

BOOK REVIEWS SECTION

Akihiro Iwashita (2015). *Japan's border issues: Pitfalls and prospects*. London: Routledge. Hbk. 141pp+Index. ISBN: 978-1-138-91677-7. US\$160.

Consult the official map of Japan, titled 'Japanese Territory', available off the website of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/territory/>. The map highlights three island areas, all of which are deemed "inherent territory of Japan": Dokdo, an island known as Takeshima to the Japanese, currently controlled by South Korea; the South Kuriles, known as the Northern Territories to the Japanese, administered by Russia/Soviet Union since 1945; and the Diaoyu islands (known as Diaoyutai to Taiwan, and Senkaku to the Japanese), currently administered by Japan as part of Okinawa prefecture, but claimed by China (and Taiwan).

In *Japan's border issues: Pitfalls and prospects*, English language readers will finally be able to dig their teeth into a full-length academic text and delve into Iwashita's pioneering research into border issues. This slim volume comprises seven chapters that distil Professor Iwashita's thoughts, analyses and experiences of Japan and its border issues, focusing specifically on its three pending, and festering, territorial squabbles with its neighbours.

Small or marginal islands can loom large in the national psyche. The author makes very interesting and valuable points that can help lead to a situation where cooperation and resolution over such border issues become more realistic and feasible. The key point is to climb down from populist and nationalist-friendly positions that claim islands as indisputably integral parts of national territory, and which by definition render any form of resolution impossible. Instead, a dialogue on regional (rather than national) history, with the more pragmatic and flexible voices and intent of local stakeholders, holds richer promises for solution. Regional cooperation offers opportunities for non-state actors, plus local government, to broaden agendas and recover a cross-border discourse that acknowledges and privileges mobility, connections and migrations rather than sovereignty and territoriality. Iwashita has been actively involved on this front, leading a series of initiatives that have explored regional cooperation between Taiwan and the Yaeyama islands, as well as Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. These projects are vividly documented in an excellent series of DVDs, also available with English voice-overs and translations.

For island studies scholars, this book makes pertinent reading for two main reasons, the first being the more obvious: all these three pending issues deal with islands, reminding us that Japan is an archipelago nation with no (current) land borders with any other country. The implications of this are that such border issues that Japan faces cannot be properly addressed without due process and care to maritime issues as well: these include fishing rights, navigation rights, rights for sea bed mineral exploration, the right to stop and search vessels and detain foreign sea captains and crew as may be felt necessary.

The second is more subtle and would require readers to look at Iwashita's professional past. As a professor of Sino-Russian border issues based at the Slavic and Eurasian Research Centre, Hokkaido University, the author has spent a considerable number of years in his career looking at the chequered history that led to the resolution of *all* border issues between Russia and China: at over 4,000 km, this is the world's sixth-longest international border. A significant stretch of this border lies along the Amur river, and the determination of the ownership of various islands along this river, and therefore the exact location of the international border, consumed many hours of tense diplomacy between Moscow and Beijing,

even leading to a military confrontation in March 1969, when Chinese forces occupied Zhenbao / Damanski island. The last unresolved territorial issue between the two countries was only settled in 2004. With that agreement, Russia transferred part of Abagaitu islet, Yinlong/ Tarabarov island, about half of Heixiazi / Bolshoi Ussuriyski island, plus a few adjacent river islets, to China. As an eclectic comparativist, Iwashita has drawn insights and lessons from this confrontation and deploys them with regard to Japan's territorial squabbles with its three neighbours. Indeed, the unlikely 'fifty-fifty' solution that has led to the division of Heixiazi / Bolshoi Ussuriyski when all else failed may find itself being considered again.

The book is largely autobiographical: the author makes extensive use of his own insights and earlier publications to tease out contexts, arguments and suggest future scenarios. The disadvantage of this approach is that the book is rather short in length and economic in terms of background reading: there are six pages of references in all, around half of which are in Japanese, Russian, Korean or Chinese (and inclusive of the author's own work).

The text comes with various useful maps at different scales. Strangely enough, the map centered on Hokkaido (p. 123) is displayed with south at top: this may confuse a few readers.

This book is essential reading for all those seeking to understand the complex nature of Japan's three ongoing border issues, as well as the likely mechanisms that could help secure their eventual solution, reducing tension in that part of the world.

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~~Samuel Edquist & Janne Holmén (2015) *Islands of Identity: History writing and identity formation in five island regions in the Baltic Sea*, Stockholm, Södertörn Academic Studies 59. 418 pp, ISBN 978-91-86069-98-8, 259 SEK.~~

~~*Islands of Identity* is an extensive presentation of the history writing and the formation of regional identities in the islands of Gotland, Åland, Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Bornholm, combined with a comparative analysis of similarities and differences related to the islands' varying geographical locations and historic circumstances.~~

~~The book begins with a detailed discussion of the theoretical and methodological background employed by the authors. By focusing on the emergence of regional history-writing and regional identities, Holmén and Edquist have chosen an approach which has been less often applied: a lot of historiographical research has been committed to the examination of historians' constructions of national identities, whereas the emergence of regional identities has been less studied. The islands selected for examination differ in their remoteness from the mainland, in their previous affiliations with foreign countries, linguistic differences and presence or absence of political autonomy.~~

~~The Swedish island of Gotland is the largest of the Baltic islands and has a population of approximately 57,000 inhabitants. At present, Gotlanders consider themselves Swedes, but the medieval language of Gotland is considered by linguists to have been different from Swedish. The author of the chapter on Gotland, Samuel Edquist, elaborates islands' history-writing from the perspective of the main tendencies that have underpinned identity formation in the region. He does so by including not only the dominant history-writing narratives with~~