

## 1 Introduction: ordinary life in an extraordinary place

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Huang Pingsheng, a twenty-one year old farmer in 1958, remembers that he was watering vegetables in the family fields when he heard the first explosions – the boom of distant guns and then the louder sound of shell-bursts in the nearby hills. It was late summer, and the peanut harvest was ready to be brought in. There were other men working in the fields nearby, but most of the women were back in the village, preparing special foods for the Ghost Festival that would begin in a few days. In the late afternoon sun, Huang could see soldiers wending their way toward his home village of Xiyuan to bathe at the village well. At first Huang assumed the shelling was from an army training exercise, and he bent down to resume his work. But the noise did not die out as he expected. The explosions spread down the slope of the hills and onto the plains, toward Huang. This was no training exercise, but the start of a great battle.

In the West, this battle became known as the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958. Huang and his fellow villagers call it the August 23rd or 8–23 Artillery War. Their home, the small island in the Taiwan Strait that was the epicenter of this conflict, is known in the local dialect as Quemoy. In this book, I refer to it instead using the island's name in standard Chinese, or Mandarin: Jinmen. For reasons that will become clear toward the end of this book, some forty years after these events Huang and dozens of other residents of Jinmen participated in a series of oral history interviews, which is why his account is recorded. Perhaps his calm narration of events has something to do with his subsequent career as a policeman, but like many victims of war, Huang Pingsheng recounts his experiences in a matter-of-fact way, with little embellishment. He does not mention the shaking of the earth, the shells whistling through the air, the sky darkening with smoke.

Collecting his wits as the shelling grew more intense, Huang threw himself into a trench that ran alongside his fields. As he worked his way carefully homewards during lulls in the shelling Huang stumbled upon a concrete bunker full of troops. Though in other parts of Jinmen soldiers barred civilians from their bunkers, those inside this one allowed him to

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take refuge. At dusk the bombing trailed off, and Huang left the safety of the bunker and continued back to his village. His house was deserted, so he became convinced that the rest of his family must be dead. But over the next few hours each of them straggled home safely from their own hiding places. In most homes, the first thing that needed to be done was to light incense to thank the gods and ancestors for their protection. This was a task that usually fell to elderly women – Huang does not say if it was his grandmother who did this in their house. As they did every night, mothers set water on the boil to cook sweet potato porridge for the evening meal, but many people were too tense to eat. Neighbors gathered on their doorsteps to exchange the day's gossip. Tonight of course the news was remarkable – who had been injured in the shelling; whose house hit; whose pigs killed. Xiyuan village escaped mostly unscathed from the bombardment on August 23, but the bombing would resume at first light the next morning. In the coming weeks some twenty of Huang's neighbors would be killed; nine of them buried alive when a shelter collapsed on them. The people of Xiyuan became used to life underground, in dank and dark shelters they hurriedly dug, packed with crying children, old folks chanting prayers to the gods, and wild rumors that the island would soon be overrun by hordes of Mao's soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

In most conventional histories the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis is told primarily as a story of diplomacy and high politics, of statesmen and their efforts to understand the tension in the context of global geopolitics.<sup>2</sup> What was the meaning of this attack by the People's Republic of China (PRC) on territory held by its enemy the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan? Why had China chosen this moment, and this tiny island, to heat up the Cold War? What would be the consequences? Chiang Kai-shek, the ROC president, turned to the US for support. President Eisenhower decided that Chiang's request fell under the Treaty of Mutual Defense between their two countries, and sent the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. The Soviet foreign minister flew to Beijing to counsel Mao Zedong to stand down. Around the world political leaders and ordinary people wondered if this conflict might be the spark that would lead to a general war. But on October 6, after forty-four days of intense shelling, the guns of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fell silent. All the parties involved claimed victory. One of the more dangerous episodes of the Cold War had come to an end, and once again Jinmen faded into obscurity.

In subsequent decades the diplomatic narratives of the crisis have given rise to a substantial analytic literature. Because the crisis of 1958 and a similar episode four years earlier had seemed to raise the possibility of war among the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, the story of Jinmen has come to figure with some prominence in the history

of US foreign policy, Chinese foreign policy, Sino-Soviet and Sino-American relations, and in the theoretical literature on deterrence and brinkmanship.<sup>3</sup>

Though it will occasionally quote from this literature, this book does not contribute to these discussions. Rather, it looks at Jinmen from a very different perspective, asking how its inhabitants experienced these dramatic events and how they remember them today. It considers Jinmen as a human society embedded in a larger world. This book thus makes use of a historiographical tactic that has become common in recent decades. It deals with a topic, the Taiwan Strait conflict, that has previously been studied as a matter of high politics and international diplomacy, and examines it instead from the perspective of social history. But in common with the earlier literature, it argues that the study of Jinmen is of broader relevance, that it can tell us something about important historical questions. The transformation of Jinmen society was inseparable from the dominant international system of the time, the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> This book seeks to situate Jinmen within a broader framework of Cold War society and culture. It is an account of life lived in Cold War-time, of geopolitical confrontation at the levels of human experience and memory.

In this book I use Jinmen as a case study to explore four inter-related phenomena: militarization, geopoliticization, modernization, and memory. In its most common usage the term militarization refers to the process by which states enhance their capacity to make or defend against war or both.<sup>5</sup> For our purposes, it is more useful to adopt a broader understanding of the term, one that considers the impact of the military on society and the infiltration of military interests, values, and discourses into social life. Cynthia Enloe describes militarization in this sense as “the step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.” Militarization in the broader sense is sometimes mis-represented as a means to accomplish militarization in the narrower sense, that is, as a way to create military power. But it is also a way to create and exercise political power more generally. On this broader definition, Enloe argues, virtually anything can become militarized.<sup>6</sup> Among the things that became militarized on Jinmen were rat tails, women’s bodies, and basketballs. A new militarized economy arose to serve the needs of the garrison troops. A cult to the spirit of a drowned woman was militarized when it was patronized by army officers as a symbol of anti-Communism. The history of Jinmen shows us in microcosm some of the ways in which militarization can change a society.

Militarization on Jinmen was closely interconnected to geopoliticization. By geopoliticization I mean the ways in which life on Jinmen became

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connected to global politics. This process took several forms. Most obviously, Jinmen was affected by outside events tied to international politics, by decisions made in Beijing, Washington, Moscow, and elsewhere. The periodic bombings of the island were driven by issues that had little direct connection to Jinmen. Two years after the attack of 1958 PLA forces launched another barrage of some 170,000 shells on Jinmen, killing seven civilians, injuring forty, and destroying 200 homes. It was their way of “welcoming” US President Eisenhower on his visit to Taiwan. Another example of geopoliticization in this sense was the presence on Jinmen of US or US-sponsored entities, whose activities involved local people in the pursuit of American geopolitical interests. These included a Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG) that advised the regular army; a CIA-proxy, Western Enterprises, that supported a guerrilla force in the early 1950s; and a US-funded development agency, the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR).<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the geopolitical influence could work in the other direction. In the 1960 US presidential debates Richard Nixon charged that John F. Kennedy’s questioning of the US commitment to the defense of Jinmen showed that he could not be trusted to stand up to Communism. To counter Nixon’s charges, Kennedy’s team put out a provocative statement of his willingness to intervene to roll-back revolution in Cuba. One can thus draw a connection between Jinmen and the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961.<sup>8</sup>

Geopoliticization also means the formal and explicit construction of Jinmen as a symbol in a larger international struggle. From the 1950s onwards, the island was invested, frequently and in a wide range of media, with great significance in regional and world affairs. It was a beacon of freedom for the enslaved masses of Asia, or the springboard for the coming war to free them. Jinmen was used as a metaphor for the determination of the Republic of China to resist the People’s Republic; the commitment of the US-led Cold War alliance to resist Communism, and even the course of human progress. For flowery rhetoric none outdid a former Cuban ambassador to the ROC, who wrote in 1959, “The preservation of the principles which have shaped humanity is being decided at Jinmen. In Jinmen, the fight is for the rights of man, for freedom of the press, for the right to think for one’s self and to believe in God.”<sup>9</sup> A comprehensive account of the construction of Jinmen as a geopolitical symbol would have to take into account the various media used to communicate that symbolism and its reception in various times and places.<sup>10</sup> But I do not consider those issues in much detail here. For the construction of Jinmen as a geopolitical symbol was not, or not only, a matter of representation, like the writing of a text, but of social processes. My chief interest here is in understanding these processes and their consequences for the people

of the island. Life on Jinmen was geopoliticized because what happened on Jinmen was thought to have geopolitical significance.

This in turn affected local life. Most importantly for this book, life on Jinmen was geopoliticized in the sense that geopolitics profoundly influenced many aspects of social relations, and became an important frame through which the people of Jinmen understood their own experiences. For the people of Jinmen, geopoliticization did not eliminate the quotidian routines that structured their lives – farming, marketing, paying taxes, raising children – but it affected them, becoming part of everyday life. The Cold War is remembered today less as an ideological confrontation than in terms of the minutiae of struggles of daily life – how people negotiated curfews, blackouts, and population registration rules; how illiterate farmers learned new agricultural techniques to produce goods that could be sold to soldiers; how families responded to the commodification of sexuality and danger of rape that seem universal wherever male soldiers are concentrated. Larger conflicts were major dynamos of social change, creating new patterns of interaction, new rhythms of life, and new attitudes to diverse issues.

The Cold War, and the Chinese civil war, were at one level struggles over mass utopias, that is, between competing visions of how society should be organized. But as Greg Grandin has written of the conflict in Latin America, “what gave that struggle its transcendental force was the politicization and internationalization of everyday life and familiar encounters.”<sup>11</sup> One aim of this book is to show how international conflict became immanent in fields such as domestic life, religious practice, and economic exchange. It is an attempt to write a geopolitically informed social history, to show the importance of social history for understanding events that are otherwise allowed to generate their own meanings at a level of abstraction far above how they were experienced.

This study thus belongs to a growing body of work on how the local is embedded in the global. The interaction of global and local also shaped Jinmen’s encounter with another great social force, the dramatic transformations that are usually labeled modernization. For the past century, the issue of how to modernize China, and what a modern China would look like, has been a central concern of Chinese political elites. Like the question of building the nation, with which it was closely connected, the question of modernization was not simply a matter of replicating a model from the West, but rather a diffuse pursuit of a complex target. In this work, I use the term modernization to describe not a specific set of conditions and values derived from Western experience but a complex of desired changes. This is not to say that modernity is an empty sign to which any meaning whatsoever can be attached; historical and contemporary

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factors impose limits on how modernity can be conceptualized. In China as in other non-Western societies the issue of how to reconcile modernity with Chinese tradition was a challenge that exercised many would-be modernizing reformers. The meaning of modernization is always negotiated and even contested, shaped both by global discourses and their local inflections.<sup>12</sup> Many of the changes desired by elites regardless of their political orientation were what might be called disciplinary schemes: education, to create modern citizens; hygiene, to create a population healthy in body as well as in mind; census-taking and registration, to allow the state to monitor that population. These took on particular and pressing importance under conditions of perceived military threat. The extraordinary situation on Jinmen made possible relatively unconstrained implementation of modernizing agendas, enabling and legitimizing distinctive forms of repression and discipline. The link between militarization and modernity, itself a form of mass utopia, produced distinctive modes of governmentality. Militarization and geopoliticization also influenced how modernization was defined, what goals were central and what peripheral. These processes came together in a phenomenon we can label militarized utopian modernism. This refers to the way appeals to external political circumstances legitimized authoritarian efforts to implement a distinctive project of social transformation shaped by a broader modernizing agenda. Militarized utopian modernism can be understood as a subset of James Scott's "authoritarian high modernism." Its distinguishing characteristic is the issue of perceived security threat and the resulting militarization of society.<sup>13</sup>

Memory is the fourth major theme of the book. The symbolic construction of Jinmen by the ROC state was aimed in multiple directions simultaneously, outwardly to ROC allies, especially the US, and also to the people of the ROC on Taiwan, as part of the project of mobilizing support and legitimizing authoritarian rule.<sup>14</sup> It was also directed inwards, toward the residents of Jinmen, as part of the project of creating them as an ideologized and mobilized anti-Communist polity. It is difficult to know now what people on Jinmen thought of the symbolic discourse about them in the 1950s and 1960s, whether they incorporated the image of themselves as heroic defenders of freedom into their own identities. But using oral history and materials from the democratization movement of the 1980s and 1990s, we can see how these previous policies shape memory and politics in the present day. Collective memory of the Cold War period is central to Jinmen residents' discussions of their own identity. In common with many other places around the world, collective memory has also become an important political resource for the people of Jinmen, shaping their relations with the state even after the end of the

Cold War. Though their own memories of the period focus mainly on everyday life, the people of Jinmen can and do remember their glorious contribution to the larger ideological and political confrontation, when it is in their interest to do so.

### **Jinmen in the world**

One of the challenges of writing local history is to avoid the pitfall of singularity. There is much about Jinmen that is unique, but its history is also of broader significance. Comparing Jinmen to other late twentieth-century societies can shed light on several questions. First, there is the larger society of which Jinmen was a part, the Republic of China on Taiwan. Odd Arne Westad points out that post-Cold War triumphalism has obscured the fact that Taiwan and South Korea are the only sites of US Cold War intervention that achieved the desired outcome of stable growth and stable democracy.<sup>15</sup> The history of Jinmen shows some of the indirect consequences of that achievement, and thus can contribute to our understanding of the effects of the ROC's entanglement in the Cold War. The militarization of Jinmen meant that policies there were often an exaggerated version of policies implemented on Taiwan, and therefore it can tell us something about ROC politics. As we shall see, many Jinmen people speak about a division of labor between Jinmen and Taiwan, wherein Jinmen was responsible for military defense, enabling Taiwan to concentrate on and later enjoy the fruits of economic development. The study of Jinmen qualifies the well-known story of the rapid economic growth and eventual political pluralization of the Republic of China on Taiwan since 1949.

Second, Jinmen offers a useful case study with which to reflect on the similarities and differences between post-1949 China under Mao Zedong and Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>16</sup> What is most striking here is the frequency with which regimes shared and indeed borrowed disciplinary and repressive techniques from their own enemy, their own alter ego. Authorities in Jinmen often defined problems and formulated solutions in ways remarkably similar to how problems and solutions were constructed in the PRC. Some of the parallels are explicable in terms of their common origins. Both the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were Leninist parties that emerged out of the political turmoil of early twentieth-century China. Other similarities make more sense in terms of the PRC and ROC's sixty-year (and counting) experience of cross-strait antagonism. Each of the two societies has sought to define itself in opposition to the other. In this process of mirror-imaging, to borrow John Borneman's description of East and West Berlin, the



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two states “fabricated themselves as moieties in a dual organization.” On the other hand there was much mutual borrowing, some of it deliberate to ensure that the other side did not gain an advantage.<sup>17</sup> While policies on Jinmen were often crafted so as to draw attention to Jinmen’s difference from the mainland, the process could also work the other way. We shall see over and over again in Jinmen’s history examples of policies clearly intended to demonstrate Jinmen’s distinctiveness from the mainland, but often in practice demonstrating the exact opposite. The parallelism thus speaks to our understanding of a modern Chinese political culture transcending explicit ideologies or the hubris of individual rulers.<sup>18</sup>

Jinmen also invites comparison with other highly militarized societies around the world. The dislocation and trauma caused by the abrupt fixing of highly politicized borders is similar whether the borders are between Jinmen and the mainland or between the two Berlins. The establishment and expansion of the garrison created economic disruptions, and opportunities, that resemble those in military base communities in many other places, from Subic Bay in the Philippines to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The processes of mirror-imaging can also be detected around the world, but are particularly evident in the other divided states of the Cold War – Korea, Vietnam, and Germany.

The Cold War on Jinmen was experienced not as a discrete phenomenon but as one tied in manifold ways to the legacies of the Chinese civil war. This too was not unique to Jinmen. Everywhere the Cold War was experienced locally, tied to local and national conflicts and concerns. This was as true in the Third World where the Cold War was often wrapped up in anti-colonial struggles as it was in the First and Second, where the Cold War was one expression of broader debates about the meaning of modernity. In many places the Cold War, often as a cipher for existing conflicts, also lent a greater urgency to the pursuit of modernity and justified the militarization of this quest. The perception that modernization was essential to national security in the face of pressing danger, and the consequences of this perception for the articulation of modernization, was widespread in Asia and beyond.

In recent years two broad trends have emerged in the study of the global Cold War. One has been a reevaluation of the period in light of the partial opening of archives from the former Soviet bloc. But as Patrick Major and Rana Mitter point out, key elements of this “new Cold War history” are not really so new. The chief subject matter continues to be diplomatic and political history. Second, there has been a flowering of interest, a “cultural turn in Cold War history,” in how culture and society shaped and were shaped by the Cold War. Much of this literature deals



with the US and to a lesser degree the Soviet Union. It shows that even in the absence of war, geopolitical tension had many disruptive consequences.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Cold War legacies continue to be important in many parts of the world. In some places, the challenge is to deal with the material consequences of the Cold War – environmental degradation, economic disruption, and social dislocation. In others, the Cold War also plays an important role in contemporary politics and memory. In Okinawa, for example, compensation for past suffering is an important element in local politics. In Vietnam, villagers and the state negotiate to produce a local politics of commemoration. The history of Jinmen is thus also part of the comparative social and cultural history of the Cold War period. Jinmen offers a local example of a much broader phenomenon, the geopoliticization of everyday life under the great ideological conflict of the latter twentieth century.

Perhaps Jinmen's experience may be relevant even beyond the temporal boundaries of the Cold War. The militarization of Jinmen from 1949 to 1992, when martial law was repealed, occurred under a condition of national emergency and martial law. The Italian political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, points out that national emergency, for which his translators use the term "state of exception," is commonly misunderstood as a *de facto* response to a crisis. The central contradiction of the state of emergency or exception is that the necessity of this response is assumed to be an objective determination, but of course it is not. It is the result of a political decision. Since the state of exception does not simply mean the suspension of laws but the suspension of the legal and political order, the state of exception actually defines the limits of law. It is a juridical measure that cannot be explained juridically. It is not simply a form of dictatorship, but something different, wherein necessity becomes the ultimate source of law. Agamben also argues that though its very name suggests temporariness, the state of exception is in fact an emergent paradigm for political sovereignty in general. While the idea of a state of emergency has a long history in Western political thought, the twentieth century has seen it increasingly deployed as a mode of government. Agamben's main interest is in the state of exception as a problem of legal philosophy and ethics. But the issue of exception can also frame issues in social history. The crucial step is to move from seeing emergency as an inevitable response to objective conditions to treating emergency as a problem to be explained. For much of the period in question, until 1987, the entire Republic of China (ROC) was under a state of emergency, whose legal basis was the Martial Law and the Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion. Jinmen's distinctive position meant that even Martial Law and the Temporary Provisions

were considered inadequate to the situation. Distinctive systems had to be created to administer Jinmen and the other offshore islands. Jinmen thus became the state of exception within a state of exception. One way of looking at Jinmen is as an exemplary site for “testing and honing the functional mechanisms and apparatuses of the state of exception as a paradigm of government.”<sup>20</sup> Its past is the history of a forty-year laboratory for fine-tuning the state of exception; its present a demonstration of the lingering consequences of that state.

### Sources and outline of the book

This book is based primarily on oral history and archival documents. It uses about seventy oral history interviews that I conducted during repeated stays on the island between 2002 and 2007, and about 170 previously published interviews conducted by other researchers.<sup>21</sup> Working with oral history that has been collected by other scholars means confronting one of the fundamental axioms of oral history – that the interviewer’s questioning techniques and methods of organizing material shape the results. For example, where one volume of interviews yields largely positive recollections of the period, another contains much more detail about government offenses and popular dissatisfaction. It is unlikely that one interviewer simply chanced upon interviewees who had suffered more than others; rather the distinctive responses reflect the interviewer’s own interpretation of this period, expressed through the questions asked and the way the material is presented. Nevertheless, I have considerable confidence in the overall reliability of the oral history testimony gathered by other scholars. What I was told in my own interviews was consistent with what is written in the published material.<sup>22</sup> This of course is not to say that the facts are indisputable, but simply that there is general consistency across the two types of oral history evidence, my own and the published material. The question of whether this testimony accords with other historical documents is a rather different one. Indeed the different ways that local people interpret the past is itself an important theme of the book. Together, the oral histories help reveal the private experiences embedded in larger contexts and changes, and show how those involved remember these changes.<sup>23</sup>

The second main research source is village-level archives. These are files from six village offices that have been preserved since the lifting of martial law in 1992.<sup>24</sup> The archives cover the period from 1964 to 1992, with the bulk from the 1970s. Mostly the routine paperwork of village governance, they include such things as budgets for the construction of bomb shelters; forms used to apply for permission to buy a bicycle, travel