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Topical Issue: The Making and Operation of Everyday Authoritarianism in Taiwan  
during the Cold War

Guest Editor: Isabelle Cheng

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# Women's Labour, Kinship, and Economic Changes in Jinmen in the Era of Authoritarian Rule

Hsiao-Chiao CHIU

**Abstract:** This article uses the life stories of three women in Jinmen to demonstrate women's economic agency in bettering the livelihood of their families in circumstances largely shaped by Cold War geopolitics and the authoritarian state's military strategies. It argues that women's devotion of their labour and earnings to their families was part of the reproductive processes of the kinship system, but also important to their building of social reputation and emotional ties with their loved ones. Moreover, the state's campaign to protect traditional Chinese culture, framed within bipolar politics, supported the ideological reproduction of women's primary roles being in the domestic sphere. While the lives of Jinmen civilians were significantly distorted in the Cold War era, their experiences of economic improvement and a certain stability in their ways of life – revolving around kinship – account for the ambivalence they now feel towards the period of authoritarian rule.

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**Keywords:** Taiwan, militarised authoritarianism, kinship, female labour, learning and economic agency

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## Introduction

This article uses the life stories of three women in Jinmen to demonstrate the intersection of a person's economic life, kinship, and geopolitical circumstances in the second half of the twentieth century, and how this intersection has moulded lay views about authoritarian rule. Jinmen is a group of islands under the governance of Taiwan and geographically very close to the Chinese mainland. The year 1949 marked not only the end of the Chinese civil war on the mainland, and the retreat of the Kuomintang (KMT, Guomindang, GMD, or the Nationalist Party) and its government to Taiwan, but also the start of a specific page in Jinmen's history, marked heavily by the military's involvement. The KMT recognised Jinmen's salience to its control of Taiwan after successfully defending it against the invasion launched by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in late 1949.

The outbreak of the Korean War in the following year drove the United States to incorporate Taiwan into its Cold War strategy of containment. In the name of the continuing fight against Chinese Communism, the KMT enacted martial law throughout its territory governed under one-party rule. However, Jinmen's military significance demanded special treatment, resulting in the establishment of the War Zone Administration (WZA) in 1956. This system gave authority in the governing of local affairs to the War Zone Administration Committee (WZAC), composed of high-ranking officers from the Jinmen Defence Headquarters (JDH), chaired by the JDH commander. From the perspective of Jinmen civilians, the WZAC and the JDH were basically the same entity of highest local authority, and it was largely through these that they formed an understanding of the state. Local people now use the term *junguan shiqi* (軍管時期, the period of military rule, which ended in 1992) to refer to the days under military governance, the CCP's two intensive artillery attacks in 1954–1955 and 1958, and the subsequent 20 years of every-other-day shelling. Therefore, the ways in which the Jinmen islanders experienced the KMT's authoritarianism were arguably distinct from what one may find in mainland Taiwan.

This article focuses on the economic aspects of Jinmen civilians' experiences in the period of military rule, scrutinising the interactions between economy, kinship, gender, and political circumstances across three women's life stories. Historian Michael Szonyi's (2008) monograph on Jinmen, in which he depicts compellingly how Cold War

geopolitics and military strategies reshaped the local economy and women's roles, is a pioneering work among the very few published studies engaging with Jinmen's Cold War history. His work also speaks to a shift of focus in the Cold War historiography from the superpowers of the US and the Soviet Union to the periphery, and from the study of high politics and diplomacy to the study of the social and cultural dimensions of this era (Kwon 2010; Masuda 2015; Zheng, Liu, and Szonyi 2010). Nevertheless, Szonyi's discussion leaves aside the significance of kinship in local life and tends to depict Jinmen civilians' action and agency as simply responsive to wider political forces. Instead, by anthropological methods of investigating the everyday minutiae of the people studied, this article highlights the importance of kinship in informing and configuring Jinmen civilians' action and agency. Via three women's life stories, I also demonstrate how Jinmen civilians were the subjects of history – transforming the effects of war and militarisation into composing elements of their personal and family histories. In line with Heonik Kwon's (2010) suggestion that Anthropology's expertise in exploring the lives of ordinary people provides insightful material to enrich Cold War scholarship, this article shows how kinship played a salient role in dissolving the effects of bipolar politics at the level of day-to-day living in Jinmen.

The social world of Jinmen is composed of numerous and long-established patrilineal villages (where a patrilineal group dominates a village's population and monopolises its land). Most of these patrilineal groups trace their roots in Jinmen back several centuries, to the settlement of their ancestors from southern Fujian, China. Throughout the mid-Ming and Qing dynasties (from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), these kin groups evolved into functional corporations with collectively owned estates such as ancestral halls and farmland. Anthropologists have noted that the large Chinese lineages used to rely on common property as the foundation for the group to expand and for its members to collaborate despite inequality among lineage brothers (Freedman 1958; Potter 1968; Watson 1985; Cohen 2005). But, as shown in evidence from the New Territories of Hong Kong, a new administrative system introduced under British colonial rule as well as the development of an industrial economy from the 1960s onwards motivated people to leave the lineage property and farming in order to seek out new means of making a living (Potter 1968; Watson 1985).

Albeit in different ways, the lineage property and people's livelihoods in Jinmen also encountered changes during the period of military rule (see next section). The entanglement between kinship and economy intrinsic to the patrilineal corporation was actually ingrained in the Chinese system that privileged men's rights to property whereas "women's labour, fertility and person constituted a form of property, itself exchangeable in a number of transactions and chiefly in marriage" (Croll 1984: 44). The patrilineal structure placed women in an inferior and passive economic position but, as the three women's stories told in this article will show, female labour became extremely important to the household economy during the period of military rule. Though Szonyi discusses extensively how the emergency in Jinmen was gendered, through examining four potential positions for women – entrepreneur, prostitute, wife-mother, and soldier (Szonyi 2008: 136–41, 149–80) – little attention is given to how the kinship system shaped women's own decisions and behaviour. My analysis of three women's life histories is an attempt, then, to highlight gender as key to understanding the interactions between the fields of kinship, economy, and politics.

The theoretical endeavour of using female life stories to bring together gender, kinship, and political-economic conditions at the local, national, and international levels has been seen previously in Anru Lee's (2004a, 2004b, and 2009) work. Lee's research focuses on female workers in textile factories in the mid-1990s, studied in the wake of Taiwan's political democratisation and economic restructuring (namely, capital outflow and deindustrialisation) of the late 1980s. She demonstrates brilliantly the multiple forces of kinship morality, family circumstances, and broader economic environments that led her female informants to become factory workers, and how these women – after several years of work – were striving to build their own lives in the face of transformations in the domestic wage-labour market following economic restructuring. Despite the very different contexts of our studies, I share Lee's view of gender as "an interlocutor of the dynamics between cultural and economy, of structure and agency, and of the processes of global, national and local" (Lee 2004a: 10). My approach uses an analytical model drawn from Alfred Gell (1988) and Charles Stafford (2004), which attends to the human capacity for learning and economic agency. As I will explain later, this model is helpful for exploring the connections between a person's

economic trajectory, kinship, gender, and shifting circumstances. In this case, it leads us to consider the relationship between the kinship system and the KMT in their common attempts to reproduce certain gendered values and roles.

The three women's stories presented in this article are based on my anthropological fieldwork in 2013 and 2014. Throughout my 15 months of research, I stayed in a patrilineal village and joined in the village voluntary group; this enabled me to build trusting relationships with local people and closely observe their family and social lives. What struck me most was the villagers' efforts to organise their life around kinship, especially the grand rituals of ancestral sacrifice and funerals that mobilised the entire village even in the hard times of military rule. This community, with a close-knit social fabric, is where my three female protagonists have spent most of their lives. The three ladies – Madam Yang, Madam Li, and Madam Cai – were born in the early 1940s, mid-1950s, and early 1960s, respectively. The differences in their ages – meaning changing geopolitical circumstances potentially having varying impacts on their lives – in their family conditions, and in their personal ambitions all had certain effects on their individual routes towards accessing and mastering specific economic abilities. In their mutually distinct economic trajectories, however, there were still some commonalities – ones generated by the forces of kinship and politics. In the final part of this article, I will discuss how the people of Jinmen reflect on the KMT's authoritarian rule with regard to their personal and family trajectories – being entwined with the islands' history of militarisation.

## Economic Changes in the Period of Military Rule

On the very first day of my fieldwork in 2013, I chatted with a taxi driver on my way from the airport to the village where I was going to stay. In response to the driver's interest in my reason for coming to Jinmen, I revealed my status as a PhD student interested in the impacts of military rule on local people's lives. The driver replied immediately that things were very different in the period of military rule, especially the local economy. He cited his family as an example, stating that they used to earn a lot from providing services to soldiers, such as food, drink, and taxis, but this business broke down due to

the considerable downsizing of troops in Jinmen following the termination of the WZA in 1992.

This conversation reminded me immediately of the painful ties between Jinmen's economy and the geopolitical circumstances depicted in Szonyi's book. That author (2008: 122) argues that there were two main dimensions to what he calls the "combat economy," in which economic planning and initiatives in Jinmen were to a significant extent shaped by the military stand-off between Taiwan and China during the Cold War era. The first dimension is the state's interventions in the economy, framed by a global discourse of state-mediated development; nevertheless, Jinmen's military importance constrained the possible options for state planners and made certain outcomes particularly desirable. For example land reform in Jinmen (1953–1955) – specifically the programme of "land to the tiller" – did not have as much effect as it had in Taiwan, because most Jinmen farmers worked only small plots of family-owned land. As Szonyi (2008: 125) puts it, the programme was mainly implemented as a political strategy to highlight the failure of land reform on the Communist-controlled mainland.

The second dimension of the combat economy refers to the emergence of local entrepreneurship, as induced by the remarkable number of soldiers stationed in Jinmen. Throughout the period of military rule, the civilian population was around 50,000 people – whereas the troops numbered more than 60,000, peaking at 100,000 at the turn of 1950s and 1960s (Szonyi 2008: 257). Both individuals and families – including those of Madam Li and Madam Cai – started small businesses to provide diverse services and goods to these troops. Like my taxi driver, a number of my informants – ones both old and young alike – recalled the mobilisation of the entire family to operate businesses and the astonishing revenues that they could earn from such engagement (cf. Szonyi 2008: 134–148).

The military-dominated economic projects were very often arbitrary and forced. For example the founding of a sorghum distillery in 1952 was born from strategic calculations shaped by geopolitical circumstances, such as the need to serve the troops' great demand for alcohol and to reduce reliance on logistical support from Taiwan while also raising profits from selling liquor (Szonyi 2008: 128–129; see also, Chang-hui Chi's article in this topical issue). To realise this project, the military ordered sweet potato – the main local produce –



to be replaced with sorghum, and private wineries to be closed. The lineage properties from which people had hitherto earned a living also suffered appropriation or disruption for military purposes. Each patrilineage on Jinmen has its specific kinds of collectively owned property, such as farmland, fishing boats, or estates in market towns. Madam Yang, for example and as we shall hear later, could still pursue oyster farming in a shallow bay monopolised by her husband's lineage, but her oyster harvest was restricted by the limited time that the military allowed her to work.

As Szonyi (2008: 125) notes, though it is unclear exactly how much lineage and private family land the army seized the total amount is supposed to have been sizeable according to the results of a scheme of the early 1990s compensating residents for such seizures of land. A case from the village where I stayed, however, suggests a peculiar situation in which geopolitical conditions led to the rediscovery of the value of lineage-owned land with low agricultural productivity. This lineage estate had apparently been seized by the military for its strategic location, but its rich deposits of porcelain clay became valuable for exploitation in the early 1960s. The military allowed the lineage, the original owner, to organise a team composed of male lineage members to exploit the porcelain clay for sale to the military-owned ceramics factory on Jinmen (where the containers for sorghum liquor were produced) or to Taiwan. This economic activity ceased in the early 1980s though, as there was no more clay to be exploited; after demilitarisation, the land was appropriated by the government for public facilities. While military rule had seriously undermined the economic benefits that civilians could gain from their lineage's common property, the above instance suggests the importance of kinship values – such as collaboration and autonomous organisation among kin – in becoming an economic force.

Using the term *combat economy* represents a distortion of economic development in Jinmen, because land reform was essentially only a propaganda measure and the sorghum distillery and some massive infrastructure investment were driven largely by military concerns. The great improvement in local living standards was also attributable less to state policy than to individual and household entrepreneurship. However, businesses with soldiers as their primary clients were extremely vulnerable to changes in the geopolitical context. Sino–American rapprochement and the seating of China's delegation

at the United Nations in the 1970s signalled the gradual dissociation of Taiwan from international diplomacy and the Cold War. The political movements for democracy in Taiwan in the 1980s further drove the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 and then in Jinmen in 1992. As a result, the number of troops in the latter had been reduced by about half by 1993 (to a total of 31,000), and many local families had to close their small businesses down – as illustrated by my taxi driver’s own anecdote (Szonyi 2008: 206–212).

This sketch has set out the general changes to the economy of Jinmen during the period of military rule, which locals may initially recall when asked about the impact of militarisation on the local economy. When viewed biographically, although there are some commonalities between people’s experiences, the ways in which the personal, the intimate, and the political come together are specific to each individual. The three women’s life stories presented in this article offer a richer understanding of how ordinary people lived through drastic political and military turmoil.

## Analytical Model

To explore the links between personal lives and broader circumstances, I adopt an analytical model that attends, as noted, to the human capacity for learning and economic agency. This is inspired by Stafford’s (2004) analysis of the life stories of two Chinese men, in which he revisits Gell’s (1988) thesis on human technical systems. Instead of the old association of technology with tool use, Gell argues that the core of technology is rather the knowledge required for the invention, making, and use of tools – and the existence and transmission of this knowledge must be linked to a certain social context. Also, human beings are distinguished by our employment of techniques that mediate between tools (e.g. the body, certain raw materials, and certain environmental features) and a desired state – one that is to be realised through the utilisation of these givens.

Building on this expanded understanding of human technological capacities, Gell proposes a model involving three general technical systems. The first is “technology of production,” which refers to roundabout ways of securing our daily needs – including food, shelter, clothing, and manufactured goods of all kinds. The second is “technology of reproduction,” which essentially refers to kinship as a

group of human beings having certain ways of breeding and rearing their offspring. Given the potential difficulty in getting people to actually comply with the demands of the technical systems of production and reproduction, the third one is, then, “technology of enchantment” – involving psychological weapons such as art, music, rhetoric, gifts, and the like that human beings use to exert control over the thoughts and actions of one another.

Stafford contends that though Gell's model may be questioned for its overextension of the concept of technique, it is a useful heuristic device from the perspective of learning and economic agency (Stafford 2004: 175). In his analysis of the life stories of one young and one older man in China, Stafford draws on Gell's thesis to look at: (1) how individual and collective economic histories are linked to elements of the three technical systems of production, reproduction, and enchantment; and, (2) how the techniques of the three systems, such as elements within a kinship system, appear to be the collective possession of a culture and require individuals to learn in order to have an impact on their lived reality. This helps to highlight the links between the diverse learning environments that these two men were exposed to, and their distinctive individual abilities – as well as choices of different careers. The older man was born to a family with migrant-merchant roots but also deeply immersed in Confucian education: His father was the founder of a small school teaching the Chinese classics. Being directly and indirectly trained by his father during childhood, the older man also took a job as a teacher after managing to graduate from high school in the Maoist era. His story shows that the most valuable fortune that he inherited from his father was not tangible assets but the manners of a person with morality and the ways of acting like a teacher, which corresponded to the techniques of production and reproduction. The older man exerted the technique of enchantment through his excellence in calligraphy, in the sense that it reinforced his social prestige as a person of virtue.

The family, however, is not the only place where a person can learn and cultivate economic abilities. In comparison with the older man, the young one lacked a privileged family background and was not interested in studying as a child. His sophisticated commercial strategies were built rather through his childhood involvement in selling vegetables in the village market, and a chicken-raising enterprise in his youth. With his long-term participation in the business

world, the young man developed excellent marketing skills – thus boosting sales through this technology of enchantment.

Though Stafford does not specifically highlight gender in his discussion, it is internal to the kinship system as the technology of reproduction – which endows men and women with certain abilities, resources, and dispositions (technologies of production and enchantment) that can have far-reaching effects on their personal lives and subjectivity. While kinship has the fundamental role of social reproduction, other institutions such as the state and school also aim to cultivate a person in certain ways for particular goals. As Szonyi argued throughout his book, the KMT – through the WZAC – sought to modernise the society and economy of Jinmen in various ways, ones that were always intended to contrast with whatever the CCP did on the mainland.

Of particular relevance here is a nationwide campaign initiated in 1967 during Chiang Kai-shek's (Jiang Jieshi) presidency, known as the *Zhonghua wenbuan faxing yundong* (中華文化復興運動, Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement), which was designed to underscore the error of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. The KMT's goal of developing its population into a modern, civilised, mobilised citizenry still continued, but became increasingly entwined with the preservation and cultivation of traditional ethical norms (Szonyi 2008: 115; cf. Billioud and Thoraval 2015). For the KMT, traditional Chinese culture involved specific gender ideologies – ones that assumed a strong bond between women and the domestic domain, existing in sharp contrast to the supposed erasure of gender difference on the mainland. Though women were still mobilised to serve certain public roles for military purposes (e.g. as militia members), the kinds of womanhood that the KMT and the kinship system attempted to reproduce were not all that different from each other. I will discuss this issue further in the section following the three women's stories.

In sum, the analytical model of three technical systems sheds light on the lifelong processes by which my three female informants learned and enhanced their economic abilities from diverse channels throughout the era of military rule. It also illuminates the role of kinship in shaping their ideas about how a woman should live her life. We now move to the three women's stories, and will see how the three technical systems have been at work in their own personal trajectories.

## Madam Yang's Story

Yang lived in a house in the village very close to mine. She gave me generous support during my initial period of settling down, and soon became one of my best informants. I was always amazed by her abundant energy in doing various kinds of strenuous activity, such as oyster collecting. I followed her twice to her oyster farm, and realised just how difficult this technology of production is for the newcomer. It involves a process of learning and repetition of the mediation between relevant knowledge and physical skills. A competent oyster farmer knows about how the tide changes each day, the appropriate work clothing and necessary equipment, and is skilled at using tools efficiently to harvest oysters – quickly distinguishing between good and bad shellfish, and keeping the heavy wheelbarrow – full of oysters – under control as they push it through the mud. Yang told me she acquired the techniques of oyster farming after she entered her husband's family, which suggests the significance of the patrilineal family as the technology of reproduction here.

Yang married when she was 18 years old, shortly after the CCP's artillery attack on Jinmen in 1958 (known as the "Second Taiwan Strait Crisis"). To ease the economic burden that had been aggravated by the war, her father arranged for her marriage to a man in a village where he had friends. At that time, Yang was the youngest daughter-in-law in her husband's extended family, subject to the guidance of her mother-in-law and the wives of her two elder brothers-in-law. Her busy schedule of daily tasks began in the early morning, preparing firewood to cook breakfast for the large family and sorting out the feed for the pigs. Apart from her household chores, in harvest season she went to the oyster farm at dawn or in the late afternoon according to the tide. Yang had been born in an inland village and had no idea about how to breed and collect oysters, so she learned it gradually through labouring with her female seniors in her marital household.

An extensive part of my field village's northern bay, where Yang's oyster farm is located, has long been monopolised by the patrilineage of which Yang's husband was part. The oyster fields in this area are owned by individual members of the patrilineage, and as family property transmitted between generations. Before the 1970s, oyster farmers used to rely on low stone pillars (a kind of family property) to cultivate oysters, which involved a complicated proce-

ture of preparation. In 1976, Jinmen Fisheries Research Institute introduced the use of bamboo sticks, which had already been widely adopted by oyster breeders in Taiwan. Some years later, the Institute promoted plastic sticks that were much more durable than bamboo ones and therefore strongly favoured by oyster farmers. The invention of new tools allowed more members of the patrilineage to join in oyster production, and the oyster fields have expanded further away from the coastline since then. Plastic sticks remain widely used for oyster breeding today. When I was with Yang in her oyster field, she described to me with a smile about how these plastic sticks made her work easier; this implied her ability to master quickly the new tools that emerged from changing circumstances, unimaginable to her mother-in-law.

Over time Yang not only mastered the techniques of producing oysters but also became proficient in catching crabs and fish that appeared in the tidal basin or between the oyster fields. Yang developed her skills and knowledge in an era when the coastal waters of Jinmen were under strict military surveillance. Yang often dismissed my curiosity about life under militarisation by saying, “Those days were very hard!” But, when we walked to the seashore, she revealed voluntarily her experience of having to show a special identification card (issued by the military to prevent the penetration of CCP spies) to the sentries standing on guard at the access point to the seashore. She also said that the soldiers would give her a helmet to wear during her oyster collecting, to aid the soldiers in identifying the oyster collectors and maintaining surveillance of their movements. Moreover, she had to work more efficiently to collect enough oysters within the rigid time limits set by the military.

It was probably not long after their marriage that Yang’s husband left farming to work in the military-owned sorghum distillery. Yang thus had to bear the additional workload of sorghum farming, about which she learned the necessary knowledge and skills from her husband, elder relatives, and other farmers in the community. She was also required to learn modern agricultural techniques and try the new types of crop developed by the Jinmen Agricultural Research Institute and the Farmers’ Association. Both institutions were established in the early 1950s with financial support from a US-funded development agency, the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (founded in light of Taiwan’s participation in the US-led Cold War

alliance, with the aim of improving the island nation's agricultural production). Eventually Yang became skilled at cultivating different produce such as peanuts, sweet potatoes, and various vegetables and fruits. Her confidence in her ability to learn was shown in her remark: "I don't know how to drive an automobile, but I am very good at driving the cattle-drawn carriage."

Thanks to Yang's capacity to juggle the multiple workloads of farming, oyster breeding, and managing the household, her husband could earn cash income from a full-time job in the distillery. Yang's economic contribution to her marital household, though not in monetary form, was undeniably important and recognised by her six children – who often expressed their appreciation for their mother. Moreover, she also contributed to her marital family by accumulating social capital. Yang has over the years been widely commended by the villagers not only for her outstanding competence in subsistence production but also in cooking various traditional meals and sacrificial foods. Her cooking ability, the result of a long period of advancing skills, is arguably her technique of enchantment. The villagers are impressed by her ability, and ask for her help when they need to prepare special foods. Yang's generous attitude to the villagers' requests has earned her reputation as an excellent co-operator and enhanced her family's relationships with the kin villagers. This kind of social capital has always been important to the people living in the patrilineage because, for example, a ritually and socially satisfactory funeral is not possible without help from kin (see Chiu 2018).

## Madam Li's Story

Li was born in a village in the northwest of Jinmen in the 1950s, at the peak of military tensions across the Taiwan Strait. The family's livelihood once relied on her father's construction business, with complementary support from her mother's agrarian work. However, her mother became ill and eventually had to stop working. As a result, Li's sister – the eldest child, and in her early teens at the time – left primary school to earn money by washing military uniforms for soldiers and to take care of her mother in the hospital. Li's father then invested in a pool table that attracted many soldiers, and thereby his eldest daughter became fully occupied by the expanded family business.

Owing to Li's sister's devotion to the running of the microenterprise, Li, her two younger sisters, and two younger brothers were able to continue their education. Education represents both technologies of production and reproduction, as it involves a set of knowledge and skills enabling a person to carry out some economic activities. Particularly modern nation states, including the KMT-led government, have attempted to make use of its function to cultivate a person with certain dispositions (cf. Benei 2008). After retreating to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT implemented six-year compulsory primary schooling throughout the territory now under its control. As the military conflicts with the CCP became less intense in the early 1960s, the KMT planned to extend mandatory schooling so as to level up citizens' education and nurture their loyalty to the nation; both were crucial to the state's political stability and economic growth.

During his inspection tour of Jinmen in 1963, Chiang Kai-shek ordered an experiment with the three-year extension of mandatory schooling in Jinmen – to start in 1964, four years prior to nationwide implementation. Nevertheless, like Madam Yang whose family held her back from compulsory primary education in the 1950s, many girls in the 1960s were still unable to go to primary or junior high school because of poverty, the need to tend to younger siblings, or due to their parents' biased notions about the wastefulness of investing in a girl's education. As Li herself admitted, while the low cost of mandatory schooling was helpful it was only due to her elder sister's sacrifice and her father's support that she could complete nine years of education. In this regard, kinship as a technology of reproduction not merely served to cultivate an individual in fixed ways but also invested resources (ones accumulated by the labour of the entire family) for an individual to develop and, possibly, to have positive impacts on the family as a whole.

After completing junior high school, Li originally planned to further her study in a vocational school in Taiwan. However she missed the deadline to register at the school because of delays to the passenger ferry, the only means of transportation between Jinmen and Taiwan allowed (and operated) by the military at that time. Instead of returning home, she decided to work in a factory in northern Taiwan and send remittances back to her family. This was a choice that many girls in rural areas of Taiwan made in the 1970s and 1980s after the state shifted its focus from agriculture to export-oriented industrial-



sation in the 1960s (cf. Gallin 1984a, 1984b). In the early 1970s, over 50 per cent of new industrial and commercial establishments were set up in rural areas; accordingly, a growing proportion of labour was elicited from peasant families. Industrialisation did not extend to Jinmen because of the enduring possibility of war, and the insecure supply of resources such as water and electricity. Consequently, many local people – unmarried women in particular – moved to Taiwan and became wage labourers. Li made the decision to work in the factory on her own, and this boldness might be related to her ability to communicate in Mandarin (the official language commonly used in Taiwan, which Li learned at school) and her experiences of assisting in the family business – which both helped her adjust to life in Taiwan. But her factory life was only short: two or three years later, Li was called back by her parents because her elder sister was getting married.

Li was asked to take over the small shop providing entertainment, snacks, and drinks to soldiers, and she managed the business excellently. The family wealth accumulated by Li and her elder sister in the years of running the microenterprise enabled their younger brothers and sisters to attend university. As a successful business operator, Li had thought to remain unmarried. Her mother was very worried about this, however, and ultimately found her daughter a husband when Li was approaching 30. In order to save her mother from worrying, Li agreed to marry the eldest son of a family in the village where I stayed. The poor economic condition of the groom's family was known to her beforehand, but only after marriage did she realise that her husband had large debts – part of which might have been related to marriage-related expenditure (the wedding banquet, new furniture, etc.). Despite his debts, her husband is a good-hearted, honest, and filial son, and the only one of three brothers who stayed behind in Jinmen to take care of his early-widowed mother and all the family affairs. Instead of complaining, Li always bears in mind the words that her mother gave her: "Great wealth is dependent on the God of heaven, but diligence and frugality lead to comfortable living."

Though Li's husband was struggling to pay off his debts using only his salary from the sorghum distillery, he still wanted Li to stay home to take care of their children and his ill mother instead of working full-time outside the home. Given that her marital family has a small plot of land, Li proposed a business idea in which her hus-

band planted watermelons in his free time and then she pushed a trolley to a military camp close to the village to sell them to the soldiers there. Li looked proud when she told me how this idea grew out of her economic sensitivity cultivated during her long-term engagement in her birth family's business, and I view it as her technology of enchantment. Moreover, both Li's commercial ability and her husband's capacity to plant watermelons (the technology of production) were nurtured as part of the engagement of their families in the microenterprise and in farming (the technology of reproduction) respectively. By this initiative – and perhaps also by other methods unknown to me – Li managed to clear the outstanding debts within a few years and finally, with some financial support from her birth family, she and her husband built a three-storey house in the early 1990s.

Li's ambition to construct a new house arose not only because their inherited traditional one was too old and narrow but also because she wanted to have a son. When she started planning the house project, she was expecting her third daughter. A spirit medium told her that their ancestral house was fine for their own residence but not propitious for the birth of male offspring. She thus made up her mind to build a new house, which eventually brought her a son. Despite remaining full-time at home, Li has also earned revenue in the last 20 years by holding two retail licences for selling liquor. As she explained to me, after the end of military rule in 1992 the first democratically elected county magistrate proposed a policy by which to cope with the crisis in the local economy in the wake of the considerable decline in soldier numbers (cf. Szonyi 2008: 208). This policy gives permission to local citizens to use their own houses as business premises with a retail licence, by which they can purchase sorghum liquor at the wholesale price and then generate a profit by reselling to local distributors or tourist shops.

Though the profit from the retail licences fluctuates according to the sales volume of sorghum liquor on the market, Li has managed to send her children to university and graduate school. Her second daughter, who was the first of her four children to start working, gave part of her salary to her mother every month. When this daughter was about to marry, Li presented her with a check repaying all the money that she had received from her together with some valuable jewellery as her dowry. She was also able to afford the cost of the wedding banquet for the guests on the bride's side. Li's sophistication

in managing the household economy was praised by her daughters, who described their mother as the family's "Minister of Finance."

## Madam Cai's Story

Cai is a native of the village where I stayed. Before her birth in the early 1960s, the economic condition of her birth family had improved to some extent because her mother and two elder sisters earned money by washing military uniforms and selling hot food to soldiers. In the period between 1949 and the late 1970s, many unused civilian buildings and ancestral halls across the Jinmen islands were occupied by troops because military bases were still under construction or as a result of soldiers being assigned to build fortifications in the villages. Particularly in the years immediately following 1949, the military forced civilians to share their living spaces with soldiers – who had no accommodation of their own. A large part of Cai's ancestral house had been occupied by soldiers for several years, but they helped build a temporary brick wall to separate their space from the owners'. At that time Cai and her younger brother were living with their father in another house in the village, whereas their mother and elder sisters stayed in the ancestral house to attend to the grandmother living there, and to their business. The considerable presence of soldiers in the village provided Cai's family with a stable and sufficient income, which they had never earned previously from agricultural work. When Cai and her brother moved into the ancestral house in the late 1960s, the troops had by then moved out – though a large number still lived in the village, constructing fortifications such as the civil defence tunnels, which involved collaboration between civilians and the army.

Cai had helped in the family business from the time she was studying in elementary school up to her graduation from senior high school. There was a clear division of labour among the four females in the household: Cai's mother and her three daughters. Cai's main responsibility was to iron the military uniforms, while her elder sisters washed and repaired them. From time to time, Cai also helped to fry a local sweet snack and take it around to sell to the soldiers. She spent most nights during her childhood and teenage years ironing uniforms while reading her textbooks. Despite the challenge of managing both work and study, Cai said that she was very fortunate because her two

elder sisters had not been able to finish junior high school. Like Madam Li, Cai's access to education – a different set of knowledge and skills, ones that a family itself could barely provide – was enabled by the operation of kinship as a technology of reproduction distributing resources for a family's longer-term development. Both Li and Cai also contributed to the family's prosperity and to their younger siblings' future success: Li's brothers and sisters attained bachelor's degrees and above, and Cai's brother became a prosecutor with a PhD.

Cai continued her studies in the local senior high school, but this was not her original plan. Unlike Madam Li, who never stated clearly what she thought about Taiwan in her teenage years, Cai declared that she had always desired to go there after graduating from junior high school. She said that she could not really explain her obsession with this desire, only that going to Taiwan was a goal many local girls in her generation possessed and strived for. She originally planned to study commerce in a vocational school in Taiwan, but the quota of places allocated to Jinmen students in senior high schools shifted from the subject of Commerce to that of Agriculture in the year in which Cai was applying. Though she was forced to stay in Jinmen, she still expected to go to Taiwan after graduating from senior high school. Before Cai decided whether she was leaving for Taiwan for further study or for work, she had encountered some opposition from her mother and elder sisters. As a gesture to show her family that she had tried to find a job in Jinmen, when she was still a student Cai took an entrance examination for administration posts in the JDH-associated institutions. Even if she succeeded in the examination, she planned to make an excuse for not taking the job. The result was that she passed the examination and could not reject the job because the JDH arranged for her to work in the military-operated hospital close to her village, which she had no reason to reject. While this job was not what Cai wanted, she distinguished herself by passing the examination – which required the capacity to read and understand the questions, and to figure out the correct answers. Such an ability was not generally shared by local girls of and prior to Cai's generation, because it was built on a substantial period of cultivating abilities to read and write in Mandarin and learning relevant knowledge and skills at school (a technology of production).

Not long after she started working in the hospital, Cai met her Taiwanese husband who was carrying out military service in Jinmen

in the early 1980s. Cai's husband has a university degree, which was a rare achievement in Taiwan at that time. As he told me, when he had just begun his mandatory service the military announced a project to encourage young men with higher education to stay longer in the army – that for the purpose of maximising the contribution of these men's professional knowledge and skills to the army's strength and quality. The military provided those willing to extend their terms of service for a couple of years with the incentives of an eventual higher rank in the army and increased salary. Cai's husband decided to take three additional years of military service, because the higher salary would help his poor family to support his younger siblings in their education. He was transferred to Jinmen after about one year of military service in Taiwan. During his third year, he took up a post in the military-operated hospital where he would cross paths with his life partner.

The couple had obtained permission for their marriage from their parents before Cai's husband completed his military duty and returned to Taiwan. They originally planned to settle after marriage in the husband's homeland in southern Taiwan but, contrary to their expectations, Cai's husband could not find a proper job there. Before Cai went to Taiwan to meet her husband, her mother-in-law asked her son to go to Jinmen again to try other opportunities. When Cai recalled this, she laughed and said: "I had been thinking that I could eventually go to Taiwan this time, but who knows, things went out of my control!" As a result, it was Cai's husband who moved into her ancestral house, a special uxorilocal arrangement in the patrilineal village. This residential arrangement also made Cai the only one of her siblings remaining in Jinmen, and able to take close care of her parents until they passed away. She also conducts almost all of the family rituals of worshipping ancestors and family gods on behalf of her younger brother living in Taiwan: as the only male heir, he is supposed to inherit the family property and duty of ancestor worship.

For a certain period prior to her husband passing a civil service examination and then working in local government, Cai was the primary breadwinner in their conjugal household. Apart from her full-time job in the hospital, Cai sought to generate additional revenue by resorting to her previous experiences of selling food to soldiers. She cooked dozens of portions of a Chinese rice meal called *zongzi* (粽子) for her husband to sell in the market, and fried noodles or rice to be

sold to the soldiers staying overnight in the hospital. Cai said that she is fond of cooking, despite never having really tried to formally learn how to do it.

Because I was living in that environment where I observed how my mother and sisters were doing cooking, I mastered the skills after some practice.

Cai's words convey the near-unconscious processes by which a person can absorb and learn knowledge and skills that she may not use immediately, but still draw on when seeking to achieve a goal – with an impact in real life. Cai's side business is a good illustration of how her technologies of production (cooking) and of enchantment (finding the right channels to sell her products) were both nurtured during her previous involvement in the family business of selling food to soldiers, which formed a specific part of their technology of reproduction.

## Female Labour, Kinship, and the State's Cultural Ideologies

The preceding three women's stories suggest their salient economic contribution to their marital households and, in the cases of Li and Cai, to their birth families. Their stories also demonstrate their abilities to advance or make good use of the knowledge and skills that they learned from different sources, to create good results for the well-being of their families. If we take Rita Gallin's (1984a, 1984b) criteria, my informants' stories did not constitute a challenge to the patriarchal system because their economic competence did not lead them to assert personal independence or to request changes to their primary responsibility for child-rearing and housework. Szonyi (2008: 140) also notes briefly that the operation of many family businesses providing food and services to soldiers actually reinforced existing family patterns, in which women worked for the business on top of their domestic tasks (e.g. cooking and doing laundry). However, I argue that attention to the reproductive processes of the kinship system provides insights about women's agency and subjectivity that Gallin and Szonyi overlooked.

In my description of the three women's economic activities, I have suggested that kinship – as a technology of reproduction –

could be at work in various forms. Yang's production of oysters was grounded in her access to her husband's lineage property and learning relevant knowledge and skills from her mother-in-law. Both Li and Cai received formal education thanks to the devotion of time and labour by their elder siblings (who thereby sacrificed their own education) to the improvement of their families' economic conditions. Notice that, as Lee (2004b) points out in her depiction of a female factory worker struggling between loyalty to her family and personal desire, the moral demand on a person to suppress personal interests for the family's collective welfare is not always effective – particularly in situations where siblings are not treated equally. Both Li and Cai told me that their parents' support for their further education after nine years of mandatory schooling triggered complaints from their elder sisters. Cai's action of seeking a job before she graduated from senior high school was mainly to appease her sisters' feelings of being treated unfairly.

Kinship as a technology of reproduction is not only about transmitting tangible assets and practical skills to succeeding generations in the hope of the family's continued growth, but also about nurturing certain dispositions that enable the offspring to accommodate themselves to the existing social environment. Women like my three informants living in patrilineal communities were asked and trained, with or without their seniors' clear guidance, to fulfil the female roles of daughter, wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and the like. They observe, imitate, and practice repeatedly the various required skills and proper ways of behaving essential to performing their roles well in the different stages of life. In other words, the kinship system involves longitudinal processes of socialising women into the patriarchal norms that associate these individuals with the domestic domain and roles of reproduction.

Nevertheless, we should also pay attention to women's subjective feelings in their devotion of time and labour to their families. As Stafford (2000) suggests, the folk notion of *yang* (養, “care and nurturance”) sheds light on a much more important and positively evaluated role for women within the Chinese family. The notion of *yang* suggests the flow of care and nurturance between generations, which is part of the technology of reproduction. After entering their husbands' households, Yang and Li became the primary providers of *fengyang* (奉養, “respectful care and nurturance”) to their parents-in-

law and ancestors (in the form of the ritual of offering sacrifices). Even though Cai continued living in the house of her birth family after marriage, she has, as noted, borne the main responsibility – on behalf of her younger brother – for looking after her parents and ancestral sacrifices – but has also done her best to deliver care to her widowed mother-in-law living in Taiwan. Practices of *fengyang*, which are observed and evaluated by kin villagers in the close-knit community, are also concerned with these women’s social reputation. All three women have devoted much of their labour to the provision of *yang* to their children; this continues even after the children have married and had their own families. For example, unlike many villagers harvesting oysters for sale, Yang saved her harvest as “gifts” to her married but not co-resident sons and daughters in Jinmen. Though Li is almost entirely occupied by voluntary activities nowadays, she is happy to spare time and labour to care for the baby daughter of her second married daughter, who has a full-time job. Rather than only offering their labour in exchange for money or rewards of various kinds, women frequently use their labour to express affection and – at the same time – to receive affection from their loved ones.

As mentioned earlier, in the late 1960s the KMT proposed a campaign aimed at preserving and protecting traditional Chinese culture against an opposing such movement in China. Part of the KMT’s cultural ideology was the association of women with the domestic sphere and the appeal for them to occupy the roles of mother and wife, with the greater aim of serving the nation. While women were drawn from their households to take part in the militia and in political campaigns, the KMT did not seek to outright subvert the patrilineal system and associated gender ideologies as the CCP did on the mainland. The Chinese communists attempted to create a new category of *funü* (婦女, “women”) dissociated from the previous context of the patriarchal family organisation, and to abolish patrimonial property and to bring women into the income-generating workforce as equal participants to men (Santos and Harrell 2017: 15–18). On the contrary, the KMT established awards for “model women” and “model mothers” to honour women’s contributions to the family and to the nation – such as their excellence in managing the household and child-rearing and, in particular, their encouragement to their sons to join the army to fight for the nation (Chou 2008: 91–93). As Whyte (2005) notes, the differences in the respective earlier interven-



tions by the KMT and CCP has led to the general outcome that Taiwan is more “traditional” than China in the sphere of family and kinship. In sum, the patrilineal communities in Jinmen to a certain extent maintained the old ways of life in the period of military rule – in which the evaluation of women's labour was still tied to their roles in the family.

## Conclusion: Jinmen Civilians' Ambivalence in Judging Authoritarian Rule

The lives of ordinary people in Jinmen in the second half of the twentieth century were intertwined with the military confrontation between Taiwan and China as well as with Cold War geopolitics. Jinmen civilians had little – if any – control over the greater political forces unfolding at the national and international levels that reshaped the islands as the military and ideological frontline against Communism. The KMT realised its authoritarianism in Jinmen through the WZA system, which led to the eventual militarisation of local society across all dimensions.

How, then, do the people of Jinmen recollect and judge the years of authoritarian rule? Szonyi (2008: 201–40) notes that there are three kinds of narrative – of suffering, of agency, and of nostalgia – in the Jinmen residents' recollection of the days under military rule, with many of them being related to people's claims for state compensation in the aftermath of demilitarisation. But, in general, they were not happy with the responses from central government, and a sense of uncertainty about the future has occupied many islanders' minds. As Szonyi states:

One of the ways in which their *ambivalence* about the present is represented is through nostalgia for the past, when political instability and military threat paradoxically provided economic and social stability. (Szonyi 2008: 240; italics added for emphasis)

I would suggest that the paradoxical circumstances that the Jinmen islanders lived through also generated ambivalence in their judgments of authoritarian rule.

During fieldwork, I observed the mixed feelings of local seniors towards military–civilian relations in previous decades. On the one hand, they appeared vulnerable to the state army's authoritarian

command as they had to participate in dangerous work as militia members or to allow the army to confiscate their land or movable property for the construction of fortifications. On the other, they appreciated the gradual material improvements brought by the military – especially during the period when Hu Lian served as general commander in Jinmen (1949–1954, 1957–58). Hu was respectfully addressed as *Xiandai Enzhuogong* (現代恩主公, “a modern benevolent master”); *Enzhuogong* (恩主公) in the local context was the respectful title for an imperial officer named Chen Yuan in the eighth century, worshipped locally for the legends about his contribution to Jinmen when he was alive and for his spiritual power after his death. Local people praised Hu not only for his establishment of the sorghum distillery, which is now the foundation of local government finances, but also for his kindness to civilians. For example, I heard an anecdote from several informants that Hu appreciated the importance of education and would offer a ride to a student whom he spotted occasionally on the road to school.

Many of my senior interlocutors could recall a number of anecdotes about the positive aspects of military rule. One local intellectual even made a telling remark from a macroscopic perspective:

Jinmen is a tiny offshore island that no one would [otherwise] pay attention to. If it had not been for the Chinese civil war and the KMT’s defeat and retreat to Jinmen in 1949, Jinmen would not have the kinds of development and construction that we see today.

This is to say, among the people of Jinmen there are no clear-cut views about the period of military rule being either wholly good or bad. Ambivalence might exist across the various parts of a person’s lived experience through extraordinary times. For example, Yang’s oyster production was restrained by the military’s regulations, but she was still pleased with the new tools provided by the official institution that facilitated her harvest. The family business of providing services to soldiers had dominated the childhood and teenage years of both Li and Cai meanwhile, but – at the same time – it also allowed them to have a formal education and endowed them with experiences helpful to their lives in the longer term. My Jinmen interlocutors not only recalled some negative aspects of military rule (e.g. militia service and confiscation of their property by the army), but also praised the improvement of local living standards (including the economy, material

infrastructure, hygiene, and similar). Their images of the KMT and the military government were not unilaterally forceful and coercive, but took into account the authorities' involvement in the preservation of traditional ethical norms. The ambivalence of Jinmen civilians towards the KMT's authoritarianism is ultimately inseparable, then, from their experiences of economic improvement – and from a certain stability in their way of life revolving around kinship.

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