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Pitfalls and prospects

Akihiro Iwashita



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Japan's Border Issues

Japan was sometimes described as a country of “peace” during the Cold War period, in contrast to the continental border conflicts taking place at the time, such as the Sino–Soviet rivalry. However, as the maritime frontier was “rediscovered” and defined by the regional powers and legal refinements of the 1970s, the process of states seeking a secure maritime zone has accelerated and maritime rivalries have become as intense as those further inland.

This book examines the territorial disputes souring relations between Japan and its three neighbors: Russia, South Korea, and China. It combines an empirical study with theoretical advancements in comparative research to understand the Cold War and post–Cold War border issues related to Japan, particularly the Northern Territories/Southern Kurils dispute with Russia; Takeshima/Dokdo with Korea; and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with China and Taiwan. Based on the history of negotiations with the Soviet Union and Russia over the course of fifty years, the study offers a series of practical suggestions to enable these disputes to be separated from arguments over their history and to be resolved on the basis of the principle of mutual advantage for those affected by them. This book provides not only the key to resolving these three disputes affecting East Asia, but the framework in which to seek the resolution of other territorial issues worldwide.

Explaining the history and possible outcomes of Japan's territorial disputes with Russia, South Korea, and China while providing concrete steps for resolving entrenched territorial disputes, this book will be of great interest to students and scholars of international relations, Japanese politics, and international law.

Akihiro Iwashita is a Professor in the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University, Japan.

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Preface and acknowledgements

The origins of the current book can be found in a small monograph published by Asahi Shinsho in 2013, entitled *Korega Kaiketsusaku: Hopporyodo, Takeshima, Senkaku* [Solutions for Japan's Border Disputes: Northern Territories, Takeshima Island and the Senkakus]. I wrote this book in order to present to a Japanese audience the realities surrounding Japan's borders in a more dispassionate manner than the emotional appeals that have bombarded the public in hundreds of nationalistic books since the Sino-Japanese clash near the Senkakus in 2012. As a border studies/foreign policy researcher, I was both amazed and dispirited by how many Japanese had little comprehension of the situation we faced on our borders; politically, jurisdictionally, or internationally. This little book sought to serve as an antidote to the groundless discussion occurring among certain so-called "specialists" on territorial disputes, including politicians as well as commentators in the media and think-tanks. However, I also took the opportunity to raise and submit my own ideas regarding various solutions to the disputes by developing a proposal for the Northern Territories that I had put forward in 2005. Without the presence of such concrete proposals, the book would have been unable to offer any starting point into how best to overcome the challenges Japan and her neighbors face in tackling these issues.

After this monograph was published, I became convinced of the necessity for such a perspective to also be heard by Japan's neighbors and the world at large, because any solution to border disputes can only occur through dialogue with these neighbors and with the understanding and support of all related parties. In addition, there is not a wealth of materials in English offering this kind of analysis of Japan's border issues. In order to assist Japan and its neighbors, I felt that it was my mission to have my analysis published so that it would circulate widely beyond Japan's own borders. Fortunately, Edward (Ted) Boyle, currently an assistant professor at Kyushu University, agreed to translate and adapt the original text into English, and threw himself enthusiastically into the task. Without his contribution, I would have had to give up this desire to publish an English version for the world.

The process of reshaping a monograph is always challenging. I offer my thanks to Stephanie Rogers for the invitation to publish the book, the tremendous editorial work done by Rebecca Lawrence and Denise File, and to the collegial support

provided by Alexander Bukh and Kimie Hara. Thanks to their efforts, the book has finally reached publication with Routledge. I greatly appreciate their endeavours on the project.

As the original monograph was for Japanese readers, I have reshaped the chapters so that the book is more readable for an international audience. The Introduction was written from scratch in order to set out the border studies framework for territorial disputes and to offer some background to the disputes concerning Russia, South Korea, China and Taiwan. I also summarized the historical views held by the various parties in order to bring readers swiftly up to speed with the wider context within which these disputes are occurring. This process was greatly aided through the support provided by David Wolff, Paul Richardson, Seth Cervantes and Ted Boyle again, who as researchers on the areas in question freely shared any insights they had.

Of course, a work such as this is always collective. The atmosphere provided by the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center of Hokkaido University and my colleagues greatly stimulates my own research. More specifically, Megumi Sasaya, an excellent map designer, agreed to update the many maps and diagrams included in the book in English. I would also like to express my gratitude to Yoshiyuki Shuto and Masao Tajima, editors at Asahi Shinsho, who agreed to the publication of an English version.

Finally, I wish to thank colleagues world-wide, particularly those associated with the Association for Borderlands Studies (ABS), Border Regions in Transition (BRIT), and the Japan International Border Studies Network (JIBSN). My career began with a doctoral thesis on Soviet theories of international law, and I subsequently moved on to examine international relations and border issues in a Sino-Russian, and latterly the Japan-Russian, context. Since encountering the border studies community in 2008, my academic life has entirely changed. I directed a huge program (the Global Center of Excellence program) on “Reshaping Japan’s Border Studies” (2009–2014) and began to envisage the development of a border studies community in East-Asia and Eurasia, to be established with the support of American and European scholarly communities. This book also looks towards the development of such a community, focussing upon Japan-related border issues while offering the possibility of developing comparative work with cases from beyond the region. While all opinions are my own, and any mistakes or oversights remain solely my responsibility, it is my desire that these research results, as imperfect as they are, be shared among colleagues interested in the common challenges brought forth by borders in the world today.

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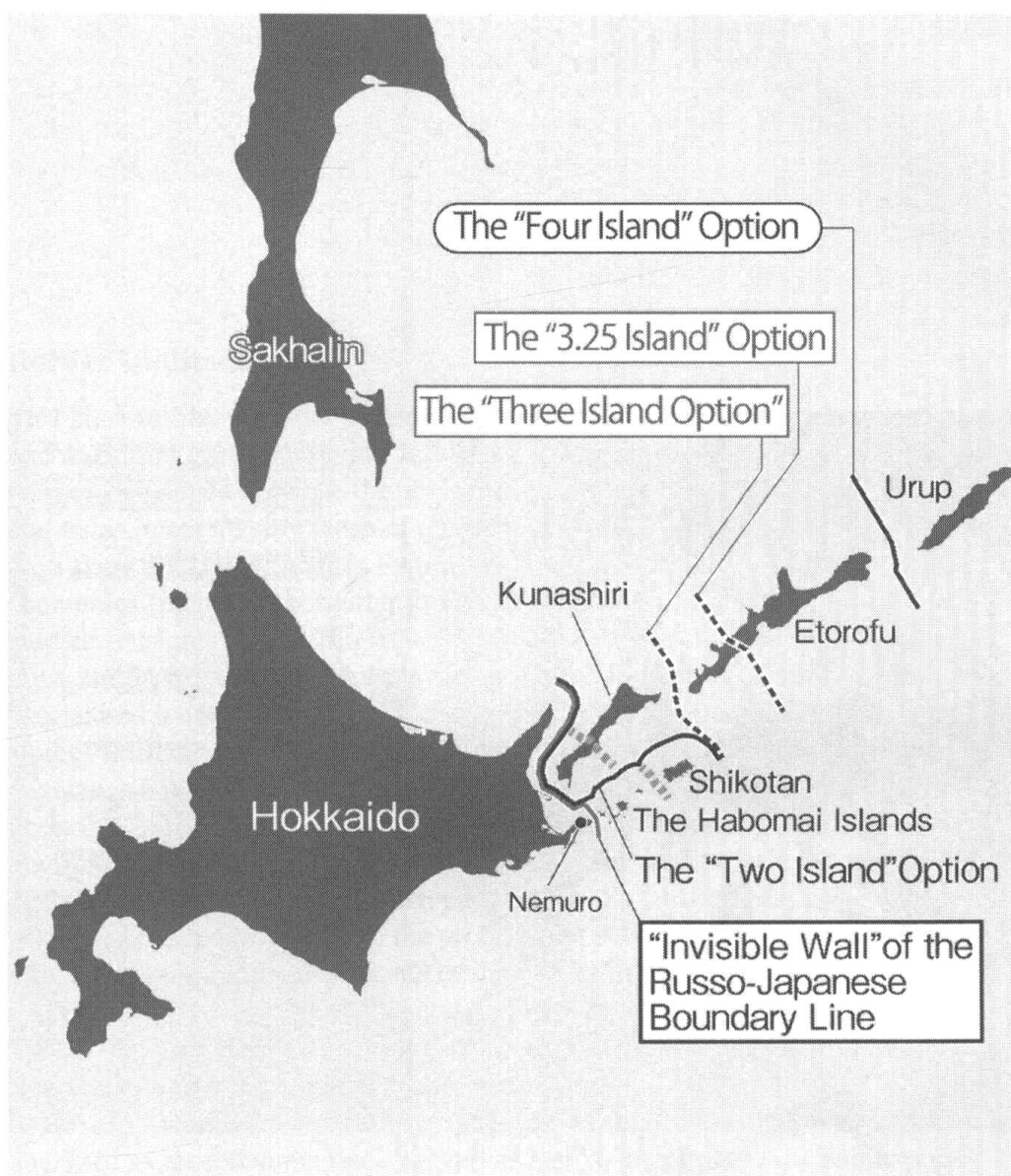


Figure I.1 Various suggestions for demarcating a border between Japan and Russia in the Northern Territories

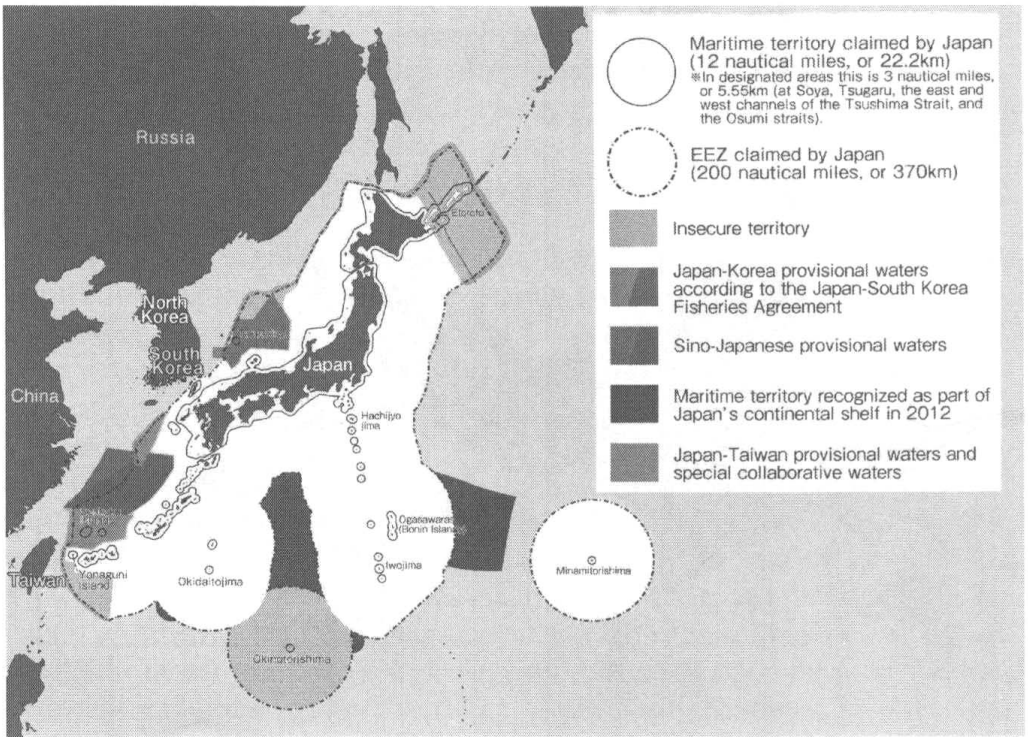


Figure I.2 The realities of Japan's maritime borders

Introduction

Border studies in play

This book utilizes a border studies framework in order to examine border disputes and territorial issues involving Japan and its neighbors. The field of border studies has developed through the interaction between various research disciplines and fields, most notably those of political geography and international law. These days there are border studies that utilize history, transnational migration studies, economics (including borderlands investment and trade research), administrative studies (customs and immigration analysis), anthropological studies of indigenous and newcomer populations along borderlands, international relations, territorial and boundary conflict studies, gender, linguistic and cultural studies, and studies utilizing film, painting, and literature, as well as various other means of analyzing borders and borderlands. The field of border studies primarily draws upon the social sciences and humanities, while occasionally looking toward the environmental, medical, and life sciences. Border studies' role is to shine a light upon certain specific spaces, often part of a state's borderlands, and bring a number of disciplines to bear upon the problems of such areas. Additionally, it should focus attention on the phenomena of the border in general, namely, how it is that society and space are (b)ordered and the ways in which we are able to investigate various functional aspects of this de/re/transbordering on the basis of this interaction among different research disciplines.¹

Let us illustrate this by using the example of shuttle trade. Shuttle trade can be analyzed as an economic issue as well as a cross-border issue of public policy. If actors involved in the shuttle trade reside in the borderlands, the topic could be understood from a sociological or anthropological perspective. If framed as an issue of human trafficking for labor or prostitution, it can be analyzed using labor or gender studies while also dealt with through an examination of literature, film, and photography. When understood as a migration issue along a nondemarcated border region, it becomes an issue of international law. If the issue emerges within the context of a bilateral conflict, it is a topic of international relations. When highlighting the origins and chronological roots of an issue, it becomes a job for the historian. Should the focus be on two cities between which trade is being shuttled, an urban geographer could analyze them as border cities.²

4 *Introduction*

Methodology is also a key factor. Roughly speaking, border studies are basically divided between “hard” studies (the positivist approach) and “soft” studies (the constructivist approach). Actually, relations between the two camps are sometimes cool and they often ignore the other’s research results. The former disparages the metaphysical discourse analysis of the constructivist approach as having little relation to the actual lives of people living on the border, while the latter make light of a positivist approach involving detailed case studies. In addition, in preferring to de-center the state, constructivists tend to consider the empiricists as involved or implicated in government policies.³ The International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU) of Durham University, established in 1989, would be an institutional example of the former camp, often organizing seminars on practical border management issues such as maritime and land border demarcation and conflict management, though some of its members do engage in more constructivist work on borders. In contrast, well-known border studies networks such as Border Regions in Transition (BRIT), which began as a conference on European borderlands in the early 1990s, are more conducive to researchers from a constructivist background, while the Association for Borderlands Studies (ABS), growing out of conferences on the US–Mexico borderlands in the 1970s, provides a home for both positivist and constructivist approaches to the border. ABS incorporates border management studies as well as issues of local representation along the border.⁴

With this multidisciplinary and comprehensiveness of border studies in the background, and giving due consideration to these two scholarly camps, this book will analyze Japan and its related border issues from a variety of angles. In particular, this book shall shed light on both the physical reality of and discourses around the border utilizing both political geography and local anthropological vantage points. The objects of this analysis are primarily the trio of border/territorial disputes currently making headlines in Japan, those of the Northern Territories/Southern Kurils, Takeshima/Dokdo (known internationally as the Liancourt Rocks), and the Senkakus/Diaoyu. This book shall provide historical overviews of these three issues and incorporate them within debates over foreign policy and international relations.

Of course, border issues have a physical reality, not merely an abstract existence, and it is this reality that should be closely examined using a constructivist approach. Through a positivist examination of local life, it is possible to acknowledge the spatial realities of geography, local economy, culture, and representation that exist on the border. It might be easier for the reader to imagine there being some sort of collision between “hard” realities and “soft” mentalities on show here, but the fact is that the two camps noted above are not necessarily contradictory and can be made to work together in parallel or as dual-functional points of view. For example, while territorial disputes, at first glance, appear to be the “hardest” topic in border studies, their characteristic “hardness” is constructed arbitrarily and historically by political and social activities.⁵ This means that a place in which no physical conflict exists can be turned into a disputed area through people’s discursive representations. In turn, if we deconstruct and debunk the myths of disputed territory that ordinary people have come to believe in, it then becomes easier to settle issues relating to the physical border itself.

Empirically this can be demonstrated through the author's previous research on the Sino-Russian border dispute and the process by which that dispute was solved.⁶ Political discourse around Zhenbao/Damanskii, a small and unknown island, had fanned the flames of a large-scale border war between China and Russia in 1969. In the mid-1980s, though, China and Russia were able to dampen down this politicized discourse in the interests of mutual rapprochement, and were finally able to succeed in settling their disputes in 2004.⁷

Interestingly we can see here that although deconstructionist ways of thinking on territorial issues usually work to dampen down the conflict, this is not necessarily in opposition to prevailing power structures. Certainly, during wartime, criticism and opposition to state territorial discourse is likely to prove dangerous for the critic. But when a state wishes to seek a flexible position in order to reach a settlement, a new discourse could perhaps be, if not welcomed, at least not rejected. Critical border studies has an opportunity to effect such politics. This shall be obvious from the details set out in the following chapters, and it was this insight that inspired the author to begin to conduct research on the Russia-Japan territorial dispute in 2005.⁸

Needless to say, deconstructionist contributions sometimes remain as verbal criticisms, though with a certain impact on government policy. The next step should then be to adopt a more positivist approach. Of course, stories of local life are often influenced by a discourse shaped by the central government. It's always possible for researchers to identify the arbitrariness of the story and materialize an alternative in opposition to that put forward by the center. However, concrete proposals, up to and including a physical solution to border disputes, should be made public. Efforts at reimagining the border must promote local interests and improve the daily lives of the people living there.⁹ If a proposal for letting local people prosper materializes, this is far more useful than just words coming from critical schools. While constructivists are generally in agreement with locals that the state pays little attention to the lives of those resident at the border, they are less effective at translating this into concrete proposals the state can adopt to improve those lives in the absence of a positivist approach. Therefore, while there are fundamental differences between the constructivist and positivist approaches, rather than working in opposition to one another, they should be brought together in tandem, simultaneously or at different stages, in order to analyze the border policies in operation at specific sites.

Background to the Northern Territories: constructing a territorial issue

The impact of the constructivist approach is not restricted to the policy implications mentioned above. Recognition that a given territorial issue has been constructed suggests the possible existence of other territorial issues yet to be constructed, which also allows us to question why they were/are as yet unmaterialized. Such critical thinking leads one to wonder about other "potential" territorial issues that may exist for Japan, beyond the three that shall be discussed in this book, and to the reasons why they cannot be featured and discussed publicly. Why does Japan refer