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## Cold War Island

During the height of the Cold War in the 1950s the small island of Quemoy or Jinmen in the Taiwan Strait was the front line in the military standoff between Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China and Mao Zedong's People's Republic. Local society and culture were dramatically transformed. Michael Szonyi uses oral history, official documents, and dissident writings to convey the history of the island during this period. In so doing, he sheds light on the social and cultural impact of the Cold War on those who lived through it, as well as on the relationship between China, Taiwan, and the United States at this critical moment. By analyzing the effects of Quemoy's distinctive geopolitical situation on the economy, gender and the family, and citizenship and religion, the book provides a new perspective on the social history of the Cold War, showing how geopolitics can affect individual lives and communities.

MICHAEL SZONYI is John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. His previous book is *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (2002).

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# Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line

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*Harvard University*



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To Kathleen and Robert

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## Preface

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For half a century, Jinmen, or Quemoy, has frequently been represented through metaphor. It has been called the West Berlin of Asia and the Dien Bien Phu of China. It was the outpost from which the forces of freedom would launch their attack on communism, or the first domino whose fall would signal the failure of those forces. A second set of metaphors conveys the opposite impression of Jinmen's significance, suggesting that the conflicts over it have been mere theater. Dwight Eisenhower famously called tension over the island a "Gilbert and Sullivan war."<sup>1</sup> More recently, I heard a former US ambassador to Beijing liken the Taiwan Strait to "a Chinese opera – there are lots of drums and gongs but no one really gets hurt." I was initially inspired to write this book in part to explain why neither set of metaphors does a very good job of conveying the experiences of Jinmen residents. My greatest debt is to the many people of Jinmen, most of whom are not named here, for their willingness to welcome me into their homes and villages and share their oral history with me. I hope that those of them who read this book find my account of their lives fair and faithful, even if they do not agree with all of my analysis.

I am primarily a historian of Ming and Qing China, so readers may wonder at my choice of topic. In fact this book reprises, in a different time and a vastly different context, the themes of my earlier research on the relation of the state to everyday life. Specifically, my interest is in how people in Chinese societies have responded in quite unexpected ways to the larger forces that surround them but do not determine their lives. Failure, as James Scott has shown, has been the almost universal fate of state policies aimed at the transformation of society. Though Scott's interests are modern, his insight holds true in some ways even for the Ming dynasty. But even as policies fail to accomplish their intended outcomes, they may still generate unintended, unexpected, and yet hugely significant consequences. These local consequences can be as important to historical understanding as the central state policies that gave rise to them. This book also makes use of similar methodological approaches to my previous work, namely the combination of traditional textual studies

with local fieldwork and oral history, and the use of local history as a means of asking larger questions. I learned these approaches as a student of Ming and Qing history while working with many other scholars, in particular those associated with the South China Research Center. Though this group borrows from anthropology its questions remain resolutely historical. One of the factors that made Jinmen interesting to me was curiosity about whether these methods might translate into other contexts. It is for readers to judge, but my own conclusion is that local history can be a powerful tool to explore the interaction of politics and everyday life in contemporary as well as earlier times.

These parallels do not explain how I first became interested in this specific context. I first visited Jinmen to attend an academic conference that ended on September 11, 2001. The subsequent turmoil forced me to extend my stay for several days. Visiting the island's villages, talking to local residents and learning of the work of local scholars is what sparked my interest in Jinmen's history. (To some degree the changed world that has emerged since then has also shaped my thinking on the key issues.) I thank Prof. C. K. Wang for the invitation that first brought me to Jinmen.

Robert Accinelli, Tim Brook, Beth Fischer, James Flath, Henrietta Harrison, Ian Johnson, Alan MacEachern, Francine McKenzie, David Ownby, and Robert Ross each read the entire manuscript, some of them more than once. Cynthia Enloe, Gregory Scott, Terry Sicular, and Wonwoon Yi commented on individual chapters. Many colleagues suggested sources, answered questions, or provided other help. They include Eileen Cheng-Yin Chow, Robert Johnson, Denis Kozlov, Li Cho-ying, Lin Hongyi, Lo Shih-chieh, Ed Miller, Rebecca Nedostup, Darryl Sterk, Nhung Tran, Lynne Viola, and David Wang (I apologize if I have left anyone out). Librarian James Cheng, Xiao-he Ma, and other staff at the Harvard-Yenching library were extremely helpful. In a matter of months, they made Harvard-Yenching what must be the greatest repository of Jinmen materials outside of the Republic of China. In Taiwan and on Jinmen, I received excellent research assistance from Chen Jiajia (Gia) and Zhang Jiying (Jackie). Bian Jinjing of the Jinmen county government facilitated my access to the Lieyu township archives; Huang Zijuan of the Jinmen National Park Headquarters provided much help. Huang Meiling was a very helpful host during my stays on the island. My other great debt is owed to two colleagues from Jinmen, Chi Chang-hui and Jiang Bowei. Both welcomed me into the small space of Jinmen studies where others might have guarded their territory. Jiang Bowei, with whom I have worked most closely, has truly been a model of scholarly generosity, a great colleague, and a great friend. I am also grateful to his research team at National Kinmen Institute of Technology, especially Weng Fenglan, for

their help and gracious response to my many requests. I must also thank the other oral historians of Jinmen, especially Dong Qunlian, for their many excellent publications. Back at Harvard, students in my freshman seminar on the Cold War in Asia offered thoughtful critiques. Jeff Blossom prepared the maps. John Wong gave tireless and crucial help in the final stages of revising the manuscript. At Cambridge University Press, Marigold Acland, Sarah Green, and Rosina Di Marzo ably shepherded the book through the production process, and Jennifer Miles Davis was a great help in improving the text. Eileen Doherty prepared the Index and Nancy Hearst proofread the book. I am also grateful to two anonymous readers for the Press who helped me to see how Jinmen was part of a larger story.

Portions of the book have been presented at the University of British Columbia, the Central Party School in Beijing, Harvard University, National University of Singapore, and Xiamen University, and I thank the participants in each of these seminars. I am grateful to the following agencies for their support of my research: the Taiwan Studies Faculty Research Award Program for Canadians, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Taiwan, Republic of China; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Clark fund at Harvard. Portions of chapters 11 and 12 have previously appeared as “The Virgin and the Chinese State: The Cult of Wang Yulan and the Politics of Local Identity on Jinmen (Quemoy),” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19:2 (2005), and are reprinted by kind permission of the editors. Parts of chapter 10 are taken from a paper co-written with Chi Chang-hui for the 2007 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting.

That it is convention to close such remarks with thanks to one’s family does not make the feelings less heartfelt. Kathleen and Robert, to whom this book is dedicated, have been patient with their father’s frequent absences and overall distraction. When at the age of three Kathleen began staying up past midnight with her crayons “working,” it was a good reminder that there are other things more important than books. I was glad to finally take them to Jinmen to see the place that has for so long been part of their lives; when we got there I found they opened many new doors for me. As for Francine McKenzie, I wish that I could find the words to express my gratitude for her support in so many ways.

## CONVENTIONS

This book uses the *pinyin* system to romanize Chinese names and terms, with a few exceptions. In modern standard Chinese (Mandarin), the geographic subject of this book is romanized in *pinyin* as Jinmen. But most

nonspecialists in the Western world know the island as Quemoy, a romanization of the island's name in the local dialect of Minnan. I hope readers will forgive my sleight-of-hand in using Quemoy in the title of the book, but Jinmen in the text. Also for reasons of familiarity, Sun Yat-sen is used for Sun Zhongshan; Chiang Kai-shek for Jiang Jieshi; Chiang Ching-kuo for Jiang Jingguo, and Kuomintang (KMT) for Guomindang. (Regrettably, this use of *pinyin* means that despite the success of Republic of China soldiers at defending the territory of Jinmen, this book actually contributes to the extension of mainland hegemony, at least linguistically, over the island.) The archipelago lying between Jinmen and Taiwan, also known as the Pescadores, is referred to here by its Chinese name Penghu. People's Republic of China (PRC) and China are used interchangeably to describe the political regime that has held power on the Chinese mainland since 1949; Republic of China (ROC) and Taiwan refer to the regime that has held power on Taiwan since that date. During martial law on Taiwan, the regime on the mainland was seen as illegitimate, and therefore it was never described as the People's Republic but rather by a variety of epithets such as "Communist bandits" or "bandits of Mao [Zedong] and Zhu [De]." Over time, these epithets became simply conventional ways of referring to the mainland regime. Therefore, in translating material, I have mostly substituted more neutral terms for the original ones, except where the source clearly uses the term with a strong negative sense. The various bombing campaigns against Jinmen are usually referred to in the Chinese sources using the month and day on which the bombing began (hence the 1958 campaign that began August 23 is known as the 8–23 Artillery War). I use the more familiar 1954–5 and 1958 Strait Crises.

For most of the period under discussion, the currency used on Jinmen was the Jinmen NTD (New Taiwan Dollar), equivalent in value to the standard NTD. Because many of the amounts cited in the text were provided in oral testimony, it would be misleading to convert them to constant dollars. To put these amounts in perspective, gross national product (GNP) per capita in Taiwan was NTD250 (US\$50) in 1950; NTD5,200 (\$130) in 1960; NTD11,680 (\$292) in 1970; NTD57,000 (\$1,400) in 1978, and NTD320,000 (\$11,600) in 1996.<sup>2</sup>

# Abbreviations

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CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCRM	Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement
CO	commanding officer
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party ( <i>Minjindang</i> )
JCRR	Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction
JDHQ	Jinmen Defense Headquarters ( <i>Jinmen fangwei silingbu</i> )
KMT	Nationalist Party ( <i>Kuomintang</i> )
MAAG	Military Advisory and Assistance Group (US)
NTD	New Taiwan Dollar
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
USO	United Service Organizations (US)
WZA	War Zone Administration ( <i>Zhandi zhengwu</i> )
WZAC	War Zone Administration Committee