Matsu Enshrined in the Sanctuary of World Heritage: The 2009 Inscription of 'Mazu Belief and Customs' on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Role of Taiwan in Preserving the Cult of the Goddess

Fiorella Allio

新港奉天宮媽祖文化系列叢書

研究新視界

媽祖與華人民間信仰國際研討會

論文集

王見川、李世偉、洪瑩發 主編

新港奉天宮媽祖文化系列叢書

研究新視界

媽祖與華人民間信仰國際研討會

論文集

王見川、李世偉、洪瑩發
主編

目錄

Matsu Enshrined in the Sanctuary of World Heritage.

The 2009 Inscription of 'Mazu Belief and Customs' on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Role of Taiwan in Preserving the Cult of the Goddess

供奉媽祖於世界遺產的聖殿：

以「媽祖信仰習俗」為名登錄聯合國教科文組織人類非物質文化遺產 (2009) 兼論台灣保存女神信奉的角色

Fiorella Allio (艾茉莉)
French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) (法國國家科學研究院)
IRASIA, Aix-Marseilles University (艾克斯 - 馬賽大學)

In October 2009, China obtained the inscription of the cult of the Goddess Matsu on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (*renlei feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiaozuo minglu* 人類非物質文化遺產代表作名錄) under the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (*baohu feiwuzhi wenhua yichan gongyue* 保護非物質文化遺產公約), adopted in 2003 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (*lianheguo jiaoyu kexue ji wenhua zuzhi* 聯合國教育科學及文化組織). The official designation of the element is "Mazu belief and customs" (Mazu xinyang

xisu 媽祖信仰習俗). This was important news, not only for the temples and adepts of Matsu, but also for those who study her cult. Scholars and experts on religion will have to take into account the significance of this recent development which holds an unprecedented global dimension and makes her cult even more complex and multifaceted.

This news is remarkable for at least two other reasons. Firstly, religious beliefs and devotions, as such, are quite uncommon in the Representative list[1]. In comparing the Matsu case with related elements in the list, one finds that "The festivity of Saint Blaise, the patron of Dubrovnik" (Croatia, 2009), for instance, presents some similitude in being also of a religious nature and explicitly associated with a saint, but its designation clearly focuses on a recurring celebration in a particular place, rather than on the belief and worship of a saint per se. "The Procession of the Holy Blood in Bruges" (Belgium, 2009), "the Indigenous Festivity Dedicated to the Dead" (Mexico, 2008), and, more recently, the Gióng Festival of Phù Đông and Sóc Temples (Vietnam, 2010) all fall within the scope of the same remark. The report by the rapporteur of the Subsidiary Body for the Examination of Nominations to the Representative List in its fourth session in Abu Dhabi (2009) may explain this rarity and the focus on ritual events instead:

> "While reaffirming that religion was crucial to the identity and life of communities, the Body held that religion as such fell outside the scope of the Convention [safeguarding intangible cultural heritage]. Nevertheless elements concerning cultural practices and expressions drawn from religion could be taken into account under the Convention[2]. By the same token, a distinction was made

[1] For the exhaustive lists of UNESCO's intangible elements since 2008, see website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011.

[2] "Social practices, rituals and festive events" are explicitly considered domains of intangible cultural heritage as stipulated by Article 2.

between canonical or orthodox practices, deemed to fall outside the scope of the Convention, and popular religious customs, which could be considered intangible heritage".[3]

We may see in the future if the inscription of the "Matsu belief and customs" will become a reference and will encourage other countries —or China itself— to apply for the recognition of similar elements.[4]

Secondly, even more noteworthy is the fact that, with this inscription, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has promoted, at an international level, a religious phenomenon pertaining to Chinese popular religion and, for this purpose, had first to include it in a national inventory and a cultural protection plan. Even if this measure conceals other intents, it may be the sign of an improvement —although relative and minor— in the official recognition of popular religion, at least in attributing to it a certain utility.

In 2009, together with the inscription of Matsu, no less than twenty-one other elements submitted by China to UNESCO were successfully granted the same recognition (one year earlier, China only had four elements registered on a previous list). In reality, it had applied for the recognition of no less than thirty different elements, a record which impressed commissions' members. China became, in 2009, the state totaling the largest amount of elements on the Representative List, with twenty-two elements inscribed; it was followed by Japan, with sixteen elements, and Korea, with eight elements. This ranking on the league table remained unchanged with the new examination process of November 2010, in Nairobi (Kenya): China

[3] See Report by the Rapporteur, Subsidiary Body for the Examination of Nominations to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO), for its fourth session in Abu Dhabi (28 September to 2 October 2009): http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-09-4.COM-CONF.209-INF.6-EN.doc

[4] In 2011, after being recongnized domestically, it was the cult of Guangong which was proposed to UNESCO's list, but this element failed to be integrated.

tallied twenty-four elements, Japan eighteen, Korea eleven. Eastern Asia is by far the most represented part of the world on the list[5]. With this move China demonstrates to be more and more concerned about its public image abroad, in paralell with the increasing role the party-state intends to assume in the global world, while trying to reconsider significantly its long-lived taboos. In this way, UNESCO definitely offers China the opportunity to shine for its rich intangible cultural heritage, little known outside of Asia.

In examining the record of the inscribed elements promoted by Peking in 2009, one finds out that they expressly fall within different categories of intangible heritage as defined in article 2 of the Convention. Once projected on a geographical map, one further realizes that the important —and problematic— margins of PRC's territory, such as Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, are distinctively represented for their well-known manifestations of intangible cultural heritage. We assume that this global inscription, preceded by a domestic process of nomination, clearly holds political integrative objectives from the standpoint of the central Han state. The choice of the Matsu cult can also be read as being inclusive in a broader sense since the application file explicitly mentioned Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, as well as the Chinese Diaspora, as "influenced areas" of the element. Besides, the inscription is reinforcing the visibility of this well-known cult in the whole Chinese-speaking world and may also reinforce the self-confidence of diasporic communities living within a majority culture or coexisting with other minorities as in Southeast Asia. In point of fact the recognition of the Matsu cult could be important for Taiwan as well, as this phenomenon could

[5] The Culture Section of UNESCO divides the world into five regions: Africa, Arab States (composed of North Africa and the Middle East), Asia and the Pacific (including Australia and Oceania), Europe and North America (United States, and Canada), Latin America and the Caribbean.

shed more light internationally on the decisive role played by the Islanders in developing and safeguarding the cult of the goddess.

This perspective will be highlighted in the last section of this paper when Taiwan's socio-religious context for the preservation, development and transmission of a rich popular culture and religious heritage is examined. In the first section, the breakdown of the inscription of Matsu on the Representative List will afford us the opportunity to introduce both UNESCO's instruments related to heritage issues and the core notion of "intangible cultural heritage" which, on the one hand, provides substance and universal scope to the present inscription, and, on the other hand, receives an increasing consideration worldwide, as well as in China and Taiwan. Then, the nomination text of the "Matsu Belief and Customs" will be approached a little closer and critically reviewed. The present study deals more with UNESCO's aspects —revealing the legal, institutional and ideological background of such a distinction in 2009—, and less with the China grounding of the submission —that can be split up into two stages: a grading at the national level, and the preparation of the submission to UNESCO's list. No fieldwork had been conducted at that time on this topic, thus what is examined here is rather the result of the process. My ultimate goal is to provide a preliminary reflection of the new international status of the Goddess Matsu in order to be able to better evaluate in the future the broad implication of this recognition upon the image and representation of Matsu and her cult.

The 2003 Convention, Related Lists and Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Representative List is part of a wide plan tackling the issue of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within the intergovernmental organization that is UNESCO. The Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ANNEX 1 & 2)[6] constitutes nowadays the main normative instrument worldwide guiding the promotion and preservation of ICH. It was adopted in Paris on 17 October 2003 during the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO and entered into force on 20 April 2006. China was the sixth state to ratify the Convention[7]; the first one was Algeria, the third Japan, after Mauritius, an island nation of 2000 km2 in the southwest Indian Ocean. In 2010, 133 countries had already adopted the 2003 Convention[8]. Predictably, Taiwan cannot make any move since the Republic of China (ROC) is no longer a member of the United Nations Organization, and, therefore is not a signatory of UNESCO's cultural conventions[9], but this situation in no way prevents the country from being active in this domain, rather the contrary (Fiorella Allio, 2010)[10]. It should

---

[6] The Convention is also available online at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf (English) and http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540c.pdf (Chinese). Both are among the six authoritative versions.

[7] At a domestic level, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress had adopted the 2003 Convention on 28 August 2004.

[8] For updates, see the full list by alphabetical order at: http://portal.unesco.org/la/convention.asp?order=alpha&language=E&KO=17116, and by chronological order of ratification at: http://portal.unesco.org/la/convention.asp?language=E&KO=17116.

[9] However, the recent admission of Palestine, on October 31 2011, as a Member State of UNESCO (while being still deprived of UN membership), may help to reconsider this equation, presented so far as insurmountable. Less than two months later, Palestine ratified the 2003 Convention.

[10] As an indication, the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act. (wenhua zichan baocun fa 文化資產保存法) (103 articles), which took effect in 1982 with a first version (61 articles), was revised

be recalled that for UNESCO and its relevant legal instruments, only state entities are considered as legitimate interlocutors. This leads to two types of remarks. While the involvement of communities in the process of heritage preservation is a prerequisite for any submission to be taken into consideration and while communities are placed in the front line when it comes to perpetuate a tradition or implement a preservation action, it is in fact impossible for a community or any other group or territory to directly submit a file. In Taiwan, this limitation raises concerns. Some people really regret they cannot make their legacy be recognized as part of the "heritage of humanity", and cannot reach a higher rank of interlocutors, or foreign communities through the channel of UNESCO. Also, they cannot be associated with a joint submission in case of an overlapping cultural element, and, this is exactly what happened in the case of the Matsu cult, spanning over different jurisdictional areas. Besides, UNESCO's framework implies that the state represents the best interests of each of its constituting territories in the realm of culture and, that all three levels —UNESCO, state, local society— pursue the same goal. We know that this is rarely the case,

for the fifh time and promulgated on October 2006 by Executive Yuan Order. It designated the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA) as the authority in charge of cultural heritage affairs.In 2007, the CCA created the Headquarters Administration of Cultural Heritage (HACH) (Wenhua zichan zong guanli chu 文化資產總管理處) with five divisions. In 2012 the CCA became the Ministry of Culture (wenhua bu 文化部)and the HACH changed to the Bureau of Cultural Heritage (wenhua zichan ju 文化資產局). Under the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act, several lists have been elaborated either at the national level or the local level to distinguish cultural properties. In March 2011, 110 elements were already designated as "traditional arts" and 67 as "folk customs and related cultural artifacts". Both categories fall within the notion of intangible culture and their protection is placed under the responsibility of the Bureau. The inscription of elements on registers started for both categories in 2006, well after that of "monuments" (1983) or "historical buildings" (2001). Nevertheless, the lists are already abundant and show the variety of Taiwan's cultural properties.

especially in the field of heritage and identity construction. In the end, the case of Taiwan shows that UNESCO's framework, although essential, is both rigid and contradictory: it sometimes does not allow the viewpoint of true heritage holders, which limits the efficacy of heritage safeguarding[11].

Prior to the 2003 Convention, UNESCO's texts of law in relation to heritage issues had mainly focused on the protection of material elements, as exemplified by the most famous reference in the domain: the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (*baohu shijie wenhua he ziran yichan gongyue* 保護世界問文化和自然遺產公約), dubbed as the "World Heritage Convention", adopted in Paris on November 2, 1972.[12] The concern for underwater cultural heritage

[11] In view of its very rich and well preserved traditions, many Taiwan's manifestations of intangible culture could perfectly match the criteria of the Convention and the list, such as the *koah-hiu*" processional ritual of Saikang in the region of Tainan, or Baishatun Matsu pilgrimage in central Taiwan, both instances of Han culture, not to mention Formosan Austronesian manifestations that are absolutely fundamental to the understanding of the diffusion of the Austronesian culture in the Pacific area. Besides, since 2002, the Council for Cultural Affairs, and later the Ministry of Culture, have been officially engaged in Taiwan in the selection and listing of different "potential world heritage sites", considered to be of natural and/or historical significance; cf. *Introduction to potential world heritage sites in Taiwan*, Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan, 2003. The 247-page book is intentionally written both in English and Mandarin in order to widen its outreach. In 2010 it was followed by an abbreviated English edition with many pictures. An interactive webpage, posted by the Headquarters Administration of Cultural Heritage, and continued by the Ministry of Culture, introduces each of the 18 sites selected so far (see http://twh.boch.gov.tw/Taiwan.action; information is available in Mandarin and English).

[12] See the text of the 1972 Convention in eight languages at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/, and the properties inscribed on the corresponding "World Heritage List" at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list. For the properties chosen in the year 2010 (21 in total: 15 cultural sites, 5 natural sites, 1 mixed site, and 8 extensions of previous sites) see: http://whc.unesco.org/en/newproperties. In 2010, 911 sites were already selected because of their outstanding universal value: 704 cultural properties, 180 natural, and 27 mixed; they spread out in 151 states parties.

materialized even earlier than that for intangible heritage through the Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (*Baohu shuixia wenhua yichan gongyue* 保護水下文化遺產公約) which was adopted in 2001. With the 2003 Convention, the non material or "living" aspects of cultural heritage were finally identified and recognized in their own right.

In clear continuity with the 1972 Convention, the 2003 Convention, nonetheless, marked a considerable step forward in the general conceptualization of cultural heritage: the starting point was no longer an object, a monument (built or natural), an artifact, but instead practices, expressions, systems of representations that do not *preeminently* appear in a physical manner. Previously, those countries and civilizations which did not possess built markers of the past equivalent to those placed on the front line by European countries such as Italy, but instead did hold long-standing know-how and remarkable oral expressions, chants, dances and immense rituals, or those countries that did possess locally renowned monuments such as temples but put less emphasis on their formal aspect than on the continuity of the living culture and customs attached to them, or on the perpetuation of ritual celebrations and communal cults, all were in fact excluded from the appreciation of UNESCO's scheme (Christian Hottin, 2008: 15). Japan which was, for instance, in this last situation had been instrumental in promoting the concept of intangible cultural heritage within UNESCO (C. Hottin, id.). In 2003, UNESCO finally internalized in its new legal instrument the actual diversity of cultural expressions, and freed itself from the prism of monumentality and esthetics. It also authorized a new approach of heritagization, centered in the role of the communities/bearers of traditions and in the value attributed to cultural elements that contribute to the construction of identity and social cohesion. The adoption of this new paradigm also meant a progressive detachment from a *western* approach to

heritigization and preservation, sometimes perceived in different parts of the world as a modern form of colonialism.

The continuity with the 1972 Convention is also manifested in the fact that a mechanism of listing of intangible cultural elements, reminiscent of the World Heritage List program, has been established within the operational framework of the 2003 Convention. This mechanism includes three categories of lists, each determined by a legal article. As Janet Blake puts it: "Articles 16 to 18 represent in many ways the core of the Convention on which all the other mechanisms and institutions are predicated" (J. Blake, 2006: 78). This mechanism represents as well the basis upon which international co-operation and assistance are organized (J. Blake: 78). On a side note, it is recognized that the lists do motivate member states to place importance on intangible cultural heritage, also for the possibility offered to them to enhance the prestige of their nations on the international scene. Behind the endeavor of UNESCO and its member states, one can realize that local elements, sometimes of a very small range, are suddenly involved in a process of cultural globalization and acquire an unprecedented visibility. But those audiences may remain beyond any physically reachable limit. Nonetheless, the critical question of how these different mechanisms could affect the elements themselves, and could help or, reversely, unsettle the crucial processes of transmission for their perpetuation remains to be concretely and honestly addressed.

The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (article 16 of the Convention) actually replaced a former list of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" (*Renlei koushu he feiwuzhi yichan daibiaozuo minglu* 人類口述和非物質遺產代表作名錄) that took effect in 2001, in virtue of the eponymous Proclamation

of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity[13] (*Renlei koushu yu feiwuzhi yichan daibiaozuo xuanyan*, 人類口述與非物質遺產代表作宣言). The inscription of outstanding cultural spaces and forms of expression started that same year with 19 elements, including *kunqu* opera, presented by China. China obtained in total four such inscriptions before the replacement of the list. Unlike the Convention, the Proclamation did not have a legal constraint and the notion of "masterpiece" —indeed an overloaded term— had been criticized for establishing a hierarchy among intangible cultural manifestations and among countries with or without "masterpieces". Most importantly, such a notion insisted on *inherent* exceptional qualities with an alleged universal value, and less on the qualities, meaning and role attributed to such elements by their sustaining communities. All the 90 so-called "masterpieces", distinguished until 2005, were included in the Representative list when the latter was launched in 2008. Their designation changed from "masterpieces" to simple "elements". The point 23 of the Report of the Expert Meeting on the 2003 Convention (Working group on the Amendments to the Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention) held in Paris on 15 March 2010 clarifies the reason of this conceptual adjustment: "As regards the Representative List in particular, the experts stressed that it is not intended to be exhaustive, but is rather intended to present examples or illustrations of the wealth of intangible heritage; the notion of excellence is not consistent with the spirit of the Convention and justifies neither the nomination nor the decision to inscribe."[14]

[13] The official text of this former Proclamation can be found at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001246/124628eo.pdf

[14] See webpage: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-10-5.COM%203.WG-3-EN.doc

The 2003 Convention program entails a second list named *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* (*Ji xu baohu de feiwuzhi wenhua yichan minglu* 急需保護的非物質文化遺產名錄) (article 17) that identifies elements at risk which cannot be expected to live on without immediate intervention; the concerned state should undertake a specific safeguard plan and may be eligible to emergency financial assistance from a UNESCO fund set up for this purpose.[15]

Finally, article 18 in the 2003 Convention gives space to a third category of index known as the "Register of Best Practices" which official name is *Programmes, Projects and Activities for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (*Baohu feiwuzhi wenhua yichan de jihua, xiangmu he huodong* 保護非物質文化遺產的計劃、項目和活動). This register is meant to highlight the safeguarding projects that best reflect the principles and objectives of the Convention, and to serve as a platform for sharing good practices as well as to inspire States, communities and anyone interested in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage[16].

The first operational inscription of elements according to the new Convention, resulting from processes of nomination by states parties and of selection by the Intergovernmental Committee, took place on 28 September-2 October 2009 at the fourth Committee meeting in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). In November 2010, 213 elements were already inscribed to the Representative List (article 16), 16 to the Urgent safeguarding List (article 17), 3 to the Register of best Intangible Heritage safeguarding activities (article 18). In what concerns China, in particular, in 2010 it had 24 elements inscribed on the first list, 6 on the second, none on

[15] See webpage: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011&inscription=00003&type=00002

[16] See webpage:http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00300

the last.

Many observers in various forums noted that, in the initial cycles of the implementation of nominations and selections, an imbalance was manifested among the three lists of the Convention, characterized by a major attention to the Representative List and a minor concern for the Urgent Safeguarding List and the Register of Best Practices, although these last two mechanisms were considered central to the completion of the spirit and the goal of the Convention. In point of fact, it seemed, that members of the committee held the first list more like a promotional and symbolic list, to serve the diffusion of the concept of intangible heritage and urge its preservation. The point is that a huge number of countries now are quick to use this new UNESCO channel of representation and the publicity it enjoys to increase their international prestige. Some hope in this way to attract tourists and investors in order to launch or sustain local economic projects. In these circumstances, one wonders how much heritage safeguarding really matters for its own sake.

The general provisions of the 2003 Convention, in article 1, starts with the purposes of the text:

> "(a) to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage; (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance."

When looking deeper at the notion of "intangible cultural heritage", Craig Forrest observes that, more often than not, its definitions fall back on enumerating examples or fields of application, instead of conceptually

characterizing its content, since determining what is "intangible cultural heritage" is almost impossible (Craig Forrest, 2010 : 362). As a matter of fact, the definition provided in the general provisions of the Convention, Article 2, paragraph 1, relies on an enumeration:

> "The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills —as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith— that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage."

And paragraph 2 continues with the precisions of fields of application specifying that intangible heritage is manifested, among other things, in the following domains[17]:

> "(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship."

After his first assertion G. Forrest follows his idea and refers to Lourdes Arizpe's statement saying that intangible cultural heritage "is not an object, not a performance, not a site; it may be embodied or given material form in any of these, but basically, it is an enactment of meanings embedded in collective memory" (Lourdes Arizpe, 2007: 361, 362).

Not only is intangible cultural heritage fluid and impalpable but its bearers are usually collective bodies. One section of the official website dedicated to intangible cultural heritage entitled "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" underscored that "the depository of this heritage is the human mind, the human body being the main instrument for its enactment,

[17] Note that intangible heritage is stated here to be "manifested in" these domains, meaning that it is not necessarily "*equivalent to*" them.

or —literally— embodiment. The knowledge and skills are often shared within a community, and manifestations of intangible cultural heritage often are performed collectively."[18] Innumerable communities worldwide have inherited traditions and living expressions from their ancestors and transmitted them to their descendants, in most cases orally. Though enduring, this development is nonetheless very fragile. One has to remember that these processes of inherent transmission and perpetuation are absolutely different from a mechanism of preservation driven by cultural policies. The main challenge heritagization is facing is not to destabilize or corrupt the process of transmission communities have settled for themselves.

The case of the "Mazu belief and customs" element submitted by China

During its Abu Dhabi session in the fall of the year 2009, the Subsidiary Body recommended to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to inscribe 76 elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, one of which was "The Mazu belief and customs" (Decision n° 4.COM 13.18). According to the regular procedure, the Committee took note that China had nominated the element (nomination file n° 00227) for such an inscription and decided that the information it provided satisfied the criteria and inscribed the element on the Representative List.[19]

---

[18] Cf. "UNESCO Culture, Basic concepts", still posted on: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=29914&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html, and originally on: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002 (April 2010).

[19] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-09-4.COM-CONF.209-Decisions.doc, pp. 38-39, UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fourth Session, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 28 September to 2 October 2009,

Unlike the application for the inscription on the World Heritage List related to the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage —for which the outstanding universal value of the element still has to be demonstrated— the submitting states to the Representative List do not have to provide a large amount of documents and records in order to prepare their nomination file.[20]

The documentation placed in the file of "The Mazu belief and customs" can be found on UNESCO's website dedicated to intangible cultural heritage[21]. The summary of the element's description and UNESCO's related decision (ANNEX 3)[22], the nomination elaborated by the China party (ANNEX 4)[23], the consents of communities (ANNEX 5 & 6)[24]; eight pictures and a 9:58 minute video are also accessible [25]. All documents are in English and in French, only the consents of communities are delivered in

Decisions.

[20] I am grateful here to Roland Lin (Program Specialist, Asia & Pacific Unit, World Heritage Centre, UNESCO) for his orientation in dealing with several conventions and their related criteria.

[21] I would like to thank Frank Proschan (Program Specialist, Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, UNESCO) for his early indications concerning the accessible UNESCO documentation for this case.

[22] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00227.

[23] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00227-Nomination_form.doc. In addition, the blank forms to be used for nominations, proposals and assistance requests, and their corresponding annual submission deadlines, as well as the link to the Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention with the details concerning the procedures, can be found at: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00184.

[24] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00227-community_consent.pdf.

[25] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00227 and click on "slideshow" or "video". Section 7.a. on the nomination form declares that supplementary materials have been provided to the Committee, however, their content is not posted on the website and not accessible.

Chinese.

UNESCO's Convention requires that the element be already, or in the process of being, included in an inventory of intangible cultural heritage within the submitting state. As for the "Mazu Belief and Customs" element, its incorporation in the National Non-Material Cultural Heritage List was ratified on May 2006 by the State council of the People's Republic of China. The Ministry of Culture is the competent authority for this inventory in the PRC.

Several remarks emerge from the reading of the application/ nomination file to UNESCO and I choose to concentrate on a few points. The bureaucratic style transpiring from the submitted nomination form, way away from the truculence and liveliness of the actual Mazu cult in the Chinese world is the first striking feature that the reader perceives. Without doubt, this is partly due to the format of the application itself, conducive of a more legal and rigid style than a spontaneous or even academic type of formulation, and to the constraint of the languages imposed for the application (English or French) which may not easily convey vernacular notions and terms, except if the writers are used to communicate in a foreign language about intangible heritage and Chinese popular religion. But this may also rest on the fact that the writing was influenced by the administration itself, which is not surprising given the role the central state has to play vis a vis UNESCO.

These initial impressions are further strengthened by another range of details, such as the preeminence of semi-official, if not official, agencies presented as "communities and groups concerned by the element". In this case the "communities" should have not been preeminently boards of directors, councils of temples and other entities hierarchically upstream of any decision making in conformity with the party-state. Therefore the

definition of "communities" and the meaning of communities' "participation" are clearly misconstrued. The Convention however underscores clearly in article 15 the necessary participation of communities, groups and individuals:

> "Within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management."

This requisite is also recalled as one of the five basic criteria (criterion R.4) to be respected for any inscription to the Representative List[26] and is insisted upon recurrently during the meetings of the Subsidiary Body for the examination of nominations.[27] This actual participation is required not only for democratic reasons but also because, as often underscored in UNESCO's documents, communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, are

---

[26] See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00026 for the Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention, in six languages; in Chapter I: "Safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage at the international level, cooperation and international assistance", see section I.2 [five] "Criteria for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity".

[27] An illustration could be found in the Report by the rapporteur on the meetings of the Subsidiary Body for the examination of nominations in 2010 to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Fifth session, Nairobi, Kenya, 15 to 19 November 2010, stating, at point 26, that: "The Subsidiary Body observed that some files did not sufficiently demonstrate community participation (criterion R.4). The Subsidiary Body is mindful that this participation may take various forms and took this variety into consideration in its examination of the nominations. However, it reiterates the importance of providing convincing evidence that communities widely participated in all stages (identification of the element, preparation of the nomination, elaboration and implementation of safeguarding measures, etc.)." See website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-10-5.COM-CONF.2.2-INF.6-EN.doc.

instrumental for the real production, safeguarding, maintenance or re-creation of a living cultural heritage. It is the very mechanism of transmission and reproduction of heritage that is at stake here, and it can only proceed from the inside for it not to become artificial and meaningless and in the end vanish. The fact that the element in question pertains to the religious domain, which de facto implies active beliefs, faith and adhesion, makes participation even more obvious and central. As a matter of fact, the conservation of this type of phenomenon, living and internalized by communities at a high degree, in theory should not need to be wrapped up by public policy, albeit cultural policy. Past official interventionism on this field —quite a negative experience—, indeed, stirs reservations on the matter.

It is hard to ignore as well a modern form of intrusion in the field of communal religious practice which has become almost an intrinsic part of all revitalized rites and festivals in China, combining varied commercial interests —fitting the "socialist" market-based economy promoted by central and regional governments—, but also new representations of popular culture and a quest for prestige —that could be used at different levels of competitive relationships. Noticeably, the inscription on a list and the claim for cultural preservation are often pronounced worldwide to reach those goals, and more precisely in our case to attract tourists and pilgrims. It remains to be seen if UNESCO's inscription will be a tangible revelator of this kind of situation in Meizhou and coastal Fujian or, worse, an amplifier of it.

The promoters of the inscription of Matsu on the Representative List, identifiable through their letters of commitment, are quite varied.[28] The list given in ANNEX 5 synthesizes the signatories of the letters posted

[28] To read the letters of commitment, consult the following website: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00227-community_consent.pdf.

individually on the website (ANNEX 6). The leading institution seems to be the China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Center, which endorses the first of the fifty-nine letters —the only one written in English— that reads:

> "Letter of Commitment to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):
> Mazu belief and Customs is a popular representative of intangible cultural heritage which covers a large area. It is important part of Chinese people's lives. It is out of the voluntary intentions and joint participations of our company and all inheritors, who have been informed in advance, that Mazu Belief and Customs would apply for joining the "representative inventory of the intangible cultural heritages of humanity"
> We hereby promise to abide by all of the safeguarding provisions in the nomination paper and fulfill all obligations.
> China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Center, January 15, 2008"

The other letters in the nomination file are in Chinese; they are all identical and translate with a slight difference the English one. In this group, the thirteen foremost letters use a stamp showing the name of the institution(s) —often two or three of them are co-signing—; but the remaining letters are signed by hand. Among the last group we note other temples, many individuals from China's big cities or provinces and two members of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia and India. A notable fact for our topic shows that two signatory temples are based in Taiwan: Nanyao gong (南瑤宮) and Guangdi miao (關帝廟) both from the city of Changhua in the Changhua County (彰化縣).[29] One easily draws the conclusion that the fifty-

[29] This has been confirmed by interviews with the Changhua City Government, Temples Depart-

nine declarations of intention do not have the same weight and role in perpetuating the rites and worship for Matsu as defined officially within the scope of UNESCO's mechanism.

Although the leading institution of the declarations of intention is the China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Center, the overall list, actually, ascertains undoubtedly the centrality of the island of Meizhou and locally based institutions. We may note in passing that the nomination text as well presents repeatedly the island as the essential site of the Matsu cult: as her place of birth, the location of the first temple dedicated to her and the center of related rituals and pilgrimage activities. On the one hand, this text highlights the wide diffusion of the cult in different regions of the world, but, on the other hand, takes no notice of the plurality of local interpretations concerning the origins of the Goddess and of the complexity of the development of her cult in the whole Putian region. It gives preferentiality to the Meizhou island over other places such as Xianlianggang and Ninghai or Baihu Shunji temple identified by other local interpretations respectively as the birth place and the first temple of Matsu.

Concerning the "ceremonies" and "folk customs" which are focal points of the introduction of the element, it remains impossible, if one is not already familiar with those religious activities, to get a clear picture of the reality out of this noticeably confusing description. The pieces of information are disconnected from their context and are presented in a scattered manner;[30] so much so that one can fear that the international community may not be able to make any sense out of them and consequently the meaning of these lively and resilient activities may be overlooked. This could be particularly

ment, October 2010. Changhua City provides the only case in Taiwan where temples affairs are handled by the official administration through a specialized department.

[30] See "Mazu belief and customs" nomination form, p. 3.

detrimental to the appreciation of the real value of the Matsu cult and then provoke a reverse effect. While the existence of so-called "divisional temples" (which is certainly referring to *fenmiao* 分廟) is mentioned, nothing is said about the mechanism leading to their establishment, that is the development of the Matsu cult through the institution of the "division of incense" (*fenxiang* 分香), structuring the relations among temples, as well as those of migrants or merchants with their hometown in Fujian. Very little is revealed about the meaning of pilgrimages and the foundations of the diffusion of her worship in many parts of the world. These explanations would have been crucial for the appreciation of the role played nowadays not only by Matsu in the Chinese religious landscape but also by a place like the Meizhou island, its temples, its communities and associations within the Matsu cult constellation.

In regards to the alleged necessity of a promotion program for the international inscription and the heritagization of the "Mazu beliefs and customs", we note quite a distance from reality when examining the cause of the current jeopardy faced by the element. It would have been surprising indeed for an official application to mention, as one of the causes of the narrowing down of the living space of the Goddess beliefs and customs and of the gap between generations in valuing the Matsu cult[31], past massive destructions of temples and cults' activities, as well as the repression and humiliation of worshippers in the countryside and in the cities by the authorities, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In point of fact, it is now too easy to hold the rather recent phenomena of globalization, industrialization and urbanization, as well as the change in living and production styles[32], responsible for impacting traditional values,

[31] See "Mazu belief and customs" nomination form, p. 5.

[32] *Ibidem.*

and to ignore deliberately domestic political reasons. It is true that adding the "Mazu beliefs and customs" into UNESCO's heritage list "would help people of all social classes to gain a better appreciation of its value and significance," as the nomination reads,[33] and, one may also add on a side note, this would comfort them that there is nothing suspicious anymore in worshipping the Goddess Matsu and nothing faulty in engaging in communal temple activities[34]. Such incomplete or mistaken historical assessment of a traumatic experience may further complicate the viability of a cult deeply based on shared experience and knotted with collective memory; unvoiced resentment could eventually lead to a lack of solidarity among the group, to alteration of transmission, or even to dissensions or conflicts. If official respect and safeguarding efforts toward the element are sincere, the public may also expect humility and accountability from the responsible authorities in facing history and collective memory.

Taiwan: a site of excellence for the preservation of the Matsu cult

Theoretically, only member states can apply for the inscription of an element on UNESCO's lists, so Taiwan has not yet submitted any application for the elements of her very rich cultural and natural heritage. We

[33] *Ibidem.*

[34] It is interesting to underscore the fact that in the past few years, several cult communities found it safer for their survival to cover their religious activities with the title of "intangible-cultural heritage" (cf. in this book Philip Clart (柯若樸), "Conceptualizations of "Popular Religion" in Recent Research in the People's Republic of China") —taking the government at its word, so to speak—, sometimes even hanging in front of the deity altar a banner reading the Chinese words "intangible cultural heritage", as a picture taken in Hebei by Zhang Shishan illustrated during theconference on "Matsu and Ethnic Chinese Folk Religion", Hsinkang (Chiayi County, Taiwan), May 2010).

can only regret this situation divesting Taiwanese people of this international recognition, but, conversely, depriving the rest of humanity of a direct access both to Taiwan's heritage elements and to interesting conservation efforts. One option here could have been to limit oneself to this state of affairs and find irrelevant to link the treatment of this topic to Taiwan. The other alternative however was to raise concern about the role of Taiwan's Han population in developing and conserving, since the late 16th and 17th century, the cult of Matsu that is now recognized of great value for humanity and in setting inner patterns of conservation, transmission and expansion, determined by folk religion and traditional social organization.

The island in effect can pride itself on its crucial contribution regarding the preservation and the extension on its territory of many cults of the Han folk religion originally brought in from the Mainland. Due to specific processes and conducive patterns of immigration, as well as to the rural nature of Taiwan's society until the early 1960s, those cults developed even more extensively than in Hong Kong, Macao and in the Southeast Asia. Compared with China, Taiwan was placed under more favorable political conditions throughout the 20th century, first under the Japanese domination, then under the KMT party-state government, as surprising as this statement may seem, and despite evident limitations. This also corresponded to the period when the crossing of the Taiwan Strait by pilgrims dwindled to become almost non-existent in the decades before and after the Second World War, accentuating quite separate religious developments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Interestingly enough, some new cults, new rituals, new deities with Taiwanese identities and hagiographies had also emerged on the island along the centuries, whereas the total number of temples and cults' networks continued to thrive and to branch out in a prodigious manner, showing how much this soil has been fertile for popular religion, proving

also the strength and adaptability of this belief system. History tells that this heritage has been without any doubt better preserved by Taiwanese than by Chinese who unwillingly and unfortunately underwent anti-"feudal" or anti-religious campaigns, compelling popular cults to stop or, when possible, when not destroyed, to go underground or hide in domestic circles, sometimes being attended at night. These conditions and irreversible losses further condemned revival activities to a certain degree of shallowness where folk religion re-emerged in recent decades. A safeguarding program in China may have some utility, even if only for repairing damages, but only if not over-determined by business perspectives and not completely permeated by public policy.

The UNESCO 2003 convention defines clearly in article 2 the significance of the act of "safeguarding":

> "Safeguarding" means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage".

This viewpoint entails many aspects and already a certain analytical distance from the element; in a modern way, it exceeds the type of preservation that is the inner process, still functioning in Taiwan, I want to evoke here: that carried on by the bearers of traditions themselves, from one generation to the next, with adaptations, and completely outside the scope of public policy and revitalization plans.

The remarkable role of Taiwan in preserving the Matsu cult does not really refer, in my view, to the fact that various Taiwanese people and associations supported its inscription on UNESCO's

list, or to the new functions cultural policies and tourist industries are adding to traditional Matsu worship events, giving them new dimensions and turning them into cultural and commercial attractions. And that, with varying degrees of success, such as the Taizhong County Matsu International Festival centered around the Tachia Zhenlan gong (大甲鎮瀾宮) Matsu pilgrimage, started in 2003, in an effort to promote international cultural tourism, followed by other large Matsu temples (such as Peikang Chaotian gong (北港朝天宮) and Hsinkang Fengtian gong (新港奉天宮), or even earlier, as in the case of the Tainan Lu'ermen Tianhou gong (鹿耳門天后宮) and Tainan Da Tianhou gong (台南大天后宮)). This role rather rests on the inestimable Taiwanese contribution to the culture of humanity —and this is what it truely amounts to— for having offered without interruption —directly or indirectly— the religious, social, economic, and political conditions for the effective conservation and perpetuation of the Matsu cult, and the traditions linked to it, within temples, festivals, pilgrimages, and rituals of all sorts, on which people count to define themselves, socially and spiritually, and interact through networks. This system of beliefs is often taken for granted, because it is self-referential and evolves in the non-official sphere. It is more and more coveted for its mobilization capacities that cannot really be substituted by any cultural policy program. This broad outline reveals two kinds of lived experiences, two visions of cultural heritage preservation in coexistence, one defined through the prism of cultural policy, more and more formal and influenced by global norms and scale, the other, more informal and embedded in the familiar process of transmission of traditions, allowing internal reproduction and rejuvenation.

Even if Taiwan is not the birthplace of Matsu, it can still be distinguished as a major site on the spiritual map of the Matsu cult. Matsu

is undoubtedly Taiwan's most popular deity. With more than nine hundred active temples dedicated to the goddess, huge pilgrimages and territorial processional systems, large nucleus of worship involving entire regions, intricate systems of ceremonial exchange, far-reaching networks of hundreds of sizable associations of followers and vast cult communities, Matsu is often considered as the patron deity of Taiwan[35] and Taiwan is often regarded as the island of Matsu, meaning *the* place where one can spiritually and practically encounter the Goddess. A paper of the BBC news online shows that even Chinese worshippers come to Taiwan to explore their religious roots and experience the kind of celebrations' ambiance that had already vanished on the Mainland (Cindy Sui, 2010). Nowadays Taiwan contributes greatly to the *representation* of Matsu and to its introduction to the world, if only for the numerous occasions offered to foreign visitors to come across spectacular cult celebrations.

If we turn now to the contribution of the people of Taiwan in the recent valorization of the Goddess, we could observe that they are not foreign to the increasing awareness of the value of the Matsu cult in China. First of all, they offered massive donations in the 1990s to rebuild and rehabilitate the Matsu temple and square at Meizhou or elsewhere. When the inhabitants of Taiwan were allowed again to travel to the mainland in the late 1980s, they began searching for the original temples of their tutelary gods and later on organized numerous pilgrimages to these places in Fujian and sometimes in other regions, while undertaking in parallel business and investment

[35] In September 2007, under Chen Shui-bien's governance, it was the Goddess Matsu (coming from Fengtian temple in Chiayi County) that was chosen to represent Taiwan's spirit and sincerity and to support, through a procession in the streets of New York City, the quest of the ROC/Taiwan to have Taiwan's diplomatic situation put on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly for re-examination. Taiwan hoped then to be reconsidered as a member of the UN, but the General Committee rejected this demand for the fifteenth time.

activities. These religious exchanges had been instrumental in re-engaging and stabilizing people's relationships across the Taiwan Strait.

Those connections, in the beginning only tolerated by the communist regime due to their religious nature, have been more and more capitalized upon, by the local and, also, central authorities, at first walking in the steps of temples' initiatives, but lately taking directly the lead to exploit pre-established exchanges, with the objective of amplifying cross-Strait relations and promoting the unification of Taiwan with China. It is no secret that in June 2010, for instance, the government of the Fujian province chartered boats to transport, for free, Matsu pilgrims in a direct trip from the region of Taichung to Meizhou. In this domain, also, a symbolic battle is in hand between China and Taiwan, perhaps less to constrain KMT government, yet committed to the same cause, than to coax or involve ordinary followers via religious activities. And, thanks to the pervasiveness of the Matsu cult, this seems to be an effective means to reach a wide range of people. By the same token, such scheme also presents China as being the source of the Matsu cult and beliefs, while substantiating the rite *iat-cho͘* (*yezu* in Mandarin, 謁祖), "pilgrimage toward the original temple (or original (statue of the) god)". As a consequence this minimizes Taiwan's position within the Matsu cult sphere, while downplaying the idea of Taiwan as a self-contained religious entity, and in the same vein reducing symbolically Taiwan's "religious sovereignty". In the UNESCO nomination text Taiwan is only presented as a place of diffusion and from this angle is logically surpassed by China.

UNESCO's inscription institutionalizes the international leadership of China, not only from a legal and a formal point of view, but also in what concerns the safeguarding of the Matsu cult. In this context, China, as the place of origin of the goddess, becomes preeminent over Taiwan's

everlasting preservation accomplishments, beliefs' pervasiveness and religious practice freedom.

Re-establishing a direct link across the Strait for religious purposes is not a new agenda on the Taiwan side either. The connection between the cult of Matsu and cross-Strait relations is no less multi-faceted and complex in Taiwan than in China. We remember the initiative of Zhenlan temple, located in the township of Tachia, Taichung County, in Central Taiwan, right after the election of President Chen Shui-bian in 2000, as for him and the Democratic Progressive Party opposed to the unification of Taiwan with China. While pilgrims and temples organizations from Taiwan were constrained beforehand to take an indirect route in order to reach Fujian or any part of China —usually transiting through Hong Kong or Macao—, the leadership of Zhenlan gong tried to defy the status quo and organize a pilgrimage by sailing directly to Meizhou. This initiative could be qualified as highly provocative since it passed over the still very tense security conditions between the two states —the regulations establishing direct links had not been passed in 2000 and started with the "small three links" in 2001, with a connection only through Kinmen and the island Matsu—, and disregarded the guarantee of pilgrims' safety and rights too, as Tsai Ying-wen, then head of the executive Yuan's Mainland Affairs Council, had pointed out. This move could also be seen as highly politicized in view of the connections Zhenlan gorg's leader, Yen Ching-piao, maintained with the opposition of the time : the KMT, the New Party and the newly formed People First Party (Paul Katz, 2003a: 406-409; Paul Katz and Murray Rubinstein, 2003b: 1-4; Mayfair Yang, 2004). This scheme has since been followed on both sides of the Taiwan Strait by many open words and acts between a number of officials and other social actors which led to today's normalization of links and exchanges.

More recently, and in direct relation to the episode of UNESCO's inscription of the Matsu cult, the Tachia temple continued to lead the way of Taiwanese initiatives, dragging in its wake the Taiwan Matsu Followers Association (Taiwan Matsu lianyi hui台灣媽祖聯誼會), based also in Tachia. In April 2008, it organized an event called the "International Forum of Taiwan Mazu" (Taiwan Mazu wenhua luntan 台灣媽祖文化論壇), coupled with scholarship activities, and planned around the annual Tachia Matsu pilgrimage in the third lunar month, as well as the Tachia Matsu International Culture and Tourism Festival. The ultimate goal of the event was allegedly to support the inscription of Matsu on UNESCO's Representative list but also supposedly to launch a joint submission including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao[36]. However, it can be noted that the official application presented by China that same year, for an expected inscription in the fall of 2009, did not refer to such an initiative and was made in its own and only name. Yet we note that Zhenlan gong did not sign any letter of commitment in the file submitted by China (see ANNEX 5), just like two other Taiwanese temples —Nanyao gong and Guangdi miao of Changhua city— which have been, instead, rather discrete regarding their support.

As *Taiwan Today* reported, according to a top story first appeared in a local media: in July 2009, a 50-member Taiwan Matsu Followers Association delegation headed by Cheng Ming-kun, vice-chairman of the Zhenlan Temple, went to Beijing "to promote the culture of Matsu." The delegation even met with Jia Qinglin, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi中国人民政治协商会议) which dominant entity is in fact the Communist Party of China and which plenary sessions, along with that of the National People's Congress (Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui

[36] See bibliography: Zhenlan gong, *The International forum of Taiwan Mazu*.

全国人民代表大会), make the important political decisions at the national level. During the meeting, Cheng suggested "that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait work together to protect Ma Zu culture by having it included on UNESCO's intangible world cultural heritage list." And "agreeing with the proposal", Jia "lauded the Taiwan Ma Zu Followers Association's efforts and success in propagating Ma Zu culture and helping foster cross-Strait ties". He noted "that establishing a framework for the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations requires not only a strong economic base but also a solid cultural foundation". And Cheng responded that "Ma Zu, who according to Chinese religious folklore protects sailors and fishermen on their voyages, has many followers on both sides of the Taiwan Strait". He noted also "that over a million people in Taiwan participate in the religious celebrations during the Dajia Ma Zu Festival held in March each year. Large numbers of Ma Zu worshippers also take part in the many activities held in coastal areas of Fujian Province in mainland China". So Cheng "urged that the two sides work together to preserve the rich cultural heritage associated with the worship of Ma Zu."[37] So, less than three months before UNESCO's selection in Abu Dhabi, Zhenlan gong and the Taiwan Matsu Followers Association seemed to have high contacts and still be very supportive of the endeavor, obviously for unspoken purposes.

What appears clearly, however, is that the Matsu cult has become in certain circumstances a stage openly utilized by the communist authorities in China, some politicians from Taiwan, and entrepreneurs of both sides, to develop biased interests. Therefore exploiting popular religion for real politics and business profit such as tourism industry, or, worse, as a springboard to penetrate a local place and its networks and set investments

[37] *Taiwan Today*, "Cross-Strait protection of Ma Zu culture urged", Government Information Office, 7 August 2009, http://www.taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=56038&CtNode=436.

plans, as it has been seen in Tianjin. It goes without saying that this new layer of meaning is hardly in line with the spirit of the Convention and its safeguarding rationale.

Having said so, however, the large majority of the Matsu temples and believers in Taiwan belong to a more traditional sphere of folk religion and continue their activities without getting involved in a dynamic guided by dramatic side interests. Sometimes huge celebrations are under major media exposure that particularly insists on their sensational aspects, rarely on socio-cultural characteristics, but this is far from determining or structuring the foundations of the phenomenon. It is hoped that a similar assessment could still be made in a few years from now, and the same in what concerns the impact of cultural policy and public plans of valorization and conservation of religious intangible culture, still mainly unobstrusive.

The key feature to be remembered here is that the island of Taiwan still proves to be one of the rare places where the entire structure and system of representations and beliefs of popular religion survives and thrives in all its complexity and cohesion, totally supported by worshippers, in an atmosphere of social tolerance for all faiths, and constitutional guaranty of respect of religious freedom. That makes Taiwan an unavoidable and essential figure of the religious adventure of humanity.

What can be said in final conclusion is that not only does Taiwan offer exceptional conditions for the comprehension of the complex social setting of popular religion, not only does it remain a place of excellence for the preservation of religious structures, but it could also inspire reflection around the world on the processes of conservation of intangible cultural heritage in relation to religion.

Selected references

ALLIO Fiorella,
"Local Traditions and their Perpetuation in a Changing Taiwanese Society: Lessons Drawn from the Study of Communal Rituals in the Nanying Region", in Lin Yu-ju & Fiorella Allio (eds.), History, culture and society in Tainan (I), Tainan County government, International Center for Tainan Area Humanities and Social Sciences Research, 2008, pp. 481-521.

ALLIO Fiorella,
"Capturing Intangible Culture and Ephemeral Manifestations: The Perpetuation of Taiwanese Traditions in Temple Processions", in Frank Muyard, Serge Dreyer and Liang-Kai Chou (eds), *Objects, Heritage and Cultural Identity*, Nantou, Taiwan Historica, 2009, pp. 239-282.

ALLIO Fiorella,
"The Influence of UNESCO's Normative Framework on the Protection of Intangible Heritage in Taiwan", *Applying the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Paradigm* panel, SEG Jahrestagung, Annual meeting of SEG/SSE (Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft/Société Suisse d'Ethnologie), Universität Bern (Switzerland), November 12–13, 2010.

ARIZPE Lourdes,
"The Cultural Politics of Intangible Cultural Heritage", *Art Antiquity and Law*, Volume 12, Issue 4, 2007, pp 361-388.

BLAKE Janet,
Commentary on the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Institute of Art and Law, Leicester, 2006.

CHANG Hsun 張珣 ,
Wenhua Mazu: Taiwan Mazu xinyang yanjiu lunwenji, 文化媽祖：台灣媽祖信仰研究論文集 [Constructing Mazu: Selected papers on Mazu cult]), Taipei, Institute of ethnology, 2003.Fiorella Allio pp. 12-13.

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
Introduction to Potential World Heritage Sites in Taiwan, Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan, 2003.

FORREST Craig,
International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Routledge, London & New York,Taiwan, 2010.

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OFFICE,
"Cross-Strait protection of Ma Zu culture urged", *Taiwan Today*, Government Information Office, 7 August 2009, http://www.taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=56038&CtNode=436 .

HEADQUARTERS ADMINISTRATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE,
Introduction to Potential World Heritage Sites in Taiwan, Headquarters Administration of Cultural Heritage, Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan, Taiwan, 2010.

HOTTIN Christian,
« Une nouvelle perception du patrimoine », *Culture et recherche*, n° 116-117, 2008, pp. 15-17.

KATZ Paul,
"Religion and the State in Post-war Taiwan", *The China Quarterly*, n° 174 (Religion in China Today), June 2003, pp. 397-412.

KATZ Paul & RUBINSTEIN Murray,
"The Many Meanings of Identity: An introduction" in Paul Katz and Murray Rubinstein (eds), *Religion and the Formation of Taiwanese Identities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, pp. 1-22.

LIN Mei-jung 林美容 ,
Mazu xinyang yu Taiwan shehui, 媽祖信仰與臺灣社會 [Mazu Belief and Taiwan Society], Taipei, Boyang Publishing company, 2006.

RUBINSTEIN Murray A.,
"The Revival of the Mazu Cult and of Taiwanese Pilgrimage to Fujian", *in Harvard Studies on Taiwan: Papers of the Taiwan Studies Workshop*, vol. 1, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, Cambridge (MA), 1994, pp. 89-125.

SMEETS Rieks,
« Une convention passe aux actes. Organisation, directives, calendrier », *Culture et recherche*, n° 116-117, 2008, pp. 12-14.

SUI Cindy,
« Taiwan festival proves China lure", *BBC News*, 19 April 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/8629453.stm.

UNESCO,
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fourth session, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 28 September to 2 October 2009, Subsidiary Body for the Examination of Nominations to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2009, *Report by the Rapporteur*.

UNESCO,
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fourth Session, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 28 September to 2 October 2009, [ITH/09/4.COM/CONF.209/Decisions, Abu Dhabi, 2 October 2009], *Decisions*.

YANG, Mayfair Mei-hui,
"Goddess across the Taiwan Strait. Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints", *Public Culture*, vol. 16, n° 2, Spring 2004, pp. 209-238.

ZHENLAN TEMPLE,
An International Forum of Taiwan Mazu, 台灣媽祖文化論壇, Tachia township, Zhenlan temple, 2008.

LIST OF ANNEXES

1. 聯合國教科文組織 2003 保護非物質文化遺產公約 [UNESCO, 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage], Chinese version (cf.: PDF: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540c.pdf).

2. UNESCO, **2003 CONVENTION** for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, English version (cf.: PDF: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf).

3. **"The Mazu belief and customs"** (China, UNESCO): **IDENTIFICATION** of the element (description, list of documents, decision (2009) for its inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (cf.: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00227)).

4. **NOMINATION FORM** submitted by China for the inscription of "**The Mazu belief and customs**" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Reference No. 00227), (cf.: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00227-Nomination_form.doc).

5. **CONSENT OF COMMUNITIES**: Summary table of signatories (cf.: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00227 (UNESCO >> Culture >> Intangible Heritage >> Intangible Heritage Lists >> Mazu belief and customs >> Identification >> Documents >> Consent of Communities).

6. **Leading LETTERS OF COMMITMENT** in English and Chinese (cf.: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00227).

中國民間信仰系列 3

研究新視界：「媽祖與華人民間信仰」國際研討會論文集

發 行 人／張瑞香
總 編 輯／楊蓮福
主　　編／王見川、李世偉、洪瑩發
執行編輯／李淑芬
封面設計／張薰云
排　　版／王立群
委託製作／財團法人臺灣省嘉義縣新港奉天宮
　　地址：嘉義縣新港鄉新民路 53 號　電話：05-3742034（代表號）
　　網址：www. 開臺媽祖 .tw
監　　製／財團法人臺灣省嘉義縣新港奉天宮第十屆董監事會
　　董 事 長：何達煌
　　常務董事：盧明森
　　董　　事：鄭新民、莊基鉦、陳炳村、黃烟樹、邱聰德、李宗祐、陳文忠
　　陳建文、林永宏、葉國榮、馬瑞駿、吳世斌、李進興
　　常務監事：黃能通
　　監　　事：戴榮松、周茂林、吳坤海、郭茂猷
出版發行／博揚文化事業有限公司
　　地址：112 台北市北投區東華街一段 48 巷 6-1 號 1 樓
　　電話：(02)28261203　傳真：(02)28237374
　　網址：http://www.boyyoung.com.tw　E-mail:boyoung2008@yahoo.com.tw
　　劃撥帳號：18871684　戶名：博揚文化事業有限公司
印　　刷／承亞興企業有限公司
總 經 銷／貿騰發賣股份有限公司
　　地址：235 新北市中和區中正路 880 號 14 樓
　　網址：www.namode.com
　　電話：(02) 8227-5988　　傳真：(02) 8227-5989
ISBN 978-986-5757-17-5
定價 550 元
2014 年 7 月 初版一刷

國家圖書館出版品預行編目資料

研究新視界：「媽祖與華人民間信仰」國際研討會論文集 / 王見川，李世偉，洪瑩發主編．-- 初版．-- 臺北市：博揚文化，2014.07
面；　公分．--（中國民間信仰系列；3）
部分內容為英文
ISBN 978-986-5757-17-5（平裝）

1. 媽祖 2. 民間信仰 3. 文集

272.7107　　103012542

本書是新港奉天宮與東華大學於2010年5月22-23日舉辦的「研究新視界：媽祖與華人民間信仰」國際研討會論文的修訂精粹集。全書議題有二：第一部份涉及媽祖信仰國際化：如登錄爲世界非物質文化遺產，媽祖形象的建立、傳播與戲劇、社區的關係。第二部份討論華人民間信仰的概念，及其與道教、民間宗教、習俗的關係。

●指導單位：內政部、外交部、文建會、陸委會 交通部觀光局、嘉義縣政府
●主辦單位： 財團法人嘉義縣新港奉天宮
●承辦單位：國立東華大學鄉土文化學系 台灣淡南民俗文化研究會
台灣新港奉天宮世界媽祖文化研究暨文獻中心
●協辦單位：新港文教基金會、國立新港藝術高中 大甲媽祖教師研習團、新港奉天宮文物義工團
●贊助單位： 台灣電力公司 台灣中油股份有限公司

BoyYoung 博揚文化
ISBN 978-986-5757-17-5
00550
9 789865 757175