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# The Affect of Memory: The Affective Community in the Matsu Borderland Archipelago

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## ABSTRACT

Using the case study of a family in Matsu, this study illustrates how emotions become the centre of social cohesion when confronting border islands. Emotions enable the Matsu people to explore the future of self-identity between a sense of fairness and justice after martial law was lifted and a sense of powerlessness while under the rule of Martial Law. First, this study explains how emotions evoked from memory reflect different personal life experiences that shape different local family oral history narratives, and, amid calls for land justice and open exchanges, how the memory of intellectuals evokes a sense of justice to optimistically redefine the Matsu people. Second, drawing from the sense of powerlessness in recalling family history and the continuous risk for fishers on the sea, this study explores how the fishers' memory demonstrates a sense of helplessness towards the strict border control exercised during Martial Law, and the weak enforcement of maritime law after it was lifted. Finally, from a discussion on family oral history in the borderland, and by examining how people in the border islands define their self-identity in the post-Martial Law era, this paper suggests border consciousness is relational, rather than processual, while still facing challenges under the changing geopolitical situation.

## Islands on the Border, Emotional Geopolitics, and the Affective Community

Geopolitically, islands play a significant role in military strategy, especially in sea power theory (Mahan 1911, 1918). Controlling an island means controlling its surrounding waters. If an island is in a channel, then it potentially strangles free passage of vessels. Islands have been seen as outposts of empire and markers of spheres of influence in the intense competition between European powers; or as self-sustained utopias sheltered from the forces of globalisation by a barrier of water (Ratter 2018). For mainlanders, islands are a marker of national sovereignty. Their status is at stake if the limit of sovereignty lies on ambiguous boundaries; namely, territorial waters surrounding islands play an important role in challenging the concept of a free

sea, where territorial claims cannot be properly established, according to the Grotian view on jus (Blanco 2020).

The aforementioned perspectives on the strategic importance of territorial control differ from those that focus on the formation of regional identity, or regional consciousness, through both grand narratives and everyday experiences. Paasi (1996, 1998) shifts the focus to how geographical elements influence regional consciousness and identity, viewing borders not merely as physical dividers but as cultural constructs. The perspective aligns with what Balibar (2002), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), and Mignolo (2012) argues that borders are crucial in a globalised world where displacements resulting from power imbalances lies as ‘borderscapes’, performing the dynamic nature of borders in the construction of social identity.

However, unlike Paasi, Megoran (2006) criticises analysis of texts and focuses more on everyday geopolitics to search why and where borders form in their interaction relationally with local people. As demonstrated by Scott (2009) and Lin (2021), local people fleeing state borders experience autonomous freedom or establish what can be termed as ‘imaging subjects’. Borders act as a catalyst for the construction of subjects, and state sovereignty represented by the borders dissipates once these subjects take shape. As Rosaldo (1989, 2008) suggests, the borderland is a way of ‘redefining the concept of culture’, and it should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as ‘sites of creative cultural production that require investigation’. This view has influenced border studies in anthropology (Berdahl 1999) and geography (Konrad and Nicol 2011). Ratter (2018, 14) argues, as Rosaldo suggested, that in island societies sharing a unique cultural tradition, the insularity shaped by physical distancing and mental self-perception is a social phenomenon that can manifest without physical separation, thereby promoting a distinct island identity.

Based on these arguments, this paper explores how affect can further illuminate the role of borders as cultural catalysts in island society formation processes. The concept of emotional community is used to examine how communities bond through shared emotions and values (Rosenwein 2006), which is expanded by Nancy’s concept of affect in *communauté désœuvrée* (inoperative community) as a fluid state of being-with rather than a fixed togetherness (Nancy 1986).

While the nature of affect is debated whether it belongs to parts of biological impulse mechanisms relating to pre-human capacity intensity, or psychological phenomena, namely emotion, linking with felt-thought (Ahmed 2014; Lindholm 2005; Lutz 1988; Massumi 1995), affect may both stem from biological natural emergence and social collectivity that can be used interchangeably (Thrift 2004). This paper follows the definition of Thrift and focuses on the relation of affect and geopolitics, especially addressing on the borderland community identity. In order to discuss (i)

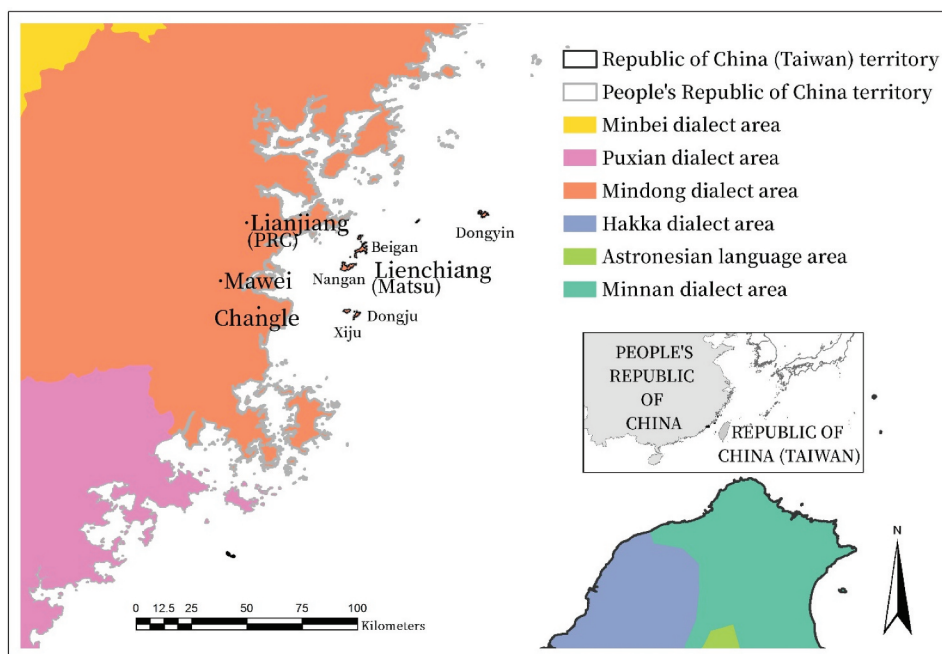
how memory embodies a primordial attachment based on personal experience and geo-historical context (Paasi 1996), and (ii) how the overflow of individual affect is ‘being-with’ (Nancy 1986) the border and (re)forms border consciousness relationally, this paper introduces a case study from sea islands on the geopolitical frontline between Taiwan and China that shows the dynamics between border formation and islander identity as follows.

### **Matsu Islands and Lin Family**

Matsu Islands, off the coast of Chinese Fujian Province, have been bordered by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), or China, and the Republic of China (ROC), or Taiwan, since the 1950s. From prehistoric times to the 10th–13th centuries, both archaeological and historical records show that the Matsu islands, originally like their counterparts off the Fujian coast, were harboured by seasonal fishers, traders, and pirates – often indistinguishable from one another. Continuous settlement on the islands did not occur until the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty (1736–1796), when the sea ban was lifted.

In WWII, Matsu became one of the battlegrounds of the Sino-Japanese War, but there were no major casualties or fire confrontations until 1949. As the Government of ROC, or the Nationalists, formed by the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT) retreated the mainland China steadily, Matsu transformed to a forefront stronghold guarding Taiwan. Together with another frontline island Kinmen, the Nationalist Government implemented the Civil Affairs/Military Government (hereafter CAMG) and formed the ‘Kinma Frontline’ as a whole. Military governance under martial law imposed stricter prohibition measures on those two offshore islands than in Taiwan under the guise of necessary militarisation to counterattack the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of PRC. Free movements, financial exchanges, and the import/export of supplies were banned, forming a state of ‘double bordering’. This term means that, in practice, Kinmen and Matsu suffer from an external unification image border to China and an internal battlefield control border that is not an extension of, but an exception to, Taiwan (Chu and Hsu 2021, 4–9).

From fishery islands to border frontiers, the five inhabited islands of Matsu (Figure 1) were not affiliated with each other until the Nationalists lost the Chinese Civil War. Natives speaking Mindong language different from most of Taiwanese mother tongue immigrated from their ancestral home in mainland China to each island of Matsu individually before the Nationalist *guanbi* policy, or port-closure policy, came into effect (Lin 2009). During that time, each coastal villager on Matsu islands was more familiar with their hometown people than their island neighbours, forming the typical littoral society where



**Figure 1.** The map of Matsu and its surroundings (illustrated by author).

coastal areas have more in common with each other than with their inland surroundings (Pearson 2006).

After the retreat of Nationalist troops, the enforced blockade caused families to split apart, and those fishers' offspring who remained on the offshore islands became known as the Matsu people, the same name that the late-arriving troop leader had given to their comparatively newly-formed army defence zone. Trauma and benefits were intertwined under the dictatorship of the CAMG Committee, as the commander was in charge of both the local executive committee and the local chapter of the KMT. The village head was selected from among local elders by the CAMG Committee, while they appointed a deputy village head from the army political warfare system who actually supervised and directed local people in building a *Zhàndòu cūn* 戰鬥村, or combat village (Lin 2021). The county magistrate was also appointed by the CAMG Committee, where measures were made from a national defence perspective, including self-defence forces, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, prisons, agricultural improvement fields, water plants, and even museums (Li 1998).

Echoing what Nissology initiator Depraetere (2008) suggests – that all island researchers should concentrate on the importance of archipelagic connections as a way to move beyond binary oppositions – the contemporary development in Matsu aligns with what Depraetere hopes for. With the end of Martial Law and the dissolution of the CAMG Committee, determining the

roles and actions of the publicly elected local governor and councilor became crucial in the newly formed constituency after military rule. Drawing from Lin (2014, 2017, 2021), it is argued here that religion is vital for the re-centralisation of Matsu islanders at this stage to explore their identity through local temple refurbishing and cross-strait pilgrimages. This coincides with Baldacchino and Tsai's (2014) belief that island relations, especially in the case of Taiwan, are based on the fluid tropes of reterritorialized assemblages connected by a range of events from NIMBY infrastructure building to the promotion of Chinese tourists.

Modern Matsu history is full of twists and turns, and the Lin Family has witnessed the entire dramatic change. The Lin Family in Nangan Island, Matsu, was made famous by their ancestral namesake, Lin Yi-He, whose name rose to prominence locally during the Chinese Republican era in the 1930s. A migrant from the mainland, Lin Yi-He took risks and created his own maritime armed force to uphold justice and the order of law. After being kidnapped by pirates, he decided to stand up and build several crucial infrastructures in Nangan, including wells, power plants, and lighting pools, during the 'anarchic' turmoil period of Matsu's history. It is said that he even left an unfinished seawall lying beneath the Matsu port, the busiest transportation hub before the lifting of Martial Law.

When the Nationalist Government was unable to control the Japanese army's occupation of China, Lin Yi-He collected *tsò-höyng* 做餉, or a sea toll, to maintain his own troops and the peace in Matsu waters while working with both the Japanese and the Nationalist intelligence. To record what he contributed to Matsu amid the chaos during the Sino-Japanese war in WWII, his son-in-law Huang Hsing-Hua wrote an unpublished biography in 2012, *Luànshì dòushì Lín Yì-Hé* (Lin Yi-He, A fighter in troubled times), in honour of his father-in-law. In the biography, Huang called Lin a 'fighter' and what he did as *Qūxiàn jiùguó* 曲線救國, or saving the country in a curved manner (Huang 2012, 9–12).

Lin Yi-He's actions are highly controversial locally, yet he has become a well-known figure on these former fishing islands. Typically, early Matsu settlers fished close to their households, villages, or islands. However, Lin Yi-He developed a cross-island sea toll network, extending beyond the areas where these settlers once fished, weaving their individual histories into a comprehensive spatio-temporal narrative across the sea of Matsu. Furthermore, while most fishers are illiterate, the history of Matsu Islands relies on people like Lin Yi-He who had worked with different



**Figure 2.** Portrait of Lin Yi-He. (Reprint from Chronicle of Lienchiang County)

official/unofficial forces and left his legacies by both word of mouth and archives. Therefore, the representativeness of Lin cannot be emphasised too much.

Based on the effect is politically manipulated rather than be given (Bond 2011; Welch and Panelli 2007), in the definition of collective memory is ‘people generally acquire their memories but also recall, recognize, and locate oneself in the society’ (Halbwachs 1992, 38) the memory itself is a schema sharing the primordial attachment, namely towards a certain social environment (Bartlett 1932). Next, I will analyse affect in oral history from this perspective and will use the Lin family to gain a glimpse of the identity of the Matsu people through an affective interpretation of history. The following point must be particularly emphasised: the analysis does not imply that the story of the Lin family can represent the entire Matsu people’s experience of the boundary-making process in the same way. However, it does reflect that, like many Matsu people, emotions play a crucial role in the formation of identity within the border community.

The following discussion of how Lin Yi-He (Figure 2) was interpreted and the meaning behind it was the result of a semi-structured 4-hour focus group interview with his offspring conducted on 23 April 2020. The participants include R, age 67, granddaughter of Lin Yi-He, and K, age 65, grandson of Lin Yi-He (Figure 3).<sup>1</sup> Although their recollections of their grandfather evoke distinctly contrasting feelings, as though their experiences transpired in entirely separate worlds, they lived together until age 18, when one left to attend college, and the other found a job in Taiwan and only later returned to Matsu. These similar experiences demonstrate the complexity of borderland islanders concerning the border itself.

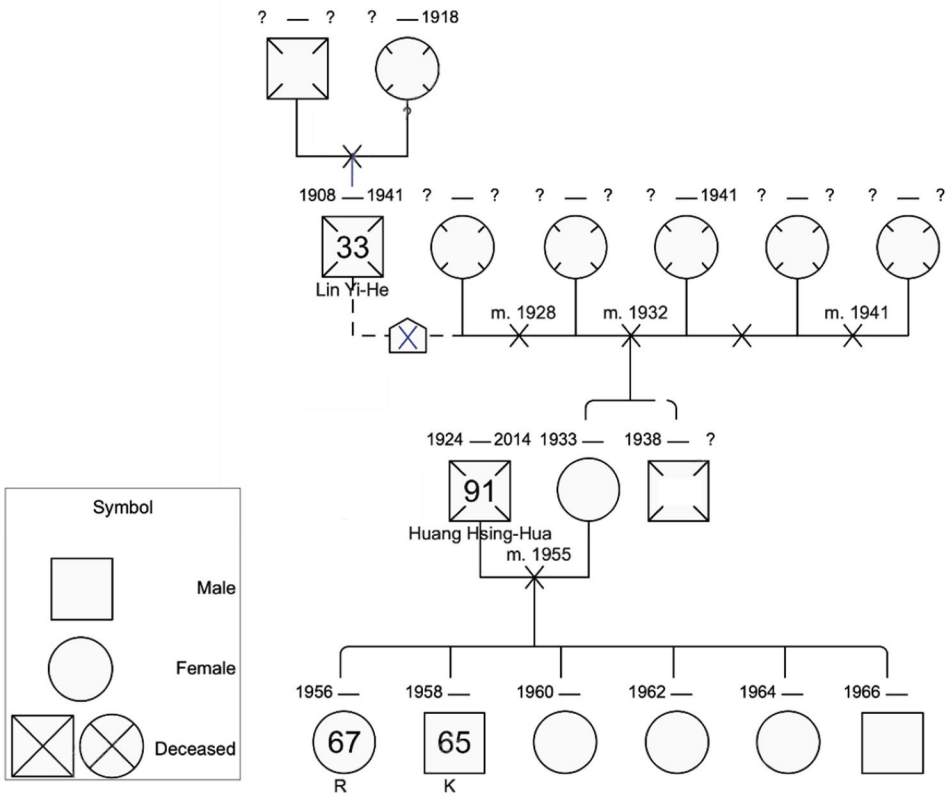


Figure 3. Family tree of the Lin's.

### The Sense of Justice from Intellectuals

R, the granddaughter of Lin Yi-He, reflected on the legacy of her grandfather through the lens of justice. Born after the death of Lin Yi-He, R could only form her image of her grandfather from the stories told by her mother. Thus, she began to recount the legacy of Lin Yi-He by first talking about her mother.

R: My mother was the *Wànnián* 萬年 president of the Women's Association, so why would she want to take up that position? First, no one wanted to accept it, and secondly my mother is enthusiastic and friendly. The point is that she can speak Mandarin – there were not many people who could speak Mandarin in Matsu at that time – and she is very enthusiastic, so many people approached her for various reasons. She is willing to help others and continuously do so, and that takes money beside a warm heart. Fortunately, my mother started to run a department store then; otherwise, we had no money to deal with those requests.

Author: Was there a paid job in the Women's Association?

No, there was no paid job [in the association]! [...] Certainly, people simply trusted my mother; she is fair in doing things, and she would do whatever she promises.



*Wànnián*, or 10000 year, is a common term in Mandarin meaning serving a long period of time, and the Women's Association was one of five major organisations<sup>2</sup> approved and sponsored by the CAMG Committee to develop the relationship with the locals. After talking about what her mother had done as a mediator in domestic violence cases and stating that Matsu women were taught to be conservative at that time, she credited the bravery of her mother to the encouragement of her grandfather. It was his sense of justice based on the geo-historical background as a bandit that gave her the strength as a female entrepreneur to not only open the first ice factory in Matsu and a clothing store, but also engage in public affairs that no women had previously dared to do. And the legend of Lin Yi-He, as R heard from her mother, was also one of courage. Once a warship off the Matsu coast was abandoned by the Japanese navy during the WWII, Lin Yi-He boarded the ship alone in spite of rumours of electrocution,

R: No one dared to board the ship, so he pondered his next move. Ingeniously, he used a piece of the planned wood chip. If the wood is planned to be longer, the wood chips will also be longer. He utilised this as an insulator to take risks; he must have been very creative and smart.

K: Can it also imply that there were many broken ships at that time?<sup>3</sup>

R: Yes, this was an international route!

R mentioned this legacy influenced her not only mentally but physically, particularly during a time when she returned to Matsu,

R: In the past, our Matsu people had to be [transferred] from large warships to small boats, and from small boats to tiny sampans. There was once a stranger who came to carry me ashore, and I did not know him at all. He carried me, and he said, 'How are you?' He referred to me as something akin to [the daughter of] a princess, referring to my mother. They considered that my mother [a princess]. When I was young, we had many people visiting my house, and my mother often bought them a bottle of wine or gave them money. I did not know about these people whom my mother called 'uncles'. I thought they were unkempt at that time, and I did not like them. However, when my mother was young, they had all protected her and served my grandfather.

R later succeeded to the position of president of the Women's Association from her mother, who had a long service record. Her mother had even been appointed as a representative of the county consultation council, a role similar to that of a councilor before the democratisation process involved advising the military government. Besides advocating for women's roles, she was heavily involved in local elections alongside her husband, who was the legislator representing Matsu and a core cadre in the KMT, the only party that ruled Matsu under the CAMG for 36 years.

For R, the way to deal with traumatic memories for the Matsu people is the possibility of restoration in pursuit of the sense of justice.

R: However, my father [who wrote the biography] has made our position clear: Even if he was a bandit, you still can write something about him. It does not matter whether he was a bandit. [...] If you said he was a bandit, it does not matter if you write it down. We did not ask for a presupposed position. In fact, all of us took this writing too seriously. Back in the old days, Matsu was almost an anarchic place. That is the same for the Northeast [warlords in China] then – they were kings with their own bases, and you did not need to say what kind of a person he was, because that does not matter. The thing is, our history during that period is blank, and my father could fill it a little bit of that. He had basically verified historical material in addition to his own memory.

The memory she learned from her grandfather's ambiguous deeds in the waters during the Second Sino-Japanese War, where she embraced a sense of justice, has influenced her affect towards Matsu affairs and the identity of the Matsu people. For instance, start with the Matsu County Government's refusal to help publish her grandfather's biography. The Lin family hopes that if the biography could be published by the local government, it would represent the historical presence of Lin Yi-He through local recognition at least. When R added at the end of the interview that the family did not mind people calling her grandfather a pirate rather than bandit, as long as it was based on the view of him as possessing a heroic outlaw spirit, R complained about the postponement of plans for the official publication of Lin Yi-He's biography due to official concerns over public endorsement of her grandfather. R insisted that Lin Yi-He was an important person, so the biography should be published officially. But, as Szonyi (2018) observed,<sup>4</sup> one difference between Kinmen and Matsu, two Taiwanese offshore islands bordering China, is that locals of the latter would not mind calling themselves the offspring of pirates. The contrasting attitudes towards pirates among officials and locals demonstrate the continuous struggle for historical reconciliation and self-identity in Matsu.

R represents those Matsuese in their middle age and expresses their life on border by affects of both cherishing the good old days and looking forward to future developments. She was raised with an education that was anti-communist but not anti-China, reflecting the military battlefield context of her upbringing (Figure 4). With the passing of the Chiang family, who led the KMT from the 1920s to the 1990s, they turned to follow the guidance of party-state elders and support open communication with the CCP for the reconciliation of the historically painful split of 'one China'.

While R believes her sense of fairness and justice is derived from Lin Yi-He and passed to her mother, then to herself, it is also her close relationship with the military government and the KMT, like her mother and her husband, that prompts in her an affect of justice. Going back to 1992, politicians in Matsu unanimously echoed the slogan 'Two gates open first, two horses go first'<sup>5</sup> by Chen Guangyi, then Secretary of the CCP Fujian Provincial Party Committee. They promoted the 'mini-three links'<sup>6</sup> as a cross-strait peace breakthrough after democratisation. In the 1993 'Koo-Wang Talks', an agenda to replace the



**Figure 4.** Young R appeared in a military news agency documentary (*mǎzǔ shí nián* 1967) (reprinted with permission).

proposed direct link between Taiwan and China with experimental mini-three-links implementation was celebrated by locals as they believed, ‘Not only is the mini-three-links a new source of economic vitality for the Kinma economy, but it also represents a new hope for cross-strait peace. As long as the government manages it prudently and eliminates unnecessary obstacles, the implementation of the mini-three-links is expected to proceed increasingly and smoothly without doubt’. Tsao (2016, as cited in Admin, 2016)

When R explained that their family did not mind calling Lin Yi-He a pirate and that she did not mind sharing the past pain that most Matsu elderly preferred not to talk about, the condition of generosity is met only if the mini-three-links are opened, representing an affect of justice and hope. With the premise of free border trade, she later expressed the hope to restore the freedom of ‘fairness and justice’ so that the Matsu people have the same rights as people in other parts of Taiwan, including the freedom of movement and transportation.

### **The Sense of Helplessness from Fishers**

In contrast to R, her younger brother K shared a different and somewhat upset affect when discussing his relationship with his grandfather. Much of it stems from how he sued and successfully acquired the ownership certificate for his grandfather’s old house. K owns a famous tourist restaurant and an old wine distillery named after his grandfather. In the old house, he serves local delicacies to group tourists and teaches visitors how to make old wine, a Matsu speciality. Later in the interview, he initially talked about his

neighbour next to the old house and how he once prepared to sail him to Taiwan for an emergency surgery using his fishing boat.

Before Matsu was democratised in 1992, accessibility was controlled, and the only way to leave Matsu was by embarking on a military vessel, which departed every 10–15 days. Fishing boats became an emergency substitute in any situation approved by the CAMG Committee. K recalled a time when his neighbour became seriously ill and needed to go to Taiwan for emergency treatment. He was ordered to transport his neighbour immediately using his boat as an alternative form of transportation. K was even ordered to receive some basic emergency medical training at the hospital. ‘However, he passed away the next day. Therefore, my medical training was not used’, K calmly described this harrowing incident while recounting his legendary experience at sea.

Then, K told of another daring experience about an accidental gunshot while grouper fishing. Shocked and terrified, K stated,

I was shot in broad daylight before. I sailed back from Juguang after fishing. The weather was fine during the day and the sun was very bright. At the time, we sailed a wooden boat. As it was fine—it was fine on the way back—I sat on the bridge and talked with the captain. Suddenly, I heard a gunshot and a bullet hit the foot of captain. The cockpit floor was made by moveable boards. So after the boat got shot in Qingshui waters [outside Nangan Island], the captain asked me to take the board with the bullet hole as soon as we got ashore. Before we returned home, a company commander came and apologized. Very angry at that time, we did not understand why we got shot when our national flag was raised high on the boat which could always be seen especially [on sunny days], and we were close to shore! It was [the distance] where the rifle could hit! However, the company commander was very young. Because we looked at him and he seemed quite pitiful, we let him go. I did not know what problem the soldier had. So, there were many accidents at that time, and people were shot mistakenly. And if they did get shot, what could they do?

K further added that, when later fishing for groupers in Dongyin Island, he was asked to return with his boat because the soldiers there did not recognise his documents and refused to let him stay. Documents issued by the Matsu Defense Command from Nangan Island were deemed incomplete by the local Dongyin Defense Command, and those two units are not subordinate to each other, meaning neither has authority over the other. ‘A lot of unreasonable regulations!’ K exclaimed angrily in a high-pitched voice when discussing fishery control during the battlefield administration era.

‘This is the situation faced by all Matsu fishers’, as expressed by Captain Chang, a Beigan fisher five years older than K when I told him the story of K. Though they did not directly know each other, Captain Chang began engaging in grouper fishing at the age of 23, around the time his father passed away. Coming from a fishery family, he inherited his father’s business and became a captain. In the 1970s, gillnets were deployed from autumn to winter

to catch yellow croakers and yellow drum fish, while groupers were targeted in the summer. As opposed to K, Chang fished mostly near his own hometown but still managed to make a substantial income.

Captain Chang: At that time, there were many groupers. I usually fished in Beigan. When the weather was good and the winds and waves were small, I went to Liangdao to fish. The number of boats that travelled to Liangdao was relatively high. In a group of four, I could catch two to three hundred a day. However, we did not know how to sell them at that time, and sold them only to nearby mainland fishers. It was only 70 NTD per catty at sea, however, if we could sell them in Taiwan, the price would be 600 NTD per catty, which was ten times more. Unfortunately, we were not aware of this information. Furthermore, I did not know how to obtain a boat to travel to Taiwan. It was possible then, that four people could fish grouper and earn 8 million NTD in three months. At that time, 8 million NTD could buy four houses in Taipei!

However, when Martial Law was lifted in Matsu, everything changed.

When I was 28 years old, Martial Law was lifted, the army was unable to disperse those mainland fishing boats by gunfire, and there was no naval security protection. This meant all coastlines were open to Mainland fishers. They visited daily, and we were unable to catch them. Originally, there were many groupers beneath every island in Matsu, however, small groupers were wiped out by Chinese octopus cages, while large groupers were caught by Chinese gillnets.

He indicated that in the past, when old fishers in Matsu used fishing nets, they adhered to a concept of catching by ‘species’, aiming to trawl only specific kinds of fish, such as clove fish.

Captain Chang: However, after the hydraulic press trawlers appeared, the fish died quickly. In the past, nets were collected by manpower and that was sufficient to have 30 gillnets per day. However, for hydraulic machines it is now possible to set up 300 gillnets per day without any manpower. The only thing fishers need to do is to check and adjust their nets.

Chang emphasised that countries worldwide are now trying to stop issuing trawler licences as they know that trawling is too destructive. However, the Chinese encourage their fishers to engage in fishing trawlers with subsidies. ‘Therefore, if there are no fish in Chinese waters, we [in Matsu] have nothing, too’.

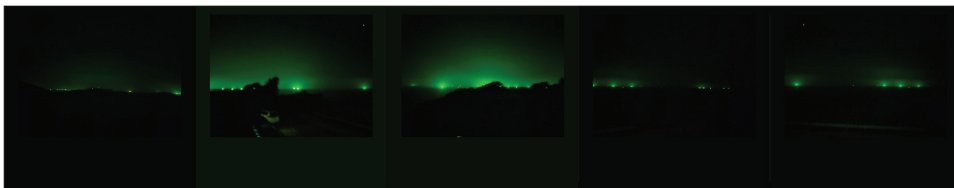
Unlike Captain Chang, who continues to sail his boat and take guests for leisure fishing, K decided to give up his fishing business and collaborated with his younger sister to co-found the ‘Lin Yi-He Workshop’. This venue was not only aimed at rediscovering the family history but also at transforming the family brewery business – established by his mother, who also served for the Women’s Association – from the primary sector to the tertiary sector, a transition made by many familial industries in Matsu. Under the guidance of a Taiwanese master, they brewed soy sauce until 1990, when they switched to producing vinegar.

K: Basically, fermented things have common techniques, and I happened to catch up with the healthy vinegar trends in Taiwan. Health food stores had just begun, and there were no government regulations. So, if we said something was organic, it was organic.

K recalled that he had begun promoting his vinegar products all over Taiwan, even to Yiguandao religious rites, as the followers were fond of it. He and Captain Chang represent two different responses to developments in the Matsu fishing industry. However, they both conveyed a sense of helplessness in the face of the depletion of fisheries resources. Being situated on the border, without clear demarcation of the oceans surrounding the islands and corresponding resource management, islanders could not freely control their own resources. This sense of powerlessness is an affect manifesting in the experiences of both K and Captain Chang. Despite not knowing each other, upon hearing each other's experiences, Captain Chang could immediately express deep understanding without any further description. In other words, shared experiences beyond language can evoke affects to express mutual understanding and feelings, based on the relational connection of a person to border and person to person.

The way for K to face historical trauma is remembering the geo-historical continuous risk for fishers on the sea by Nationlist soldiers in the past, as K recalled being accidentally shot. And this life-on-border attitude has been shared by other Matsuese when Chinese fishing boats appear in the present (Figure 5), as evidenced by their high voltage of fish lights around Matsu, referred to as the 'Matsu Aurora'. Fishery depletion has led both K, Captain Chang and other Matsu fishers to change their careers out of helplessness. Furthermore, the 'Matsu Aurora' symbolises not only a sign of environmental disaster but also a sensory-perceived and embodied experience ashore, synthesising negative personal affective feelings of powerlessness and helplessness beyond human capacity to the internal and external worlds of radiance (Chien 2015; Jackson 1994; Yu 2015).

The Lin Family offers us a fresh perspective on borderland society through affect. Both R and K represent typical occupations among middle-aged in Matsu. The emotionalisation of memory in the interview represents different epistemology towards the island border and legitimises contradicted contemporary geopolitical identity of islanders. While R reflects on memories as the daughter of a princess, K could only remember discussing property rights, thinking about the experience of his neighbour who had to be sent to the hospital in an emergency, and then contemplating the moments of life and death he also faced on the boat. Whether it was R's confusion when she did not know who had called her the daughter of a princess or K's sympathy towards the company commander and letting him go after being shot on a fishing boat, they all reveal mixed feelings, and thus, social facts.



**Figure 5.** Panorama shot of “Matsu Aurora”, named by Matsu locals to mock themselves, in Da’ao mountain of Beigan Island on July 6, 2021 (shoot by author).

From justice to powerlessness, after Martial Law was lifted, the Matsu people on the border used different memories related to ocean sensations to appeal to their affects and re-explore their identity. Although feelings may vary, the events triggering them all stem from the same authoritarian and hegemonic conditions of martial law on the militarised frontline islands. The interviews show that in a disunited borderland like Matsu, where contradictory identities are still being contested, the dynamic political mechanism on this newly-born border archipelago not only requires participation from the locals themselves but also indicates that senses are at stake where spatio-temporal geopoliticization continues.

### **Conclusion: The Meaning of Affective Community in Border Consciousness**

This paper adopts the self-focused research method (Beatty 2014) to capture personal emotions and delves into memory, which operates not merely in mediating but also in determining social arrangements (Olick and Robbins 1998). From oral interviews with family members about Lin Yi-He, we can observe how memory has become an integral element of cohesive self-identity in a society where social memory is always in a state of ambivalence. Thus, memory is not only a philosophical reflection on subjective thinking but a question of how bodily thoughts reveal the nature of island society. By utilising an oral interview of memories of family history to discuss how memory embodies a primordial attachment based on personal experience and geo-historical context, this paper asserts that an island is a border and that borders should be considered not as transitional zones but as sites of culture production, and not as passive places moulded by external forces but as active, complex and varied meeting points (Mogiani 2023), especially in the exchange of different affects.

Although not all Matsuese have the same affect about life on border like what the Lin family members do, it does reflect that affect play a crucial role in the boundary-making process and its identity formation within the border community. The institution of the border becomes meaningful only through local recognition (Megoran 2006), and instinctive affect proves to be the very

foundation of that recognition against the top-down national border. The Spinozian naturalistic view of the individual as one substance combining thinking and acting highlights what affect means to a border consciousness (Thrift 2004). Unlike what Paasi claims, the border does not physically exist in actual lines, and the border consciousness does not imply a fixed and processual component. Representations and interpretations of borders are actually all affective products of dynamics between island people and the border itself. Border consciousness is based on the cultural contexts in which individual affect lies.

The border is the catalyst for community identity, not the reactant of it. The affective and sensory mechanisms put islander identity in coevolution with border formation, not in what Scott (2009) and Lin (2021) categorised as a state of total autonomy nomad or relative autonomy imaginative subject. Individuals on borderlands are perpetually subject to state control over border territories and are restricted in their imaginations from detaching themselves from it independently.

From justice to powerlessness, after Martial Law was lifted, the Matsu people on the border islands used different memories related to ocean sensations to appeal to their affects and re-explore their identity. The ambivalence of multi-directional memory affect conveys how contingent the nature of affective community is in examining the border through inquiries of memory, affect, and identity, and as a relational approach that reveals the border as coming into being through the embodied experiences of islanders.

The border is not only an institution rooted in structure and interpretation or a contested political space of differing temporalities (Pfoser 2022); it is also an affect-sharing mechanism shaped by the dynamic relationships and encounters between individuals, which reveal a distinct border consciousness on the island. People on border islands do not merely devise ways to breakthrough boundaries and create new imaginative subjects. Instead, these subjects arise from affects rooted in past memories, reflecting an ongoing process of positioning within diverse social epistemologies. It is the collective experience of 'being-with' others in the face of an inevitable border – rather than any particular sentiment – that enables differently affected individuals in the borderland to remain intimate as family members, friends, or partners, even as they may hold opposing views about their future, their nation, and even themselves. Only through these tensions can the border community continue to progress, finding a shared identity within their differences.

## Notes

1. Age here is stated by the year of 2023.



2. The five government-sponsored associations are Fisher's Association, Farmer's Association, Trade Union, Chamber of Commerce, and Women's Association.
3. K, the younger brother of R, is another interviewee in the focus group interview. Because other informants may occasionally answer the questions in a focus group interview format, this paper chooses to remain the original cut in on conversations.
4. Szonyi proposed three possible reasons for those differences: the nature of military-civilian relationship, the research methods, and the research time.
5. Two gates refers to the island of Kinmen and Xiamen with the suffix '-men', meaning gate in Chinese. For two horse, it refers to Matsu Islands and Mawei with the prefix 'Ma', meaning horse in Chinese.
6. The term 'Mini Three Links' encapsulates a set of transportation and communication accords between mainland China and Taiwan, designed to expedite direct travel, trade, and postal services across the Taiwan Strait. Instituted in the early 2000s, these links predominantly facilitate connections between the outlying Taiwanese islands of Kinmen and Matsu and the proximate Fujian province in China.

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