



Contested enclave metageographies: The offshore islands of Taiwan



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The offshore islands of Taiwan (Republic of China) are dynamic examples of contested metageographies, island spaces caught in between competing and opposing interpretations of their identities, relativities, notions of sustainability and futures. Three cases – (1) population growth, land use conflict, a switch from a military to a tourism economy, and ever closer links between mainland China and Kinmen Island; (2) the rejection of a move to establish a casino economy on the Penghu archipelago; and (3) protests against the storage of spent nuclear waste on Orchid Island – are presented as illustrative of such changing topographies, themselves reflective of a transition to a more democratic and pluralist society in Taiwan. The paper hints at an evolving shift in both vertical (top/down) and horizontal (island-to-island) relations in the construction of development paths and futures for Taiwan's *de facto* archipelago. This re-territorialization offers a fresh, archipelagic repivoting of political geography for and beyond Taiwan.

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Introduction

“What the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (de Certeau, 1988, p. 129).

The anomalous political status of Taiwan/Republic of China, and its relationship with the People's Republic of China is a subject of keen international and multi-disciplinary scholarship (Chen, 2013; Chiu, 1979; Hickey, 2009). What is often neglected in this literature – and as is common in various jurisdictions that are, or include, archipelagos (Baldacchino, 2012) – is that ‘Taiwan’ is more than just the one main island that bears this name; this island does not constitute “the sum total” of the polity's territory since 1949 (Berry & Lu, 2005, p. 3). Rather, Taiwan (the main island) is engaged in a domestic relationship with a series of offshore islands; these extend to the coastal zone of mainland China, to the Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea (a claim disputed by Japan, which calls them the Senkaku islands); and as far as Taiping (or Itu Aba) Island, the largest member of the Spratly island chain, in the South China Sea (a claim also disputed, this time by no less than six regional

powers). All together, some 121 islands form the archipelago that comprises the current jurisdiction of Taiwan (see Table 1).

Taiwan's offshore islands are lessons in diversity: of size, population, remoteness, history, natural beauty, indigenous people and touristic appeal. Within this diversity lurk competing notions and presumptions of how these islands could and should develop, what functions they could and should serve, and for whom.

Since the late 1940s, the *de facto* national government of Taiwan in Taipei has peddled its own interpretation of the islands' function/s within the overall national imaginary: these include military outposts, high security prisons, waste disposal sites, fishing grounds, tourism sites, nature parks, and cultural reserves for indigenous people and their customs. Since 2000, this central government has also tended to drive forward a model of island development that has focused largely on projects to promote infrastructural self-sufficiency; and, more recently, on an interpretation of sustainable development that privileges protection and conservation, ensures the overall welfare and quality of life of islanders, and promotes tourism appeal.

Local interests however, have not always embraced these representations. In some cases, the transition-in-progress implicit in these projections dovetails with local islanders' aspirations; such as for peaceful co-existence and economic development (on Kinmen Island); though concerns relating to the consequences of mass tourism may be on their way. Meanwhile, other state-driven conceptualizations of what should be the role of Taiwan's offshore islands have been questioned, challenged and opposed. In a couple

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Table 1
Basic data on Taiwan's offshore islands (updated: February 2014).

Name of island group	No. of islands in group	Relative location	County	Closest distance to mainland Taiwan (km)	Largest island in group (sq km)	Total area of island group (sq km)	Population (2013)
Kinmen	13	Xiamen Bay, Mainland China	Kinmen, Fuchien Province	227	134	150	120,037
Matsu	19	Northern Fujian, Mainland China	Lien-Chiang, Fuchien Province	211	8.4	29.6	11,196
Penghu	64 ^a	Taiwan Strait	Penghu	40	64	127	98,843
Green Island	1	Eastern Taiwan	Taitung	33	15	15	3580
Orchid Island	2	South-Eastern Taiwan	Taitung	90	47	48	4905/4194 ^b
Liuchiu Island	1	South-Western Taiwan	Pintung	15	7	7	12,415
Turtle Island	2	North-Eastern Taiwan	Ilan	10	3	3	Military post
Keelung Islands	4	North to Keelung	Keelung	5	1	2	None
Diaoyutai Islands	8	East China Sea	Ilan	185	5	6	None
Pratas Islands	3	South China Sea	Kaoshiung City	440	2	2	Military post
Taiping Island	1	Spratly Group, South China Sea	Dept of Defence	1600	0.5	0.5	Military post
Others	3					0.02	
Total	121					387.6	250,976

^a 90 Islands in all, if very small islets are included.

^b Indigenous population on island.

of high profile instances, locals have rejected initiatives to establish a casino economy (on Penghu); and strongly protested against the storage of spent nuclear waste (on Orchid Island).

This paper

This paper describes the competing island topographies involved in these disputes. We present a set of contested island imaginaries, focussing on the extensive archipelago that makes up the jurisdiction of Taiwan. The history of these offshore islands as components of Taiwan has been relatively short and recent: Taiwan is a jurisdiction emerging from a devastating civil war in the late 1940s, and a leading member of the so-called four 'Asian Tigers' or 'Little Dragons' (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009, p. 38; Vogel, 1991). Its various islands are, and have been, platforms for the unfolding of differing and contrasting interpretations (as much as of anxieties) of identity, positioning and geo-politics. The transformation of the incorporation of small islands into the national psyche and imaginary of Taiwan is a result of a democratic transition, as well as of a stronger voice and presence of islander voices at the negotiating and visioning table. In this way, we re-territorialize and pivot 'Taiwan' archipelagically, presenting it in contra-distinction to other dominant representations of this same jurisdiction: particularly from Beijing/People's Republic of China (PRC), and from Taipei/Republic of China (ROC) itself. What unfolds is an exercise in the mechanics and dynamics of mapping that aligns with the topography of (in this case, *de facto*) state formation and evolution; a rich territorialization that unfolds in relation to changing conceptualizations and manifestations of a national space that is both material and affective (Brighenti, 2010a, 2010b).

Of course, we admit and acknowledge that this revisioning exercise flies in the face of Beijing's and Taipei's own official interpretations of their territorial claims. And it is perhaps for such reasons that the current *de facto* operation of Taiwan as an archipelagic jurisdiction remains under-acknowledged. And yet, unfolding domestic politics are raising questions of island governance and exacerbating this archipelagic 'turn': the islands of, and off, Taiwan are promoting, and being promoted as, self-evident topos of geographical plurality. In any case, the 1991 amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of China can be seen to imply that its current jurisdiction is equivalent to the island of Taiwan and its offshore islands (Chow, 2007, p. 107; Taiwan Constitution, 2013). Since then, there have been moves to

implicitly recognize the nature of the island state and to specifically promote the welfare of residents of its offshore small islands, particularly via the Offshore Islands Development Act of 2000 (OIDA, 2009). Furthermore, the claiming of Taiwan as an 'Ocean Country' is mentioned in the Ocean Policy White Paper of 2006 (RDEC, 2006).

To make and sustain such an argument, this paper is organized as follows. We first situate our concern within the burgeoning literature on islands as enclaves or excised sites of jurisdiction, suggesting that islands are more pliable spaces with(in) which to practise inbordering, carving out or reconfiguring specific economic, environmental or military functions that need not, and should not, spill over elsewhere. We also explain why we have chosen Taiwan to ground and flesh out our concerns; and to support our case graphically with what we consider to be a more suitably archipelagic map of Taiwan. Next, we offer a brief twentieth century history of Taiwan that privileges the changing use values of outlying islands in the context of the unfolding of relations between ROC and PRC. This is the lead-up to a review of three case studies from three of these island groups – Kinmen, Penghu and Orchid – that illustrate an emerging pluralism in Taiwanese politics whereby different and multiple interpretations of island identities are now being articulated, championed and/or resisted, and invoking scenarios quite different from a judicious offshoring meant to keep risky, undesirable or suspicious elements at bay. Case studies from different island groups, such as the Diaoyutai (the Senkaku) and Taiping Island (Itu Aba) – very much in the news in recent months (Corcuff, 2013; Ogden, 2013) – would have offered material for other spatial imaginaries; but such an analysis will have to wait for a separate paper.

This re-imagining of Taiwan as archipelago is thus a reflection of unfolding power relations within Taiwan itself. We discuss the implications of these observations, with respect to both the current governance of Taiwan and its possible futures when reframed archipelagically.

Islands fit the bill

"Islands ... bounded but porous; isolated, connected, colonized, postcolonial; redolent of the performative imaginary; vulnerable to linguistic, cultural, environmental change; robust and able to absorb and modify ... utopian and dystopian, tourist meccas, ecological refugia" (Stratford, 2003, p. 495).

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