

Acknowledgements

I first visited Matsu for a conference in 2006. At that time, the islanders were contemplating the varied possibilities for their future, as direct “links” between China and Taiwan would soon be established after years of military confrontation. During that first visit, the islanders’ close-yet-distant feeling for the ocean deeply intrigued me. Since then, and over many years of traveling back and forth between Taiwan and Matsu, I have relied on the help and friendship of many Matsu people. To protect the privacy of my informants, I have used pseudonyms for many in this book, but my gratitude to them for talking to and for teaching me goes beyond anything words can express. Not only have I learned to be patient (while waiting interminably for frequently canceled flights to Matsu), I have also improved at playing “bandit mahjong” (though I will probably never come close to matching their speed). Most importantly, I have always marveled at and aspired to match their imaginative powers. My warmest thanks go to my foster mother, whom I call “*laoma*,” and to her family for housing, feeding, and standing by me: their love, knowledge, and support has been an emotional anchor during my time spent on these islands.

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