Religion at the Corner of Bliss and Nirvana

Politics, Identity, and Faith in New Migrant Communities

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Creating a Transnational Religious Community

The Empress of Heaven and Goddess of the Sea, Tianhou/Mazu, from Beigang to San Francisco

JONATHAN H. X. LEE

In recent decades, within the context of an accelerated globalization, Chinese America has experienced unprecedented demographic changes, which in turn have originated a new diversity—along class, language, political, economic, and religious lines—within ethnic Chinese American communities across the United States. This accelerated globalization, fueled by rapid advances in telecommunications and Internet technology, as well as by growing financial, commercial, and cultural-religious global ties, has concretized existing transnational connections and forged new ones in ways previously not imagined.

In this essay I propose to examine this process as it is unfolding by examining the transnational veneration of a goddess from the vast Chinese folk pantheon. She is known both by her imperial title, Tianhou, and her more familial name, Mazu/Mazupo, and she is the Empress of Heaven and Goddess of the Sea. I use Vivian-Lee Nyitray's probing and critical inquiry as a guide on the reconfiguration of Tianhou/Mazu's religio-cultural and political sovereignty: "The multiple and powerful forces of modernization and shifting world populations have redrawn the boundaries of Tianhou/Mazu's concern. What remains to be seen is the final map of the goddess's sovereignty: Will it be so localized that Chinese people worship Chinese Mazu, Taiwanese people worship Taiwanese Mazu, and North American devotees worship a Canadian or American or Mexican Mazu? Or will Tianhou/Mazu's sovereignty shift from the identity politics of nation-states and ethnic origins to a conceptual realm of common culture?" (2000, 175–76).

In the following pages I give a brief introduction to the goddess and I survey the history of her veneration in the United States. I follow this survey with a discussion of the relevant trends in transnational Chinese immigration and its relation to the creation of a transnational community and, by extension, a transnational goddess. I then discuss some preliminary observations on the transnational veneration of Tianhou/Mazu in the United States as manifested in the pilgrimage of the Tianhou/Mazu from San Francisco's Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. to her mother temple in Beigang, Taiwan.

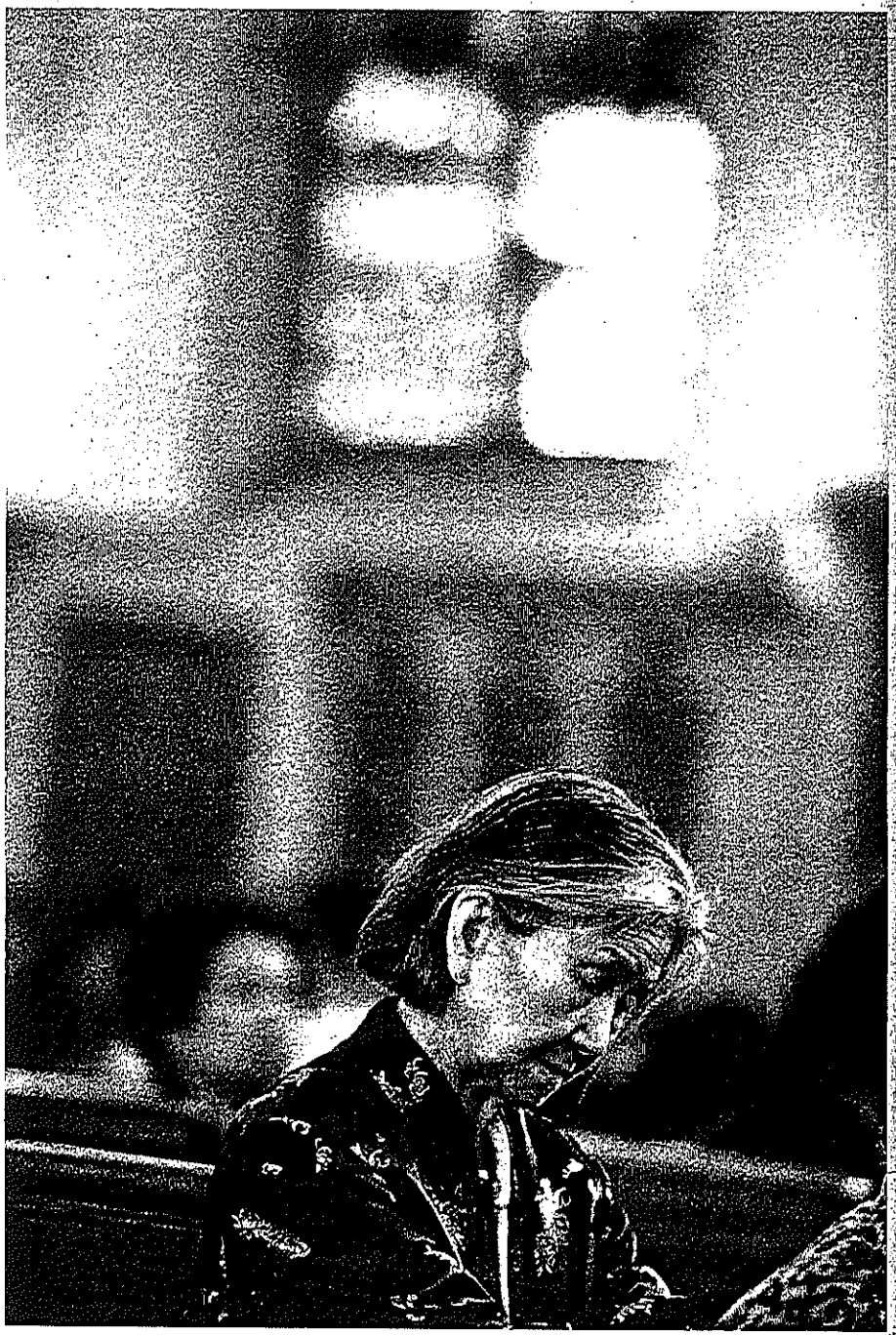
THE EMPRESS OF HEAVEN AND GODDESS OF THE SEA

In the cities and villages of China's coastal provinces the goddess Tianhou/Mazu ranks second only to the Buddhist Bodhisattva Guanyin as a female object of popular devotion (Nyitray 2000, 165). Although in this essay I focus on the United States, specifically San Francisco and Sacramento, Tianhou/Mazu is also popular in the Chinese diaspora in places as disparate as Brazil, Burma, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.[1]

The cult of Tianhou/Mazu is based on the worship of a maiden named Lin Moniang ("Miss Lin, the Silent One") who is said to have lived from 960 to 987 CE on the island of Meizhou in the Minnanese Putian District of Fujian Province. There are numerous myths and legends surrounding her life, but the most widely held beliefs conform to the following outline. Miss Lin was born on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month in 960 CE into a pious family, variously described as humble fisherfolk or as local gentry. Her father is frequently identified as a virtuous but low-ranking Confucian scholar and official. Miss Lin is described as having as many as four brothers and as many as five sisters. The Bodhisattva Guanyin made Miss Lin's conception possible by giving her mother a magic pill. In another version, Guanyin of the South Sea (Nanhai Guanyin) visited Tianhou/Mazu's mother in a dream and gave her an *utpala*, or blue lotus, to eat; fourteen months later she gave birth to Lin Moniang. The process by which Miss Lin transformed from mortal girl to goddess to the Empress of Heaven is straightforward. Miss Lin's dedication to helping her family and others in perilous situations, especially while at sea, coupled with her many magical powers, brought about the respect, support, and dedication of her early devotees.

Settlers from coastal Fujian, the original home of the Tianhou/Mazu cult, brought the goddess with them when they immigrated to Taiwan. In Taipei and in the port city of Lugang, Mazu's cult was well established by the time the Qing authorities (1644–1911) made their presence felt. The Mazu temples in Taiwan were thus identified with the political and cultural interests of indigenous Taiwan. Accordingly, in Taiwan the goddess is known by her kin name, "Mazu/Mazupo," and not by her imperial title, "Tianhou."[2]

Tianhou/Mazu is a fluid and flexible goddess who adapts to meet the needs



of her devotees. The first wave of Chinese immigrants sought her protection as the "goddess of the sea" because they traveled across the Pacific Ocean. In other words, it is her role as "protector" that made her invaluable to the first wave. In light of this, we can pose a number of questions: Has she continued in the role of protector as immigration laws and cultural trends have changed? What role does she play in the various and complex ethnically Chinese American communities? Is her role limited to helping new immigrants make their transition to the United States? What role does she play in the established Chinese American communities? What part does she play in the construction and continuation of Chinese identity in Chinese American society? Is she a common denominator in the various generational, regional, and diverse ethnically Chinese American communities, honoring linguistic and other local differences, while simultaneously unifying them as Chinese-cum-Chinese American? I address these questions beginning with an examination of how the first wave of Chinese immigrants to San Francisco brought Tianhou/Mazu with them and incorporated her into their new lives.

The First Tianhou Temple in the United States

In San Francisco's Chinatown it is easy to miss the temples on Waverly Place unless one looks upward toward the heavens. The street level is occupied with restaurants, salons, florists, bakeries, and cafés, but on the upper level there are several Chinese associations and temples housing the gods and goddesses of "Chinese popular religions."[3] The Chinese temple is a unique physical setting in which mythology, folklore, legend, and great figures out of China's past are brought into the present. It is a realm symbolically created by the fusion between earth and heaven; geographical space and position are transformed into symbolic space and time in accordance with the practice of feng shui.

The Tien Hau Temple is located in the upper realms of Waverly Place. The temple, dedicated to Tianhou, is one of the oldest operating Chinese temples in the United States, having opened its doors in 1852. The Sanyi District Association appears to have been the original owner of the temple, but sometime later (before 1906) the ownership of the temple switched to the Sue Hing Benevolent Association.[4] Its present address at 125 Waverly Place is thought to be its original location; however, the original structure was destroyed during the 1906 earthquake and fire.[5]

After 1906, the Sue Hing Benevolent Association built a new multistory building on the original site and placed the temple on the fourth floor. Although the original Tien Hau Temple was destroyed in the earthquake and fire, the image of Tianhou and part of the altar were saved. The temple bell was

buried in the ruins, but was uncovered during the construction project and reinstalled in the new temple. All other furnishings in the temple were imported from China in 1910 (Wells 1962, 26).

Prior to the 1860s Waverly Place was called Pike Street and was known for its brothels filled with prostitutes brought from China. It deserved its nickname as the place of "homes of ill repute."[6] In fact, the first recorded Chinese resident in what became San Francisco's Chinatown was a prostitute named Ah Toy who emigrated from Hong Kong in 1849. She settled first in an alley of shanties off Clay Street and then moved to Pike Street to establish a brothel with immigrant Chinese prostitutes. It is said that Chinese miners from the Sacramento Valley would travel by boat to the city just to get a glance at the alluring beauty of Ah Toy (Pan 1995, 6). Later on, in the times when the Tien Hau Temple was established, the street's reputation changed, and a new nickname circulated among the Chinese citizenry: Tien Hau Miu Gai, or Tianhou Temple Street.

For reasons that are unclear the temple was closed in 1955, but it reopened twenty years later on May 4, 1975—the twenty-third of the third moon, Tianhou's birthday.[7] A possible explanation for the temple's closure may be that it happened as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882. As Bill Ong Hing notes: "In the 1880s cities and towns with a Chinatown were scattered throughout the West, though the Chinatown might consist of only a street or a few stores and its inhabitants might number only a few hundred. Eventually, these enclaves disappeared altogether. By 1940 only twenty-eight cities with Chinatowns could be identified; by 1955, only sixteen" (1993, 50). The temple eventually closed its doors to the public and reopened when Chinese immigration to the United States was reestablished with the passage of the 1965 Immigration Law. As Hing states: "Since 1965 immigrants have contributed to the rejuvenation of Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. One need only walk along Grant Avenue or Stockton Street in San Francisco at noon . . . to feel the vibrant intensity of these resilient enclaves. After World War II these Chinatowns began to shrink and even disappear as the older immigrants died. The first signs of their revival appeared in the early 1960s with the admission of refugees from Mainland China. . . . Chinatowns endure because, as the second and third generations leave, immigrants replace them and because the larger community sustains them" (84–85).

Chinatowns in San Francisco and elsewhere are historical reminders of anti-Chinese discrimination, so it is ironic that the temples also serve as tourist attractions for sightseers visiting Chinatown.[8] The Tien Hau Temple, now celebrated as part of the multireligious fabric of the American religious landscape,

was viewed not too long ago as "idolatrous" and "pagan." The reintroduction of Chinese emigrants from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere has rejuvenated Chinatowns in major cities across North America. When the Tien Hau Temple reopened in 1975, this rejuvenation was reflected in the addition of new deities popular among the incoming Chinese immigrants (e.g. "the legendary Han dynasty physician" Shenyi Hua Tuo; "the Twelve model mothers" Shier nainiang; the Daoist Immortal Lü Dongbin; the Daoist Immortal Han Zhongli; and the Great Immortal Sage Huang, Huang daxian). As San Francisco's Chinatown endures, so too does the Tien Hau Temple.

Today the temple continues to serve a small group of Cantonese-speaking Chinese and newer ethnically Chinese Vietnamese who also speak Cantonese. The current positive attitudes toward religious pluralism, coupled with changes in immigration policies and the increasingly global economy, have created a favorable environment for the establishment of a new Tianhou/Mazu community, this time by emigrants from Taiwan instead of Mainland China.

A New Temple to Tinahou/Mazu

In San Francisco on March 14, 1986, Taiwanese-Chinese immigrants established a second temple to Tianhou/Mazu—the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A.—as a branch of the Chaotian Temple located in Beigang, Taiwan.[9] After ten years on Grant Street, the temple relocated to 30 Beckett Street. The temple's stated mission is to advocate the virtues of Mazu, teach benevolence, uphold the Buddhist dharma, teach the principles of human kindness, and promote social morality.

If the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. reflects the changing geography and demographics of Chinese America in the wake of the 1965 Immigration Reform Act,[10] it also heralds something new: the appearance of transnational individuals who live both in Taiwan and in the United States. The existence of transnational Taiwanese is made possible by the rising economic status of East and Southeast Asia. Throughout the 1980s, Taiwan's economy was characterized by some as a "miracle," attested to by its successful development from a poor peripheral country to the world's thirteenth-largest trading economy and a producer-exporter of high-tech products (Harrell and Huang 1994). There has been an enormous increase in the standard of living among all sectors of the population on the island. As a result there are Taiwanese—new transnational citizens—participating significantly in creating new transnational communities alongside Taiwanese-Chinese Americans.

The joining of Taiwanese and Taiwanese-Chinese Americans in a transna-

tional community between the island and the United States is symbolized by the establishment of the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. Mazu becomes a transcontinental deity in the deterritorialized space of this new transnational community composed of diverse individual devotees who share not only a common Chinese heritage but also a new American identity. Tianhou/Mazu's identity—cultural and national—mirrors the multiple identities that her devotees possess: they are simultaneously Chinese, Taiwanese, and American.

Tianhou/Mazu is a territorial goddess. The territorial nature of her religiosity is manifest in her celestial inspection tour, a ritual procession during which she views the state of her religious realm and the territory in which she is sovereign. A key question posed by Vivian-Lee Nyitray concerns the localization and identity of Tianhou/Mazu, who finds her Chinese devotees worshipping a Chinese Tianhou/Mazu, her Taiwanese devotees worshipping a Taiwanese goddess, and her U.S. devotees worshipping an American goddess. The differences between these identities are evident in small ways, such as the prefix to their titles Meiguo (America) versus Beigang (Taiwan). Beigang Mazu is one and the same as American Mazu; at the same time she is understood to be different entities, as mother versus daughter, or as Taiwanese versus American.

The American Mazu is enshrined at the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. and is referred to as Meiguo Mazu in all religious rituals. In the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A., Beigang Mazu's honorary shrine is placed in front of Meiguo Mazu's main shrine, indicating Meiguo Mazu's origins and connection to Taiwan. As daughter temple to the original Beigang Mazu temple in Taiwan, all statues of Mazu housed in the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. are from the Beigang temple, including the ones donated to the temple by Taiwanese American devotees. The name Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. in contrast to the name Beigang Mazu Temple reflects unity and diversity; they are both Mazu temples but are located in different places. There are slight differences in religious functions resulting from the different needs and concerns of Taiwanese communities versus Chinese American communities. Immigrant Taiwanese Americans confront cultural, linguistic, social, and political issues that their Taiwanese relatives back home do not. Taiwanese American parents tackle issues of moral and familial education as their children negotiate their identities and attempts to fit into the United States. How has the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. been able to negotiate traditional religious duties while creating new ritual traditions that cross cultural and national boundaries?

TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF TIANHOU/MAZU'S VENERATION

Every few years, Taiwanese-Chinese American members of the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A., along with transnational Taiwanese Americans, journey back to Beigang, Taiwan. This journey to the mother temple is made in order to replenish the spiritual *qi* of Meiguo Mazu (American Mazu). The pilgrims' return to Taiwan reestablishes community ties with other Mazu devotees while reaffirming their identity as Taiwanese-Chinese, a dual identity. Meiguo Mazu is a symbolic manifestation of this dual identity. On the one hand she is the daughter of Beigang Mazu and thus is Taiwanese. On the other hand she is Meiguo Mazu, the American daughter who lives and works in San Francisco and whose sovereignty is in America. Meiguo Mazu returns to the Beigang Mazu Temple because she needs to do so: at the mother's temple she acquires and assimilates her spiritual energy, her spiritual efficaciousness, or *ling qi*. The pilgrimage home reestablishes the American daughter with her powerful Taiwanese mother, as well as with all of her sisters, thus reaffirming Meiguo Mazu's status and power. Beigang has been the center of the Mazu cult in Taiwan for over one hundred years.[11] The history of the Beigang Temple is the source of Meiguo Mazu's ling-qi, her efficacious qi:[12] the older the temple, the more powerful the deity. Hence, Beigang Mazu's qi is very powerful, and Beigang Mazu gives her daughter Meiguo Mazu power when she returns home to Taiwan for a visit.

It is important to be aware of the social-communal dimension of the pilgrimage. The Beigang community members expressively inform their American relatives of their roots and origins. They inform Meiguo Mazu that she is their Mazu too. From October 3 to October 17, 2002, fifteen Taiwanese Americans journeyed home to Taiwan on a Meiguo Mazu pilgrimage to the Beigang Mazu Temple. The group of fifteen joined with a group of devotees who were already in Taiwan. During this time, Meiguo Mazu was paraded in the streets and alleys of Beigang, her hometown, thereby symbolically claiming the territory of her religious realm. As noted above, Mazu is a territorial goddess, and this parade demarcates her religious realm. Meiguo Mazu symbolically shares this religious realm with her Beigang Mazu mother because in a sense they are one and the same. The communities of worshippers from America and the local people venerate the same goddess and accept her religious sovereignty. There is a dual understanding: Meiguo Mazu is different from Beigang Mazu, just as Taiwanese Americans are different from native Taiwanese, but she is still one and the same, just as the returning pilgrims are still in some measure Taiwanese. Members of both communities create a sense of collective identity based

on a shared conception of their common culture whose object of devotion is Mazu.

The Taiwanese American community understands the importance of the direct link to Beigang Mazu because through the mother's power the daughter is powerful. American Mazu will become powerful in her own right as she flourishes in the United States, as her devotees thrive as new American immigrants, and as their descendents prosper. Only the future can say if she will break the matrilineal line of power and become a "mother" herself, with American daughters scattered across the American religious landscape. The local dimension of Tianhou/Mazu's veneration will clue us in on the future as new ritual traditions are established in the diaspora.

The Local Dimension of Tianhou/Mazu's Veneration

In traditional Chinese settings the birthday celebration for Tianhou/Mazu features huge bonfires, firecrackers, big banquets, continuous religious rituals performed in the temple by Daoist masters, and performances of Chinese operas—all to honor and entertain the goddess. This type of traditional celebration is still practiced in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Fujian, and other major Tianhou/Mazu temples in East Asia (Savidge 1977). The Tien Hau Temple and the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. celebrate her birthday on a smaller scale, however, and there is no celestial inspection tour—at least not during her birthday celebrations.[13]

On Sunday May 5, 2002, I attended Tianhou/Mazu's birthday celebration at the Tien Hau Temple in San Francisco's Chinatown. By 11:00 AM, large numbers of worshippers were visiting the temple to make offerings to Tianhou/Mazu. By noon there were dragon dances outside the temple punctuated by the blasts of hundreds of firecrackers. The offering table was full of fruits, flowers, cookies, cakes, Chinese pastries, roast duck, chicken, pork, and other foods. Many devotees were engaged in Chinese divination practices, and the temple offered visitors and worshippers a vegetarian meal and a souvenir.[14] In addition, the Sue Hing Benevolent Association used the occasion to bring its members together, and a band playing Chinese folk music had been hired to entertain the senior members of the association. By 2:00 PM the activities outside the temple had ended, and within the temple the heavy traffic had slowed. Men, women, and children of all ages had attended the festivities, just as they do during Chinese New Year.

On the same day at the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. there also was a ritual invocation and offering for Meiguo Mazu. And, just like the Tien Hau Temple, the offering tables were filled with fruits, flowers, candies, traditional Chinese pastries, vegetarian dishes, and, in this case, some meat dishes. All of those who came to wish Mazu well and to ask for her blessings and continuing protection were offered a large vegetarian meal and a gift of "good luck" noodles from the temple.

As noted above, neither the Tien Hau Temple nor the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. includes a celestial inspection tour as part of the birthday celebration.[15] Instead, the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. takes advantage of its participation in the Chinese New Year parade, two to three months before the birthday, to provide the goddess with an opportunity to make her celestial inspection tour.[16] During this American version of Mazu's inspection tour she views the state of the world and extends her protection to the community by joining the large New Year parade, thus adapting to both Chinese and non-Chinese culture while expanding the parameters of her religious sovereignty (Nyitray 2000, 176). One of the main functions of Mazu's tour is to unify the community.[17] As a symbol of Chinese religious culture, she brings to both the Chinese and non-Chinese viewers something that is essentially Chinese.[18]

In events like the New Year celestial inspection tour the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. sought avenues to publicly announce its presence in America by taking advantage of civic celebrations and community events. To further this end, the temple also has participated in another Chinese American festival in the historic gold-rush town of Maryville, California.

Expanding Locality: Tianhou/Mazu in the Sacramento Valley

Maryville honors its Chinese American community with the annual civic festival honoring Bei Di, known locally as "Bok Kai," a Chinese god enshrined in the Beixi Temple (North Creek Temple, or "Bok Kai Temple" in the local Cantonese dialect).[19] Chinese immigrants built the temple in 1879 because Bei Di protects his devotees from floods and provides them with bountiful water for farming. The highlight of the annual community festival is the Bok Kai Parade. Tianhou/Mazu has a place in these devotions and festivities. This parade, produced annually for 121 years, is the oldest continuing parade in California. Paul G. Chace (1992) suggests that despite its beginnings as a yearly religious celebration, the parade's 121 years in Marysville have, over time, deemphasized the religious nature of the parade. Instead, he says, two American threads have risen to the fore—commercialism and coping with ethnic and cultural diversity.

Chace considers the present-day Bok Kai parade to be nonreligious, and he explains this secularization as due to what he terms "interpretive restraint" (1992, 3–6). Interpretive restraint is the purposeful withholding of symbolic meaning for traditional ritual performance. Chace suggests that with interpre-

tive restraints, the rites of Chinese popular religions could serve to celebrate the larger community and to promote interethnic and intercultural relations. In this example, interpretive restraint suggests that Chinese Americans have politely concealed or downplayed the original reasons for the parade, thus allowing it to take on a new emphasis in the United States. I find Chace's interpretation interesting, but I question his hasty conclusion regarding the "nonreligious" nature of the parade. While the parade itself may have become a community-wide celebration, it is only one part of the festival. The religious dimensions of the festival occur away from the parade, at the Bok Kai Temple proper, and they are by no means invisible. Thousands of Chinese Americans, including both recent immigrants as well as second and subsequent generations, visit the temple with offerings of whole-roasted pigs and an array of other foods. Every inch of the temple is taken as people perform their food offerings and rituals. Afterward, they adjourn to the adjacent lawn with friends and family, whole-roasted pigs in hand, for a picnic. Clearly the celebration is a dual one: one religious and one civic. Whereas the non-Chinese visitors may be there for the parade, the Chinese visitors, with their whole-roasted pigs, are not there just for the parade but to share a meal.

This dual dynamic is also at work at San Francisco's Chinese New Year parade. The case of Tianhou/Mazu and her participation in both the San Francisco Chinese New Year and Bok Kai parades demonstrates multiple levels of understanding and symbolism. First, participation in Tianhou/Mazu's celestial inspection tour is a religious ritual to the immigrant Chinese Americans. Second, an increasing number of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Chinese Americans attending the parades are aware of its religious significance. Third, to the non-Chinese and fully Americanized Chinese viewers of the parades, Tianhou/Mazu is a symbol of Chinese religious culture, even if the ritual dimension of the religious activities may not be as visible to all because they occur in the temple. This doesn't mean that the ritual dimension lies outside the public domain: it is in the public domain because it is not exclusive to Chinese worshippers. Anyone who comes to the Bok Kai festival can visit the temple and its surroundings and see religious activities. What this suggests is that the religious dimension of these two civic celebrations is visible, invisible, or partially (in)visible to Chinese immigrants, various generations of Chinese Americans, and non-Chinese.

Many viewers of the palanquin carrying Mazu in the New Year parade see her two attendants walking in front of her exploding firecrackers and they understand this to be an aspect of Chinese American culture, just as are dragon dances and young Chinese American children dressed up in folk Chinese

clothes. They may not know that from the religious standpoint the firecrackers are used to scare away demons as Mazu inspects her precinct. To Mazu's devotees, her participation in the parade extends far beyond an expression of secular cultural exchange; it is Mazu's birthday celestial tour, with all of its rich religious meaning. This American version of her inspection tour is an example of adaptation by Mazu and her adherents: it serves a dual function, religious and secular. Each year, during the parade, Mazu is an honored symbol of Chinese religious culture for both Chinese American and non-Chinese viewers.

Chace's theory of "interpretive restraint" is informing but limited. New generations of Chinese Americans who watch Mazu on her palanquin with her attendants go by in the parade will not know that what they are seeing is a celestial inspection tour. They will see the nonreligious side of this activity, which is a civic expression. Some leaders of the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. want to assimilate Meiguo Mazu more into the civic aspect of this ritual and parade because participation in the annual festival secures them a space in the San Francisco community, and, by extension, in American society. However, the "pilgrims," the devotees, are not concealing the symbols or rituals of their religious act; they are acting religiously in a civic forum, which is public to the point of being televised. What we have here is a religious transformation that results from a fundamental restructuring as a new religious community situates itself on new soil.

Jonathan Z. Smith posits that we must consider two issues when imagining religion—namely that we note what takes place in ritual and what place is to ritual experience. Smith explores the relational dynamics between place and ritual as the determining category for understanding ritual itself and thus as a possible avenue for the reformulation of ritual theory. To this end, Smith posits that "place [is] a fundamental component of ritual" and that "ritual demonstrates that we know 'what is the case'" (1987, 103, 109). Hence, distinguishing the place, for instance, "within the Bok Kai Parade" or "within the San Francisco Chinese New Year parade" versus outside the actual parades, communicates the performance of a religious versus nonreligious "ritual." Within the Bok Kai parade the religious ritual expression may have taken a back seat to civic cultural celebration; however, around the Bok Kai Temple religious life and meaning take a front seat, especially among the Chinese American visitors. In contrast, Mazu's participation in the San Francisco Chinese New Year parade blurs the distinction between religious and civic ritual. Depending on the perspectival limitations of the subject, it is a deep religious ritual expression, a civic celebration, or both.

Civil society is created through the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A.'s active invitation

of non-Chinese participants as a form of cultural exchange. For example, during the Chinese New Year parade, members of the temple warmly invited non-Taiwanese/Chinese volunteers to be flag carriers, horn blowers, and incense holders. They even went so far as to let volunteers wear the costumes of Mazu's two generals. After the parade, they invited all of the volunteers to participate in the ritual return of Meiguo Mazu to her celestial throne, followed by a meal. They invited everyone to visit the temple on any occasion. Their hospitality was matched by the enthusiasm of the volunteers who made it clear that, although they were not devotees, they were excited to show their support for the Chinese American community while having fun by participating in the parade, especially with the possibility of being televised.

The dynamics of transformation vis-à-vis Tianhou/Mazu's celestial inspection tour are still unfolding. Unlike the historic Bok Kai festival, American Mazu continues to return to her native homeland, Taiwan, just like the many new immigrants who live transnational lives. America's civil society and Chinese America's common culture confront each other as a result of global forces, and both have been altered by the encounter. This is nothing new. What is new is the possibility for "transnational culture" to be localized and naturalized. To be American is not to be settled and fixed like Bok Kai and the first wave of Chinese immigrants; rather it is to be like American Mazu, moving back and fourth, to and from, here and there.

A PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION

There is a spatial paradox in the transnational veneration of Tianhou/Mazu.[20] She is a territorial goddess, yet her expanding territorial sovereignty is based on a deterritorialization of the geographic and temporal space of a community of transnational personalities.[21] The new transnational citizen is a citizen with multiple nationalities, and even though the transnational nature of recent and current immigration to the United States is nothing new it has intensified and accelerated as a result of changing immigration laws, economic developments in East Asia, and new understandings of nationality and ethnicity. The first wave of Chinese immigrants in the mid-1800s arrived in America with no intentions of staying; they were sojourners pushed by famine and economic hardships and pulled by the allure of the gold rush. As Erika Lee explains, "A successful sojourn involved not only the accumulation of wealth but also the maintenance of transnational economic and familial ties between the sojourner and his family and village back home" (2003, 120). Today's Taiwanese sojourners are not laborers or gold seekers but rather the children and housewives of

newly rich businessmen who send reverse remittances to their loved ones' bank accounts overseas.[22] They maintain active, ongoing interconnections with their home country (Taiwan) and their host (United States) and perhaps with other diasporic Chinese communities as well. These relationships may be political, economic, social, cultural, or religious; more often than not they are all of these simultaneously. Even though the transnational citizen may take up permanent residence and achieve legal citizenship within the host country, this does not imply a break with the homeland. Transnationalism as a way of life and a condition of being is thus a matter of degree. It may be intense, involving constant transcontinental economic exchange, communication, and travel, or it may be relatively restrained, involving only occasional contacts.

Living across borders, transnational migrants break down the identification of nation and state and give rise to the paradoxical concept of a deterritorialized state or, more accurately, deterritorialized space. Geographic boundaries are no longer the sole definition of citizenship, nationality, and identity. Tianhou/Mazu's expanding religious sovereignty and celestial realm are based on her expanding territorial domain. Symbolically illustrated by her celestial inspection tour in San Francisco's Chinese New Year parade, her vitality is predicated on deterritorialized transnational Taiwanese-Chinese American citizens. Tianhou/Mazu's religious sovereignty is not defined by fixed geographic boundaries, just as transnational Chinese identity is increasingly defined less by nation-state and more by culture.

NOTES

1. As I write this essay, plans by Taiwanese Americans are being made to establish a second Beigang Mazu temple in the New York area.
2. Recently Lin Meirong of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan has posited that Mazu has become an important symbol for people attempting to establish different forms of identity. On one level, the Mazu cult has been promoted by local leaders as a source of local pride and used as a means to attract tourists and pilgrims. On the other hand, Mazu has become a symbol for Chinese communist officials who advocate the reunification of China and Taiwan. Lin Meirong examines Mazu's association with Taiwanese folk religion and national identity, as well as her forming role as "national deity." See "AAS Abstracts: China Session 25: Popular Religion and the Problem of Taiwanese Identity," 1996, http://www.aasianst.org [visited on March 3, 2002]); see also Sangren 1983.
3. *Sanjiao*, which refers to the "three teachings," has sometimes been used to describe the notion of Chinese popular religion but fails because it ignores an entire dimension of folk traditions. *Minjian zongjiao* is often translated as "popular religion" as

well, but it is better translated as "religion among the peoples." Traditionally, the term Chinese popular religion has been used to characterize the religious landscape of China and that of culturally Chinese areas. Scholars usually distinguish among at least four Chinese religious traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and "folk traditions." The term "popular religion" was created as a catchall term for the ideas, actions, and rituals that failed to conform to the fundamental teachings of the three institutional traditions. Therefore, it is important to understand "popular religion" as the religious life, ritual practices, beliefs, values, and ethics among the Chinese peoples. See Teiser 1995 for an overview of definitions of and approaches to the study of Chinese popular religion. Note that the current building architecture of Waverly Place emerged after the earthquake and fire of 1906; for more information, see Choy 1980, 129.

4. See Wells 1962, 25. Unfortunately it is now impossible to determine whether or not the Sanyi District Association was the original owner, because the city documents were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire.
5. Wells (1962, 25–26, 28–29) mentions that it is possible that the "Temple of Ah Ching" that existed in San Francisco located in the sand dunes near Union Square (what is now the corner of Mason and Post Streets) may have been the "original" temple dedicated to Tianhou/Mazu. The owner of the temple was a man named Ah Ching who established it supposedly with an eye for his own profit. Wells's reference for Ah Ching's temple is from "Our Heathen Temples," an article by A.W. Loomis published in November 1868 in *The Overland Monthly*. Besides this article there is no other document or record that this temple ever existed, because most of the city records were destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906.
6. See Loewenstein 1984 for a detailed history of San Francisco's street names.
7. Note that Wells visited the Tien Hau Temple in 1962 while she was researching and writing her thesis. At that time, she mentioned that the temple was "closed to the public," but she was able to get a private personal tour from Dr. Peter Kwan (26).
8. According to the temple keepers at the Tien Hau Temple, the majority of worshippers visiting the temple are Cantonese-speaking Chinese, but over the last decade there has been increased participation by Chinese Americans who are Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese Vietnamese. Although the number of devotees visiting Tianhou/Mazu at the Tien Hau Temple is small, the overall percentage of devotees to the goddess remains large. This is suggested by Tianhou/Mazu's enshrinement at other Chinese temples throughout Chinatown (e.g., the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A., the Kong Chow Temple, the Chi Sin Buddhist and Taoist Association, and the Ching Chung Taoist Association of America) where devotees may go to venerate the goddess, ask for protection, and so on.
9. Before moving to the Grant Avenue location, the temple was located in the Latino Mission District. The Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. does not keep detailed demographic data. However, my informant and friend Dino Tsai tells me that there are approximately fifteen hundred fee-paying lifelong members and roughly eight hundred registered members. About 60 percent are multilingual speakers of Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, and English; about 30 percent speak only Mandarin Chinese; and about 7 percent speak Cantonese Chinese. Devotees speaking other languages (e.g., Vietnamese) often visit the temple as well. In terms of age range, 60 percent are fifty years or older, 30 percent are between thirty and fifty, and 5 percent are under thirty years old.

10. The 1965 Immigration Act abolished the 1924 discriminatory national origins provision favoring immigrants of Western European origin, which was retained in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. The subsequent series of amendments in 1990 of the 1952 act, collectively referred to as the Immigration Act of 1990, provides for an overall increase in worldwide immigration. The 1990 act increases the allocation for both family-related and employment-related immigration and further creates a separate basis by which "diversity immigrants" (nationals of countries previously underrepresented since 1965 due to visa issuance) can enter the United States. Amendments of the 1952 act that were directed toward the increase of Chinese immigrants entering the United States are as follows: the 1981 amendment created a separate quota of twenty thousand for Taiwan, which Taiwan previously shared with China and Hong Kong; in 1987, the annual quota for Hong Kong was increased from six hundred to five thousand, then to ten thousand from 1990 to 1993, and subsequently to twenty thousand; and finally, thousands of people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and Southeast Asia were admitted to the United States as students.
11. This is a contested center, there is a sense in Taiwan that Beigang may be second to Dajia Mazu (located in Central Taiwan) due to a recent usurpation of power.
12. Qi is generally defined as "life force," "energy," "pneuma," "atom," "breath," and "vapor." The concept of qi underlies all religious traditions in China. Qi is believed to originate from the original primordial Dao. Qi undergoes recurrent cycles of transformation, with its unfolding based on yin and yang, the five phrases, or the eight trigrams. For more on qi, see Bokenkamp 1997, 15–20. Lingqi refers to the efficacy of a deity or a temple's "potency," "power," or "magical power." The intensity of lingqi commonly resides in the incense burner; its ashes may be used for medicinal cures and talismans or for the establishment of new temples. For more on lingqi and its relationship to local temple associations and cults, see Feuchtwang 2001, 86–89.
13. There are some key characteristic differences between the historic Tien Hau Temple founded in 1852 and the Mazu Temple U.S.A. founded in the 1980s. First, the Tien Hau Temple was founded by immigrant Chinese whose primary spoken dialect is Cantonese and the Taishan dialect. The language of preference at the Mazu Temple U.S.A. is primarily Taiwanese and secondarily Mandarin Chinese. The majority of visitors at the Mazu Temple U.S.A. are recent Taiwanese Americans, while the Tien Hau Temple has seen an increase in the number of Sino-Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the United States as a result of the Vietnam War. In addition, the Sino-Vietnamese Americans tend to speak Cantonese.

14. The temple also continues to sponsor regular vegetarian meals, open to the public, based on events in the Chinese lunar calendar (e.g., Guanyin's birthday, Chinese New Year, and other traditional Chinese festivals).
15. Feuchtwang, in *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (2001, ch. 3) has highlighted the "imperial metaphor" of the "celestial inspection tour." In short, he suggests that because local temples are the centers of territorial cults and deities, they are used imperially as "imperial police" and for "local control."
16. There is a temple dedicated to another Chinese water deity in the Sacramento Valley town of Marysville, where Tianhou/Mazu is enshrined along with several other celestial deities. During the annual Bok Kai Festival and celebration, Tianhou/Mazu along with Bok Kai make their "inspection tour" (see Nyitray 2000, 175–76). The Mazu from the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. had been taken out of the temple and driven over to Marysville to participate in the annual Bok Kai Temple festival. The last time they did this was in 2000. It is Mazu from the Ma-tsu Temple U.S.A. who participates in the parade, not the Tien Hau Temple.
17. This effort to unify occurs on several fronts. First, the Taiwanese American community at the Mazu Temple U.S.A. uses the opportunity to gather and visit with old friends and family. Second, Mazu's participation in the Chinese New Year provides a platform for "civic unity." The leadership within the Mazu Temple U.S.A. has been preoccupied with "Americanizing" Mazu since the temple's inception. They offer bilingual newsletters in Chinese and English, openly welcome non-Chinese visitors, provide Dharma classes in English, and since 1986 have established themselves as regulars in the Chinese New Year Parade. On the idea of "unity" Sangren (1983, 4–25) has posited that female deities occupy prominent positions in the Chinese religious pantheon in that, unlike male deities, they are not tied to a territory, they are not bureaucrats, and they are not hierarchical because their gender disqualifies them from being considered "officials." Nyitray (n.d.) has also explored the symbolic nature of Chinese female goddesses in terms of "unity" in advancing the notion of a "collective divine feminine," where syncretic chains of association link local river sprites (e.g., Lingshui furen) to an increasingly powerful maritime deity (e.g., Tianhou/Mazu) and to chaste virgin "mothers" such as Tianhou/Mazu and Guanyin.
18. There are many symbols of Chinese culture publicly on display at the Chinese New Year Parade. However, not all symbols are Chinese (e.g., the corporate sponsors, the various school bands, and the children's organization). On the other hand, the Mazu Temple U.S.A.'s entourage in the parade, carrying incense sticks and wearing yellow vests and straw hats, surround her brightly lighted palanquin, do bespeak something Chinese. Furthermore, the announcers on the televised version of the parade highlight Mazu's Chinese heritage. In the 2003 parade, both the Chinese announcers and the non-Chinese pointed out that she is a "Chinese goddess" who is popular with "Chinese people" from Taiwan and Hong Kong.
19. The Bok Kai Temple is a name designating a location. Bok (Cantonese for north, properly pronounced "Bak"), Kai (meaning creek or stream), and Miu (temple) was originally located at the northern section of a creek before the levees of the Yuba River were constructed. The deity known as Bok Kai is actually Xuantian Shangdi, also known as Bei Di, meaning the Northern Emperor, whose origin stems from the Chinese classic *Journey to the North*. A snake and turtle, two demons the emperor subdued and took into his service, iconographically accompany Bei Di. He is popularly known in Daoism and popular religion as a powerful exorcist. His association with floods and droughts and his concerns with water are regional adaptations that developed in Marysville, California, as times of drought, floods, and natural disasters are often associated with being possessed by demons and inauspicious spirits. See Stevens 2001 for more information on Bei Di; for a detailed account of his biography, see Seaman 1987. The Bok Kai Festival and parade occur annually on the first weekend of March.
20. My phrase "spatial paradox" is informed by Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996, 48). Appadurai insists on a need for a new type of ethnography due to the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity. As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond. The landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscapes—around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous. We have fewer cultures in the world and more internal cultural debates . . . the ethnoscapes of today's world are profoundly interactive.
21. These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) he would like to call *imagined worlds*—that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of individuals and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many individuals live in such imagined worlds (and not just in imagined communities) and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them (Appadurai 1996, 32). See also Yang 2000, 332.
22. See Ong 1999 for a complete study of the characteristics of new transnational citizens.

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