
Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux
Reviewers: Gordon H. Chang, Dai Chaowu, Xiaobing Li, Rana Mitter


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To many specialists in U.S. foreign relations, Quemoy precipitates images of the Cold War crisis in Chinese-U.S. relations in the 1950s, most notably the Artillery Wars of 1954-1955 and 1958, with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles pushing President Dwight Eisenhower to “brinkmanship” and rumblings of “massive retaliation”. From the Kremlin, Soviet leaders including Nikita Khrushchev offered rhetorical backing for Mao Zedong and the People’s Liberation Army artillerymen who fired away at Quemoy. In Szonyi’s book, however, Khrushchev doesn’t even make it into the index; Dulles gets six citations and Ike eight.

So what kind of Cold War Island is Quemoy? As Professor Szonyi points out, Quemoy is the familiar romanization of the name of the island in the local dialect; Jinmen is the romanized name of the island in Modern Standard Chinese or Mandarin. Fortunately, the author provides several maps, which locate Jinmen and Little Jinmen some three and two miles from the Chinese mainland city of Xiamen, and over 100 miles west of Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait. Reviewers use Quemoy and Jinmen interchangeably in their assessments.

As the reviewers point out, Szonyi’s study is a stimulating study of the people on Jinmen, how they responded to living on a Cold War island under both deadly artillery fire from Xiamen and intense pressure and controls from the Republic of China (R.O.C.) regime on Taiwan that included a very extensive military presence that imposed martial law throughout the Cold War long after any military threat from the mainland had dissipated. As Gordon Chang and Rana Mitter favorably note, Szonyi applies a cultural and social approach in his study that reinforces several recent studies with a similar orientation on local communities in the Cold War.1 These microstudies on borderland areas of the Cold War offer many opportunities for new studies that make extensive use of local archives and oral history such as Szonyi’s research in Taiwan’s and Jinmen’s archives as well as extensive use of his own interviews in Jinmen and the interviews from other sources.

The reviewers endorse Szonyi’s approach and central thesis on the social and cultural impact of the Cold War on the people on Jinmen (as well as on the soldiers stationed there) as well as his thorough exploration of the related aspects of militarization, geopoliticalization, modernization, and memory. They also pose a number of questions to which Szonyi offers a suggestive and thoughtful response.

1) Dai Chaowu raises some questions about the political and military dimensions of the two crises in 1954-55 and 1958 with respect to why Washington and Mao Zedong backed off in the 1954 crisis and Mao again in 1958.2 Dai points to Mao’s calculations that a seizure

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of Jinmen and Matzu, another “Cold War island” to the north of Jinmen, would reinforce a “two-China” situation by increasing the separation between the mainland and Taiwan. Szonyi agrees with Dai’s clarification that it was “a combination of revolutionary diplomacy and domestic politics that lay behind the initiation of the bombardment in 1958, and concern about preventing a de facto ‘Two China’ situation that stayed Mao’s hand.” (1)

2) Gordon Chang suggests several alternative points of comparison for Jinmen, such as comparisons within Chinese political culture and Chinese civil war history. Chang notes that Szonyi “thoughtfully acknowledges but does not pursue to any significant extent” these contexts, “arguing forcefully that the contexts of geo-politicization and globalization are the more salient and meaningful.” In Szonyi’s detailed reconstruction of experiences on Jinmen and R.O.C policies, Chang highlights his “accounts of the trauma of daily life under Nationalists on the mainland in the 1930s and 1940s. There is the brutalization of the civilian population by soldiers, the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of the anti-communist campaigns, the promotion of archaic Confucianism, the turn toward local religions for solace … and the everyday acts of ‘resistance,’ big and small, against authority.” Chang also notes the relationship of the Jinmen experience to Chinese political culture with the “virtual mirror images” of campaigns on the mainland and Jinmen: “There are political campaigns, model villages, and political educations of various sorts” as well as almost identical “anti-pest and hygiene promotion campaigns” including kill-the-sparrows and anti-rat efforts.(3) Szonyi agrees that a number of different comparisons could be made and suggests parallels and differences between R.O.C policies on Jinmen and what Mao was doing on the mainland.³ At several points Szonyi emphasizes the preoccupation of Taiwanese authorities with their competition with the mainland and campaigns to emphasize positive differences between the two societies especially during Mao’s disastrous economic initiatives, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, and in comparisons of the family and status of women.

3) Szonyi agrees with Chang and the reviewers that a number of other comparisons could be made although he faced limitations in pursuing several -- such as the parallelism between the mainland and the R.O.C.’s campaigns, “but the explanation does not lie in the Quemoy archive—it is more likely to be found in the institutional connections and ideological and intellectual preoccupations of leaders and bureaucrats.”(2) Szonyi also recognizes the usefulness of comparing developments on Jinmen and Taiwan after 1949 but this approach “would speak to a relatively small audience and … might detract from many of the most interesting aspects of Quemoy society, those tied closely to global geopolitics.” (2)

4) Szonyi preferred to focus on how Jinmen as a Cold War Island reflected the global geopolitics of the Cold War brought to an isolated outpost and how the 50,000 residents of Jinmen in 1949 interacted with these pressures combined with the unresolved Chinese civil war. “It is an account of life lived in Cold War-time, of geopolitical confrontation at the levels of human experience and memory,” the author asserts in the introduction, and none of the reviewers suggest that he has omitted an important dimension from his coverage of

³ See Cold War Island, 81-82,166, 178, 250-251.
matters ranging from militia service, to the creation of combat villages, the economy and G.I. Joe business, women's lives, and “Ghosts and Gods of the Cold War.”(3) With this approach, Szonyi hoped to reshape the Cold War story. “Among the issues that the oral history of Quemoy residents can help us understand,” Szonyi suggests, “are the intertwining of Cold War geopolitics and prior local conflicts, the politicization and militarization of everyday life, and the importance of human agency in shaping the experience of the Cold War.” (3)

5) Militarized modernity is a significant theme in Szonyi's study along with geopoliticalization and memory. Ritter notes the value of Szonyi’s relating a case study at the grass roots to a wider framework. (2) In evaluating military rule through martial law on Jinmen through the creation of the War Zone Administration in 1956 and its retention until 1992 long after a military threat ceased to exist, Szonyi demonstrates the degree to which an authoritarian militarism pervaded Jinmen along with a modernization quest. Szonyi suggests that both militarism and modernization are linked to the geopolitics of the Cold War and when the Sino-American rapprochement began in the 1970s, Taiwan's concerns shifted and Jinmen found itself still entangled in a different Cold War even as Taiwanese troops were withdrawn and demilitarization emerged. Szonyi makes use of the literature on militarism and modernization and other case studies such as South Korea, although Brad Simpson’s Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968 and Greg Brazinsky's Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy, the focus of recent H-Diplo roundtables, came out too recently to be included. There are similarities between Szonyi, Simpson, and Brazinsky in their focus on a military-led modernization. The perceived enemy in both cases is internal as well as offshore in some respects in Indonesia and across the 38th parallel in Korea. The main difference appears in the central role of U.S. policymakers, advisers, and Western economic interests in advancing military modernization in both Indonesia and South Korea. As Chang points out, in Szonyi’s analysis U.S. officials are absent from Jinmen, the War Zone Administration, the Taiwanese army, and the R.O.C. government on Taiwan.

Participants:

Michael Szonyi is John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, where he teaches Chinese history in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. His most recent book is Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line (Cambridge, 2008). His main research interests are the local history of southeast China from the Ming dynasty to the present, Overseas Chinese history, and the history of Chinese popular religion. He is currently working on a social history of the Ming military.


**Dai Chaowu** is Professor of history at East China Normal University and a senior fellow at ECNU’s Center for Cold War International History Studies in Shanghai. Prior to coming to ECNU in 2007, Professor Dai taught at PLA International Studies University (1988-2003) and Nanjing University (2003-2007). His main research interests are China foreign relations during the Cold War, especially China-United States relations and in China-India relations; American diplomatic history, and Cold War international history. He is the author of Confrontation and Era of Crisis: Taiwan Strait Crises and China-United States Relations, 1954-1958 (Beijing: Social Science Document Printing House, 2003); American Diplomatic Thoughts in History (Beijing: Renmin Press, 2007). He is currently working on the research project of Nixon Administration, U.S.-China Economic Relations, and China’s “Reforming and Opening.” Professor Dai received his Ph.D. from Northeast Normal University in 1996.

**Xiaobing Li** is professor of the Department of History and Geography and director of the Western Pacific Institute at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), Edmond, Oklahoma. Among his recent books are A History of the Modern Chinese Army (University of Kentucky Press, 2007), Voices from the Korean War; Personal Stories of American, Korean and Chinese Soldiers, co-author with Peters (University of Kentucky Press, 2004), Taiwan in the 21st Century (2003), Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, co-editor with Millett and Yu (University Press of Kansas, 2001), and Asia’s Crisis and New Paradigm (2000). Currently, he is President of Southwest Conference on Asian Studies (SWCAS) and President of Oklahoma Chinese Professionals and Scholars Association. He is also the Editor of the American Review of China Studies and Editor of the Western Pacific Journal for many years.

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About fifteen years ago when my collaborator, He Di, and I were completing our article on the Taiwan Strait offshore island crisis of 1954-1955,¹ we visited Xiamen on the China mainland, just across the narrows from Jinmen, or Quemoy as it had been known to most Americans. We entered a park-like area, got to the top of a hill, and looked out through the haze at one of the most hotly contested spots at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s. Quemoy and Matsu (Mazu), another archipelago 150 miles to the north, riveted the world’s attention during three major confrontations between the military forces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and those of the Republic of China (ROC), which had been able to retain control of the miniscule bits of land when they retreated from the mainland in 1949. The Communists repeatedly attacked the islands. The ROC adamantly refused to give them up and maneuvered the United States to support their defense. During tense moments in these crises, many believed the United States was about to venture into war with China over islands of negligible strategic significance. The islands had become flashpoints in the Cold War.

I had studied the offshore island crises for years but was unprepared for what I saw in person: Quemoy was really just a stone’s throw (let alone an artillery lob) from Communist-controlled territory. Little Quemoy was about 2 miles away, while Big Quemoy, lay a bit further offshore. I could have been standing on the southern tip of Manhattan looking at Liberty Island and the Statue of Liberty, about the same distances in separation.

Taiwan, the new home of the ROC, was 100 miles away, east across the Strait. Though not visible, its presence was clearly palpable. Binoculars showed beach fortifications and ROC flags flying in impunity on the Quemoys. Though actual military hostilities threats were long past, there was still a sense of stand-off in the air: Berlin, Cuba, Panmunjom, Quemoy-Matsu, all still invoke imminent danger. But unlike the other sites, an air of unreality also hung in the area that day in Xiamen. Hundreds of tourists and visitors from Taiwan and other Chinese from overseas were visiting Xiamen. They climbed steep steps to see the view, visited local temples dedicated to deities worshipped on both sides of the political and geographic divide, and snapped loads of pictures to commemorate the festive occasion. This was a Cold War site no longer.

The confrontations over Quemoy inspired an array of political and academic writing over the years. Leaders such as former presidents Eisenhower and Nixon wrote about the crises in their memoirs. So did McGeorge Bundy and a host of other top level American officials. Respected scholars such as O. Edmund Clubb, Alexander George, Richard Betts, Morton Haperin, Tang Tsou, Warren I. Cohen, Nancy B. Tucker, and many other political scientists and historians examined the episodes as case studies in crisis management, Cold War confrontation, and U.S.-China relations. But in virtually all previous accounts, the local people who actually lived through the crises are ignored. We learned nothing about them.

though the fate of the world sometimes seemed to pivot on what happened on their bits of land.

Michael Szonyi’s account of life on Quemoy is the first major account of what it had been like to live on a “cold war island.” A social/cultural history of the people (and to a much lesser extent, the soldiers stationed on the island) from1949 to the early 1990s, this book reveals the difficulties and oft-time tragedies of real life on the front lines of the Cold War. The local population, often with only marginal interest in the Chinese civil war and in global geo-politics, was swept into dramas that produced death to their loved ones, destruction of their farms and homes, and warped their daily lives. Szonyi shows that nothing escaped the efforts of the ROC to make the island defensible as well as a show case for its military/political resolve to stand-down the Communists. Every sphere of life – economic, social, spiritual, educational, family, gender, and sex – was fair game for ROC officials and their authoritarian rule. Still, the independent human spirit endured as Szonyi emphasizes: local citizens constantly found ways to mock, evade, overturn, or utilize for their own purposes, various ROC campaigns and policies.

Szonyi uses this history to explore “four inter-related phenomena: militarization, geopoliticalization, modernization, and memory.” These are big issues and the author never lets the reader forget that the presented story is about these matters as much as it is about the specific experience of the people of Quemoy. And here lies a tension in his excellent book. Near its end, Szonyi discusses the challenges of conducting a study of one highly defined site (a small island of only about 50,000 residents in 1949) based primarily on oral histories: all local historians, he says, must deal with the “issue of representativeness and particularism” (p. 248). He seems sensitive to the perception that the Quemoy story might only be understood as “singular and irrelevant” rather than “emblematic and instructive” (p. 256) for us today. Szonyi draws meaning from his particular story by constantly referencing other experiences under the Cold War and claiming, ambitiously and controversially, that the changes on Quemoy he documents are “the changes of the militarized states of the twentieth century in miniature and sometimes in exaggerated form.” The theme that is regularly involved is “militarized modernity,” the term Szonyi uses to describe the transformations forced upon the people of Quemoy and other people on the front lines of the Cold War.

He enhances the narrative account and memories of events, conditions and experiences that occur over some forty years with insights from cultural and social theory and seeks to situate his book within the emerging scholarship on the social and cultural implications of the Cold War. There is already a considerable literature about American experiences and an emerging body of literature on European experiences. Diplomatic History, for example, just published a review of Paul Steege, Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-1949 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), which examines the illegal economy that flourished between the two sides of the divided city.

Writing history is all about choices, of course, and Szonyi could have selected a different context and different literature to engage. Not to detract from his thoughtful and erudite effort in any way, I raise questions for discussion about directions not taken. Transcending
particularism, a sort of antiquarianism, to establish broader meaning does not necessarily require seeking the global. There are other ways to argue for meaning beyond the particular. There are other contexts and literatures that the Quemoy story can address. For example, I wonder how the local history of Quemoy fits into the contexts of Chinese civil war history and Chinese political culture, two matters that Szonyi thoughtfully acknowledges but does not pursue to any significant extent, arguing forcefully that the contexts of geopoliticalization and globalization are the more salient and meaningful. But it seems to me that the particular Quemoy story could be told as part of a compelling story of the on-going Chinese civil war, certainly one of the signal events of the 20th century. Portions of the Quemoy story, in my reading, recall accounts of the trauma of daily life under the Nationalists on the mainland in the 1930s and 1940s. There is the brutalization of the civilian population by soldiers, the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of the anti-communist campaigns, the promotion of archaic Confucianism, the turn toward local religions for solace, (Chapter 11, “Ghosts and Gods of the Cold War,” with the discussion of the evolution of a local cult based on a young woman, Wang Yulan, whose corpse is found in the surf one day and assumes deep spiritual significance for local people, is absolutely fascinating), and the everyday acts of “resistance,” big and small, against authority. The Quemoy story, it seems to me, provides further insight into Nationalist rule, its effective and heroic side as well as its debased one.

I also wonder what the Quemoy story tells us about Chinese political culture more broadly, an issue that Szonyi raises but backs away from in his emphasis on global implications. His book regularly discusses ROC actions and campaigns on Quemoy that he compares just briefly with events on the mainland. Often, these read as virtual mirror images of each other. There are the political campaigns, model villages, and political educations of various sorts. How similar some of these episodes in the ROC and PRC sound! One campaign especially stands out: authorities on Quemoy periodically mobilized the population to conduct anti-pest and hygiene promotion campaigns that were almost identical to those on the mainland at almost the same moment. Chapter Seven opens with a description of kill-the-sparrows and anti-rat efforts on Quemoy that sounded just like those on the mainland undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s.

All this leads to a couple of large questions on the conceptual level, posed in a way to generate exchange: Is the Cold War the best context in which to understand the social history of the people of this bit of island? Is this in fact a “Cold War island,” an island whose history was principally defined by the contours of geopolitics? Szonyi makes a cogent and compelling case. But there are also arguments for de-emphasizing the capacity to generalize the island’s history or for at least refining the scope of its implications: Quemoy was an actual war zone for decades. Fighting and bombardment regularly occurred on its soil. Just a few miles from the enemy, infiltration and sabotage were a daily worry for the authorities. The dance between the PRC and ROC had of course many connections to the United States and the Soviet Union, but had powerful features of their own that had little to do with the superpowers. (Curiously, there is little discussion of Americans and their doings on the island.) The general features of the Quemoy story appear to be a lot like life in wartime Vietnam or South Korea in stalemate with the north during the same period. Quemoy exemplifies the tragedies of life in the front line of the contest in these divided
Asian nations, whose stories arguably were less about the Cold War than they were about the unresolved issues of political legitimacy, national power, identity, and modernity that preceded the Cold War of the superpowers. And life eventually changed for the better on Quemoy because of the improvement in the cross-Strait relationship that occurred long before the end of the Cold War came for the rest of the world.

The Cold War is over and so is the militarization of Quemoy life, at least for now, but the uniqueness, even singularity, of the history and continuing life on that peculiarly located island Quemoy continues to offers rich and absorbing meanings, many of which Michael Szonyi has superbly presented in this rich book.
When Mao Zedong decided to shell Jinmen (Quemoy) in 1954-55 and again in 1958, his mind was undoubtedly dominated by political, military, and diplomatic concerns. He never expected that these bombardments could have a far-reaching and considerable influence over the people of Jinmen. Michael Szonyi discusses these events and influences in his *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*. Jinmen (and Mazu), which embodied one of the most essential characteristics of the Cold War in Asia, has for many years been a prime concern to statesmen, to the people, and to the scholars. The intensive attacks during the Taiwan Strait Crises have emphasized top-level decision-making and the interaction among the great powers.

There are, however, critical aspects that scholars do not explore. Odd Arne Westad, who is in the vanguard of the “new Cold War history,” claims in *The Global Cold War* that “the most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military or strategic, nor Europe-centered, but connected to political and social development in the Third World.” 1 More and more students of the Cold War history, attempting to understand local and domestic consequences of the diplomatic history of the Cold War, have adopted a social history approach to take account of the role of international affairs on the everyday lives of individuals.2 Michael Szonyi, recognized by his studies of Ming/Qing China and best known to the Chinese academic community for his Chinese name Song Yiming, has situated the history of Jinmen within a broader framework of the Cold War society and culture. One of the main attractions of such an approach is that “the Cold War is remembered today less as an ideological confrontation than in terms of the struggles of daily life.” Szonyi’s study focuses scholars’ attention, in the light of “the struggle for the soul of mankind,” on the political and social developments on the Mainland and Taiwan during the Cold War, which had been shaped by these crises, the military threat, the hostility across the Strait, and the global conflict. From the perspective of social history, *Cold War Island* shows how the international conflict became immanent in fields such as domestic life, religious practice, and economic exchange. The study of the local history of the Cold War reveals the crucial importance of breaking down traditional boundaries between international relations history and the history of domestic processes (254). So in the sense of the “new Cold War history” studies, Szonyi’s book is sailing into unchartered waters.

What is striking in *Cold War Island* are its methodological approaches, “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 question.” Because of the importance of global factors throughout the period, Szonyi has used the phrase “Cold War” in his *Cold War Island* “to describe the overall context from the Battle of Guningtou all the way to demilitarization in the early 1990s.” His book does not try to “contribute to a story of diplomacy and high

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politics.” As Szonyi points out, “even as we pursue the project of a global comparative social and cultural history of the Cold War, we must acknowledge that there was not one but many Cold Wars. The differences are most obvious in those places where the Cold War did not remain cold” (248-249). Szonyi correctly notes that local history can be a powerful tool to explore the interaction of politics and everyday life in contemporary as well as earlier times. By considering the influence of the Cold War and by emphasizing social history in his book, Szonyi brings into focus how the local is embedded in the global and emphasizes the importance of their relationship. Based primarily on oral history interviews, archival documents and village-level archives, Cold War Island takes a closer look at the local history, as “these local consequences can be as important to historical understanding as the central state policies.” Using the island as a case study, the author explores four inter-related phenomena: militarization, geopoliticalization, modernization, and memory. The book, based on this exploration, builds an explanatory framework that stresses the transformation of Jinmen society as inseparable from the Cold War (2-3, 5). Szonyi offers a convincing analysis of the evolution of Jinmen’s social history under the influences of the Cold War through these organically-correlated four parts. From the point of view of Cold War historiography, Cold War Island is an outstanding monograph that combines macro analysis and micro arguments, and demonstrates an academic breakthrough.

Szonyi is excellent in his discussion about the relationship and interplay among these factors that he believes to be critical to the social changes of Jinmen. Why and how life on Jinmen became connected to global politics is the burden of his argument. Szonyi places the geopoliticalization and militarization of Jinmen at the center of his analysis. Geopoliticization, as used by Szonyi, explains the ways in which life on Jinmen became connected to global politics (3-4). According to the definition of militarization given by Szonyi, he employs with “one that considers the impact of the military on society and the infiltration of military interests, values, and discourses into social life.” As Szonyi points out, “the interplay between geopoliticization and militarization has been the most important relationship in the history of the island since 1949” (241). Highlighting the importance of militarization, the book examines the phenomenon of militarization from a different perspective. In his discussion about the origins of Jinmen militarization, Szonyi rightly points out that Truman’s decision to “neutralize” the Taiwan Strait meant that unresolved aspects of the Chinese civil war were now internationalized and becoming part of the larger global Cold War. The War Zone Administration (WZA) system was the embodiment of what Taiwan authorities began to enforce and to administrate the successful militarilization of Jinmen. Jiang Jieshi tried to keep Jinmen under Taiwan control for the long term. More importantly, Taiwan authorities sought to construct the image of Jinmen as a bastion of freedom and a symbol of the commitment to the fight against global Communism, to secure international, especially American, support for Taiwan (pp. 26, 28). Cold War Island comes to the conclusion that militarization led to shifts of local and trans-local geography.

The modernization process of Taiwan and Jinmen have their respective features. The models of their economic development and modernization, under the military pressure of cross-strait relations, have represented not only the political struggle of the Cold War, but
also the Chinese cultural tradition. What about the relationship between modernization and militarization? From the onset of the Cold War, fears that the USSR was providing a better example of development than anything the West had to offer animated thinking on development: “The best counter to Communist appeals is a demonstration that these same development problems are capable of solution by other means than those the Communist propose” (p. 8). With national development taking place under the shadow of a military threat that was defined locally and tied to the larger Cold War conflict, modernization was defined in the way that prioritized the danger of infiltration, subversion, and sabotage. The book’s discussion shows not only how modernization was connected to the wilder global Cold War politics, but also how these discourses were themselves reflections upon the difference between traditional and modern societies. Szonyi rightly says that Jinmen also invites the “useful comparison with other highly militarized societies around the world” (p. 252). In appraising the relationship between militarization and modernization, modernization theorists tried to find the answer in the late 1950s and 1960s when they were connecting this theory with U.S. strategy of containment. A number of American social scientists, especially Hans Speier, Walt Rostow, and Lucian Pye, reconsidered the role of the military in postcolonial nations in the modernization process. Pye claimed that the military could play a positive role in the process of modernization in three basic ways. First, it could help to overcome the psychological problems that he considered as an unavoidable, and unfortunate, by-product of decolonization and modernization. Second, the military was in many -- if not most -- instances the force most likely to be able to provide “stability” during the modernization process. Third, “the military could provide practical training in the instrumentalism that was the functional face of modernity.” Although one makes distinctions between militarization and military dictatorship, the development model of highly militarized Jinmen under martial law had borne a resemblance to some extent to military dictatorships of the “undeveloped world.” It is often said that the relationship between militarization and military threat was basically reversed over the course of the period. Militarization was increasingly driven by political rather than military concerns (243-244).

“Modernity was not just about a way of organizing economic production, but also about society and polity, cultural norms and forms.” During the modernization of Jinmen, the need to monitor the population and train its bodies and minds into docility was a central concern. For the island’s residents the need to prepare for war thus profoundly shaped both the construction and the experience of modernity. (pp. 25, 41) Szonyi explores two specific policy issues of monitoring populations and maintaining ideological unity, “to illustrate the interconnection between local politics on Jinmen and geopolitics, and between militarization and modernization.” He offers a systematic portrait of a combination of five factors which have driven social transformation of Jinmen. While presenting four factors of the administrative ordering of state and society, a “high-modernist ideology” of faith in the possibility of state planning, an authoritarian state, and the weakness of civil society, the book persuasively describes the fifth one of “the local

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articulation of the global conflict.” When Speaking of “Cold War militarized modernity” and “militarized utopian modernism”, Cold War Island “shows us in microcosm some of the ways in which militarization can change a society” (5).

Overall, as an illuminating and thought-provoking book, Cold War Island provides not only a sense of intellectual wholeness based on a global conception of social changes in Jinmen, but also the inspiration for Chinese scholars to study the civil life of Xiamen (Amoy) on the Fujian Front Line in years of the Cold War. Brilliant in methodological approaches and replete with materials, the book should prove a major contribution to the social history of the Cold War.

A couple of final questions for the author:

(1) First of all, while fixing his attention on the social history of Jinmen in Cold War Island, Szonyi leaves little room for the crisis situation itself. Although not orientated towards a history of the diplomatic, political, and military aspects which had originated from the Taiwan Strait Crisis, his book remains open to some alternative perspectives which are important to understand the social history of Jinmen.

As to the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954-1955, Szonyi believes “that U.S. deterrence worked” when he briefly analyzes the reason for the Mainland decided to lessen tension and to stop shelling (p. 43). As American archives reveal, Eisenhower and Dulles were desirous of finding a way out of their brinksmanship in early April. The main factors which led these two American top decision-makers to reconsider their policies toward Taiwan and the offshore islands were opposition from allies, division in public opinion, and dissidence in Congress. The Radford and Robertson mission to Taipei in the late April was the result of such reconsiderations. At the same time, Mao and other Politburo members of the CCP believed that, after PLA soldiers occupied Yi Jiang Shan Island, there would be an unacceptable fact of “Two Chinas” if the Mainland seized Jinmen and/or the United States forced Jiang Jieshi to withdraw his troops from these offshore islands. They decided to leave Jinmen and Mazu under the control of KMT. It was therefore the new estimates of the Taiwan Strait situation by Chinese leaders which stopped the Mainland’s shelling, rather than American nuclear deterrence. The proposed Bandung conference provided a chance to end the crisis both for the United States and for the Mainland.

The above-mentioned calculations worked again when Mao decided not to take Jinmen in the 1958 shelling. The concerns of Mao and other top leaders in the CCP were the “Two Chinas” trap, instead of “the specifics of the U.S.-ROC alliance” that they believed the United States had plotted since the KMT fled to Taiwan. It is true that Szonyi argues that “seizing Jinmen would have worked against the ultimate goal of reunification by encouraging the separation of Taiwan from the mainland” (pp. 248-249). But the decision of the alternate day bombing resulted mainly from Mao’s “revolutionary diplomacy” and domestic politics, especially the Party power struggle, not from Mao’s recognition of “the specifics of the U.S.-ROC alliance.” In regard to the 1958 shelling, crucial elements of decision-making should be mentioned. The PLA’s General Staff Headquarters and Fuzhou Military Region had prepared the detailed military plans which were approved by Mao and the Central Military
Commission. After the beginning of bombardment, Mao and other members of the CCP Politburo often discussed how to deal the Strait situation. It is wrong to say that Mao personally made the decisions about Jinmen situation (66-67).

(2) In its discussion about the modernization of Jinmen, *Cold War Island* examines the connection of the island’s process with the social development on the Mainland. For example, the campaign of Taiwan authorities to construct Jinmen as a “Model County for the Three Principles of the People” in 1960 “was intended to demonstrate the superiority of Taiwan approaches to modernization and development over those of mainland. The Model County campaign was a form of political warfare, a program of development dictated by geopolitical issues and concerns” (pp. 82-83). Stressing that “communication was essential to its effectiveness”, Szonyi takes a closer look at three main mechanisms which had mediated such communication: the return of would-be defectors, local fishermen, and formal propaganda (p. 92-95). Given the Chinese political circumstance and strict social control at that time, it is doubtful that these communications would exert any effect on the people of the Mainland.

(3) The United State had played a considerable role in shaping Taiwan’s industrial economy and modernization. After 15 years of economic aid, the United States declared Taiwan as “the first country” being “graduated” from U.S. foreign assistance in 1965. David Bell, chief of the Agency for International Development at that time, affirmed that “what has happened on Taiwan is what we want to see happen throughout Africa and Asia and Latin America. Taiwan is an especially impressive case.” Although U.S. aid was concentrated on Taiwan Island itself and cross-government aid ended after 1965, modernization of Taiwan undoubtedly has had long-lasting consequences on the island of Jinmen. On the one hand, Szonyi recognizes that “in the decades since 1958, Taiwan policies toward Jinmen continued to be shaped by the U.S. relationship”. On the other hand, while “American models of economic and political changes continued to shape policy choices” (249), the book does not go into great detail about the effect of U.S. assistance on Jinmen.

(4) Szonyi’s account of local politics under the WZA system is accurate when he summarizes five parts of this system: the political instructorship, household register system, pass system, mutual responsibility system, and ward system. The author points out that the post-Guningtou village politics created a new and intensive regime of surveillance which “was not a complete break from traditional patterns of village politics” (35). In order to support his viewpoint, the author uses the oral history he has collected on the island. *Cold War Island* stresses that an oral history indicates that a man on the island with “ideological problems” meant his thought was too extreme. “He’d be taken away, and he’d never return.” In dealing with “politics of the war zone,” we need more detailed data to confirm the consequences of “surveillance and repression” on Jinmen residents. Few examples (just four) are provided to support this important conclusion in the book (38-40).

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A n old saying speaks of trying to find a whole world in a grain of sand. While a great deal larger than any grain of sand, the tiny island of Jinmen (Quemoy), just off the coast of Fujian, is a rather small canvas onto which to paint the geopolitical grand drama of the Cold War. Yet what Michael Szonyi has done is to pull off a very difficult trick – create a perfectly described world in miniature, and link it to a genuinely global framework. For some years now, there have been calls to create a Cold War history that goes beyond the traditional concerns of international history, moving the focus from leadership elites and state-to-state relations to a vision of the period informed more by the social and cultural turn. A worthy aspiration, but not easy to do in practice: archives tend to be more forthcoming about what Khrushchev said to Mao than about what the woman in the street in Beijing or Budapest made of the new Soviet-influenced books, music, or ideological slogans that appeared in the years after 1945.

Szonyi’s study is very much a grassroots one. The protagonists are not Chiang Kaishek or Mao Zedong, but villagers whose island obscurity is suddenly transformed when Jinmen becomes the frontline of the Cold War in Asia. We meet tradesmen, homemakers, and local militia members, thrust suddenly into a conflict that they do not understand, described in lucid prose.

The book has significance in a variety of fields. First, it helps to complicate the Cold War history of greater China. The last decade or so has seen a number of outstanding studies in this field, both in English (Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Qiang Zhai) and in Chinese (Niu Dayong, Niu Jun, Yang Kuisong), whose concentration has been on exploiting the riches that have been released from the diplomatic archives in the mainland. Less work has been done on Taiwan although there are notable exceptions (e.g. the work of historian Steve Tsang). Very little indeed has yet been done to examine the effects of the Cold War framework on everyday lives in the region; in a sense, Szonyi’s concentration on the anthropological local detail on Jinmen throws the geopolitical framework into even greater contrast. The book does a great deal to show that local cultures, specifically Chinese ones, do not disappear under manifestations of geopolitical modernity, but are rather reshaped by it, and also force modernity to adapt in turn.

The book will also provoke comparison with studies of Cold War sociocultural flashpoints elsewhere. Patrick Major will shortly publish his magisterial history of social life behind the Berlin Wall, another clear location where geopolitical meets local during the Cold War. In general, a whole genre of such “geopolitical microstudies” (and not just for the Cold War era) would be immensely valuable. A recent work, which Szonyi cites, by Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (California, 2006), is a good point of comparison. Like Szonyi, Kwon wishes to use an anthropologically informed interpretation of local communities to make wider points about the nature of the Cold War (in his case in Vietnam, not Taiwan). The book blends the global and the local very skilfully, and I think succeeds in arguing that the affairs of two obscure villages (or,
rather, like Jinmen, places thrust into the limelight through no desire of the locals) tell us important things about the geopolitical contours of the Cold War in Asia.

Where, exactly, does the value lie for the historian of Cold War diplomacy? The answer is, essentially, the same as for historians of any period of turmoil in international history: that scholars of state-to-state relations can learn a great deal more about the nature of those states and their leaders by developing a wider understanding of the peoples whom they lead. There is a danger that either personality or structure (Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek; the authoritarian communist command economy versus the Cold War U.S. client state) can overshadow the variability and contingency that exists at the grassroots. Similarly, the stress on the geopolitical in Szonyi’s book serves to remind the social historian that the detailed microstudy is of most value when it can also provide material that generates cases for comparison: the understanding of specificity and difference, particularly among the marginalized (and one cannot get much more marginalized than the people of Jinmen) should not eliminate the need to understand the wider framework within which they exist.
The year of 2008 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1958 artillery war between the Chinese Communist forces on the mainland and the Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) forces on the island of Quemoy (Jinmen). At 1730 hours on August 23, 1958, the coastal batteries of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began to shell the KMT-held island. The first rounds delivered by 459 artillery pieces sent about 2,600 shells onto the Jinmens. In the initial 85 minutes, the PLA fired more than 30,000 shells onto the islands and killed some 600 KMT troops, including three vice-commanders. When the KMT guns fired back, one of the longest and heaviest artillery wars in world military history was on. The bombardment continued until January 1979, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the United States normalized their diplomatic relationship. Jinmen not only occupied a decisive position between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists in reshaping their civil struggle over the Taiwan Strait, but also played a critical and problematic role in the confrontation and communication between the People’s Republic of China and the United States for more than two decades during the Cold War.

Few areas of research in the history of the Cold War pose more difficulties than Jinmen because of the latter’s unique geopolitical position in relation to the origins of the Sino-American conflicts and on-going civil struggle between the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC). In many studies, historians treated the offshore island in the Taiwan Strait briefly as a precursor of an invasion of Taiwan. Jinmen is all too commonly dismissed as a sterile place in the Sino-American relations by scholars, to whom Beijing, Taipei, and Washington are most important. Michael Szonyi offers a new perspective in understanding the Cold War through a case study of Jinmen from 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek lost the civil war to the Chinese Communists on the mainland to the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. He moves his study away from the usual international approach and instead focuses on the relatively neglected area of local society. With his fresh insights into the social history of Jinmen, his book shows how the Cold War changed forever the life of the men, women, and children on the island.

Szonyi employs a social history approach to address his main issues including Jinmen’s geo-politicization, militarization, and demilitarization through the Cold War. He looks into the inner life cycle of the villagers, soldiers, and their families, which had defined the unique characteristics and had changed it in many different ways. The interesting stories provide insights into those who have shaped the society and military and made unprecedented changes over the past sixty years. It puts the individual farmer, fish man, army private, business owner, school teacher, and government employee in the context of society, culture, religion, and international politics as “an important frame through which the people of Jinmen understood their own experiences” (p. 5). The author bases his research on oral history and local archival documents. He conducted about 70 oral history interviews and uses about 170 previously published interviews conducted by other researchers from Taiwan and Jinmen (p. 10). Oral history is a vital source for historians who study the history of the Cold War in Taiwan and China. It has become more readily
used not just to fill in factual gaps but also to serve as the main source for discovering both the theme and framework of this topic.

The book follows major historical events, beginning in the first part with details of the Battle of Guningtou in 1949, the 1954-55 artillery war, and the 1958 artillery war, showing how these events had connected Jinmen to regional and global conflicts, which are labeled as geo-politicization. Part Two is devoted to the major events in the 1960s and 1970s with an emphasis on the militarization. Szonyi argues that “the interplay between geo-politicization and militarization has been the most important relationship in the history of the island since 1949” (p. 241), even though the militarization of Jinmen slowed down in the 1970. The third part reveals that the political and military changes had a strong impact on Jinmen’s social life by examining its economy, the status of women, and religious activities. It shows “the social and cultural effects of the Cold War” (p.119). The last part covers the demilitarization at the end of the Cold War, when China and Taiwan began their political dialogues and cross-strait trade. Through its comprehensive analysis of the historical experience of the island, the book goes beyond the existing scholarship on this topic, which has proved to be political- and international-politics centered, in a methodological sense. A reassessment of Cold War history requires not only the exploration of new sources but also the development of new conceptual or analytical frameworks.

Although the author offers some new generalization in this book, he develops yet a fresh conceptual framework that can be applied to similar experiences in other areas in the Cold War. Szonyi could have explained a bit more about his collection and selection of characters on Jinmen. Are they here simply because they are different from the persons featured elsewhere or since each is an exemplar of some character-type of the artillery wars? The book could have benefited from recently released Communist documents by China. Some of the Party documents of the Chinese Communist Party, government archives, military materials of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and memoirs and papers have become available in the recent years. Many local officials and field commanders wrote and published their personal accounts during these artillery wars against Jinmen. The extensive details of their experiences made a remarkable contribution to this topic by adding a new perspective on the subject. No matter how politically indoctrinated they might have become, the Chinese officials and generals were culturally bound to cherish their memories of the past. The 1990s brought a considerable number of military and artillery war memoirs to Chinese readers. Some are in the form of books, some appear as journal and magazine articles, and other are printed as reference studies for restricted circulation only. Even though the newly declassified documents from these sources shed light on many questions, they do not necessarily offer automatic answers. They certainly provide new research opportunities, but they also require that historians take greater care in the treatment of historical sources and be more creative in the construction of new conceptual and analytical frameworks.
Author's Response by Michael Szonyi, Harvard University

I had hoped that *Cold War Island* might contribute both to the greater geographic diversity and the broader intellectual scope of the new Cold War history. So I am grateful to the H-Diplo editors for choosing the book as the subject of a roundtable. I also thank the participants for their thoughtful comments. I’m glad they liked the book; accordingly, I focus my response on the larger issues on which the reviews stimulate reflection.

First, some brief remarks on military and political questions. As I pointed out in *Cold War Island*, I am not an expert on the high politics of the era and did not see the book as contributing to that already extensive literature. I appreciate that the reviewers did not dwell on my limited knowledge and accepted the book on its own terms, as a work of Cold War social history. Professor Dai does make some comments on the military and political sides of the 1954-44 and 1958 crises; for the most part I agree with them. Regarding perceptions about the easing of tension in 1955, I do think I was correct in writing that “at the time, it appeared that U.S. deterrence worked.” But Dai is also quite right that the reality was rather different, as much research since the 1950s has demonstrated. Similarly, I agree that it was a combination of revolutionary diplomacy and domestic politics that lay behind the initiation of the bombardment in 1958, and concern about preventing a *de facto* “Two China” situation that stayed Mao’s hand, as I outline in Chapter 6. My comment that Mao made decisions about Quemoy “personally” was meant as a rebuttal to those who argue that the 1958 bombardment was the outcome of factional struggle; it was not meant to suggest that Mao took those decisions alone or without consultation.

A common theme links several of the reviews. The reviewers agree with me that for all its distinctiveness, Quemoy in the Cold War is not *sui generis*, but can usefully be compared and contrasted to other times and places. The question is how to choose from among the various alternative approaches by which one can transcend the particular. What is the most productive scale of comparison? And is the purpose of comparison to highlight commonalities or differences? Making comparisons across time, we might compare

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1 As Professor Li notes, newly available sources from the PRC side, both personal accounts and declassified documents, suggest that interpretation of military and political issues will remain contested. I am less sure that inclusion of these materials would significantly have affected the story of everyday life on Quemoy.

2 Mao’s direct and personal involvement is in fact explored in an article by another contributor. Xiao-bing Li, “Making of Mao’s Cold War: The Taiwan Straits Crises Revised,” in Xiaobing Li and Hongshan Li, *China and the United States: A New Cold War History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 58-64. To respond to some of Professor Dai’s other comments, I also agree propaganda efforts launched from Quemoy likely had little effect on the PRC citizenry. This was only in part because of deliberate efforts by Quemoy fishermen to sabotage those efforts. But the effectiveness of these efforts is really beside my intended point. Elements within the ROC government continued for many years to assert publicly that the people of the mainland were ready to rise up against the Communists, that all that was needed was a trigger or spark, and that with U.S. help the ROC could create this trigger. This was a fantasy, but it was an influential and enduring fantasy. On the issue of surveillance and repression, I too regret the inadequacy of the evidence provided. This remains a sensitive topic. But heroic efforts by victims, activists and local politicians are gradually yielding fruits from previously closed archives.
Quemoy during the 1950s and 1960s to the history of the Republic of China (R.O.C.) prior to 1949. Across space, there are several possible comparisons: with the Republic of China on Taiwan, with the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.) on the mainland, with other sites of Cold War conflict, or with zones of low-level military conflict in general. To put this another way, is the story of Quemoy best told as a story about the history of the Republic of China, the history of modern China and the Chinese revolution, the history of the Cold War, or perhaps even world history? Of course, these are not mutually exclusive choices.

To label Quemoy as a Cold War Island is to mark its history after 1949 as discontinuous with what came before. Prof Chang suggests that the book might have explored how “the local history of Quemoy fits into the contexts of Chinese civil war history and Chinese political culture.” I chose not to develop this theme not because there were no comparisons to be made – indeed the parallels are at times extraordinary – but because there seemed no way to support those generalizations while retaining the focus on Quemoy. For example, the obsession with hygiene and the anti-pest campaigns on Quemoy look remarkably like campaigns on the mainland under the R.O.C. before 1949 and under the P.R.C. after. But the explanation for the parallelism, whatever it is, does not lie in the Quemoy archive – it is more likely to be found in the institutional connections and the ideological and intellectual preoccupations of leaders and bureaucrats.

Several readers from Taiwan have pointed out that Quemoy could be considered emblematic of the Republic of China on Taiwan in the early years after Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists’ withdrawal from the mainland in 1949. As political, economic and social developments transformed the larger island, Quemoy changed much more slowly. So a comparison between Taiwan and Quemoy might be a useful way of illuminating these changes. But as Mitter points out, the history of Taiwan has been largely neglected in the English language (though this is now changing). This approach thus struck me as an interesting line of argument, but one that would speak to a relatively small audience and that might detract from many of the most interesting aspects of Quemoy society, those tied closely to global geopolitics.

The scope of comparison could also be much broader. Quemoy might be treated as a case study of how low level militarization and geopolitical tension in general can affect social life. The dangers to civilians posed not just by the enemy’s soldiers but by one’s own soldiers, or the way in which militarization damages and distorts life for all while simultaneously creating new opportunities for some, are issues that would be familiar to communities in many different times and places.

Ultimately it struck me as most productive to show how the Quemoy experience can be seen as related to historically specific global processes, or as the local inflection of those processes, which meant looking at global geopolitics in the latter half of the twentieth-century. I thought it was most interesting to focus on Quemoy as an emblematic or extreme expression of experiences that were widespread in many places in the Cold War period. The parallels with other divided regimes like the two Germanys or the two Koreas are legion. The politics of scarcity explored in Paul Steege’s *Black Market, Cold War:*
Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-1949 would be very familiar to Quemoy residents. So too are the parallels with other geopolitical flashpoints, where decisions made in far-off capitals could have profound yet unexpected consequences on private life.

I did not wish to record the experiences of people who lived through this period simply to rescue them from, to use E.P. Thomson’s famous phrase, the “condescension of posterity.” Rather, my goal is nicely summed up in Mitter’s comment that the value of a social history of the Cold War is to provide a more thorough understanding than one that rests only on personality or structure or both. In other words, effective social history of the Cold War should not simply add to the story but should have the potential to remake it. Among the issues that the oral history of Quemoy residents can help us understand are the intertwining of Cold War geopolitics and prior local conflicts, the politicization and militarization of everyday life, and the importance of human agency in shaping the experience of the Cold War.

Finally, I should mention another possible line of comparison. My first visit to Quemoy was in September of 2001; I researched and wrote the book in the years since, while living in the United States. Though I did not develop this theme explicitly, I was often struck by parallels between Quemoy in the Cold War and my own world, in which the social and moral costs of a permanent state of emergency and war and the suspension of the normal order on grounds of putatively objective necessity were gradually becoming evident. None of the reviewers chose to draw out this parallel. As I write this response in January 2008 I wonder if this is perhaps because they felt this parallel was unproductive, or perhaps because the roundtable contributions were written at a moment of optimism that the post-9/11 order may itself soon be history.

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