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Enclosing resources on the islands of Kinmen and Xiamen: From war blockade to financializing natural heritage



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Abstract The cultures of the islands of Kinmen and Xiamen, also respectively Quemoy and Amoy, are tightly interwoven with the South China coastal region of Fujian. Both archipelagos played important historical roles in coastal defense and have been home to many Overseas Chinese since the 19th Century. A decisive battle in the Chinese Civil War was fought on Kinmen in 1949, cutting off Kinmen's connection with Xiamen and Fujian. Positioned on a critical frontier between the 'free world' and the 'communist world', self-sufficiency became militarily important in the event of a blockade. After 1979, Xiamen was designated as a special economic zone attracting large flows of foreign investment and experiencing rapid urban development. Since 2002 the scheduled ferries between Kinmen and Xiamen reopened connections between Kinmen and its neighbor cities in the People's Republic of China. Renewed exchange highlighted the remarkable differences between the two archipelagos' developmental paths that had developed over the course of the 53-year suspension of contact. This paper analyzes these divergent developmental paths through comparative case studies involving forms of enclosure. The wetland conservation at Tzi Lake in Kinmen as well as gentrified residential developments around Yuan-dan Lake in Xiamen are compared; changing relationships, the impact of the sudden re-opening of borders, new forms of enclosure under globalization; and regional flows of capitals are discussed.

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Introduction – the geographical and historical connections of Kinmen and Xiamen islands

Kinmen (or Quemoy) is an archipelago composed of the main island Kinmen, Lieyu (also called 'Little Kinmen') and other

surrounding small islands, with a total area of around 153 km². The history of the island Kinmen is closely knit with that of the coastal region of Fujian (Ng, 1983). The island has a strategic location in the Xiamen Bay or the estuary of Julong River in Fujian Province, facing a number of Chinese cities, including Tong-An District to the north, Jinjiang District and Quanzhou City to the east, and Xiamen Island and Zhangzhou City to the west. On the other hand, it is nearly

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Fig. 1 Map showing position of Kinmen Island (left of center) in relation to the Mainland (north and west of Kinmen) and Taiwan (large island right of center). *Source: Tsai, 2003, p. 210.*

200 km across ocean between Kinmen and Taiwan Island – the later central government location after 1949.

The island of Xiamen and its surrounding small islands have an area of 128 km² and are located at the same bay area with Kinmen Islands (Fig. 1). Historically there was a close geographical relationship between Kinmen and Xiamen, with both serving as a gateway to the coastal areas and territorial seas of southern Fujian. In addition to their geographical relationship, Kinmen and Xiamen possess a shared political, social, and cultural history. Clans from the Central Plain of Mainland China began settling on these islands in the 4th Century. Both islands became important strategic coastal defense sites since 1380s in the Ming Dynasty, and started marine trade from the early 17th Century to compete and cooperate with Western companies (such as The Dutch East India Company – Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC). On a 17th Century European map, dated 1670, it's shown two islands with the names spelled by local dialect as Amoy and Qumoy (Fig. 2).

During the second half of the 17th Century, Koxinga (General Cheng Cheng-Gong) and his followers confronted the Ch'ing Dynasty on behalf of the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty on these two island groups. At that time, Kinmen and Xiamen islands also served as military base for launching attacks on Dutch-occupied Taiwan in 1662. After 20 years confrontation, the Kinmen and Xiamen islands were forced to incorporated into the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1683. Since then the major trade routes from the islands were mainly along coastal areas of Mainland China (Ng, 1983). By the mid-19th Century, Xiamen was designated as one of the five 'Treaty Ports' to international trade under the Treaty of Nanjing¹ (signed in 1842) due to the failure of Chinese army in a succession of battles against British forces at the first Chinese-British Opium War in 1839–1842. Since then, as

one of the treaty ports, Xiamen began serving as a free port to the world and gradually became the economic center of southern Fujian. Many Kinmen people also moved overseas via Xiamen port, and that the Kinmen–Xiamen archipelago became the homeland of a large number of Overseas Chinese.

After World War II and Chinese–Japanese War ending in 1945, the Chinese Civil War between Russian supported Communists party and the Nationalists government of Republic of China fought throughout the country, and the nationalist were defeated and withdrawn from Mainland to islands of Taiwan in the end of 1949. In October 1949, the decisive battle was fought on Kinmen Island, ending with a wall through the archipelago and cutting off Kinmen's connections with Xiamen. Positioned on a critical frontier not only between communist People's Republic of China and nationalist Republic of China, but also between the 'free world' and the 'communist world' as one of the boarder during the world's Cold War era, the islands development have been greatly restrained.

From 1949 to 1992, tens of thousands of soldiers were stationed in Kinmen, and military facilities of every kind were set up in the archipelago. Considerable state funds were injected for geostrategic purposes, including the ability to survive a long blockade. Thus, strictly regulated efforts got underway to promote reforestation, ensure an adequate water supply, boost agricultural and pastoral land to secure food self-sufficiency, and introduce drought-resistant sorghum for the mass production of liquor (kaoliang) for export as a source of income (Tsai, 2003). Cross-strait relations have however markedly improved in recent years; and Kinmen has transited "from battlefield to cross-strait bridge" (Taiwan Today, 2011; Baldacchino and Tsai, 2014).

'Facing each other': the development of Xiamen and Kinmen Islands in the Post-Cold War era

Xiamen: special economic zone after the 1980s

Under the tense atmosphere of the confrontation between both coasts, the development of Xiamen had also been hindered

¹ The Treaty of Nanking, 1842—the first of what the Chinese later called the unequal treaties—granted an indemnity and extraterritoriality to Britain, the opening of five treaty ports, and the cession of Hong Kong Island. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Opium_War.

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