

“Envisioning Island Spaces: Integral territory and national fragments”

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Abstract

Immediate post-Cold War optimism regarding a resolution of Japan's Northern Territories issue with Russia seems a lifetime ago. In recent years, the Japanese government has sought to make use of the notion of 'integral territory' in order to assert that what, for the majority of the Cold War, were understood as competing claims over islands should now be interpreted as disputes whose outcomes will literally shape Japan in the future. The security imperative of 'integral territory' reflects the state's concern regarding the maintenance of its borders, a concern both facilitated and complicated by the adoption of instruments of global governance, such as UNCLOS, as well as regional political practices.

Japan's possession of comparatively small islands is now able to expand its "territory sixfold". The decision in early 2017 to single out 71 of these islands as "inhabited border territories", able to avail themselves of special support because "letting islands become uninhabited is bad for national security", shows how national territorial concerns come to be refracted through these small scraps of land. This paper will reflect upon the role of these island spaces on national maps, and the importance of such representations of the nation for understandings of their security today.

Keywords: borders, Japan, maritime territory