of pop stars, politicians, and television personalities.

Pilgrimage to Meizhou Island: Direct Sealinks, Airplane Transfers, and Satellite Uplinks

The political hostility between China and Taiwan has long posed an obstacle for Taiwanese religious movements seeking to reconnect with their ritual origins in mainland China. Since there is no official agreement governing the “three direct links” of communication, transportation, and trade between mainland China and Taiwan, all religious pilgrims from Taiwan to Fujian have had to fly via a transfer point, such as Hong Kong or Tokyo. This roundabout journey is costly and arduous for pilgrims, who stand to save considerable money and effort by a *direct* sealink across the seventy-mile-wide strait. In May 2000, after the inauguration of Taiwan’s newly elected president, Chen Shuibian, the chubby chairman of the Zhenlan Temple, Yan Qingbiao, whose betel nut chewing and heavy Taiwanese accent marked him as a man of the common people, challenged the new government. He reminded the administration of its campaign promise to open up cross-strait transportation and communication and criticized their slowness in forging a “direct religious sealink” between Taiwan and Fujian (Wang 2000). He invited the media to broadcast a public consultation of Mazu, in which he threw wooden divination crescents to establish the departure date for their pilgrimage to Meizhou that year. Mazu picked the date of 16 July, which set a deadline for the Chen Suibian government and its Mainland Affairs Committee to approve the sealink. Meanwhile, Zhenlan Temple negotiated with a Moroccan shipping company to



Lian He Evening Paper, 16 June 2000

Cai Yingwen, of the Mainland Affairs Committee in Taiwan, dragging her feet and being dragged to Meizhou by an impatient pilgrimage ferry

charter the four large ferries he planned to use for the first *legal* pilgrimage to Meizhou by sea. The media used the figure of Mazu to playfully exaggerate the tensions between Zhenlan Temple and the government Mainland Affairs Committee (headed by Cai Yingwen), with newspaper headlines such as, "Is Mazu Bigger or the Mainland Affairs Committee? Human and Deity Battle It Out" (Wang 2000: 2) and "Cai Yingwen Does Not Get Outsmarted by Mazu" (Li 1999: 22).

The Mazu cult poses thorny problems for the state in both Taiwan and China. I was told that many of Zhenlan Temple's core constituents, who are neither wealthy nor educated, voted for President Chen and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), known for its support of Taiwanese independence from China. But the Mazu cult's origins in China, and the fact that its followers feel compelled to make pilgrimages to a religious center on the mainland, make it more difficult for the DPP to appropriate the powerful Mazu cult as the ground for a new Taiwanese nationalism. The pilgrims' desire to cross the fraught political borders between Taiwan and the mainland reveals the incongruities between ritual territoriality

and state territoriality. Conversely, while the mainland government officially welcomes these pilgrimages in order to promote national unification, it is also nervous about the dissemination of a popular grassroots religious organization among local people, and it aggressively limits and monitors the movements of Taiwanese pilgrims. Mainland official discourse conveniently forgets that what the Taiwan pilgrims are really returning to is not so much China as Meizhou, the sacred origin of the goddess Mazu. Rather than the political unification of China and Taiwan, it would seem that cross-strait Mazu pilgrimages are creating a regional ritual space and religious community of Chinese coastal peoples that do not conform to existing political borders.

Failing to gain approval for the sealink in 2000, Zhenlan Temple organized an indirect pilgrimage by airplane via Hong Kong and Macao. The temple's board of directors accompanied five Mazu statues that were seated in a first-class cabin. Together, they flew from Taiwan to Hong Kong, then on to Xiamen in Fujian, then north by bus to Putian City and by ferry to Meizhou Island. Over two thousand Mazu worshippers from across Taiwan also made the pilgrimage, some bringing goddess statues from smaller, local Mazu temples. While in Fujian, the pilgrims were hosted by the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou Island, which is controlled by Beijing, as well as by smaller, local government-controlled and grassroots Mazu temples in Putian and Quanzhou cities. Zhenlan Temple invited nine Taiwanese television news stations and several newspapers to cover the six-day event and paid for the airfare and hotel accommodations of over eighty media personnel. This elaborate journey and media event was a testament to the transnational organizational powers of Zhenlan Temple, which exercises considerable influence with governments and media organizations on both sides of the strait.

Three cable news stations in Taiwan, Dongsan, Sanli, and Zhongtian, and one network station, Minshi, blanketed the Taiwan media with live, on-site satellite reporting of the pilgrimage. Their competitors, TVBS and the three Taiwan government news stations, had to physically run their tapes to the Xiamen and Fuzhou television stations, which then relayed microwave signals to Beijing's Chinese Central TV, where they were beamed up to satellite before pickup in Hong Kong and retransmission to Taiwan a full day or two later. Those stations with live coverage made use of Electronic News Gathering and on-location Electronic Field Production (ENG/EFP), technologies that became standard in global news reporting only in the late 1980s (MacGregor 1997). They uplinked to one of the three Dongsan-contracted satellites overhead, Asiasat, Apstar, or SuperBird. The Taiwanese news crews brought their own video cameras, portable editing decks, and lighting and sound equipment to Fujian, but they could not ship their Satellite

News Gathering (SNG) vans because China does not allow broadcasting equipment to be brought into the country. They thus needed to rent SNG trucks in China, but given the strict state controls on satellite uplinks in China, this proved a difficult task.

The details of how Dongsen Television News achieved a direct satellite uplink on the mainland is a fascinating tale of how two previously isolated and territorially sealed electronic communities were connected. Originally, Dongsen's Taipei office was negotiating via telephone with Beijing's Central Chinese TV station and Shanghai TV to rent their SNG vans, but things were not going well. Only four days before Zhenlan Temple's entourage was due to arrive at Xiamen Airport, neither of the mainland stations had started sending out the vans. Dongsen's producers were very worried.

When Chen Jianxiang, the technical manager of Dongsen's satellite broadcasting division, got to Fujian, he found out that the reason why neither Beijing nor Shanghai TV had sent out their SNGs was that they could not get official permission for the satellite transmissions—despite the fact that the Taiwan Affairs Bureau in Beijing had already agreed that the Taiwanese media could transmit live coverage. In China, satellite uplinks need a special seal of approval from an administrative office, which assumes responsibility should anything go wrong, such as broadcasts of counterrevolutionary messages or state secrets. According to Chen, although much of the communication industry has now been privatized in China, it is much harder for satellite broadcasting to break away from the state or military and enter the commercial world.

Chen immediately set about securing approval for the transmission. He went to several different government offices to no avail. No official wanted to take responsibility for an unprecedented six-day direct satellite transmission that was full of political risks. Finally, after waiting in an air-conditioned McDonald's for the long mainland lunch break to end at three o'clock, he went to the Fujian Provincial Taiwan Affairs Office. They first tried to kick the matter upstairs, saying that this was up to the *National* Taiwan Affairs Office, but Chen patiently explained that the national office had already given permission and delegated authority to the provincial officials. Chen's years of experience dealing with a similar bureaucracy in Guomindang Taiwan paid off, and he got the seal of approval.

In the end, Dongsen rented two SNG vans and sixteen technicians from a Fujian bureau that was a branch of the very military establishment on alert for war with Taiwan. This was the first time that the bureau had engaged in a direct commercial transaction with an overseas media company, and they were very pleased with the income it generated. Much like the Zhenlan Temple forging a rit-



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ual community across the strait, this transaction brought together the media of two politically sealed entities and was a step toward the reconfiguration of Taiwanese and mainland media spaces.

Back in Taipei, I asked Wu Enwen, manager of Dongsen Television News, whether his company, like Zhenlan Temple, supported the “three direct links” with mainland China. “That is correct,” he said. “The mainland is where our future market is, and all TV stations in Taiwan that wish to grow must do this.” Dongsen broadcasts via satellite to Southeast Asia, but merely as a nonprofit service for overseas Chinese; it receives subscriber fees but no advertising revenue, since

overseas Chinese are too dispersed to attract advertisers (the main source of profits for broadcasters). “Since our product is in the Chinese language, we have no hope of exporting it to the U.S., like other Taiwan products. So our biggest market is China, but there are all these political obstacles.”⁴ Thus, in the television media community in Taiwan and on the mainland, there is a growing desire to overcome political isolationist borders and achieve direct communication links. Dongsen already has two reporters stationed in Beijing and two in Shanghai, who are rotated once a month due to Chinese visa restrictions. It is also developing a working relationship with Phoenix TV, the only foreign-owned Chinese-language television channel operating in China, to help them access the mainland media space. Here we see an odd partnership between two transnational forces: popular religion carving out its own ritual space and media capitalism expanding

4. The political obstacles are readily demonstrable. As one television technician told me, Taiwan’s off-shore island of Jinmen is now connected to Taiwan proper by an undersea telecommunications cable. To connect Taiwan to China, one would only need to lay cable across the *one* remaining nautical kilometer that separates Jinmen from the city of Xiamen in Fujian Province, but this cannot be done yet.

its market share—both operating against the grain of state territoriality. In order to understand the significance of this parallel movement across the strait, we need to examine their historical vicissitudes.

Nation, Media, and Religion in Taiwan and China

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the two media systems of China and Taiwan—despite their ideological differences—resembled each other in their state ownership and control, their centralized, homogeneous, and monolingual media culture, and their exclusion of religious, ethnic, and political opposition in favor of secular nationalism. The Guomintang media in Taiwan deployed a state Confucian discourse of family, hierarchy, and education in order to promote development (Chun 1994; Chin 1997). The Minnan dialect spoken by the Taiwanese majority was barred from all broadcast media and public schools in favor of Mandarin, the “national language.” On the mainland, the Communist media celebrated the revolutionary spirit of peasants, workers, women, and the Party—all in Mandarin, the “universal language”—while suppressing commercial entertainment and religion. The Enlightenment legacy of the May Fourth movement in China and its modernist attacks on “tradition” in the name of national strengthening meant that religious discourse was virtually absent on television in China and Taiwan.

Within China, capitalist forces have gradually transformed the media since the 1980s, so that television stations are funded more through advertising than government allocations, and propaganda value has been replaced by the entertainment value of consumer culture. The predictable government news coverage of



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*Opposite:
Meizhou Mazu
goddess hosting
her Taiwan Mazu
guests, July 2000.
Left: Two rented
SNG vans on a
street in Putian
City, July 2000.*

solemn Party meetings and production outputs characteristic of the early 1980s has largely given way to gripping historical costume dramas, emotional soap operas, racy popular music stage performances, stock market analyses, tourist travelogues, and socially conscious documentaries (Yang 1997). Although government censorship remains in place, the introduction of satellite and cable links has also begun to reconfigure the Chinese mediascape. New upstart provincial satellite stations, like Hunan TV and the transnational, Hong Kong-based Phoenix Station, have broken free of state administrative boundaries and are challenging the monopoly of Beijing's Central Chinese Television (CCTV) over national audiences (Chan 2003). Despite the growing cosmopolitanism and diversity of mainland television, popular religion has not gained entry, except as an exotic object representing the past for a touristic gaze. Certainly, there is no religious organization in China strong enough to overcome state prohibitions or wealthy enough to purchase its own time on television or hire television news crews to report on them. Since the Chinese domestic television market is so vast, we have yet to see strong signs of movement out from China toward transnational broadcasting (except for CCTV-4—the voice of the central government).

The lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 reduced state media censorship, and the passage of the Cable Television Law in 1993 legalized vast underground networks (both literally and figuratively) of cable television, producing far-reaching changes. Since then, Taiwan's commercial television market has become the most intense in Asia, and its news stations have become ever more sensationalist to compete with one another for the small audience of 22 million viewers. The exuberant growth of cable and satellite stations in the mid-1990s made Taiwan the biggest cable television center in Asia (Lee 1999; Chin 1997; Chen 1999). In 2000, there were over ninety cable stations and 77 percent of households subscribed to cable television (Ruo 2002: 6). The increasing popularity of cable now threatens the viability of the three government-run broadcast stations. Taiwanese cable television is more cosmopolitan than American television, as it currently receives transnational satellite broadcast from multiple American, Japanese, Hong Kong, and even mainland stations. Following the general flow of Taiwanese capital, technology, and professional talent toward mainland China (Gao 2000), Taiwanese television is also trying to establish a presence in China. According to Xie Mingjin, a manager at Dongsun News Station in Taichung City, several Taiwanese television companies are already forming their own satellite stations for broadcast to Chinese-speaking viewers in China, Southeast Asia, and North America. If successful, they will be competing against Hong Kong's Star TV and the

Chinese state-run CCTV-4, which are currently the two Chinese-language satellite services with the most powerful global reach.

Thus, the commercialization of the media has begun to deterritorialize the state monopoly media space. Deploying new satellite technology, Taiwanese media capitalism reaches far beyond the stratosphere to twenty-two thousand miles above the territoriality of the nation-state. Satellites in geostationary orbit are owned jointly by several states or by states and transnational capital. Through satellite transmission, the familiar boundaries between national cultures, between media ownership and content, and between state and capital are being reconfigured. However, the terrestrial states on both sides of the strait have embarked on programs to recapture and recode these flows.

In the martial law era, before 1987, news in Taiwan was understood as the transmission of information concerning the government, economic production, foreign relations, local officials, and the like. According to Katie Fang, of the non-profit Broadcast Development Fund, television in the days of the three government stations was directed toward a middle-class audience and largely ignored the rural and working classes. Now, many cable news stations have found that these people are an important audience and market and that reporting popular religious and social events as news boosts ratings. Thus, popular religion rooted in the rural and working classes—deity cults, Daoist temples, city and earth gods, and spirit mediums—gains increasing exposure on TV news or through special programs marking local religious festivals.

Over the past decade, a cultural trend known as indigenization (*bentuhua*) has swept the island. It is a movement to delink national identity from the Guomindang Party, which has stressed continuity with a great mainland Chinese civilization (*dazhonghua*). Indigenization seeks to carve out a distinctly Taiwanese identity by sifting through rural cultures and religions and the histories of Minnan and Hakka settlers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The recent growth of the cult of Mazu (who protected the early settlers when they crossed the strait to Taiwan) is part of this nativization process. With the election of Chen Shuibian in 1999, indigenization has increasingly been part of the construction of a new Taiwanese *national* identity. At this historic moment, when Taiwan is caught between two national identities, we can see that the Mazu cult is not fully compatible with either project because of both its genealogy in a *prenationalist* past and the *postnationalist* tendencies incident to its transnational organization (Appadurai 1996).

One Goddess, Multiple Temples and Descendants

Like all Chinese deities, the goddess Mazu was originally a human being, born in 960 CE in Xianlianggang, a fishing town in Putian County, Fujian Province. She led an exemplary life helping drowning sailors, died unmarried in 987, and ascended to heaven from Meizhou Island. As her reputation grew in the following centuries, several imperial courts bestowed official titles on the goddess, expanded her temple, and built other official Mazu temples. Mazu began as a minor local deity worshipped by poor fishermen but was transformed into one of the two most important female deities in the imperial religious pantheon overseen by the Board of Rites. Thousands of Mazu temples were built along coastal China, from Manchuria in the north down to Guangdong Province, and waves of emigration brought Mazu to Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Japan.⁵ While for the common people she represented safety for seafarers, female fertility, and divine intervention in personal and familial adversity, her cult was also standardized and appropriated by the imperial state as a symbol of a civilizing force and the pacification of pirates, smugglers, and rebels (Watson 1985).

In Taiwan, Mazu worship was partially suppressed, first by the colonial government of Japan (1895–1947), which wanted to replace Taiwanese popular religion with state Shintoism, and then by the incoming Guomindang government, whose modernizing elite viewed popular religion both as a reflection of the ignorance of the uneducated masses and as a potential threat to their imposed nationalism. The resurgence of Mazu worship and other popular cults in the 1980s benefited from the declining influence of the Guomindang in Taiwan and the growing economic prosperity of the island (Weller 2000).

In China, the Mazu cult fell victim to the state eradication of religion until the 1980s, when the state changed its policy from prohibiting to strictly regulating religious practices. The centuries-old Meizhou temple complex in Fujian was torn down by the local revolutionary committee at the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1968. In 1979, Taiwanese fishermen sneaked onto the island and started to worship at a small Mazu shrine the locals had secretly erected. They brought with them a metal incense burner, candleholders, and other ritual paraphernalia with which to pay homage to Mazu. While the first two Meizhou temple halls were

5. According to the Meizhou Temple Web site (www.mz-mazu.org.cn/htmls/mzzm1.htm), late Qing Dynasty sources record twelve hundred Mazu temples in China at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1987, there were 800 temples in Taiwan, 57 in Hong Kong and Macao, and 135 in Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, the United States, France, Brazil, and Argentina.

built in the 1980s with local donations, more recent structures have been built with money provided by Mazu temples in Taiwan. Today, the new ancestral temple has a Web site that welcomes tourists to the area and records major donations of buildings and monuments from Taiwanese temples. Countless official delegations from Beijing have visited the temple and left calligraphies promoting tourism and Taiwan's return to the mainland. In a new movement of state appropriation, Mazu in mainland state discourse now stands for the reunification across the sea of Taiwan with China.

Many Taiwanese Mazu temples sponsor annual festivals to celebrate the goddess's birthday and make pilgrimages to the senior Mazu temples they derive from. The most prominent Mazu temples compete for fame, political influence, worshippers, and lucrative donations and comb the historical archives to establish historical links with the ancestral temple in Meizhou. Many temples sponsored pilgrimages across the strait to Meizhou before Japanese colonization ended such travel in 1895. This loss of ties with the Meizhou temple continued under the Guomindang government, which took over from the Japanese in 1947 and transformed the strait into a tense, militarized border. Nevertheless, Taiwanese Mazu temples maintained a sense of their ancestral connections across the strait. In the visitors hall of Tianhou Temple, in the coastal town of Lugang, there is a photograph of a rare "ritual across a long distance" (*yaoji*) conducted in 1984. Daoist priests presided over the ceremony, in which a three-hundred-year-old incense-darkened temple statue of Mazu was carried in her palanquin back and forth along the shore, beckoning her Meizhou "mother" across the sea.

According to temple records, Zhenlan Temple in Taiwan was founded in 1730, when a native of Meizhou Island crossed the strait bearing a statue of Mazu. Taiwanese anthropologist Zhang Xun has carefully traced how Taiwan's new transportation networks, urbanization, population mobility, and media have helped Zhenlan Temple evolve from a small local temple in the 1970s to an influential, nationally recognized temple today (Zhang 2000). I would emphasize that priority must be given to Zhenlan Temple's skillful harnessing of the Taiwanese media just when the latter was gaining increasing autonomy from the state.

In the 1980s, Zhenlan Temple managers figured out how to capture the national media's attention. Before each annual pilgrimage, the temple would buy television commercial time to announce the event. It also purchased expensive time slots to show off the temple's power to mobilize 100,000 pilgrims for the eight-day walk to Chaotian Temple. "Zhenlangong knows how to accommodate the media," said Wu Enwen, manager of Dongseng Television News. "For example, they know that weekends are the best times for the media to broadcast any news

about them, since government offices are closed and our reporters are at a loss for news. So when they *buabui* [cast wooden divination crescents] to consult the deity for the best date for events, they only give Mazu two options to choose from: a Saturday or Sunday." A Taiwanese pilgrim I met in Meizhou said that television coverage helps expand participation every year. "Before, many families did not want their elderly folk to go on pilgrimage, for fear they might collapse on the arduous journey, but after seeing other old people going on television, they start to feel it's O.K." One resident of Dajia told me that "before the media, our little town was known only for the straw hats and bed mats which are our native product, but now we are known for Zhenlan Temple."

An important historical turn for Zhenlan Temple occurred in 1987. Increasingly dissatisfied with the lower ritual status implied by its annual pilgrimage to Chaotian Temple, the Zhenlan temple board ingeniously hit upon the idea of a pilgrimage directly to Mazu's ancestral temple on Meizhou Island in order to celebrate the millennial anniversary of her ascension to heaven.⁶ At the time, this was a risky undertaking because of the Taiwanese government's ban on travel to China. Nevertheless, seventeen temple board members undertook the exciting historic airplane journey via Japan, taking one of the temple Mazus with them. There, they were greeted warmly by local officials and the Meizhou temple committee. The sacred objects they returned with, a Meizhou Mazu statue, a carved stone seal, an embroidered altar skirt, and an incense burner and ashes from the Meizhou temple (Guo 1993: 95), established Zhenlan Temple's new status as a temple that now had a clear and direct relationship of descent from the ancestor temple. The pilgrims' triumphant return to Taiwan created a media sensation, and worshippers from around Taiwan converged there to see the Meizhou Mazu. This daring pilgrimage emboldened Zhenlan Temple to declare, in 1988, that since it was *not* an offshoot temple of Chaotian Temple, it would no longer direct its annual pilgrimage there but instead to Fengtiangong Temple in Xingang.

By the 1999 presidential election, Zhenlan Temple had already become a staple topic for the Taiwanese media. Its large constituency throughout the island made it an important stop on the campaign trail, and all three major presidential candidates went to Zhenlan Temple to burn incense to Mazu and cultivate an image of dedication to the goddess. These visits, and temple chairman Yan Qingbiao's public endorsement of Song Chuyu for president, were given extensive coverage by all

6. A temple that makes a pilgrimage to another temple is always positioned lower than the destination temple in the ritual hierarchy of temples. A direct pilgrimage to Meizhou implies that Zhenlan Temple is subordinate only to the Meizhou ancestral temple.

of the television news stations. However, this intense media exposure and involvement in national politics had its drawbacks for the temple. The temple's challenge over the direct sealink was not forgotten by the new administration, which also disapproved of the temple's close ties to mainland authorities. Mafia elements attracted by the lucrative temple finances had penetrated several major Mazu temple organizations, and this presented an ideal situation for the government to simultaneously uphold the law and deter a potential political adversary. Yan Qingbiao was arrested in 2001 and charged with connections to the mafia, resulting in a loss of donations to the temple. However, the government was unable to convict Yan, and he was elected to serve as local representative while in prison. In this struggle between the government and Zhenlan Temple's leadership were broader tensions between nation-state territoriality and identity, on the one hand, and the transnational ritual spatiality of Chinese popular religion, on the other hand.

Thus, what Derrida (1998) called the "return of the religious" is not in Taiwan a simple return. Religion has now harnessed the media: an indubitable sign that popular religion is engaged with modernity, albeit as a dissonant cultural voice against the secular professional elite. This means that popular religion can no longer be regarded as merely a traditional folk culture that disappears with modernization. Rather, it is an expression of the rural, working, and lower middle classes, who vote for the progressive policies of a DPP that supports labor, feminism, social welfare, and multiethnic representation but demur on its secular nationalism and pro-independence state territoriality. Given the increasing interaction across the Taiwan Strait, this "return" qua new departure suggests that popular religion may also come to harness the media in mainland China.

Ritual Transnation and the Fluid Lines of Matrifocal Kinship Space

Over the centuries, the Mazu ancestral temple on Meizhou spawned thousands of offspring temples along the China coast and in Taiwan. The ritual process of establishing a descendant temple is called "dividing spirit" (*fenling*) or "dividing incense" (*fenxiang*), in which incense ashes from the mother temple are put into an urn and taken to the newly established temple (Schipper 1990; Ter Haar 1990; Sangren 1993). This process of division is understood through an idiom of kinship. As Mazu scholar Zhou Jintan told me, "relations between Mazu temples are like kin relations between human beings," in which kinship distance and generational ranking are taken into account. He further described pilgrimages from offspring temples, as from Taiwan back to the ancestral temple in Fujian, as a process of "coming back to recognize kin."

Given the patrilineal orientation of Chinese kinship, both Mazu's gender and the kinship terms used to classify her temples are of key significance. The journey of five Zhenlan Mazu statues from Taiwan to the Meizhou ancestral temple in 2000 was described as the goddess's "return to her mother's home" (*hui niang jia*). In a patrilineal culture with patrilocal marriage residence for women, this phrase adopts a female subject-position and evokes the warmth and security of a married woman returning to her natal home for a visit with her mother. Due to the extended period when ties with the ancestor temple in Meizhou were broken off, a separate system of pilgrimage circuits developed in Taiwan that centered on the major Taiwan Mazu temples and *their* offspring temples. These pilgrimages were also described as a "return to the mother's home," and temples descended from a common "mother" considered themselves "sister temples" (*jiemei miao*).

In an important essay on Chinese female deities, Steven Sangren (1983: 9) asserts that the Mazu cult's system of branch temples emphasizes affinal over agnatic kinship. As an expression of female affinal linkages, Mazu occupies the position of Chinese wives, who mobilize horizontal, affinal kinship connections across vertically constructed, self-contained patrilineal communities. With her temple divisions and pilgrimages, the goddess Mazu is a figure of movement that contrasts with the rootedness and localization of male lineages and territorial cults, whose icons, deities, and ancestors are usually male gods whose authority parallels that of bureaucrats administering a region (Wolf 1974; Sangren 1983).

I would submit that what this female-centered language suggests, besides affinal kinship, is a suppressed logic of matrilineal descent by which successive generations of Mazu temples trace their lineage to the ancestral mother temple. *Ma-zu* literally means "mother ancestor" or "mother's ancestor." The term *niang* (mother) in "returning to mother's home" (*hui niang jia*) has two meanings here. On the one hand, it refers to the patriline to which the mother belongs, with the implication that a woman's role is to promote affinal connections between two patrilines. On the other hand, when a wife returns to her natal home, the most important person she sees is her mother, so the mother-daughter relationship is what is foregrounded. Thus, *niang* suggests something independent of the patriline: an ancestress whose descendants return home to seek renewal through her. However, as the staff at Lugang's Tianhou Temple told me, despite the "matrilineal" (*muxi shehui*) features and potentials of intertemple relations, many Taiwanese temples refuse to recognize their line of descent past the third generation, especially as they get bigger, wealthier, and more influential. Sometimes they deny or alter their genealogy in order to claim direct descent from Meizhou in

China. Lugang's Tianhou Temple claims to have been so bypassed by Beigang's Chaotian Temple, and Chaotian Temple has made similar complaints about Zhenlan Temple's switching its age-old pilgrimage to Fengtian Temple. These inter-temple squabbles reflect the dominance of the patrilineal principle in Chinese culture more generally. That is, matrilineal potentials tend to be culturally suppressed down to merely two or three generations, unlike patrilineal descent, which can be traced through thirty or more generations.

The gender- and kinship-inflected spatiality of relations among Mazu temples underscores the fact that Chinese rituals of territorial deities evolved their own spatial logic long before the rigid lines of modern nation-state territoriality. Scholars of Chinese popular religion have recognized how popular ritual inscribes territory and geographical space and have examined the substantive role of this ritual spatiality in constructions of collective identities. Many Chinese gods are local, with jurisdiction and power only over local areas. Lin Meirong's classic distinction between *ritual circles* (localized community rituals for local gods) and *belief circles* (larger regional cults devoted to a single deity) shows how places are ritually marked and how collective ritual produces both the community and its self-identity (Lin 1989). Fiorella Allio (2000) discovered a ritual processional system in the Tainan area, where villages come together in a ritual procession demarcating a higher-level ritual space. A similar ritual spatial system in rural Fujian province, called "the seven territories" (*qijing*), has been described by Ken Dean (2000) and Zheng Zhenman (1995). Villages take their main gods on a ritual procession around their territorial borders, then several villages embark on a joint procession along the boundaries of their collective area—all blessed by a day-long Daoist *jiao* ritual. These studies show the importance of space to Chinese ritual life and suggest that space is not a simple geographic or administrative given but rather is invested with meaning and power through ritual demarcation and socially inscribed through collective footsteps. As Henri Lefebvre (1991: 174) has noted, the archaic "absolute space" of the sacred is *marked* and *produced* by the body, though the body has increasingly lost this ability in modern, planned "abstract space." While local ritual processions carve out the space of local communities, long-distance pilgrimages ritually draw the contours of a larger space of collective identity across a region or (in modern contexts) national borders.

It has often been observed that Chinese popular religion replicates the old imperial bureaucratic structure, so that the popular Chinese pantheon of territorial gods with their local ritual jurisdictions has been called a "celestial bureaucracy" or an "imperial metaphor" (Wolf 1974; Feuchtwang 2001). It must also be

noted that imperial state administrative territories often did *not* coincide with local ritual territories (Sangren 1987).⁷ Thus, we must pay attention to how ritual territorialities have their own internal mechanisms and definitions of boundaries and movements through space, which are not reducible to the political orders outside the ritual polity. Even after state overcoding, ritual space may still reclaim state space. Chinese anthropologist Wang Mingming (1995) shows this in his excellent study of how Ming Dynasty urban administrative units were appropriated and subverted in the city of Quanzhou. The local residents of Quanzhou transformed spatial units designed by the state for control and surveillance into a system of territorial festivals and ritualized community building. Thus, we cannot assume an isomorphism between sociopolitical formations and the ritual order, for the latter creatively reworks existing administrative and spatial structures of social life. This autonomy of ritual space can be identified in late imperial China and also across contemporary nation-state boundaries.

Besides patrilineal corporate groups, the female-centered kinship and ritual space of Mazu temple and deity relations engender a difference from another sort of male community, that of the modern nation-state. The English translation “motherland” for *zuquo* (literally “ancestral country”) is most inappropriate; from ancient times, the Chinese have privileged patrilineal ancestors, so *zuquo* should properly be translated as “fatherland.” Mazu’s female kinship contrasts with the patriarchal nationalist discourses on both sides of the strait: in China, Mao was referred to as a “father” and “savior star” of the Revolution (Yang 1994: 258); and in Guomindang Taiwan, Sun Yatsen was called the “father of the nation.” With the beginning of a new and enlarged pilgrimage circuit from Taiwan to Fujian in the late twentieth century, Mazu’s female iconicity assumes new significance as a mediator and boundary-crosser between two male-defined, modern “political entities.” In cross-strait travel, the Mazu cult reworks the ritual relations and spatial boundaries of communities long separated from one another, delineating the contours of a new, matrifocal transnational ritual community.

7. This disjuncture between Chinese popular ritual territorialization and state administrative spatialization accords with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987: 209–13) distinction between “primitive supple segmentarity” and “rigid state segmentarity.” For Deleuze and Guattari, primitive segmentary societies are the original territorial machines, marking their shifting social organizations in the earth. The archaic state machine comes along and deterritorializes them, overcoding its own spatial divisions or absorbing their segments into a concentric bureaucratic apparatus where all segments resonate with the same center. The modern nation-state, with its mapping of latitudes and longitudes, further rigidifies the outer edges of state boundaries.

Margaret Morse (1998) has pointed out that television represents an intermediate phase between film and new information technologies that create more immersive and interactive virtual environments. Television's "fictions of *presence*" (Morse 1998: 14–21), where the world on television and the lived world of the viewer are tied together through simultaneous transmission and reception, make it a suitable medium for transmitting the power of religious and magical forces, especially in ritual performances. The "liveness" of the simultaneous transmission and reception of the grand sacrifice ritual in Meizhou can be seen as a rare media event in which ritual moments of sacred and divine presence were transmitted to viewers across vast geographical and political distances. However, this mediated coevalness of religious imaginaries across the strait involves a continuous struggle between popular religion and the state and between religious and market forces.

Zhenlan Temple managers fought with the Meizhou temple planners over the *liveness* of the voice of the master of ceremonies. The Meizhou authorities wanted a prerecorded voice played out over the loudspeaker, to ensure against politically incorrect remarks. On Chinese state television, except for occasional sports broadcasts, there is always a five-second delay to catch any "errors." For Zhenlan Temple, it was essential that the master of ceremony's voice be part of the action of the ritual: her voice must not only be in synchrony with the ongoing ritual but also set its pace. The ritual had to have its own temporal integrity and cohesion; its parts had to share a common presence unfragmented into different temporalities. In the end, a compromise was reached in which Zhenlan Temple submitted a prewritten script that was reviewed for problems the day before the ritual. A local Fujian woman was selected to read the prepared script live but not spontaneously. In this struggle, Zhenlan Temple tried to preserve the integrity of ritual temporality from state attempts to fragment it. Ironically, they had already compromised with Taiwanese media capital by agreeing to punctuate the broadcast with frequent TV commercials and cuts to other news items.

I was struck by the contrast between the Taiwanese media sending so many people for six days of nonstop coverage and the relative lack of interest shown by the mainland media. Local mainland television news stations gave the event some coverage, but they focused on the political implications of the strait crossing and ignored its religious dimension. There was no national coverage on the evening news of China Central TV in Beijing. It was only one month later that a fifteen-minute special on the pilgrimage was broadcast on CCTV-4, which is

aimed at overseas Chinese. When asked why the mainland media hardly broadcast this event, Fujian locals generally gave two explanations. The most common answer was that this was only an “event of the people” (*minjian huodong*), not a government activity, and therefore unimportant. In mainland thinking, the job of the media is to publicize the activities of the government, since the state is seen to propel society—not the other way around. Media editors and programmers did not seem curious about the various social forces that provide new impetus for social change. The other answer given to me was that this was a “religious event” and would therefore not be reported in the Party media, since Communist principles do not condone religion. The arrival of an army of Taiwanese reporters and cameramen to cover what many still regard as superstition generated great curiosity among mainland reporters. Members of the Taiwanese press were repeatedly asked why they had come. The fact that the high-tech, secular Taiwanese media saw no contradictions in covering a religious, “backward” practice was puzzling.

The satellite broadcast of this pilgrimage was a small but important step toward dislodging satellite technology from the Chinese military and expanding not only the commercial but also the religious uses of satellites. Although the satellite transmission was a media event primarily for Taiwanese viewers, there was nevertheless some leakage into the mainland audience. Despite the fact that satellite receiving dishes are banned for ordinary citizens in China, many homes in urban and coastal areas have clandestine dishes that are produced in rural factories (Lynch 1999). In addition, any apartment or work unit connected to a legal satellite dish can also receive Taiwanese television. Coverage of popular religion on mainland television may take a long time to develop, but the budding cable television industry in China may exert pressure for more diversified and cosmopolitan programming, as it did in Taiwan in the 1980s. The initiation of live broadcasting across the strait harbors the potential that viewing communities in China and Taiwan will someday come to share the same temporality in mediated ritual events.

Conclusion

Historically flowing outward from Fujian to Taiwan and now moving back from Taiwan to Fujian, the Mazu goddess cult’s genealogy predates both modern nationalism and global capitalism. Now intertwined with the movement of globalizing media across political borders, this renewed religious force is a ritual reterritorialization of the state. Although it may appear to conform to the mainland’s

expansionist desire to reincorporate Taiwan, Mazu worship is a polytheistic regional cult that counters the mainland's monological, secular, and centralized national imaginary. Its kinship-based logic of transnational connectedness between ritual communities contrasts with the rigid segmentarity and individual identity formation of nationalism. Its female iconicity and matrifocal logic diminish nation-state masculinity. In her female affinal role, Mazu bridges and transcends two masculine spaces, ritually constructing local spaces of identity around village or town temples and a transnational space of identity across coastal China and Taiwan. Her cult creates alternative ritual centers (Meizhou, Dajia, Beigang) to national capitals, shrines to national heroes, and commercial hubs. At the same time, transnational media also deterritorialize the nation-state with the swath of space lying within a satellite footprint. In this process, the liveness of satellite television and the matrilineal logic of the goddess can elevate a shared ritual temporality and sacred geography over the secular national history and territory promoted by governments on both sides of the strait. Composed of rural, working-class, and lower-middle-class worshippers, the Mazu cult strikes a dissonant chord against the dominant professional and elite classes, who have had a history of embracing secular nationalism.

In this religious pilgrimage transmitted via satellite television, we see a strange convergence between the ritual territoriality of Mazu pilgrimage and the transnational expansion of media space. Both are propelled by an inner compulsion to cross existing political boundaries. The Mazu cult seeks to transcend localities and integrate ever larger communities of worshippers, to renew kinship ties with sites of ancestral origin, and to cultivate matrilineal and sisterly relations with temples in far-off lands. For satellite television, there is both an economic and a technological compulsion to traverse the strait despite the Taiwanese government's efforts to restrain capital flow to China. Capital's profit motive in the television industry takes the form of an endless quest for new audiences, markets, and advertisers; in the saturated Taiwanese television market, the only way out is to expand abroad. Furthermore, the tremendous cost of constructing and launching satellites and renting satellite transponders requires a large audience base to attract advertisers. However, satellite footprints do not conform to the boundaries of nation-states. If a nation-state like China, with its huge population lying under a footprint, does not allow its people to set up receiving dishes, there is a great loss of revenue for the satellite launchers and transponder users. Satellite technology works best with large transnational audiences, and this goes against the grain of the current system of nationally protected media spaces. Thus,

there will be continuous efforts by the capitalist media to overcome nation-state territoriality, even as states actively ward off these challenges (Price 1994, 1999, 2001; Chan 1997).⁸

Popular religion hitches a ride on the capitalist media's desiring-machine, which decodes the flows of desire toward the state (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 224). As popular cults make more use of media, they must also contend with a commercialization of religion that threatens to submerge their spiritual core. The Mazu cult has found an ally in the capitalist media, which are more than willing to help carry its messages to both sides of the strait and also seek to overcome the boundaries of the nation-state for their own reasons. However, with time, what may come to the fore are the contradictions between the profit motive of media capitalism and Mazu's example of simplicity, generosity, and sacrifice and between the logic of capital accumulation and that of ritual expenditure (Yang 2000).

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8. Monroe Price (1994, 1999, 2001) observes that, in the age of media globalization, states are finding it less effective to rely on traditional methods of deflecting foreign media, such as legal prohibitions or restrictions, technological mechanisms to shut out unwanted transmissions, or force. Instead, states are actively engaged in negotiations with both transnational media corporations and their host states in order to limit, alter, or stop transmissions.

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