

Godfrey Baldacchino (2017). *Solution protocols to festering island disputes: 'Win-Win' solutions for the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-4724-7518-1 (hbk, £88.00); ISBN: 978-0-3672-1877-5 (pbk, £29.59).

Why would China and Japan risk large scale military conflict over a few insignificant and uninhabited rocks? These little 'islands' should, as Baldacchino's argues, mean *nothing* to these two great powers. But even the most superficial Google search quickly reveals that disagreement about who owns the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and fishing grounds that extend from their coastlines, could mean *everything*. Explaining this, and considering what might be done about it, is the central aim of this book.

The practical importance of answering these questions is clear: a war between these two nations would likely have catastrophic consequences for the entire globe, and this alone justifies scholarly interest and intervention. But Baldacchino's theoretical aims are perhaps more important to the way the book is written and structured. In essence, he sets the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as a test case for the nascent field of island studies, an interdisciplinary endeavour that he has dedicated his career to pioneering. By bringing an 'island lens' to historical, political, legal and economic questions, Baldacchino seeks to "throw some fresh and badly needed light and inspiration on the tense goings on in the East China Sea" (p. xi).

Solution protocols to festering island disputes succeeds remarkably in this endeavour. Its approach is avowedly interdisciplinary. The first three substantive chapters set the context from multiple angles by explaining - in full, rich, historical detail - the origins of the dispute and its contemporary meaning. The effect is to circle in on the islands themselves: starting wide and then narrowing in until these rocks - that are, collectively, a little over 10km² of land - assume a pivotal place in the narrative. In essence, the islands themselves become unwitting characters in a high stakes political dispute that has the potential to be a flashpoint for the region and the globe. Typically seen as a two-sided dispute (China and Japan), in this account we are treated to a more complex story that includes nearby Okinawa and Taiwan.

The next two chapters outline the island lens that Baldacchino seeks to employ. In Chapter Five, we are treated to a synthesis of his decades-long argument about the importance of studying islands and islandness. The key point in relation to this book is that islands regularly serve as pretexts, bargaining chips and proxies in the games that great powers play. Chapter Six then shows how this zero-sum, 'winner takes all' outcome, while common, is not predetermined: islands are also sites of 'creative governance' in which alternatives to the straightjacket of mainstream sovereignty are trialled and tested. Baldacchino sees these creative alternatives as potential solutions to the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Taking inspiration from Ostrom and Dator, the rest of the book is structured around seven concrete examples of these 'win-win solution protocols' in practice. The options include: 1) Splitting, by partitioning the islands into separate jurisdictions; 2) Sharing, by implementing forms of condominium government; 3) Suppressing (or suspending) sovereignty by turning the area into a 'commons'; 4) Single sovereignty but shared jurisdiction, by one state (in this case, Japan) choosing not to exercise complete or full jurisdiction; 5) Shelving (or setting aside) a dispute while developing, by allowing development of the islands to proceed despite disagreement about which state the territory belongs to; 6) Swapping and selling, by allowing the islands to be sold or bartered; or 7) the Status Quo (or stalemate or standstill), by essentially allowing the dispute to rumble on without being resolved, but never quite triggering outright conflict either.

The strength of this structure is that it allows Baldacchino to range widely and draw on numerous examples from across the world to illustrate the sheer variety of jurisdictional forms. This breadth is complemented by discrete contributions by 11 specialists: Fleury and Johnson (The Minquiers and Écréhous, Channel Islands), Grydehøj (Svalbard), Gupta ('The World', Dubai), Hillebrink (St Martin), Iwashita (Bolshoi Ussuriiskii), Lindström and Nauclér (Åland), McIntyre (Tuvalu and Vanuatu), van Aert (Picton, Lennox and Nueva, South America), and van Dijk (UNESCO World Heritage Waddensea area, shared between three countries) – in the cases that Baldacchino covers. The book also contains three substantive commentaries – Katayanagi, Liu Jiangyong and Iwashita – on the case at hand.

This unique stylistic feature highlights the strength and virtue of island studies as a genuine interdisciplinary alternative: it provides scope for comparative insights, while maintaining a commitment to contextually rich and nuanced case-specific knowledge. It also makes the book fun and interesting to read as the narrative is interspersed with different voices and perspectives. In this sense, the book succeeds remarkably well in its aim to both explain the dispute itself but also outline plausible ways forward that are illustrated with real world empirical examples.

Despite the thoughtful and empirically rich smorgasbord that demonstrates the value of an island lens, the book nevertheless raises important questions about the potential limits of such an approach. Specifically, while a shared islandness allows for creative and eclectic parallels to be drawn across historical and cultural contexts, the book does not offer anything by way of a theoretical explanation for why solutions prevail over others. The answer, as with the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, is always to default to context as the explanation for why things turned out the way they did. This has the appeal of being empirically precise. By adding Okinawa and Taiwan to the mix we gain a much more nuanced and clear-eyed understanding of the dynamics at play. And, given the practical aim of the book – to provide evidence of alternatives – this is not a major shortcoming. But it does raise important questions for island studies scholars. If by studying islands on their own terms we start to treat uninhabited rocks as central characters in historically significant events, what type of character are they? Baldacchino is essentially silent on this question. But, academically at least, the stakes are high as, without this conceptual underpinning, contextually rich accounts, even those as broad-ranging as this one, run the risk of being dismissed as 'mere' description and the island lens as simply metaphor by mainstream disciplines. This state of affairs is lamentable, given the uniquely creative scholarship on offer here.

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