



# Divergent trajectories: Environment, heritage and tourism in Tanegashima, Mageshima and Yakushima

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**Abstract** This article addresses aspects of contemporary heritage orientation of Tanegashima and Yakushima islands in southern Japan in the context of their historical association; the status of adjacent Mageshima island; and the divergent nature of the tourism attractions and related industries that have developed on the islands from the late 20th Century on. The discussion involves two aspects of heritage and heritage protection and exploitation; in the case of Yakushima, one focused on the natural environment and, in the case of Tanegashima, one substantially premised on historical and present-day technological refinements and innovations. As might be expected, these different orientations result in different engagements with issues of environmental protection. The islands' divergent trajectories illustrate the range of potential developments for small islands and the problem with over-generalistic characterisations of island 'essences' and/or predetermined socio-economic destinies.

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## Introduction

Mageshima, Tanegashima and Yakushima islands, located due south of the southernmost promontory of Kyushu island, are administered by Kagoshima prefecture. While the former is now uninhabited, the latter two have well-established populations and tourism industries. But despite their proximity, and the historical associations discussed below in the pre Meiji

era, the modern populations of the islands predominantly associate with – and travel between – their home islands and the prefectural capital, Kagoshima. One of the main issues that has sustained connection and a sense of common purpose between the populations in recent years has been resistance to attempts to locate 'problematic' facilities in the region.

During Summer 2012, posters appeared on lamp-posts and walls around Tanegashima and Yakushima carrying a striking image and stark slogan (Fig. 1). The poster showed a manga-style representation of US jetfighters roaring over Mageshima island, sending soundwaves across the wider region, accompanied by images of the inhabitants of nearby Tanegashima and Yakushima islands shaking their fists in protest at the jets' incursion into their airspace. The poster positions an onomatopoeic slogan around the airplane image. This phrase (which can be roughly translated into English as 'whirr, whirr, whirr,

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**Fig. 1** Mageshima FCLP proposal protest poster (photograph Philip Hayward, 2012).

whirr') derives from manga usage and represents both an engine noise and an escalation of menace.<sup>1</sup> The poster's image and slogan refer to a plan, originally mooted in 2007 and subsequently revived in July 2011, to develop a field carrier landing practice (FCLP) airstrip on Mageshima to replace a similar facility at Iwo-To.<sup>2</sup> FCLPs are ground-based installations that simulate aircraft carrier landing decks as training facilities for pilots, in this case, those training to join the aircrew of the USS George Washington aircraft carrier, which is permanently stationed in East Asian waters.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese Ministry of Defence's proposal was, in turn, part of the Japanese government's attempt to facilitate an accelerated reduction of US forces and facilities on Okinawa and to come good on

a promise to provide the US military with such a facility made in 2006, during an earlier round of negotiations on the future of US military bases in Japan.

Until 1980, Mageshima, located 12 km to the west of Tanegashima's port city of Nishinoomote and 40 km northeast of Yakushima, was inhabited by a population that had peaked at over 500 in 1959 but steadily declined over the next two decades until its occupants voluntarily relocated to Tanegashima, seemingly leaving the island's endangered endemic Mageshika deer to revive their population free from competition with human residents. But the vacation of the island by its human inhabitants also attracted the interest of external organisations interested to use the land area of Japan's second largest uninhabited island for other purposes. A number of investors began to purchase vacated land on the island in the 1970s and proposed a series of development projects. As McCormack (2012) has identified, initially these involved the establishment

<sup>1</sup> See The Jaded Network SFX translation of 'gogogo', online at: <http://thejadednetwork.com/sfx/browse/gogogo/>.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly known as Iwo Jima.

<sup>3</sup> See Slavin and Sumida (2011: online).

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