

## Islands of China and the Sinophone world

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**ABSTRACT:** This special thematic section lays the groundwork for the development of island studies in the Sinophone world as well as introduces international scholars to the region's islands. Papers are included from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

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### An unrepresentative world of islands

Island studies is the study of islands of the world. The field will never be comprehensive in its coverage, sacrificing the living world of islands for a cold catalogue of every islet, skerry, sandbar, rocky outcropping, uninhabited polar expanse, and vibrant island community. Yet if the field is to fulfil its promise of elucidating what makes islands special, highlighting the 'active ingredients of islandness', then it must do more than just provide lip service to representativeness (Grydehøj, 2017).

The prominence or otherwise of certain regions within the international field of island studies has depended on these regions being in the vicinity or (potentially neocolonial) sphere of influence of countries with Anglophone universities. Thus, scholarship from Australia and New Zealand has made Oceania central to island studies theory, British researchers have brought Caribbean islands into the spotlight, and conditions in Malta and Prince Edward Island – sites of concerted scholarly endeavour in the field – have structured the questions that island studies asks and the approaches it takes to answering them. Similarly, researchers working in university environments dominated by a European language without a truly autonomous scholarly literature (Greek, Italian, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.) have had a disproportionate impact on the field, simply because of pressures to publish in English.

By comparison, the large island researcher communities in France, Japan, and Germany have remained relatively separate from international island studies *per se* (as represented by the overlapping research communities surrounding the International Small Island Studies Association and the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative as well as their respective associated journals, *Island Studies Journal* and *Shima*). Although individual researchers or groups from these linguistic communities

do engage with international island studies research, much scholarly activity occurs in parallel linguistic worlds. The ‘international’ in ‘international island studies’ simply becomes shorthand for ‘people who are comfortable reading and writing in English and are incentivised to do so’.

And then there are those countries and regions that possess islands yet have neither developed their own island research traditions nor engaged much with ‘international’ island studies scholarship. Russia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the near-shore islands of Africa as a whole, and South America have been largely missing from island studies’ worldview, thereby limiting our ability to engage in a truly informed and truly global island studies. Dirlik’s (2005) call for indigenous and oceanic approaches that challenge fundamentally Western perspectives within area studies remains sadly relevant.

### **The view from China**

The same is—partially—true for the Sinophone world. There exists a large Chinese-language scholarly community, with its own traditions that are influenced by but remain distinct from those of Western scholarship, as evidenced by the discussions of Chinese sociology and anthropology in Ou and Ma’s (2017) contribution to this special thematic section. Chinese scholars have also evinced interest in individual islands and archipelagos as research sites, and there is a growing Chinese literature on island tourism *per se*. China, however, has never hosted what could be called an ‘island studies community’. Islands have traditionally been peripheral to the mainland-oriented Chinese worldview (Luo & Grydehøj, 2017), and even when they have entered the national consciousness, it has often been in terms of a somewhat restricted island-mainland relationality, rather than a more complex attempt to consider islands or islanders on their own terms. This has been the situation in ‘mainland’ China as well as in Hong Kong and Macau, China’s two Special Administrative Regions.

This has not been true for Taiwan. Although Taiwan has inherited many mainland Chinese intellectual traditions, its divergent cultural, economic, and political development since 1949 has led to a distinctively Taiwanese form of island studies. This is perhaps unsurprising since Taiwan is not only an archipelago but is an archipelago that has needed to conceptualise itself as offshore from something else rather than—in the tradition of archipelago states such as Japan or Indonesia—as its own mainland or collection of mainlands. In addition, Taiwan’s distinctive geopolitics have contributed to the internationalisation of Taiwan’s island studies, so that Taiwanese researchers have taken leading roles in the wider field: Huei-Min Tsai of National Taiwan Normal University and Chang-Yi David Chang of National Taiwan University have organized international island studies conferences and taken leadership roles in island studies scholarly associations.

The significance of contributions from Taiwanese scholars to international island studies has concealed a mutual lack of communication between the field and researchers in mainland China. This is beginning to change. Inspired in part by the hosting of the Island Cities and Urban Archipelagos conference in Hong Kong in 2016 and in the Zhoushan Archipelago in 2018, a non-Taiwanese Sinophone island studies community is developing—and is embedding itself in the international scholarship in a distinctive manner, with noteworthy engagement in the subfield of urban island studies. This emerging community has contributed the bulk of the papers to the present special thematic section, yet the simultaneous development of governmental focus on islands in mainland China is encouraging certain localized streams of research and academia-industry engagement. As the field further establishes itself in China, we can hope that these various research activities might dovetail and even merge. We can also hope for increased interaction between island research in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

### **About this special thematic section**

This special thematic section on ‘Islands of China and the Sinophone World’ can serve both as a useful introduction of the region’s islands to the international island studies community and an

contribution to the foundations of the region's own developing island studies community. From Changshan Archipelago in the Bohai Sea to Zhoushan Archipelago in the Yangtze River Delta, from Xiamen Island in Fujian to the island cities of the Pearl River Delta, from mythical isles to rapidly urbanizing Hainan Island in the South China Sea, from Orchid Island to the southeast of Taiwan to Kinmen Archipelago in Xiamen Bay, this special thematic section is the first ever collection of papers to encompass islands from across Sinophone East Asia and to treat them as a single object of study. Its 13 papers involve disciplinary approaches ranging from human geography to environmental science, from anthropology to tourism studies, from political science to literature studies.

Gang Hong's (2017) paper on 'Locating Zhuhai between land and sea' is that rarest of things: a lucid and incisive contribution to island studies and urban island studies theory that is nevertheless grounded in a careful case study of a hitherto-neglected archipelagic space. Bin Luo and Adam Grydehøj (2017), for their part, delve into the role of islands in the Chinese worldview in their paper on 'Sacred islands and island symbolism in Ancient and Imperial China', demonstrating why Western conceptions of islandness cannot be taken for granted and thereby heeding the call for a 'decolonial island studies' (Nadarajah & Grydehøj, 2016).

Wenze Yue, Shuangshuang Qiu, Huan Zhang, and Jiaguo Qi's (2017) paper on 'Migratory patterns and population redistribution in China's Zhoushan Archipelago in the context of rapid urbanization' discusses trends in intra-island, inter-island, and island-mainland demographics to show how industrialization is transforming Zhoushan, creating new centres and peripheries at the vanguard of China's maritime economy. Archipelago connectivities are likewise considered by Abraham Leung, Michael Tanko, Matthew Burke, and C.S. Shui (2017), whose paper on 'Bridges, tunnels, and ferries: connectivity, transport, and the future of Hong Kong's outlying islands' takes its place as an instant classic in studies on the impact of fixed links for island communities. Lest it be assumed that bridges and land reclamation necessarily result in the erasure of islandness, Ping Su's (2017) study on 'The floating community of Muslims in the island city of Guangzhou' explores how shifting archipelago geographies have influenced the development and consolidation of a religious minority community. Meanwhile, in their paper on 'Relational geography of a border island', Su-Hsin Lee, Wen-Hua Huang, and Adam Grydehøj (2017) engage with theories of island relationality in a case study of the drivers and impacts of archipelagic thinking on the small island of Lieyu, which locates itself among the other islands of the Kinmen Archipelago, the island city of Xiamen, and Taiwan's main island.

Research into island politics and government has frequently highlighted the impact of small size on political systems. Ying-ho Kwong and Mathew Y.H. Wong's (2017) comparative study of 'State size and democratization in hybrid regimes: the Chinese island cities of Macau and Hong Kong' considers various measures of democracy in China's two SARs from the perspective of smallness.

Ming Ming Su, Geoffrey Wall, and Sangui Wang (2017) consider a distinctively Chinese form of island tourism in their paper on 'Yujiale fishing tourism and island development in Changshan Archipelago, Changdao, China', presenting recommendations for how this means of adding value to the fishing industry can better meet community needs. Zuan Ou and Guoqing Ma (2017) explore the plight of South China fisherfolk in the context of urban renewal in their paper on 'Marginalisation of the Dan fishing community and relocation of Sanya fishing port, Hainan Island, China'.

Chia-Pin Yu, Yu-Chih Huang, Pa-Fang Yeh, and Pei-Hua Chao (2017) take a quantitative comparative approach to perceptions of tourism from three of Taiwan's outlying islands in their paper on 'Residents' attitudes toward island tourism development in Taiwan'. Shuangshuang Qiu, Wenze Yue, Huan Zhang, and Jiaguo Qi's (2017) description and analysis of 'Island ecosystem services value, land-use change, and the National New Area Policy in Zhoushan Archipelago, China' considers how the growth of new industries and decline of old ones are changing the environmental composition of China's largest near-shore archipelago. Taking an urban island studies approach, Ni Sheng, U Wa Tang, and Adam Grydehøj (2017) consider the importance of island spatiality in their paper on 'Urban morphology and urban fragmentation in Macau,

China'. Finally, Yu-Long Chao and Shang-Yu Chao (2017) offer a detailed case study of 'Resident and visitor perceptions of island tourism: green sea turtle ecotourism in Penghu Archipelago, Taiwan'.

The papers of this special thematic section can hopefully help lay the groundwork for the growing size, sophistication, and coherency of island studies in the Sinophone world.

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