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**REMOTE
ISLANDS OF
JAPAN**

**Island Studies and The Remote
Island Development Act**

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要旨

一般的に遠隔地とは、山間部や島嶼部など、アクセスが困難で比較的住みにくい場所を指す。このような地域は一般的に、孤立、人口の減少と高齢化、質の高い教育・医療・交通サービスの確保が困難、（過度又は季節的な）観光、厳しい自然条件といった共通の問題に直面している場所である。

これらの理由から、遠隔地は、地球温暖化やグローバル化のような変化の影響を受けやすい場所もある。実際、遠隔地は、海面上昇、冬（およびスキーのような冬場に関連するアクティビティ）の短縮、自然災害（例えば、洪水、地滑り、火災など）の増加、地域の文化的伝統や知識の消滅のように、色々な困難に悩まされている。これらは、本稿で取り上げた日本離島の場合のように、国や国際社会が遠隔地に特別な関心を寄せるの理由もある。

本稿では、日本の離島について研究するものだ。とりわけ、離島振興法（昭和二十八年法律第七十二号）を通じて、離島の（持続可能な）発展に向けて地方および国の政策に焦点を当てる。

研究の内容を文脈化するために、第1章では「島嶼学」というトピックを展開する。まず、第1段落では、「島嶼学」が国際的に認知されるに至った歴史的過程と、「島根性」に関連する原因と結果を分析する。次に、第2段落では、地理文化に関連するいくつかの問題をよりよく鑑定するために必要な、研究対象の地域化に関する最新の傾向について論じる（本稿の範囲においては、特にアジア太平洋地域に焦点を当てる）。

第2章では、日本の離島学に従事する主要なグループやセンターの紹介を通して、特に国および地方の認識に従って、日本離島の地理的、法的、政治的役割と状況の変遷を概説する。つまり、日本の文脈におけるも海外におけるも、離島の重要性をより深く理解することができる。

このような関連知識を踏まえて、第3章では、離島振興法について、その歴史的推移および2023年に制定された最後の改正法の詳細な考察から論じる。次に、第3段落と第4段落では、離島振興法の現在の施策をまとめ、法律の成果および将来の展望について考察して結論する。そのためには、まず、この法律の策定を促した、日本離島に特有の社会経済的な一般的課題および機会を探る必要がある（第1段落）。

さらに、最後の第2章では、日本社会とグローバル社会の変化を分析し、その結果、(1)「国境地帯」に対する国の認識も、(2)離島振興法の目的と規定も進化したことを説明する。実際、立法者は、離島の関係する官民団体と同様に、年々加速する社会の変化をとらえ、離島の発展計画に反映させる能力に長けていると言える。

例えば、（世界的な傾向に従って）国が、2050年以内に「デジタル化」と「カーボン・ニュートラル」を達成することを目標に、離島特有の資源を完全かつ効率的に活用し、ICTと持続可能性をますますに考慮している。

したがって、離島振興法の施策は、離島を改善し、促進し、活性化し、維持するために、総合的かつ詳細な枠組みを提供すると結論できる。

本稿の目的は、日本離島学の背景を、また、現在の日本の離島の社会・政治・経済・立法状況を包括的に概観することであり、おそらく、このような「孤立した」（あるいは「島根性的な」と言うべきか）場所の世界的な重要性を示す貴重な事例を提供することにある。特に、「島」は、(1)新しい解決策を試したり、世界的な疑問に対する答えを見つけたりするための理想的な実験室、(2)地域資源の管理と地域活性化の両方に役立つ、古くからの（生態学的）ノウハウの場所／コミュニティ、(3)類まれな価値を持つ、ユニークな生物・文化的多様性のある場所、(4)壊れやすいと同時に弾力性のある場所（およびコミュニティ）であるため、押しつけられた「進歩」や「発展」を達成するためではなく、逆に、このグローバル化した世界における独自性を維持するために、特別な注意と支援が必要である、つまり、(5)「それぞれは独自の島」である。

つまり、本研究は、遠隔地（だから離島）の課題や機会に対する筆者の個人的な関心から生まれたものであり、離島地域の行政というトピックを取り上げる際に登場するあらゆる変数を考慮に入れながら、以下の質問に答えようとするものである：日本の離島とは何か？「離島学」とは何か（日本で？又は、政界中では？）？島国の日本は、国内の島々が置かれた明らかに不利な立場をどのように認識し、対処しているのか？その認識と関連政策は、時代と共にどのように変化してきたのか？日本離島の場合（離島の状況、住民、コミュニティズ、経済、必要性、主導、グローバルな観点など）から何を学ぶことができるのか？

INTRODUCTION

Certain natural environments have figured prominently in humanity's dreams of the ideal world: they are the forest, the seashore, the valley and the island.¹

In general terms, remote areas are hard to reach locations and where it is relatively hard(er) to live in: namely, mountains and islands. Such realities typically face common issues, such as: isolation, decreasing and aging population, difficulties in assuring high quality education, health and transportation services, (over- or seasonal) tourism, severe natural conditions, and so on.

For all these reasons, remote areas are considered fragile places, susceptible first to changes – such as global warming or globalization, that are resulting in sea level rise, shortened winters (affecting also the related activities such as skiing, etc.), fiercer natural disasters (such as floods, landslides, fires) or disappearance of local cultural traditions and knowledge.

At the same time, these are also the reasons why the national governments, as much as the international community, address remote areas with special attention – as it is the case of Japanese remote islands and the Remote Islands development Act (Act No. 72 of 1953) (離島振興法 (昭和二八年法律七二号)), discussed in the present research.

Moreover, “remoteness” is often associated to “rurality”, although there are many examples of urban islands – in Japan we have Naha City in Okinawa (沖縄の那覇市), for example, which is densely inhabited, or even Hiroshima is actually an ensemble of riverine islands (as the name itself suggests, 広島, whose kanji means ‘wide’ and ‘island’, respectively) – and towns “in the middle of nowhere”, i.e. surrounded by mountains, fields, deserts – such as Las Vegas or Perth.

Hence, one can certainly infer that such characteristic of “remoteness” is a perception that originates from a comparison between some areas and other

¹ TUAN, Y., *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, 2nd edition, Columbia University Press: New York, 1990, p. 247.

realities that are perceived (and perceive themselves) as “central” – mainly because of their political or economic importance. In other words, remote areas are “remote” *in relation to* other “central” areas, *from their perspective, because of* them. This a crucial step to get in the framework of islands studies, under whose scope this paper falls.

Chapter I, explores the topic of ‘island studies’, by analyzing its main trends and the historical process that led to the (relatively recent) international recognition of the field (§ 1.1) – which, *per se*, is not as recent as one might think, considering that the most exemplary ‘island study’ is Darwin’s research on Galapagos, published in 1859. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion on such notions as ‘islandness’ (the intrinsic characteristic of islands) and the causes and consequences related to the ‘lure’ of the island. Finally, paragraph two examines the latest trends concerning the regionalization of the focus of inquiry, necessary to better investigate some geo-cultural related issues (this, according particular attention to the Asia-Pacific region, for the scope of this paper).

Chapter II outlines the evolution of Japanese remote islands’ geographical, legal and political roles and situation. In particular, paragraph one focalizes on the Japanese context, in order to provides a better understanding of the national ‘remote islands’, according especially to the perception of those areas by the central government (as well as the mainlanders) and the local administrations (and the islanders). Such background helps envisioning the evolution of ‘island studies’ in Japan – therefore analyzed in paragraph two, together with an overview of remote islands’ importance and roles, as well as of the major groups and centers engaged in remote islands studies within the country.

Based on the above, *Chapter III* will then dive into the Remote Islands Development Act, starting by outlining its historical evolution and its last amendment in detail – enacted in 2023 (§ 3.2). Paragraph three, summarizes the Act’s current measures, whereas paragraph four concludes with some consideration on the Act’s results and future perspectives. However, to do so, it is

necessary to firstly explore what induced to the formulation of this Act, i.e. the general – as well as unique – socioeconomic challenges and opportunities peculiar to Japanese remote island (§ 3.1).

Therefore, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the context in which the islands-related researches are inscribed worldwide, in order to discuss about Japanese remote islands current socio-political and economic-legislative situation by focusing in particular on the local and national policies towards their (sustainable) development, especially throughout the Remote Islands Development Act, perhaps hoping to provide a valuable example of the global importance of these “isolated” (or, should we say, “insular”) realities.

In sum, the present research arose from the author’s personal interest in “remote” realities, their challenges and opportunities, and try to answer to the following questions, taking into consideration the various factors that come into play when it comes to address the topic of remote island areas’ administration: what are Japanese remotes islands? Then what are ‘island studies’ (in Japan and the World)? How does Japan, as an ‘island nation’, perceives and deals with the evident disadvantageous position in which certain domestic islands pour? How have the national perception and the related policies changed over time? What can one learn from the Japanese Remote Islands realities: their situation, their inhabitants, their communities, their economies, their needs, their initiatives, their global perspectives?

CHAPTER I. ISLAND STUDIES

*There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and ‘a sea of islands’.*²

*Epeli Hau’ofa (1993) (...) would have us talk about “our world of islands”, rather than “the islands of the world”.*³

Introduction

This chapter outlines the general tendencies of the academic field known as ‘island studies’. First and foremost, it provides a definition of ‘island studies’, along with the historical evolution of the process that led to an international recognition of the field. Then it discusses the ‘lure’ of the island, along with its causes and consequences and a brief but comprehensive overview of the most addressed issues within this field of study. The final paragraph covers a discussion on the future of island studies and the latest trends concerning the need to regionalize the focus of inquiry in order to better understand some geo-cultural related issues. This, in order to circumscribe the scope of this thesis and its *raison d’être*, before addressing the topic of Japanese remote islands in *Chapter II*.

1.1 Island Studies in the World

In order to appreciate ‘island studies’, it is necessary to know how this field was born and evolved so far. To do so, Baldacchino (2006), the *Shima* journal Editorial Board (2007), and Grydehøj (2017), among others, offer some particularly insightful points of view, that allows a clear understanding of the historical

2 STRATFORD, E., et al. “Envisaging the Archipelago”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol.6 (No.2), 2011, p.123.

3 BALDACCHINO, G., “Islands, island studies, island studies journal”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol.1 (No.1), 2006, p.10, citing Hau’ofa, E., *New Oceania: Rediscovery of our Sea of Islands*, Suva, Fiji, University of the South Pacific, 1993.

evolution of the field as well as some reasons why this area of inquiry is so complex.

1.1.1. A “new” focus of inquiry

Let us first outline the focus of ‘island studies’, i.e. the notion of ‘island’ – as the name of the field itself can easily suggest. However, even a non-expert can remark that an ‘island’ is a complex socio-biological reality which necessarily involve many disciplines and areas of inquiry: sociology, culture, arts (music in particular), geography, morphology, economy, history, politics, anthropology, zoo-geography, archeology, viability and security (and non-viability or vulnerability), public administration, geopolitics, tourism management, educational planning, migration studies, linguistics, price differentials (compared to the mainlands), biology, engineering, epidemiology, sustainable development, ecology, electricity generation, biogeography, renewable energies, information technology, waste management, and many more.⁴

Nonetheless, as Baldacchino (2006) states:

The core of ‘island studies’ is the constitution of ‘islandness’ and its possible or plausible influence and impact on ecology, human/species behavior and any of the areas handled by the traditional subject uni-disciplines (such as archaeology, economics or literature), subject multi-disciplines (such as political economy or biogeography) or policy foci/issues (such as governance, social capital, waste disposal, language extinction or sustainable tourism).⁵

Having said that, there is a question that naturally arises: when academics started talking about ‘island studies’?

First and foremost, one must notice that there is undeniable evidence on the fact that the *interest in* and the (parallel) *study of* islands have a long history, both in academic and fiction. Just to mention the most famous: simply consider the

4 Ivi, pp. 7-10, cit.

5 BALDACCHINO, G., “Islands...”, 2006, p. 9, cit.

Homer's *Odyssey*, or the so well-known and science-changing Darwin's research on Galapagos.⁶

However, 'island studies' *per se*, as a recognized international and interdisciplinary academic field, that gather a number of scholars and initiatives all around the world with the attempt to «understand and account for the nature, dynamics and diversities of islands and islanders (and their relation to non-island entities)»⁷, is relatively recent and it was not until the end of the 20th century that it started earning international recognition and resonance as a consolidated field of research⁸:

Over the past two decades [1980s and 1990s, n.d.r] islands have been subject to an increasing amount of research and, to a lesser extent, theorisation. Their study was pioneered by a loose coalition of scholars and activists involved in locally-orientated research and development initiatives (such as Maine's Island Institute, established in 1983) and more internationally focused entities, such as the University of Malta's Islands and Small States Institute, established in 1989.⁹

In addition, Grydehøj (2017) distinguishes two moments in which island studies can be sorted out, in its emerging process: (i) «early studies of individual islands and particular aspects of insularity»¹⁰, where are included all the numerous but scattered (around the world¹¹ and over the time) studies about islands, which authors were not aware of the necessity to frame an *ad hoc* field of research; (ii)

6 HOMER, *The Odyssey*, translated by S. Butler (24 Books), Wildside Press: USA, 2021, 346 pp. DARWIN, C., *The Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection*, John Murray: London, 1859. For more references, see BALDACCHINO, "Islands, island studies ...", 2006, cit.

7 Shima Editorial Board, "An Introduction to ...", 2007, p. 1, cit.

8 BALDACCHINO, "Islands, island studies ...", 2006, p. 7-8. Cfr, Shima Editorial Board, "An Introduction to Island Culture Studies", *Shima*, Vol. 1 (No. 1), 2007, p. 1.

9 Shima Editorial Board, "An Introduction to ...", 2007, p. 1, cit. In the paper it is also precised that the University of Malta's Islands and Small States Institute has been initially established as «the University of Malta Foundation for International Studies' Islands and Small States Programme with the Institute being formally established in 1993» (ivi, p. 4).

10 GRYDEHØJ, A., "A future of island studies", *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 12 (No. 1), 2017, p. 5.

11 In this regard it is due to specify that for Japan it is necessary an *ad hoc* discourse on what, how and when 'Japanese (as the language and the *loco* of research) island studies' emerged and evolved (see *Chapter II and III*).

«the movement from the 1980s on toward a more general study of islands and island societies *per se*»¹² or what many calls the study of islands “on their own terms”, i.e. the final emersion of ‘island studies’.

In fact, is at the end of the last century that the first relevant gathering events for island-engaged scholars took place:

One of the most significant early initiatives in the field was the ‘Islands of the World Conference’ held in 1986 on Vancouver Island. This stimulated sufficient interest and networking to prompt follow-up events in Tasmania in 1988 and The Bahamas in 1992.¹³

Following these pioneering events, the primary conceptualization of ‘island studies’, by Grant McCall (1994, 1996)¹⁴ made its appearance in the international arena. On the occasion of the first meeting of the International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA), held in Okinawa in 1994¹⁵, McCall proffered the term *Nissology* (after the Greek word for “island”, νησί – [nisi]) as a “new” field of scientific investigation on island.

As the *Shima* Editorial Board explains, the term *Nissology*, didn’t establish itself as a standard appellation for the field, however «his [McCall’s, n.d.r] call for continuing debate and reflective analysis amongst island researchers remains a significant one»¹⁶ and it is considered as the first attempt to institute an ‘island studies’ field as we know it nowadays.

Indeed, to exhaustively grasp the perhaps elegant but cryptic definition of ‘island studies’ as “the study of the islands on their own terms”, Baldacchino (2006)

12 GRYDEHØJ, “A future of ...”, 2017, p. 5, cit.

13 Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, p. 1, cit.

14 McCALL, G., “Nissology: A proposal for consideration”, *Journal of the Pacific Society*, Vol. 17, 1994, pp. 1-14; McCALL, G., “Clearing Confusion in a Disembedded World: The Case for Nissology”. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 84 (No. 2), 1996, pp. 74–85.

15 The ISISA opening meeting was first established in a dedicated session of the aforementioned ‘Islands of the World Conference’ in Bahamas (1992). Source: Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, p. 1, 4, cit. Cfr. KAKAZU, H., “Challenges and Opportunities for Japan's Remote Islands”, *Eurasia Border Review*, Vol. 2 (No. 1), 2011, p. 1.

16 Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, p. 1, cit.

explains why McCall's *Nissology* is a "clarion call" that came from a "radical thrust" and "iconoclastic intent":

If the 20th century had been the century of mainland, industrial, large-scale, continental (but polluting?) progress, he [McCall, n.d.r.] argued (and hoped), that perhaps the 21st century could prove to be that of island, small-scale, service-driven (and perhaps more sustainable?) prosperity. McCall (1994, 1996) called this bold, islands-driven focus *Nissology* (...). Its key mandate: sharing, advancing and challenging existing theorization on islands and island studies; while avoiding, delimiting or debunking false or partial interpretations of the island condition.¹⁷

Following this early definition of the 'focus on islands' (in which many scholars were fully engaged without a valid appellation and – therefore – no academic recognition), 'island studies' have been hitherto extensively conceptualized. In fact, by just reviewing the results of a simple research into an academic database, one can easily observe the existence of a vast number of academic papers discussing about (i) what the island studies' scholars should focus their attention on – according respectively to the author's opinion, or (ii) what the future of island studies *could* or *should* committing to.¹⁸

For instance, while advocating on the importance of the "study of island on their own terms", many point out that researches on islands could be useful not merely for *those* island or islanders only: on the contrary, they can serve as useful examples/comparisons for *other* islands (and islanders) and the mainland (and mainlanders) too.

17 BALDACCHINO, "Islands...", 2006, p. 10, cit.

18 Cfr. PUGH, J., "Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago", *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 8 (No. 1), 2013, pp. 9-24; HAYWARD, P., "Aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages. Towards an integrated study of island societies and marine environments", *Shima*, Vol. 6 (No. 1), 2012, pp. 1-11; RONSTRÖM, O., "Finding their place: islands as locus and focus", *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 20 (No. 2), 2013, pp. 153-165; SKINNER, J. "Introduction: Introducing Islands" in SKINNER, J. and HILS, M. (eds.), *Managing Island Life: Social, Economic and Political Dimensions of Formality and Informality in 'Island' Communities*, University of Abertay Press: Dundee, Scotland, pp. 1-14; BALDACCHINO, "Islands...", 2006, cit; GRYPDEHØJ, "A future of...", 2017, cit.

Hence, it is increasingly argued that a stronger focus should be put on the connections and relations that exist between islands and, respectively, the sea, other islands (including mainland)¹⁹ and the world.

In this regard, Baldacchino (2006) states that:

Seeing islands as part of complex and cross-cutting systems of regional and global interaction should be one of the strengths of island studies as well as of an island studies journal, and another reason why scholars focused on continents might want to read and contribute to the field.²⁰

However, in spite of the undeniable contribution to the scientific community brought in by the island studies field, before 2006 all the research papers about islands were «dispersed in a multitude of different journals, always assuming that respective journal editors have been convinced that the material is appropriate for inclusion»²¹. That is why, island studies's international community started framing «a suitable branded journal»²², that that led to the launch of the *Island Studies Journal*: the first dedicated academic publication.²³

As it has been briefly outlined here-above, the journey to build the international recognition that islands studies deserve, has been long (but fruitful) and involved many actors, such as: the United Nations (UNESCO) and European Union's committees, programs, alliances and other actions such as regional *fora*²⁴; the Global Islands Network (GIN)²⁵, the International Small Island Studies

19 To attain some interesting points of view on the difference in the perception of what is “island” and what is “mainland” and why is so, see §1.2. Cfr, PUNGETTI, G., “Islands, culture, landscape and seascape”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol.1 (No. 2-1), 2012, pp. 51-54.

20 BALDACCHINO, “Islands...”, 2006, p. 10, cit.

21 Ivi, p. 8, cit.

22 Ibidem, cit.

23 Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, p. 1, cit. Cfr. <https://islandstudiesjournal.org>.

24 Such as: UNESCO's SIDS (Small Island Developing States) Programme, AOSIS (Alliance of Small and Island States), UNDP and Small Islands Voice; European Union's Regional Policy Directorate-General, the Committee of the Regions and the lobbying of the Islands Commission within the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions; regional fora such as the Pacific Islands Development Program, South Pacific Forum, the Baltic Seven Islands Cooperation Network, the Indian Ocean Commission or the Caribbean Community.

25 Whose official websites is: www.globalislands.net

Association (ISISA, since 1992, which first «provided a platform for economic, infra-structural, political, social and environmental research into island societies»²⁶), the Japan Society of Island Studies (*Nihon-Tōsho-Gakkai* 日本島嶼学会, since 1997)²⁷, the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI, since 2005, aiming mainly to «research and assist the maintenance and development of the language, literature, music, dance, folkloric and media cultures of small island communities»²⁸);²⁹ and a score of universities around the world have established courses, curricula, faculties, research centers focusing on islands studies³⁰; the International Publishing Printer (UK) has an ‘Island Studies Series’ since 1996.

Yet, besides the *Island Studies Journal* (since 2006), there are now other journals entirely dedicated to islands, namely: *Shima* (since 2007) and the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* (since 2012), that are particularly relevant in the scope of this paper because of their Asia-Pacific vocation – with international outstretch (§1.2).³¹

The addressed issues comprehend all the aforementioned topics related to islands, including various conceptual matters such as the meanings and characteristics of ‘islandness’ or ‘insularity’ and even ‘island’ itself, providing critical space for discussions.³²

26 Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, p. 1, cit. Cfr, Official ISISAs website: www.isisa.org.

27 Whose official websites is: <https://islandstudies.jp/jsis>

28 Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI) official website: www.sicri.net.

29 Not to mention the national administrations’ official sites for those countries that are actively engaged in their own island-region management and programs (for instance, Scotland <https://islands.scot>, www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk or Japan www.mlit.go.jp/report/press/kokudoseisaku11_hh_000114.html, www.mlit.go.jp/kokudoseisaku/chirit/index.html).

30 Just to mention a few: University of Malta (Islands and Small States Institute <https://www.um.edu.mt/issi/>), University of Hawaii at Mānoa (Center for Pacific Islands Studies, <https://hawaii.edu/cpis/>), Prince Edward University (Canada – Institute of Island Studies <https://islandstudies.com/>), University of the Ryukyus (Research Institute for Island and Sustainability, <https://riis.skr.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/>), Kagoshima University (International Center for Island Studies, <http://cpi.kagoshima-u.ac.jp/>).

31 Whose websites are respectively, <https://www.shimajournal.org>, <https://jmic.online>. To be honest, there also is *The Contemporary Pacific* (since 1989) that has provided a critical space for island studies scholars when a “suitable branded journal” didn’t exist yet.

On the one hand, that *gave* and *is giving* birth to a number of theories and more specific focus of inquiry, as it the case of ‘Urban Islands Studies’³³, for example, that focuses on «‘Island Cities’ densely populated small islands and population centres of larger islands and archipelagos» and takes «an island approach to urban research and an urban approach to island research»³⁴.

On the other hand, these further conceptualizations and theoretical focuses of inquiry have been allowing the field’s scholars to develop different fundamental perspectives and approaches towards ‘islands’, resulting in non-homogeneous definitions all around the world: for instance, what ‘island’ and ‘mainland’ signify to an island-country (Japan) or an island-region/continent (Oceania)? These interesting issues will be further analyzed in §1.2 and the following Chapters II and III, but first let’s dive deep into the reasons why focusing on islands and the causes and consequences of the island’s lure.

1.1.2. The lure of the island(ness): causes and consequences

At this point in the discussion, as might be expected, the following question arises: why study (or visit/live in/focus on) islands?

First and foremost «It has been said that there is “little doubt” that islands have what has been described as a particular “lure” or “fascination” to visitors»³⁵.

32 BALDACCHINO, “Islands...”, 2006, cit. Cfr PUNGETTI, “Islands, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, cit; HONG, S., and PUNGETTI, G., “Marine and Island Cultures: A unique journey of discovery”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, 2012, Vol.1 (No.1), pp. 1-2.

33 For more information on this interesting topic, see e.g. GRYDEHØJ, A., BARCELÓ PINYA, X., COOKE, G., DORATLI, N., ELEWA, A., KELMAN, I., PUGH, J., SCHICK, L., SWAMINATHAN, R., “Returning from the Horizon: Introducing Urban Island Studies”, in *Island Dynamics - Urban Island Studies*, 2015, pp.1-19.

34 Ibidem, p. 1, cit.

35 BALDACCHINO, G., “The lure of the Island: A spatial analysis of power relations”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol.1, 2012, p. 55. Cfr. KING, R., “The geographical fascination of islands”, in LOCKHART, D.G., DRAKAKIS-SMITH, D. and SCHEMBRI, J.A. (Eds.), *The Development Process in Small Island States*, Routledge: London, 1993, pp. 13-37; LOCKHART, D.G., “Islands and tourism: an overview”, in LOCKHART, D.G. and DRAKAKIS-SMITH, D. (eds.), *Island Tourism: Problems and Perspectives*, Mansell: London, 1997, pp. 3–20; BAUM, T.G., “The fascination of islands: a tourist perspective”, in LOCKHART, D.G. and DRAKAKIS-SMITH, D., *Island Tourism: Problems...*, 1997, pp. 21-35, cit.; BAUM, T.G., HAGEN-GRANT, L., JOLLIFFE, L., LAMBERT, S., SIGURJONSSON, B., “Tourism and cold water islands on the north atlantic”, in BALDACCHINO, G. and

As a matter of fact, the huge amount of fictional literature that talks about island makes it logical to infer that, within the human history, islands have been exerting a particular ‘fascination’ over humans beings.

Furthermore, even if *not* every island studies’ scholars are islanders themselves, nonetheless they find in islands something that provokes in them such strong interest to dedicate their whole academic efforts to the topic – as the need to create an internationally recognized ‘island studies’ field is its last symptom.

Indeed, as Tuan’s (1974) affirm: «[islands, n.d.r] have a tenacious hold on the human imagination»³⁶.

To explain this phenomenon, an insightful further step is made by Kakazu (2011):

The general characteristics of islands are elusive and relative. For instance, the Japanese islands named Takara Jima (Treasure Island) and Akuseki To (Evil Stone Island) are located side by side. Their names demonstrate the commonly held, but contradictory, images of islands as both paradise and hell, or confinement (prison) and openness (utopia).³⁷

Hence, in such a dichotomy, between the two – mutual – perceptions of ‘island’ as a place of ‘integrity’ (confinement) and ‘possibility’ (openness), lies the aforementioned ‘lure’ or ‘fascination’: it is the feeling of a *possible* pioneering disclosure of both the ‘ancient’ (i.e. the traditions or myths that can explain the actual functions or characteristics of *that* island)³⁸ and the ‘future’ (i.e. the discovery of new and innovative possibilities – far from the globalized world – for the sake of the entire humanity)³⁹.

MILNE, D. (eds.), *Lessons in the Political Economy of Small Islands: The Resourcefulness of Jurisdiction*, Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2000, pp. 214-229.

36 TUAN, Y.F., *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*, Prentice-Hall, 1974, p.118.

37 KAKAZU, “Challenges ...”, 2011, pp.1-2, cit.

38 E.g. SUWA, J., “Becoming Island. The Aquapelagic Assemblage of Benten-sai Festivals on Sakurajima, in Sai Village, northern Japan”, *Shima*, Vol. 11 (No. 2), 2017, pp. 5-19.

39 E.g. Islands as pioneering and virtuous examples of sustainable development; military bases; suitable model-development places; and so on. Sources: GRYDEHØJ, “A future of...”, 2017, cit; PUNGETTI, G., “Islands, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, cit; BALDACCHINO, “Islands...”, 2006, cit.; BALDACCHINO, G. (ed.), *The Routledge international handbook for island studies: A world of islands*, Routledge, 2018; HAYWARD, P., KUWAHARA, S., “Divergent tra-

Thus, it is explained how and why islands are often treated as laboratories: now by researchers (from biologists to linguistics)⁴⁰, now by innovation's industries (from green energy production to rocket development)⁴¹.

In other words:

[T]he 'lure' or 'fascination' of islands has to do with the fact that islands suggest themselves as *tabulae rasae*: potential laboratories for any conceivable human project.⁴²

[F]rom tourist paradises to immigrant detention camps, from offshore finance centres to strategic military bases, islands offer distinct identities and spaces in an increasingly homogenous and placeless world.⁴³

[A]bove all, it [the island n.d.r] symbolizes a state of prelapsarian innocence and bliss, quarantined by the sea from the ills of the continent.⁴⁴

As a further step confirms, if one consider that, «an island is that biophysical body of land surrounded by water that makes it naturally and visually distinct from any other land spaces»⁴⁵, one can thus affirms that the island's lure or fascination can be identified in the concept of 'islandness'⁴⁶, in view of the fact that 'islandness' is «an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways»⁴⁷.

jectories: Environment, heritage and tourism in Tanegashima, Mageshima and Yakushima”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 29–38; KELMAN, I., BURNS, T.R., MACHADO DES JOHANSSON, N., “Islander innovation: A research and action agenda on local responses to global issues”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 4, 2015, pp. 34–41; ISHIZAWA, M., “Cultural Landscapes Link to Nature: Learning from Satoyama and Satoumi”, *Built Heritage*, Vol.4, 2018, pp.7-19; TSAI, H., PERSOON, G. A, and HSIAO, H. M., “Introduction: Island Environmental Histories and Management in the Asia-Pacific Region”, in *Island Environmental Histories and Management in the Asia-Pacific Region*, a special issue of Asia-Pacific Forum, 2009; WHITTAKER, R.J., and FERNÁNDEZ-PALACIOS, J., “Part I: Islands as Natural Laboratories”, in *Island Biogeography – Ecology, evolution, and conservation*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007.

40 Ibidem.

41 Ibidem.

42 BALDACCHINO, “Islands...”, 2006, p.5, cit.

43 BALDACCHINO, G. (ed.), *The Routledge international ...*, 2018, p.1, cit.

44 TUAN, Y.F., *Topophilia ...*, 1974, p.118, cit.

45 BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, p.57, cit.

46 Defined before as «the core of 'island studies'». Source: Ibidem, cit.

47 BALDACCHINO, G., “The coming of age of island studies”, *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* (Vol. 95, No. 3), 2004, p.278. Cfr. PUNGETTI, “Island, culture, landscape

Therefore, ‘islandness’ is what makes an island not only *an* island, but *that* island in terms of its physical aspect, its society and its biosphere: in one word its ‘cultural landscape’, which «does not mean a special type of landscape; instead, it reflects upon a way of seeing landscapes and associated attributes that emphasizes the interaction between human beings and nature over time – maintaining existence-continuity-transformation and transferability»⁴⁸.

Hence, ‘cultural landscape’ is very insightful when it comes to explain some causes of the island’s lure.

Furthermore, the concept later evolved into another focus of inquiry, centered especially on the domain of ‘bio-cultural diversity’, which is the practical as well as spiritual encounter between ‘nature’ (biological diversity) and ‘human’ (cultural diversity)⁴⁹. In fact, these two types of ‘diversity’ meet *in* landscapes (and/or seascapes)⁵⁰ if we consider that «landscape is the visible interaction of abiotic, biotic and human processes developing on the earth surface over time»⁵¹. Therefore, ‘land- (or sea-) scape’ is the place where «biological culture forms, advances and also changes»⁵².

...”, 2012, cit.

48 SINGH, RANA, P.B., *Sacred Ecology that bridges the Present & Future of Asia-Pacific Landscape Architecture: The Asian Vision*, a keynote address in the 2nd APELA – Asia Pacific Environment – Landscape Architecture Forum on “Present & Future of Asia- Pacific Landscape Architecture”, #220 Asia Center SNU, Seoul, organized by: The Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture and Seoul National University, 17-19th October 2016, p.2.

49 HONG, S., “Biocultural diversity conservation for island and islanders: Necessity, goal and activity”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 103.

50 ‘Seascape’ can be defined as «[t]he interaction of these [abiotic, biotic and human, n.d.r] processes on the coast, sea and adjacent waters». Source: Ibidem, cit. In addition, Pungetti (2012) state: «[a]s can describe the effect on landscape at the confluence of sea and land, seascape becomes an area of inter-visibility between land and sea, with three defined components: sea, coastline and land (DTI, 2005)». Source: PUNGETTI, “Island, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, p. 52, cit.

51 PUNGETTI, “Island, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, p. 52, cit. Cfr. HONG, S., “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, cit; WU, J., “Integrating nature and culture in landscape ecology”, in HONG, S., WU, J., KIM, J., NAKAGOSHI, N. (eds.), *Landscape Ecology in Asian Cultures*, Springer: Tokyo, pp. 301–321.

52 HONG, S., “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, p. 103, cit. Cfr. MAFFI, L., WOODLEY, E., *Biocultural Diversity Conservation – A Global Sourcebook*, Earthscan: London, 2010.

Qu (et al., 2023) and Tsai (et al., 2009) summarize these insights as follows, and link the concept of ‘islandness’ (thus, ‘cultural landscape’ and ‘bio-cultural diversity’ too) to the tendency of viewing islands as laboratories:

Superficially, islandness refers to how a society defines what is and is not an island. Intrinsically, it is the full range of identities, beliefs, socio-economic relationships, environmental relationships, and cultures that make an island place unique.⁵³

The contained and separate nature of islandness has made islands tempting as laboratories for advancing and assessing new ideas across a wide range of interdisciplinary interests.⁵⁴

[B]ecause of their clear boundedness, and their clear cultural and biological specificity (...) islands provide interesting material for testing various kinds of theories and models [and, n.d.r] can provide useful comparative knowledge.⁵⁵

Thus, one can argue that there is a common tendency of considering islands as a *tabula rasa*. Inasmuch as that they are “protected” (some will say “excluded”), by the sea, from the widespread globalization, hence they are (erroneously) perceived as unchanged and confined realities: in one word, “natural”. But, what is more natural than the change/evolution itself? As a matter of fact, Singh (2016) explains that «the *tabula rasa* of ‘natural landscape’ (...) has probably never existed, since its own features are subject to constant change through geophysical, climatic, hydrological and other processes of change (...)»⁵⁶. In this regard, Ishizawa (2018) also remarks that «[t]he nature-culture divide is an artificial separation consolidated by Western modern science. (...) a social construction that disseminated globally, but does not exist in some non-Western societies»⁵⁷.

53 QU, M., FUNCK, C., USUI, R., JANG, K., and LEW, A.A., “Island Studies and Socio Economic development Policies in East Asia”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 18 (No. 1), 2023, p.228.

54 Ivi, p.277, cit.

55 TSAI, et al., “Introduction: Island Environmental ...”, 2009, p.5, cit. Cfr. WHITTAKER, et al., “Part I: Islands as ...”, 2007, cit.

56 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p. 3, cit. Cfr. CRONON, W. (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, Norton Pub. Co., New York, 1995.

57 ISHIZAWA, “Cultural Landscapes ...”, 2018, p. 7, cit.

In relation to this latter statement, if one consider that islands «find themselves presented, even constructed *de novo*, as locales of desire, as platforms of paradise, as habitual sites of fascination, emotional offloading or religious pilgrim-age»⁵⁸ and «are closely associated with the myths of both origins and extinctions»⁵⁹, there is thus an additional aspect concerning islands, that has been widely observed (in non-Western societies in particular, for what concerns islands⁶⁰) and it is perhaps the most primitive expression of the bond existing between ‘nature’ end ‘human’: ‘sacred spaces’ and/or ‘sacredscapes’.⁶¹ Owing the fact that:

Since the first step of human evolution the idea of particularity of place, *mysterium tremendum*, has been part of human environment. Joseph Campbell (1974: 184⁶²) asserts that “the idea of a sacred place where the walls and laws of the temporary world may dissolve to reveal a wonder is apparently as old as the human race”.⁶³

Therefore, this also refers to the tendency to confer a religious meaning to some islands,⁶⁴ which is especially relevant in the scope of this paper as it has been observed in particular within the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, from the earliest times, islands in China were often «associated with sacred or heavenly realms abodes of gods and spirits, and the possibility of immortality⁶⁵» and, currently, in Asia-Pacific island studies «religious and cultural beliefs are significant areas of focus»⁶⁶.

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that:

58 BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, p.55, cit.

59 GILLIS, J.R., “Island sojourns”, *Geographical Review*, Vol. 97 (No. 2), 2007, p. 208. For instance, Johnson (2021; 363) argues that «a characteristic of islandness in Japan has an inherent connection with Shintō religious myth» (source: JOHNSON, H., “Island narratives in the making of Japan: The Kojiki in geocultural context”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 16 (No. 2), 2021, pp. 363-380).

60 JOHNSON, “Island narratives in...”, 2021, cit. SUWA, “Becoming Island...”, 2017, cit. QU, et al., “Island studies ...”, 2023, cit.

61 Ibidem. Cfr SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, cit; SUWA, “Becoming Island...”, 2017, cit.

62 CAMPBELL, J., *The Mythic Image*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1974.

63 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p. 4, cit.

64 E.g. SUWA, J., “Becoming Island ...”, 2017, cit.

65 LUO, and GRIDEHØJ, 2017, p. 39.

66 QU, et al., “Island studies ...”, 2023, p. 10, cit. Cfr. SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, cit; SUWA, J., “Becoming Island ...”, 2017, cit.

The identification of a place as sacred place is never essentially one of individual recognition; “in actual fact, the place is never ‘chosen’ by man, it is merely discovered by him” (Eliade 1958: 369⁶⁷). In some way or another the ‘spirit of a place’ attracts and reveals to man, and that is how he merely ‘find’ them but cannot make or select their positions.⁶⁸

Hence, one can consider this religious aspect as both a consequence and a cause of the lure that (those) islands exert on people: on one hand, the island’s lure provokes a tendency among the related community (i.e. the islanders themselves, or the shoreside inhabitants that are in some way related to a near island or islet)⁶⁹ to attach some religious/mythic/mystic significance to that very island; at the same time, the existence of a myth or a shared belief towards that island trigger a certain fascination over the related community (or the outsiders as well)⁷⁰.

Moreover, the latest evolution of the human-nature relationship finds its expression in ‘ecology’ (thus, ‘sustainability’), which comes from the sense of environmental urgency perceived world-wide. In this context, a special attention is accorded to islands’ realities (or, its cultural and biological diversities), since «[i]t has been realised that islands have an important role to play in the conservation of the world’s natural wealth»⁷¹.

In fact, in order to find a solution to this urgency within this significantly changing environment it is necessary to consider both the traditional ecological knowledge⁷² of the islanders (including what Singh [et al., 2016] call ‘sacred

67 ELIADE, M., *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Sheed & Ward: London, 1958.

68 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p. 4, cit.

69 E.g. SUWA, J., “Becoming Island ...”, 2017, cit.

70 SUWA, J., “Becoming Island ...”, 2017, cit. Cfr, Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, cit; SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, cit.

71 TSAI, et al. “Introduction...”, 2009, p.1, cit. Cfr, WU, J., “Integrating nature and culture in landscape ecology”, in HONG, S., WU, J., KIM, J., NAKAGOSHI, N. (eds.), *Landscape Ecology in Asian Cultures*, Springer: Tokyo, pp. 301–321.

72 In this regard, HONG et al. (2103) point out to an interesting initiative: the agenda of “Strengthening Biocultural Diversity and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Asia-Pacific Island Regions,” that was initiated and accepted as a resolution during the 5th World Conservation Congress (WCC) in September 2012 at Jeju, Korea. In order to realize the agenda, the ‘Island Biocultural Diversity Initiative’ was formed and gave birth to its first activity in 2013, London, with the International Congress of Ecology (INTECOL, where the ‘Island biocultural diversity and traditional ecological knowledge’ symposium took place) as «an academic meet-

ecology’ and/or ‘ecospirituality’)⁷³, and the latest innovations in terms of environmental management.⁷⁴

That is why it has been recently observed a global inclination towards the so-called “green” solutions, respecting different ecosystems – and cultures – as it is the case of renewable energy production or eco-tourism, for example.⁷⁵

Be that as it may, these environment-friendly tendencies are often related to political decisions and the market economy. These therefore are the dynamics «behind the misuse – in policymaking, popular representation, and scholarship – of the conceptual simplicity of ‘the island’ for the purposes of presenting idealised visions of islandness»⁷⁶.

This is known, for example, for some ‘eco-islands’ «which produces numerous negative impacts on islands themselves and on efforts to engage in meaningful sustainability initiatives at a global scale – all the while serving powerful global corporate and political interests»⁷⁷.

These trends are often encouraged by «superficial and symbolic efforts at promoting sustainability»⁷⁸ and rarely take into account the local ecological

ing designed to develop international networks, and provide support for both domestic and international researchers working on this agenda.». Source: HONG, S., WEHI, P., MATSUDA, H., “Island biocultural diversity and traditional ecological knowledge”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol.2, 2013, p.57. Cfr. TSAI, et al. “Introduction...”, 2009, cit; HONG S., et al., *Landscape Ecology in ...*, 2011, cit; and HONG, “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, cit.

73 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p. 1, cit. Which, due to the nature of this paper, will not be further discussed herein.

74 E.g. TSAI, et al. “Introduction...”, 2009, cit.

75 United Nations’ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, *The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*, 2015.

76 GRYDEHØJ, A., “A future of...”, 2017, p. 10, cit.

77 Ivi, p.11, cit. Cfr. GRYDEHØJ, A., e KELMAN, I., “Island smart eco-cities: innovation, secessionary enclaves, and the selling of sustainability”, *Urban Island Studies*, Vol.2, 2016, pp.1-24; GRYDEHØJ, A., e KELMAN, I., “The eco-island trap: climate change mitigation and conspicuous sustainability”, *Area*, Vol.49 (No.1), 2017, pp.106-113.

78 Ibidem.

knowledge, which would clearly be more suitable to an informed and conscious utilization of the local biological diversity.⁷⁹

That is why, many call the need for further and conscious researches into sustainable future for islands⁸⁰, and Grydehøj (2017) reminds us that:

Our shared desire to promote the sustainability of island units and the wellbeing of island citizens must not blind us to the various accidental, unconscious, or intentional abuses and misuses of island status, by both islanders and external actors.⁸¹

In this regard, the inter- and multi-disciplinary approach of ‘landscape ecological studies’, for instance, «provide useful information (...) to better understand the human-environmental relationship and landscape sustainability»⁸². By doing so, this discipline may prove to be especially suitable in order to take more informed – therefore attentive – decisions, when it comes, for example, to build the necessary infrastructures for tourism development and/or green-energy production on islands. In fact, if such infrastructures are planned and build without taking into account the local features (in terms of natural and cultural environment) the consequences can be deplorable for the island as a whole, even if (many will say *because of*) the initial aim was local development.⁸³

However, a promising shift is, for example, constituted by the concepts of ‘geo-heritage’ and ‘geo-tourism’, that are linked with the aforementioned eco-tourism.⁸⁴ Indeed, the world-wide tendency towards ecology and sustainability is leading to a growing awareness towards the unquestionable (as well as necessary) richness

79 HONG, S., “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, p. 105, cit.

80 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 228, cit.

81 GRYDEHØJ, A., “A future of ...”, 2017, p. 11, cit.

82 HONG, et al. *Landscape ...*, 2011, p.v, cit.

83 GRYDEHØJ, “A future of ...”, 2017, cit. Cfr. HONG, “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, cit; HONG, et al., “Island biocultural diversity ...”, 2013, cit; BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, cit.

84 CHAKRABORTY, A., MOKUDAI, K., COOPER, M., WATANABE, M., CHAKRABORTY, S., (eds). *Natural Heritage of Japan. Geological, Geomorphological, and Ecological Aspects*, Geoheritage, Geoparks and Geotourism. Conservation and Management Series, Springer International Publishing AG, 2018.

of the natural environment, and the consequent human responsibility with respect to its degradation, therefore its protection.⁸⁵

The term ‘geoh heritage’, i.e. «the collective term for those specific features of geodiversity that may be identified as being worthy of geoconservation (...) because of their scientific or other values», originates from the vital importance accorded to the recognition and protection of the local geodiversity, i.e. «the abiotic equivalent of biodiversity»⁸⁶.

Therefore, to use Chakraborty’s et al. (2018) words:

[G]eodiversity brings a huge variety of goods and services that benefit us in our everyday lives (...) [and, n.d.r] has been brilliantly exploited by generations of humans from the Stone Age to the Silicon Age. (...) Because geodiversity and geoh heritage are of value to us in various ways yet may be lost, damaged, or polluted by human activities, there is an unanswerable case for geoconservation.⁸⁷

In fact, the concept of geo-cultural heritage (as a merge of cultural and natural heritages) was brought to the attention of the UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee in 1992 along with the idea of ‘cultural landscape’ «as an option for heritage listing properties that were neither purely natural nor purely cultural in form (i.e. ‘mixed’ heritage)»⁸⁸. This led to «a revolution in the nomination process and in the perception of what cultural heritage is»⁸⁹. But before all else, in 1971 Hiroyuki Matsuda⁹⁰ introduced the idea of ‘biosphere reserves’ (BRs) as UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites, which can be defined as:

[N]atural protected areas and their surroundings, with the protected areas working as cores for conserving biodiversity, supporting the sustainable de-

85 United Nations, “Transforming our world...”, 2015, cit.

86 CHAKRABORTY, et al., *Natural Heritage of ...*, 2018, p. vi, cit. Cfr. GRAY, M., *Geodiversity: valuing and conserving abiotic nature*, (2nd edition), Chichester, UK, Wiley Blackwell, 2013.

87 CHAKRABORTY, *Natural Heritage ...*, 2018, p.vi, cit.

88 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p.2, cit. Cfr. FOWLER, P.J., *World Heritage Cultural Landscapes 1992–2002*, (World Heritage Papers 6), UNESCO: Paris, 2003.

89 ISHIZAWA, “Cultural Landscapes ...”, 2018, pp.12, cit.

90 HONG, et al., “Island biocultural diversity ...”, 2013, p.57, cit.

velopment of the inhabited areas around them, and becoming research laboratories.⁹¹

These new categories have been particularly useful in terms of regain and reinforce the human-nature relations, by forging new connections and creating sustainable development «through tourism, eco-tourism, agro-forestry and other activities that had declined because of urban migration and desertification of rural areas»⁹².

Hereinafter originated a new way of *doing* tourism: more sustainable and attentive towards the local environment and community.

As d’Hautesserre and Funck (2016) argue, this innovative direction taken within the tourism domain, has been necessary after the recent years’ increasing awareness toward two main problematics related to tourism: (i) «the carbon imprint of long distance travel»⁹³ (that is mandatory, for example, in order to reach many islands, considered as remote destinations for the majority of the visitors), (ii) the tragic consequences of the mass- and over-tourism in exceptionally fragile areas (such islands can be), in terms of degradation or destruction of the local environment and culture (for example, by building tourists-oriented infrastructures and attractions), yet «pollution, folklorisation, social inequality, chaotic urbanization»⁹⁴.

91 Ibidem, cit.

92 Ibidem, cit.. Cfr. ISHWARAN, N., PERSIC, A., and NGUYEN H.T., “Concept and Practice: The Case of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves”, *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development*, Vol.7 (No.2), 2008, pp.118-131; ARAYA ROSAS, P., and CLÜSENER-GODT, M. (eds.), *Reservas de la Biosfera: su contribución a la provisión de servicios de los ecosistemas. Experiencias exitosas en Iberoamérica [Biosphere Reserves: Their Contribution to the Provision of Ecosystem Services. Successful experiences in Latin America]*, Paris: UNESCO, 2010; REED, M.G., and MASSIE, M.M., “Embracing Ecological Learning and Social Learning: UNESCO Biosphere Reserves as Exemplars of Changing Conservation Practices”, *Conservation and Society*, Vol.11 (No.4), 2013, pp.391-405; CHEER, J.M., COLE, S., REEVES, K.J., KATO, K., “Tourism and landscapes: Cultural realignment, social-ecological resilience and change”, *Shima*, Vol. 11 (No. 1), 2017, pp. 40-54.

93 D’HAUTESERRE, A., and FUNCK, C., “Innovation in island ecotourism in different contexts: Yakushima (Japan) and Tahiti and its Islands”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 11 (No. 1), 2016, p. 227.

94 MUZY, J., “Ecotourism: a solution for island economies?”, a special issue presented in the occasion of the *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, No-

In this regard, many islanders «manifest different degrees of ‘actorness’, articulating their own concerns and interests»⁹⁵, for instance by standing against mass- or over-tourism.⁹⁶

However, tourism is a big entry in islands’ economies. Therefore, despite the many challenges in terms of accessibility and sustainability, islands must continue to find new and innovative solutions to keep supporting their tourism activities.

In fact, islands have been projecting themselves as ideal destinations for relaxation or exploring, after realizing that they can ‘sell’ their natural scapes and resources as well as their cultural productions⁹⁷. In other words: after committing to a shrewd ‘island branding’⁹⁸, «and thus carve out for themselves a beguilingly easy route to development»⁹⁹.

vember 17-21, 2017.

95 BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, p.57, cit.

96 MUZY, “Ecotourism: a solution ...”, 2017, cit.

97 There are in fact many examples (and different degrees) of locals participation in promoting and allowing tourism on islands. For instance – other than running hotels and restaurants – by hosting visitors in their own homes, for a more immersive and aware experience of tourism, or running local traditional crafting enterprises. Source: SROYETCH, S., “The mutual gaze: Host and guest perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism: A case study of the Yasawa Islands, Fiji”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 5, 2016, pp. 133-144; SAKUMA, S., “Conditioning the hosts: local participation in tourism activities in northern Okinawa”, a special issue presented in occasion of the *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; MIYAKUNI, K., “Exploratory Study on Sustainable Tourism Based on Residents’ Perceptions toward Tourism Impacts and Ecocentric Attitudes: The Case of Iriomote Island, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan”, *Ryūkyū Daigaku Keizai Kenkyū* (Economics Research of Ryūkyū University), No. 93, 2017, pp. 38-54; ATTERTON, J., DILLEY, F., FUKUSHIMA, C., SHINZATO, S., GKARTZIOS, M., and LAMONT, K., *Approaches to island depopulation in Japan and lessons for Scotland*, Scottish Government, 2022, 87 pp.; BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, cit.

98 BALDACCHINO, “The Lure of ...”, 2012, p.55, cit.

99 Ibidem, cit. Cfr. APOSTOLOPOULOS, Y., GAYLE, D.J., *Island Tourism and Sustainable Development: Caribbean, Pacific and Mediterranean Experiences*, Praeger: New York, 2002; BRIGUGLIO, L., ARCHER, B., JAFARI, J. and WALL, G. (eds.), *Sustainable Tourism in Small and Island States: Issues and Policies*, Pinter: London, 1996a; BRIGUGLIO, L., BUTLER, R.W., HARRISON, D. and LEAL FILHO, W. (eds.), *Sustainable Tourism in Small and Island States: Case Studies*, Pinter: London, 1996b; CONLIN, M. and BAUM, T.G. (eds.), *Island Tourism: Management Principles and Practices*, John Wiley: Chichester, 1995; DE KADT, E.B., *Tourism: Passport to Development?*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1979; ROYLE, S.A., *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity*, Routledge: London, 2001, “Chapter 9”.

However ‘development’ alone is not enough: a long term plan, that takes into account (to then prevent) any activity which can be dangerous for the local natural and cultural (eco)system, is indispensable. In other words, something «that would be environmentally compatible and respectful of local communities – as well as economically viable in the long run»¹⁰⁰. Whose suitable instance is precisely ecotourism, since it is, according to the The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), a «responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education»¹⁰¹.

In national and international terms, the evolution of eco-tourism concerns also the emergence of UNESCO’s World Heritage Global Geoparks and National Parks as «heritage areas of outstanding value»¹⁰², that are easily susceptible to become popular tourist attractions and educate the visitors towards a more respectful tourism.¹⁰³

As a matter of fact, it has been observed that, by allowing a larger number of people to come in contact with this – otherwise – isolated realities (i.e. islands), this “ecologic” and “aware” tourism can even originate a re-population trend and thus overcome the problem posed by Grydehøj (2017) about the fact that local traditional «(...) livelihoods are rapidly becoming impossible to carry out – though not as rapidly as they are becoming unpopular among the younger generations»¹⁰⁴.

Actually, if educated on the local eco-cultural environment’s necessities and opportunities, these visitors might return on island as tourists or even as new inhabitants. For instance, among the island’s attractiveness of new inhabitants there are the perspective to conduct a healthier lifestyle (less stressed and

100 MUZY, “Ecotourism: a solution ...”, 2017, cit.

101 The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), Revision of *Definition and Principles*, 2015, <https://ecotourism.org/news/ties-announces-ecotourism-principles-revision/>, 27/03/2024.

102 Such as many Japanese islands are. Source: CHAKRABORTY, et al., *Natural Heritage of Japan...*, 2018, p.ix, cit. Cfr. EADES, J., COOPER, M., “Landscape as Theme Park – Demographic change, tourism, urbanization, and the fate of communities in 21st century in Japan”, *Tourism Review International*, Vol. 11, Cognizant Comm. Corp.: USA, 2007, pp. 9–18.

103 Ibidem, cit. Cfr. SONG, D., KUWAHARA, S., “Ecotourism and World Natural Heritage: Its influence on islands in Japan”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 5, 2016, pp. 16-46.

104 GRYDEHØJ, “A Future of ...”, 2017, pp.12, cit.

endangered by pollution, when compared to the urban one), or the possibility to re-discover some – endangered or not – traditional professions and pursuit its transmission through the generations, while being in part financially supported by a government that promote national islands’ re-population¹⁰⁵.

In regard to this latter statement, it is now necessary to discuss the recent trends and necessities to ‘regionalize’ the island studies, along with outline the future perspectives of the field.

1.2 From Local to Global to Regional and the Future of Island Studies

In §1.1.1 it has been outlined the island studies scholars’ efforts to achieve an international recognition of the field: a necessity that emerged from the local desire to acquire an external validation of the global value of ‘islands’ and ‘island studies’. Following this achievement and the consequent globalization of the field, it has been noticed a more recent urge to now regionalize the focus of inquiry and thus conduct more regional-centered researches, in order to better address some issues that are geo-cultural constituted and «encompass the diversity of island knowledge and experiences»¹⁰⁶.

105 In this regard, a recent and very interesting tendency has been observed in Japan, since the Covid-19 sanitarian crisis spread world-wide: the so-called “workation” phenomenon, that can be defined as a step further to the more well-known “smart/remote/online-working”, since it allows the worker to move into a remote, rural area for a longer period (weeks, months or years) while pursuing his tasks remotely (online). Source: SHIRIMOTO, T., *Jinkōgenshō chi’iki no wākēshon nitsuite no kōsatsu – tōsho chi’iki (Nagasaki-ken Ōjika-chō) de no ge-ichi’iki chōsha kara* (Observation of Workation in Depopulating Regions: Based on Field Survey in the Island Region of Ojika-Cho, Nagasaki), *The Joournal of island Studies*, Vol. 24 (No. 2), 2023, pp. 67-89. 城本 高輝、人口減少地域のワーケーションについての考察 — 島嶼地域(長崎県小値賀町)での現地調査から —、*島嶼研究*、第24巻2号、2023年、ページ 67-89. Cfr. ATTERTON, J., et al., *Approaches to island depopulation ...*, 2022, cit; Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, organized by Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI) and University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies(IIOS), held in University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; MENDAS, Z., “Promoting Sustainable Rural Island Archipelagos”, *Regions – The voice of the membership*, No. 301 (Issue 1), Regional Studies Association: Seaford, 2016, pp. 29-30.

106 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 226, cit.

For instance, what do ‘island’ and ‘mainland’ signify to an island-region/continent (as it is Oceania), or an island-country (such as Japan)? How islands have been addressed, in cultural and/or political terms – for example – in Asia? And what about Europe? Or, Africa? How has the regional/national perception of islands changed over time? And why so?

In order to address these issues, it is necessary to first define what an ‘island’ is. An issue that may seem easy to settle, but that actually poses quite a few complications (as it will be outlined below) and for which some regional dynamics come into play.

Even if, naturally, we all have something in mind when it comes to read or listen the word “island” (typically, a “wild” piece of land, relatively small and surrounded by water), there are very different type of islands, scattered all around the world, in terms of dimensions, geography (latitude and longitude), morphology (natural environment), destination (what is the island ‘used’ for), imaginary/perception (as “paradise” or “hell”), and so on.¹⁰⁷

Here’s explained why many countries have signed the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, that defines – among many other relevant matters – what an island is, or «a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide»¹⁰⁸.

However, there still are some disagreements within the international community concerning the definition of island, especially if one consider the economic and military significance of what is surrounding an island: the water (along with its resources) and the air-space – both of which are extremely important in terms of national economic/military security (§ 2).¹⁰⁹

107 QU, M., et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit. Cfr, KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, cit; Shima Editorial Board, “An Introduction to ...”, 2007, cit; PUNGETTI, “Island, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, cit.

108 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), United Nations, 1982, Part VIII, Article 121, Comma 1. Cfr, TAGLIONI, F., “Insularity, Political Status and Small Insular Spaces”, *Shima*, Vol. 5 (No. 2), pp. 45-67.

For instance, since Japan account as ‘island’ any piece of land «having a perimeter of 0.1km or longer¹¹⁰», Japan’s Okinotori-shima (沖ノ鳥島) and Minamitori-shima (南鳥島), even if uninhabited “rocks” (atolls), are officially considered by the national government as part of the Japanese territory, thus under its land-air-sea sovereignty and part of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).¹¹¹ However – and *because of* that latter consequence – not every neighbor country agrees with this statement, causing no few international tensions (§ 2.1.1).¹¹²

As a matter of fact, Qu et. al (2023) state that «the understanding of ‘islands’ is heavily influenced by governmental, geopolitical, and cultural factors»¹¹³. Yet, one has to keep in mind that «global classifications overlook the unique characteristics of different islands and island regions»¹¹⁴, hence more regional-centered researches that take into account the region’s (and its nations) cultural, historical and geo-political specificities are needed.

Nonetheless to get a clearer however general overview about islands’ main characteristics as well as their challenges and advantages, merits and demerits, the diagram in Fig.1 redacted by Kakazu (2011) appear to be especially useful and comprehensive.¹¹⁵

109 AKIMOTO, K., “The Strategic Value of Territorial Islands from the Perspective of National Security”, The SPF Review of Island Studies, The OPRF (Ocean Policy Research Foundation) Center for Island Studies, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2013, 15 pp, translated from Japanese “Tōsho no senryakuteki kachi”, SPF no Tōsho Kenkyū Jānaru, Kaiyō Seisaku Kenkyōjo Tōsho Shiryō Sentā, Sasakawa Heiwa Zaidan, 2012, pp. 54-69. 秋元 一峰、『島嶼の戦略的価値』、「島嶼研究ジャーナル」、海洋政策研究所島嶼資料センター、笹川平和財団、2012年、54-69ページ。Cfr. FURUKAWA, K., “Bordering Japan: Towards a Comprehensive Perspective”, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 26 (No. 3), Routledge, 2011, pp. 297-314.

110 Japan Coast Guard, *The Status of the Coast Guard*, 1987.

111 Source: <https://www.t-borderislands.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/>. Cfr. AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2013, cit.

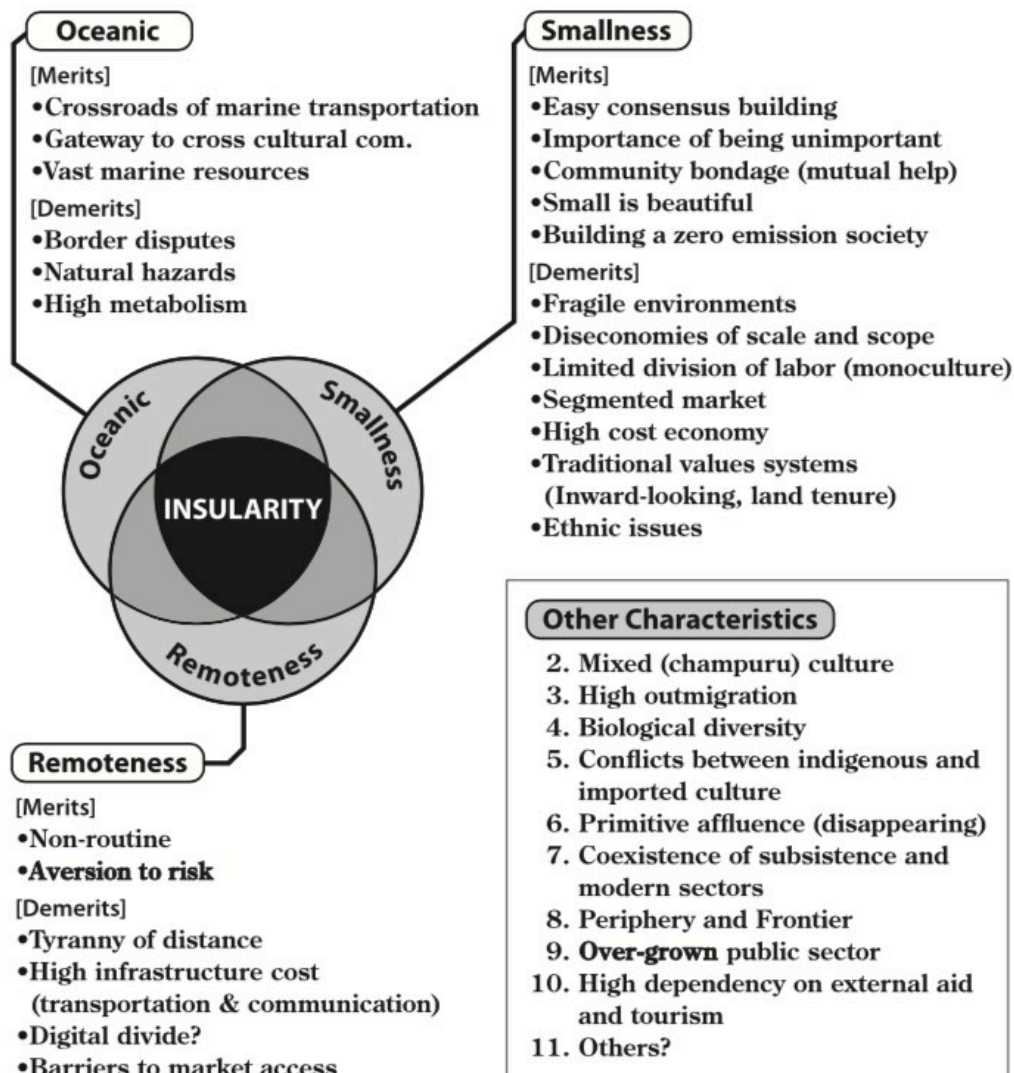
112 Ibidem, cit. Cfr. FURUKAWA, “Bordering Japan ...”, 2011, cit.

113 QU et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 240-241, cit.

114 Ivi, p. 227, cit. Cfr. CLARK, E., “Financialization, sustainability and the right to the island: A critique of acronym models of island development”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 128-136.

115 KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, p. 2, cit.

Fig. 1 “Main characteristics of Small Island Societies”.



Source: KAKAZU (2011; 2)

As it has been stated before, another difficulty that stresses the possibility to come to an overall definition of ‘island’ (or ‘islandness’) is posed by the differences over what is perceived as ‘mainland’, since it is from this perception that comes out the understanding of what ‘island’ (and the related ‘islandness’) is.

By seeing this in regional terms, it is interesting to notice that within the western literature these conceptual issues have been largely discussed, but same cannot be said with respect to East Asian scholars, where Qu et al. (2023) call for further

investigation and theorizations, in order to allow and acquire a solid (regional) collaboration within the field.¹¹⁶

This, in view of the fact that: to deep regional researches and collaborations means also to lay out a suitable settings for a savvy policy-making: studies on islands that take into consideration regional dynamics and its influences on island's specificities, can be especially useful for the region's national governments, when it comes to develop/implement guidelines concerning island.¹¹⁷

In this regard, among the aforementioned journals on islands studies that honor the important role to investigate and inform about islands, there are some regional-centered ones that have recently emerged: namely *Shima* and the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, not to mention the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies* (OJIS). Those three journals are particularly relevant in the scope of this paper since they were born (however do *not* focus only on) Asia-Pacific region – in which Japan inscribes itself – and thus they will be briefly analyzed hereupon.

Shima, is a semestral peer-refereed multi- and inter-disciplinary academic journal, since 2007. The Japanese word 'shima' (島) is usually translated in English as 'island', but it refers also to other type of space that are perceived as 'insular' by their own communities, and therefore manifests different type of 'insularity' and/or imagination of space.¹¹⁸

According to its official website (<https://www.shimajournal.org>) *Shima* publishes: theoretical and/or comparative studies of island, marine, lacustrine or riverine cultures; case studies of island, marine, lacustrine or riverine cultures; accounts of collaborative research and development projects in island, marine, lacustrine or riverine locations; analyses of "island-like" insular spaces (such as peninsular "almost islands", enclaves, exclaves and micronations); analyses of fictional

116 QU et al., "Island Studies and ...", 2023, cit.

117 TSAI, H., HONG, S., "Island development: Local governance under globalization", *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol.3, 2014, pp. 41–42.

118 SUWA, J., "The Space of Shima", *Shima*, Vol. 1 (No. 1), 2007, pp. 6-14.

representations of islands, “islandness”, oceanic, lacustrine and riverine issues; in-depth “feature” reviews of publications, media texts, exhibitions, events etc.; photo and video essays.¹¹⁹

Shima addresses social, cultural, environmental and conceptual aspects of various types of island, peninsular and otherwise insular coastal and shoreline communities, their relationship to the oceanic, estuarine, deltaic, riverine and/or lacustrine environments that substantially define them and the manner in which various types of engineered waterways and bodies of water constitute cultural landscapes in terrestrial locations.¹²⁰

Whereas, the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, is the international journal of the Institution for Marine and Island Cultures of the Mokpo National University (Republic of Korea) and focuses on island and ocean-related issues that affect mankind.

According to the journal’s official website (<https://jmic.online/>):

The journal aims to publish peer-reviewed and original research papers and reports, as well as reviews and comments covering all aspects of the humanities and cultural issues on marine and island environment. (...) The journal particularly encourages the submission of papers relating to marine and island cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region as well as in the American, European and Mediterranean Regions, not excluding the other parts of the world.¹²¹

Finally, the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies* of the Research Institute for Island and Sustainability (RIIS) at the University of the Ryukyus, is a peer-reviewed international journal published annually (in English), and covers various topics related to islands and islandness «that are not limited to Okinawa»¹²².

The OJIS held a noteworthy initiative: the International young scholars conference, as a part of its research project titled “Creating an International Hub for Multidisciplinary Research on Islands”. It’s last edition’s (2022) title was

119 Source: <https://www.shimajournal.org/index.php#gsc.tab=0> .

120 Source: <https://www.shimajournal.org/introduction.php#gsc.tab=0> .

121 Source: <https://jmic.online/>.

122 Source: <https://riis.skr.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/publication/ojis/>.

“Toward the Future of Island Studies: Networking International Young Scholars 2022”, confirming the world-wide perceived need for further investigation on the future of island studies.

Moreover, there are important regional-centered forums, whose work also concern islands’ development and/or administration (and related issues): namely the Pacific Forum, defined as «one of the world’s leading Asia-Pacific policy research institutes»¹²³.

Finally, for what concerns island studies’ future, it has been observed that new specific focuses of inquiry are emerging.

For instance, concerning the development of islands, researches are tending towards three main challenges: (i) to outline ‘models’ of island development, (ii) to provide critical analyses of island societies’ economic and cultural challenges, (iii) to discuss on (and find solutions to) the concerns regarding globalization and sustainability.¹²⁴

This latter focus of inquiry links also to the matter regarding ‘islandness’, for example with regard to the understanding of rural islands compared to the metropolitan ones, or the tropes of islands’ colonization («colonial and decolonial islands»¹²⁵) also in its most recent terms as it is the case of the so-called ‘eco-colonization’ «occasioned by human-induced climate change»¹²⁶.

As a matter of course, island studies too crossed the social science latest tendencies, such as: inter- and trans- disciplinary perspectives, feminism and

123 Source: <https://pacforum.org/the-history-of-pacific-forum/>.

124 TSAI, and HONG, “Island development ...”, 2014, cit.

125 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2013, p.227, cit. Cfr. GINOZA, A. (ed.), *The challenges of Island Studies*, Springer: Singapore, 2020; GRYDEHØJ, A., BEVACQUA, M.L., CHIBANA, M., NADARAJAH, Y., SIMONSEN, A., SU, P., WRIGHT, R., and DAVIS, S. “Practicing decolonial political geography: Island perspectives on neocolonialism and the China threat discourse”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 85, 2021, 102330; GRYDEHØJ, “A future of ...”, 2017, cit.

126 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2013, p.227, cit.

gender studies, researches on activism and social justice (diversity, equity and inclusion), ‘relational thinking’, and so on.¹²⁷

However, in the scope of this paper, the most relevant newness can perhaps be found in those researches that emphasize epistemic diversity, so to «encourage the understanding of islands in a manner that makes sense to islanders and within specific islands’ own cultural contexts»¹²⁸. In fact many scholars are now calling not only for a study *of* or *about* island, but *with*, *for* or even *from* them, since it is deemed to be the best way to conduct researches among the island studies *for* and *with* the islanders themselves: emphasizing their understanding of islandness, in a way that «must be sensitive to the diversity of perspectives not just between but also within the islands»¹²⁹.

Hence, it is quite evident that a regional-centered focus of inquiry proves to be the most suitable way to allow the development of this awareness, by considering the islanders (and “their” islands) as «inevitably simultaneously local and global beings»¹³⁰, and therefore always «[t]hink *universally*, see *globally*, behave *regionally*, act *locally* but *insightfully*»¹³¹, for the sake of the world.

127 Ibid., cit. Cfr. KARIDES, M., RODRÍGUEZ-COSS, N., “Island Feminism in/on Island Studies”, *Shima*, Vol. 16 (No. 1), 2022, pp. 137-142; GINOZA, 2020, cit; PUGH, J., “Relationality and island studies in the Anthropocene”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 13 (No. 2), 2018, pp. 93-110; RANDALL, J., *An introduction to island studies*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2020; GINOZA, A., PAPOUTSAKI, E., NA’PUTI, T.R., and KARIDES M., (eds.), “Special Issue on Island Activisms”, *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*, Vol. 4 (No. 2), 2023; GOAVEC, C., “Dependence or independence for former colonial island territories: an empirical analysis”, special issue for *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; VOGT, G., “Political Protest from the Periphery: Social Movements and Global Citizenship in Okinawa”, a special issue for *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017.

128 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2013, p.227, cit. Cfr. NADARAJAH, Y., MARTINEZ, E.B., SU, P., and GRYDEHØJ, A., “Critical reflexivity and decolonial methodology in island studies: interrogating the scholar within”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol 17 (No.1), 2022, pp. 3-25.

129 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2013, p.227, cit.

130 Ibidem, cit.

131 SINGH, *Sacred Ecology ...*, 2016, p. 1, cit.

In other words, the reason why island studies and this very approach «can be a powerful force towards a better understanding of the world and the furtherance of knowledge»¹³² is that:

An island is a nervous duality: it confronts us as a juxtaposition and confluence of the understanding of local and global realities, of interior and exterior references of meaning, of having roots at home while also deploying routes away from home. An island is a world; yet an island engages the world.¹³³

For these reasons, the following chapter will be focusing on the Japanese case (within the Asian-Pacific context), by outlining its major tendencies and characteristics, in order to provide an example of islands' administration, promotion and development that can be useful – with its merits and demerits – in global terms, as well as to build a clearer scope in which this thesis is inscribed.

132 BALDACCHINO, “Islands...”, 2006, p.6, cit.

133 BALDACCHINO, G., “Islands: objects of representation, editorial introduction”, *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol.87B (No.4), 2005, p.248.

CHAPTER II. REMOTE ISLANDS OF JAPAN

For an island country like Japan, the promotion of remote islands which border on foreign countries can contribute not only to the stabilization of life and improvement of the welfare of people living on those islands, but also to enhance the economic development and benefit of entire people.¹³⁴

Introduction

In order to better understand the importance of remote islands within the Japanese context (and beyond), the first paragraph of this chapter serve as a starting point, to acquire some basic notions about Japan (i.e. its geography, morphology and geopolitics) along with a clearer definition of ‘remote island’. The second paragraph will then provide additional information about the Japanese remote islands studies’ state of affairs, as well as an overview of the remote islands’ importance and roles in Japan. This, in order to acquire a comprehensive perspective over the Japanese context, in which the Remote Islands Development Act (analyzed in *Chapter III*) inscribes itself.

2.1 The Japanese Territory and Its Remote Islands

Japan is one of the World's largest ‘island nation’: from the northern to the southern, western to the eastern island, its land and sea territory consist of a vast area of approximately 3,000 kilometers.¹³⁵

But, by what means a country is defined as ‘island nation’? Although it may seem obvious, this term alone is of difficult definition, as it will be ascertained here below.

The term ‘island nation’ can be translated in Japanese as *shimaguni* (島国, literally ‘island’ and ‘nation’). However, Japan is actually an *assemblage* of many islands, an ‘archipelago’, which is a similarly controversial term itself.

¹³⁴ KUWAHARA, S., “The development of small islands in Japan: An historical perspective”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 1 (No.1), 2012, p. 44.

¹³⁵ Source: Nihon Ritō Center, <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>.

Coming from the Greek words for ‘chief’ (*arkhi-*) and ‘sea’ (*pelagos*), the term was initially used as a proper name for the Aegean Sea (‘the Archipelago’), which is notable for its large numbers of islands: hence, from here originates the general sense of this word as we use it now (i.e. ‘archipelago’ = *an assemblage of islands*).¹³⁶

Nonetheless, among the island studies’ scholars, many have been arguing on the necessity to think the ‘archipelagos’ as ‘assemblages of *sea and islands*’, rather than as ‘assemblages of *islands*’ only.

Therefore, the neologism ‘aquapelago’ is considered a more suitable term to express the willing to view the ‘sea’ as an element of connection that links islands (*among* themselves and/or *with* the mainland), rather than merely as an empty space between them (i.e. an obstacle for possible exchanges).¹³⁷

It is interesting to notice that, as a matter of fact, the Japanese word for ‘archipelago’ is *tatōkai* (多島海, which ideograms means respectively ‘many’, ‘island’ and ‘sea’): a term that «does not imply any profound holistic interrelation of terrestrial and marine environments [but, n.d.r.] it does provide a common reference for both aquatic and terrestrial spaces»¹³⁸.

Furthermore, in the 8th century Japanese classic about the creation of the world [i.e. Japan] titled *Kojiki* (古事記, 712; literally, “writings about ancient matters”) one can find the first definition of the Japanese Archipelago as *yashima* (八島, ‘eight’/‘many’ and ‘islands’): a term that «provides an archipelagic framework for defining a geocultural realm»¹³⁹.

136 Oxford Languages for Google, *The Oxford Dictionary*, <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>. Cfr. STRATFORD, et al., “Envisioning the Archipelago”, 2011, cit.

137 HAYWARD, “Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic ...”, 2012, cit. Cfr. GRYDEHØJ, A., “A future of ...”, 2017, cit; BALDACCHINO, “Island, Island Studies ...”, 2006, p. 10, cit; PUNGETTI, “Island, culture, landscape ...”, 2012, cit.

138 HAYWARD, “Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic ...”, 2012, pp. 4-5, cit.

139 JOHNSON, “Island narratives ...”, 2021, p. 364, cit.

[T]he main islands referred to in the *Kojiki* are interpreted as border islands that help demarcate an emerging geopolitical territory across land and sea, which occupied a sometimes-contested sphere in the northeast Asian region.¹⁴⁰

This acknowledgement also leads us to the following crucial issue about the Japanese understanding of ‘(remote) island’, since, in fact:

In the *Kojiki*, islands are particularly relevant as physical markers of geocultural importance in Japan’s origin myths, and are locations that help in comprehending what islands mean in this archipelagic setting.¹⁴¹

2.1.1 Defining Remote Island?

Owing the fact that, as mentioned (*Chapter I*), the definition of ‘island’ (i.e. its ‘insularity’ and ‘isolation’) is relative to what the island itself is compared to (i.e. the ‘mainland’) – one must take into account that, within the 6,852 islands that constitute the Japanese archipelago, a number of 6,847 islands are defined as ‘remote islands’ (*ritō*, 離島), in order to distinguish them from the five *perceived* ‘mainland’ (*hondo*, 本土), which are: Honshū, Hokkaidō, Shikoku, Kyūshū and Okinawa.¹⁴²

In other words: «[i]n Japan (...) islands are defined in relation to the geographical scale of their larger main island(s). Larger islands are seen as ‘mainlands’, and smaller islands are ‘remote’ or ‘offshore’»¹⁴³.

Moreover, if one considers that «[a]ll islands are physically separate from their mainland, but more insular islands are more isolated and less integrated with the

140 Ibidem, cit.

141 Ivi, p. 378, cit. Cfr. SINGH, *Sacred Ecology...*, 2016, cit.

142 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 229, cit. Cfr. PELLETIER, P., *La Japonésie: géopolitique et géographie historique de la surinsularité au Japon (Japanesia: Geopolitics and Historical Geography of Hyper-insularity in Japan)*, CNRS: Paris, 1997a; PELLETIER, P., “Aspects géopolitiques de la surinsularité japonaise” (Geopolitical Aspects of Japanese Hyper-insularity), in SANGUIN, A.L. (ed), *Vivre dans une île: Une géopolitique des Insularités (Living on an Island: Geopolitics of Insularity)*, L’Harmattan: Paris, 1997b, pp. 131-41.

143 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 229, cit. In this regard, the authors affirm that, for instance «[i]n Japan, there is also a general lack of discussion of its mainland islands as ‘islands’». Source: Ibidem, cit.

mainland»¹⁴⁴, one might conclude that the notion of ‘remote island’ simply coincides with the idea of a piece of land “surrounded by water” (island), “more isolated” and “less integrated” (remote).

However, although many authoritative sources over time have attempted to outline various requisites to circumscribe the scope of the category and/or built a clearer framework to comprehensively understand the Japanese perception of ‘island’, ‘islandness’, ‘insularity’ and ‘mainland’¹⁴⁵, not in legal nor academic terms there is a clear definition of the notion of ‘ritō’.

On top of that, if one considers that «Japanese RIs [remote islands, n.d.r] are so diversified geographically, culturally, historically and economically, that four different national development laws and plans have been enforced»¹⁴⁶, it happens to be evident how difficult it is to provide a general definition of ‘remote island’.

As a matter of fact, these four Acts¹⁴⁷ (§2.2.3.1) – for the development and promotion of remote islands – do not include remote islands «where bridges allow daily movement off the islands»¹⁴⁸.

In addition, one of these pieces of legislation – the Remote Island Development Act, further analyzed in *Chapter III* – defines remote islands as constituted by “backwardness” (with respect to the mainland) other than a “limited population” (6000 residents or less). By the same token, it also outlines five – quite vague – categories of island that can fall under its scope, considering their distance from

144 Ivi, pp. 240-241, cit.

145 To acquire a comprehensive overview of the theoretical discussion around the definition of these concepts within the Japanese context, see: eg. QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, pp. 229-230, cit; Japan Coast Guard, *The Status of...*, 1987, cit; KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 38, cit; PELLETIER, *La Japonésie ...*, 1977a, cit; PELLETIER, “Aspects géopolitiques de ...”, 1977b, cit.

146 KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities...”, 2011, p. 9, cit.

147 For what concerns all these acts, for now suffice to know that «[t]he main policies of these acts were in implementation of public work projects to improve such infrastructures as traffic, industry, life environment, and national land conservation». Sources: KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 40, cit. Cfr. ATTERTON et al., “Approaches to ...”, 2022, p. 41, cit; KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities...”, 2011, cit; SHIRAKAWA, H., “Expectations for the Revision to the Remote Islands Development Act”, *Ship & Ocean Newsletter*, Selected Paper, Vol. 17, 2013, pp. 13-15.

148 ATTERTON et al., “Approaches to ...”, 2022, p. 40, cit.

the main islands: (i) islands relatively close to the mainland, (ii) islands in the outer sea but not very far from the mainland, (iii) islands which are in a cluster group, (iv) relatively large islands in the outer sea, (v) small isolated single islands.¹⁴⁹

Summarizing Matsumura and Miyoshi's (2018)¹⁵⁰ analysis concerning the various definitions of 'remote island' one can argue that a remote island is an «“underdeveloped” area deemed to need support, and defined (by the Remote Islands Development Act) as an area possessing characteristics of ‘compactness’, ‘remoteness’, and ‘oceanicity’»¹⁵¹.

However, as Qu et al. (2023) observe, even these condensation of characteristics «would not cover all islands that are subjects of island research (for example, river islands, large islands, and near-shore islands)»¹⁵².

Hence, there are many variables that come into play when dealing with the subject of defining such an entity that incorporate so many different perceptions and perspectives (place of paradise and hell, confinement and openness, isolated but connected, “just discovered” but “that has always existed”)¹⁵³.

Therefore, in view of what has been stated so far, it is logic to grasp the reasons why, in the Japanese context, we refer to 'remote islands' and not just to 'islands'.

2.1.2 Remote Islands' Importance and Roles

Since Japanese remote islands account for only 2% of Japan's territory and 0.5% of Japanese population, one might think that they are not worth of much

149 BRIGUGLIO, L., “The development of the Japanese Remote Islands”, *Occasional Papers on Islands and Small States*, Vol. 5, 1994, pp. 7-8; QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 230, cit.

150 MATSUMURA, Y. and MIYOSHI, E., “Forces in the development of remote islands in Japan: A case study of local energy enterprises in Tsushima Island”, *Osaka Human Sciences*, Vol. 4, 2018, p. 64.

151 MATSUMURA, and MIYOSHI, “Forces in the development ...”, 2018, p. 64, cit.

152 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 230, cit.

153 Eg. KAKAZU, H., “Challenges and Opportunities...”, 2011, cit; HONG, and PUNGETTI, “Marine and Island ...”, 2012, cit; GRYDEHØJ, “A future of...”, 2017, cit; BALDACCHINO, “The lure of...”, 2012, cit; CONKLING, P., “On Islanders and Islandness”, *Geographical Review. Islands*, Vol. 97 (No. 2), Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2007, pp. 191-201.

consideration. However, they actually play some important roles for the sake of the country: from national (economic and military) security, to geo-cultural conservation.¹⁵⁴

For an island country like Japan, the promotion of remote islands which border on foreign countries can contribute not only to the stabilization of life and improvement of the welfare of people living on those islands, but also to enhance the economic development and benefit of entire people.¹⁵⁵

For example, the length of the Japanese remote islands coastline accounts for more than 20% of the Japan's overall territory.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, although the national land area extension ranks 61st in the world, if we consider both the territorial water and the resulting Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) – an expanse of about 4,5 million km², almost twelve times the size of the national land area (Fig. 2) –¹⁵⁷ the country places 6th in the world.¹⁵⁸

The consequences of what has just been stated are well enunciate by Akimoto (2013) as follows:

Countries attach geographical, economic, and cultural importance to remote islands as they provide bases for extended territorial claims over land, sea, and airspace;

154 Eg. AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value...”, 2012, cit; ATTERTON, et al., “Approaches to island ...”, 2022, cit; KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit; Nihon Ritō Centre (Japan Remote island Center), *Nihon no Ritō no Genkyō (Present Condition of Japanese Remote Islands)*, April 2019, https://www8.cao.go.jp/okinawa/siryu/singikai/senmoniinkai/14/14-3-2_1.pdf, 5/05/2024. 日本離島センター、「日本の離島の現況」、平成31年4月。

155 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 44, cit.

156 ATTERTON et al., “Approaches to ...”, 2022, cit. Cfr. AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value...”, 2012, cit.

157 The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is defined as «an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, subject to the specific legal regime» in Part V, Art. 55, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which also establishes – among other measures – the EEZ's breadth and delimitations (Art. 57, 74), and governs “the rights, jurisdiction and duties” of the coastal State (Art. 56), as well as “the rights, freedom and duties” of other States (Art. 58), being therefore a basis for the resolution of possible conflicts regarding the attribution of EEZs (Art. 59). Source: United Nations, *Convention on the...*, 1982, Part V, cit.

158 After United States, Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and Canada. Source: ATTERTON et al., “Approaches to ...”, 2022, p. 40, cit. Cfr. Nihon Ritō Center, <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>, cit; KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, cit.

sovereign rights to marine resources in the EEZ and continental shelf; and nurturing grounds for the culture and lifestyles of residents.¹⁵⁹

Therefore, remote islands maintain several significant roles for Japan, including the safeguarding and conservation of crucial areas within the nation – namely its territorial expanse and Exclusive Economic Zone, but also its unique bio-cultural diversities and geo-heritage sites.

Remote islands serve, in fact, as key places for the exploitation of marine resources and the reliable provision of food supplies, the protection of natural habitats, the transmission of diverse cultural heritages and opportunities for people to connect with nature.¹⁶⁰

In this regard, another relevant piece of legislation was enacted in 2017 (with a 10-years limitation and covering 71 border islands): the Act on Special Measures Concerning the Preservation of the Remote Border Island Areas and the Maintenance of Local Communities in Relation to Specified Remote Border Island Areas (有人国境離島地域の保全及び特定有人国境離島地域に係る地域社会). As the title itself suggests, its purpose is «to maintain local communities on the islands as a base for the preservation of territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone»¹⁶¹.

As it has been stated before, 0.5% of the overall Japanese population lives on more than 400 remote islands. Considering that the total number of remote islands in Japan reach roughly 6.900 units, it results that many remote islands and islets are uninhabited, but no less important for that. On the contrary, in fact, the easternmost and southernmost Japanese pieces of land are, respectively, the

159 AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2013, p. 2, cit.

160 Source: Nihon Ritō Center, <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>, cit. Cfr. eg. CHAKRABORTY, et al., *Natural Heritage of ...*, 2018, cit; GRAY, *Geodiversity: valuing and...*, 2013, cit; D’HAUTESERRE, and FUNCK, “Innovation in island ...”, 2016, cit; HAYWARD, and KUWAHARA, “Divergent trajectories...”, 2013, cit; KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, cit; HONG, S., “Biocultural diversity conservation...”, 2013, cit; HONG, et al., “Island biocultural diversity ...”, 2013, cit; ISHIZAWA, M., “Cultural Landscapes Link ...”, cit; ISHWARAN, et al., “Concept and Practice ...”, cit.

161 ATTERTON et al., “Approaches to ...”, 2022, p. 42, cit.

aforementioned Minamitorishima (南鳥島) and Okinotorishima (沖ノ鳥島): two “rocks” (atolls) which are off limits for the public but assure Japan a vast Exclusive Economic Zone in the surrounding area and, because of that, are grounds for international strains.¹⁶²

Whereas the northernmost and westernmost lands, respectively Etorofutō (択捉島) and Yonagunijima (与那国島) are inhabited – although Etorofutō was once held by Russia, no Japanese live there nowadays, and it is still a disputed area.¹⁶³

162 Source: General Affairs Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area – Prefecture (Tōkyō-to Sōmukyoku 東京都総務局), *Japan's Southernmost and Easternmost Border Islands*, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, <https://www.t-borderislands.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/>. 6/05/2024. Cfr, AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value...”, 2012, cit; KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit.

163 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, cit. Kuwahara also explains that the northernmost, easternmost and southernmost lands inhabited by Japanese people are, respectively: Cape Souya and Cape Nossapu, both in Hokkaido, and Haterumajima island of Okinawa. Source: *Ibidem*, cit.

Fig.2 Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone



Source: AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value...”, p. 10, cit. Cfr. Japan Coast Guard (Kankatsu kaiiki jōhō, 管轄海域情報), *Nihon no ryōkaitō gainenzu* (Japanese Territorial Waters' Map, 日本の領海等概念図), http://www1.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/ryokai/ryokai_setsuzoku.html.

2.2 Island Studies in Japan: a Focus on Remote Islands

2.2.1 The East Asia Context

The Japanese (as language and *locus*) island studies, primarily inscribe in the East Asia research context, that «provides examples of both English and native

language perspectives across four distinct socio-cultural contexts: Japan, South Korea, the Chinese mainland, and Taiwan»¹⁶⁴.

By analyzing the various socio-economic development policies, the corresponding literature allows the understanding of (i) the East Asian researchers' engagement in the field and (ii) the local and regional perception of "islandness". Hence, it provides a context to compare the four socio-cultural areas of investigation and to therefore observe similarities and differences (based especially on variations in domestic political perspectives)¹⁶⁵.

However, owing to the fact that island research in East Asia is quite recent, one must consider that «many topics await more detailed future examination»¹⁶⁶, such as further investigations on the concept of 'islandness' and on theoretical perspectives in general, as it has been stated before.

This is what has been defined as «(...) the most significant research gap in East Asian island studies»¹⁶⁷.

It is with these acknowledgments in mind that we will now delineate the Japanese approach(es) on island studies.

2.2.2 An historical perspective

As mentioned before, Japanese islands have rarely been addressed – outside the East-Asian context – among the major international island studies review (i.e. the *Island Studies Journal*).

In consideration of that, for example, Adam Grydehøj (2017) called for greater commitments towards further collaborations and exchanges among the «various roughly parallel but partially non-communicative island studies traditions

164 QU, et al., "Island Studies and ...", 2023, p. 226, cit.

165 Ibidem, cit. Cfr, CONKLING, "On Islanders and ...", 2007, cit.

166 Ibidem, cit.

167 Ivi, p. 240, cit.

associated with particular languages of research ([...] for example, the large English, French, and Japanese language island studies communities)»¹⁶⁸.

Be that as it may, one must agree on the fact that this gap has been increasingly compensated by the aforementioned region-born publications, i.e. *Shima, Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* and *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies* (§ 1.2).

Nonetheless, a reason that can explain this lack of research on Japanese islands – outside of the national context – is that Japan is normally (internationally) perceived as an island itself, because of its geographical situation (i.e. an ‘island-nation’) (§2.1).

Nonetheless islands studies around the (western) world, usually focus on (i) small islands, (ii) Small Island Developing States (SIDS), or (iii) ex-colonies: categories to which Japan does not belong.¹⁶⁹

Moreover, one must consider that Japan possess a significant tradition of commitments towards its (remote) islands, precisely because of its geo-political situation. QU et al. (2023) argue that:

(...) Japan has the world’s oldest tradition of island studies as such, predating the emergence of anglophone island studies by several decades.¹⁷⁰

To outline the evolution of island studies in Japan, Miyauchi’s (2013)¹⁷¹ research is particularly insightful, and provides a comprehensive analysis of the major trends among geographical investigations conducted towards Japanese (remote) islands over time.

168 GRYDEHØJ, “A future of...”, 2017, p. 8, cit.

169 Ivi, cit. Cfr, BALDACCHINO, “Island, island Studies ...”, 2006, cit; KAKAZU, H., *Sustainable Development in Small Island Economies*, Boulder CO: San Francisco, and Westview Press: Oxford, 1994; SUFRAUJ, S.B., *Essays on Small Remote Island Economies (SRIES)*, Doctoral Thesis, PhD in Economics and Management, Doctoral School of Social Science: University of Trento, 2011; STRATFORD, et al., “Envisioning the Archipelago”, 2011, cit.

170 QU, et al., “Island Studies and...”, 2023, p. 230, cit.

171 MIYAUCHI, H., “A Review of Island Studies within Japan’s Geographical Research”, *Geographical Review of Japan - Series B*, Vol. 86 (No. 1), The Association of Japanese Geographers (日本地理学会), 2013, pp. 100-110.

Before the Second World War, the great bio-cultural diversity of Japanese islands – scattered from the subtropical south to the subarctic north – led the researchers to focusing principally on «how natural factors shaped different island societies and cultures»¹⁷². Therefore, there were almost only individual case studies (on few selected islands), typically inserted in ethnographic journals.¹⁷³

Besides, there were considerable disparities were also existing in terms of development: comparing to the mainland, the majority of remote and small islands «had been left underdeveloped since prewar periods»¹⁷⁴.

To overcome this gap, the Japanese government established a targeted policy, that started with the enactment of Remote Islands Development Act in 1953 (*Chapter III*), to be followed by the aforementioned three more Acts for the development and promotion of the various groups of remote islands of Japan (Amami, Ogasawara and Okinawa’s islands).¹⁷⁵

This policy also resulted in the formation of some centers or foundations for island studies, such as the national *Nihon Ritō Center* (日本離島センター, *Japan Remote Islands Center*), which has so far played a fundamental role in investigating and providing outreach on the subject of Japanese remote islands (§ 2.2.3), besides encouraging more institutes and publications.

172 QU, et al., “Island Studies and...”, 2023, p. 229, cit.

173 SUYAMA, S., “Tōsho chiiki no keiryōteki chikikibun” (Quantitative classification of Japanese Island Regions), in HIRAOKA, A. (ed.), *Tōsho Kenkyū I* (Island Studies I), Kaiseisha, 2003, pp. 9-24. 須山聡、島嶼地域の計量的地域区分、平岡昭利(編著)『離島研究 I』海青社、2003年、9-24 ページ。Cfr. WATANABE, K., MIZUSAWA, R., ABE, H., and USHIMARU, A., *Sekai no tōsho seibutsugaku to Nihon no shimajima* [Gakkai yōshi] (World’s Island Biology and Japanese Islands [Conference Abstract]), Nihon Seitai Gakkai (Ecological Society of Japan), 67th Zenkoku Taikai (National Meeting). 渡邊謙太・水澤怜子・阿部晴恵・丑丸敦史、世界の島嶼生物学と日本の島々 [学会要旨]、日本生態学会第 67 回全国大会。

174 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 38, cit.

175 Ivi, cit. Cfr. SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the...”, 2013, cit; BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, cit; KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, cit; MATSUMURA, and MIYOSHI, “Forces in the ...”, 2018, cit; National Diet of Japan (Hokkai), *Remote Islands Development Act* (Ritō Shinkō-hō), Act No. 72 of 1950 (Shōwa nijūhachi-nen hōritsu dainanajūni-go). 国会、離島振興法、昭和二十八年法律第七十二号。

Moreover, the Remote Islands Development Act and the related policies have influenced Japan's islands studies in several ways: (i) by focusing the attention on *some* islands (most research have excluded the five mainland islands and other type of islands such as riverine or lacustrine islands), (ii) by constructing a negative image of remote islands, as fragile and problematic realities, because underdeveloped, hence needing for special support – only in the most recent times some case studies addressed islands' situations in a positive way, for instance by bringing to the public attention examples of virtuous initiatives implemented on certain islands (§ 3).¹⁷⁶

Indeed, «several waves of island research have occurred»¹⁷⁷ often related with popular issues such as (i) matters of public interest (in particular trends in agriculture and fisheries, [de]population, settlements, tourism [and ecotourism since 1990], health care, public services and transportation, renewable energy, national security), as well as (ii) culture-related topic (such as human-nature relationship, traditional lifestyle and livelihood, religion), and (iii) research on Okinawan culture and scenario (especially starting from the conclusion of the US occupation on the islands, and the consequent restitution of those areas to Japan, in 1972).¹⁷⁸

All things considered, many call now for more «[t]heoretically based studies and regional contextual studies» that serve as foundations to build a solid field's awareness within the East Asia region.¹⁷⁹

176 QU, et al., "Island Studies and...", 2023, cit. Cfr. MIYAUCHI, H., "Nihon no jinbunchirigaku niokeru ritō kenkyū no keifu [1] ("Genealogy of Remote Islands Studies in Japanese Human Geography" [1]), *Ningenkagaku* (Human Sciences), Vol. 18, 2006, pp. 57-92. 宮内久光、日本の人文地理学における離島研究の系譜(1)、人間科学、第18号、2006年57-92ページ。

177 QU, et al., "Island Studies and...", 2023, p. 239, cit.

178 Ibidem, cit. Cfr. eg. KUWAHARA, "The development of ...", 2012, cit; MIYAUCHI, "A Review of ...", 2013, cit; SINGH, *Sacred Ecology and ...*, 2016, cit; SUWA, "Becoming Island ...", 2017, cit; JOHNSON, H., "Island narratives in ...", 2021, cit.

179 QU, et al., "Island Studies and ...", 2023, p. 228, cit.

During the 1950s and 1960s, some national human geographers started to discuss on the notions of ‘insularity’ and ‘islandness’, or «the characteristics of islands that make them different from non-islands»¹⁸⁰. But, as mentioned before, the theorization of such notions in the East Asia context remains limited to such few attempts.

Yet, it is interesting to observe that «a characteristic of islandness in Japan has an inherent connection with Shintō religious myth»¹⁸¹. This connection can be found in the aforementioned *Kojiki*’s “mythological islanding” that led to a “religio-political ideology” by affecting the Japanese imperial line and sovereignty, delineating the national borders and forging the socio-cultural essence (i.e. the Japanese’ lives), since «the chronicle consolidates the interconnection between Japan’s indigenous belief system and imperial rule»¹⁸².

As mentioned above, and considering all these different approaches, it is evident that there is a need in island studies for collaboration amongst various disciplines. This trans- and inter-disciplinary (as well as inter-national) sight has been increasingly carried out, recently, mainly by the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* of Mokpo University (which however focuses especially on Korea’s islands) and the – yet limited – *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies* (§ 1.2).

In fact, “interdisciplinary island research projects”, while «bringing about increased cooperation between Japan’s natural and social scientists»¹⁸³, they also have undertaken an important shift in island studies, leading them «away from

180 Ibidem, p. 229, cit.

181 JOHNSON, H., “Island narratives in ...”, 2021, pp. 363, cit.

182 Ivi, pp. 378, cit. The author further explains that the text, together with the anthology *Rikkokushi* (六国史; litt. ‘six national histories’), was «written in order to legitimise the new state order by providing an account of how the world came into being and by tracing the origins of the emperor to the age of the gods». Source: SHIRANE, H. (ed.), *Traditional Japanese literature: An anthology, beginnings to 1600*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 1. Cfr, SAKAMOTO, T., “The six national histories of Japan”, J.S. BROWNLEE (trans.), University of British Columbia Press, 1991; JOHNSON, H., “Island narratives in ...”, 2021, cit; SINGH, *Sacred Ecology...*, 2016, cit.

183 QU, M., et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 229, cit.

notions of deficiencies and toward development strengths and opportunities¹⁸⁴, for example showing how the convergence, in islands, of different cultures – the locals one and the newcomers’ – can catalyze economic and social innovation and/or be crucial for achieving island sustainability.¹⁸⁵

However, as previously mentioned, most of island research in Japan has been sought by the Japanese government, and substantially aim at report the actual – or forecast the future – situation of each investigated island, as it is shown in the following paragraph.¹⁸⁶

2.2.3 Research Groups and Societies on Japanese Remotes Islands

As it has been stated before, the Remote Islands Development Act and the related policies marked the opening of a series of studies and research towards remote islands. In this paragraph we will thus list and analyze the major research groups and societies that direct and publish studies on Japanese remote islands’ socio-economic and politico-legal situations.

2.2.3.1 The Government

The government’s actions aiming at developing and promoting remote islands, are part of the growing concern to find solutions to the issue of poverty and lack of opportunities in rural areas. Therefore, they are included in the historically «broad

184 Ivi, cit. Cfr. FUJITA, Y., TOGUCHI, K., KARIMATA, S., *Tōsho chiiki no aratana tenbō* (New perspective on Islands Regions), Kyūshū Daigaku Shuppon (Kyūshū University Press), 2014. 藤田陽子・渡久地健・かりまたしげひさ、『島嶼地域の新たな展望』九州大学出版、2014年。

185 QU, M., COULTON, T.M., and FUNCK, C., “Gaps and limitations: Contrasting attitudes to newcomers and their role in a Japanese island community, *Bulletin of the Hiroshima University Museum*, Vol. 12, 2020, pp. 33-46; USUI, R., FUNCK, C., and ADEWUMI, I.B., “Tourism and counterurbanization in a low-amenity peripheral island: A longitudinal study a Yakushima Island in Kagoshima, Japan”, *Sustainability*, Vol. 13 (8822), 2021, pp. 1-12; KAKAZU, H., “Island Sustainability and inclusive development: the case of Okinawa (Ryukyu) Islands”, *Journal of Marine and island Culture*, 2018, Vol. 7 (No. 2), pp. 1-36; KAKAZU, H., “Tōshogaku koto hajime (kyū) – Tōshogaku hōhō shiron” (Introduction to Island Studies (IX) – A Trial Approach to Island Studies Methodology), *Tōsho Kenkyū* (Island Studies), Vol. 20 (No.1), pp. 37-52. 嘉数啓、島嶼学ことはじめ(九)ー島嶼学方法試論ー、島嶼研究、第20(1)号、2019年、37-52 ページ。

186 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, cit.

range of policies that have both recognized and sought to address the issue of regional decline in Japan»¹⁸⁷, by both developing regional infrastructure and increasing employment opportunities.¹⁸⁸

In this regard, one of the most important actions taken by the Japanese government, was the specific recognition of some rural areas as ‘depopulated areas’ (*kaso chiiki*, 過疎地域)¹⁸⁹, that cover nowadays almost 60% of the national territory of Japan and involve roughly 11 million people (out of a total population of about 124 million people)¹⁹⁰.

This recognition brought to the consequent engagement with this very issue «while trying to embrace place-based and differentiated local responses»¹⁹¹.

The first Act on Emergency Measures for Depopulated Areas (*kaso chiiki taisaku kinkyū sochi hō*, 過疎地域対策緊急措置法) was enacted in 1970 as a 10-years-limited piece of legislation. Its principal aim was «to reduce regional disparities and ensure a national minimum standard in terms of services and facilities»¹⁹². The Act has been amended in its contents and goals four times so far, along with adjustments in its title as follows: Act on Special Measures for the Development of Depopulated Areas (1980-1989), Act on Special Measures for the Revitalisation of Depopulated Areas (1990-1999), Act on Special Measures for the Promotion of Self-Reliance of Depopulated Areas (2000-2020), Act on Special Measures for

187 ATTERTON, et al., *Approaches to ...*, 2022, p. 30, cit. It is interesting to notice that the authors bring as examples of these policies a various range of laws such as the Mountain Village Promotion Act (1965) (山村振興法), the Temporary Act for the Promotion of Coal Producing Areas (1961) (産炭地域振興臨時措置法), or the Special Policy for Heavy Snow Areas (1962) (豪雪地帯対策特別措置法).

188 ATTERTON, et al., *Approaches to ...*, 2022, cit. Cfr, FELDHOFF, T., “Shrinking communities in Japan: Community ownership of assets as a development potential for rural Japan?”, *Urban Design International*, Vol. 18 (No. 1), 2013, pp. 99-109.

189 FELDHOFF, “Shrinking communities in ...”, 2013, cit.

190 Statistic Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (*Sōmushō Tōkei Kyoku*, 総務省統計局), *Population Estimation (Jinkō Suikei*, 人口推計), 2023-2024, <https://www.stat.go.jp/data/jinsui/new.html>. Cfr, The World Bank, Open Data, *Population Total - Japan* <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=JP>.

191 ATTERTON, et al., *Approaches to ...*, 2022, p. 31, cit.

192 Ivi, pp. 31-32, cit.

Supporting the Sustainable Development of Depopulated Areas (2021-2030). Hence, it now focuses more on promoting internal urban-rural migration, settlement, and inter-regional exchange, while emphasizing the valuable roles of depopulated areas, securing and fostering human resources and developing leadership in local communities.¹⁹³

Furthermore, starting from 2014, the national government put forward the Regional Revitalisation Strategy (*chiiki kasseika senryoku*, 地域活性化戦略), which goal is to promote the vitality of regional economies other than overcoming population decline, while introducing subsidies to implement revitalisation plans that are proposed by local municipalities and based on Key Performance Indicators.

In this context and under the expression *kankeijinkō* (‘relationship population’, 関係人口), many initiatives took place to allow flourishing exchanges between rural and urban populations: in many remote islands, for example, has arisen the project ‘Remote Islands, Travel and Parallel Work’ (*Ritō-Tabi-Fukugyō Suishin Purojekuto*, 「離島×旅×複業」推進プロジェクト) as a way to deal with the sinking population and economy, by giving the possibility to the mainlanders of steadily work online while traveling to a remote island.¹⁹⁴

Anticipating this projects, in 2009 another interesting initiative was launched, by the hand of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, in order to support people moving to rural areas from urban ones: the ‘Community

193 Ivi, p. 36, cit. Cfr, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (*Sōmushō Tōkei Kyoku*, 総務省統計局), *Measures Against Depopulation (Kaso Taikaku, 過疎対策)*, https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/jichi_gyousei/c-gyousei/2001/kaso/kasomain0.htm, 25/04/2024.

194 Sources: *Kankeijinkō* portal site (関係人口ポータルサイト) <https://www.soumu.go.jp/kankeijinkou/about/index.html>; *Remote Islands, Travel and Parallel Work* Project (*Ritō-Tabi-Fukugyō Suishin Purojekuto*, 「離島×旅×複業」推進プロジェクト) https://www.soumu.go.jp/kankeijinkou/model_detail/pdf/r01_36_amacho_01.pdf.

Cooperative Support (CCS) initiative’ (*Chiiki Okoshi Kyōryokutai*, 地域おこし協力隊),¹⁹⁵

In addition, for what concerns remote islands in particular, two 10-years-limited pieces of legislation has been furthermore enacted: the Remote Islands Revitalisation Grant Programme (離島活性文化府金事業) in 2013, and the Act on Special measures Concerning the Preservation of the remote Border Island Areas and the maintenance of local Communities in relation to Specified remote Border Island Areas (有人国境離島地域の保全及び特定有人国境離島地域に係る地域社会の維持) in 2017.

The former had the initial aim of «increase employment and the number of *kankeijinkō* by expanding the scope of support, to include aspects of daily life such as mobility, migration and settlement»¹⁹⁶, besides the canonical development of infrastructures. Its revision in 2023 introduced some innovations, in line – as expected – with the government’s efforts towards digitalisation and carbon neutrality.¹⁹⁷

The latter (covering 71 islands), originate from the territorial disputes with Japan’s neighboring countries (§ 3.1), and «aims to maintain local communities on the islands as a base for the preservation of territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone»¹⁹⁸ by promoting measures that assist the (daily) life on those islands (such as employment opportunities, tourism promotion, low fares on travel, shipping and daily commodities).

195 Source: Ministry of internal Affairs and Communication (Sōmushō, 総務省), *Community Co-operative Support (CCS) initiative (Chiiki Okoshi Kyōryokutai, 地域おこし協力隊)* https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/jichi_gyousei/c-gyousei/02gyousei08_03000066.html.

196 ATTERTON et al., *Approaches to...*, 2022, p. 40, cit. Cfr, Cabinet Office (Naikakufu), *Ritō shinkō no tame no shien menyū-shū* (List of support menus for the remote islands development), 2021. https://www.nactva.gr.jp/php/files/20210517032318_1.pdf. 内閣府、離島振興のための支援メニュー集、令和3年。

197 ATTERTON et al., *Approaches to...*, 2022, p. 41, cit.

198 Ibidem, cit. Cfr, Cabinet Office, Summary Document, 2017 https://www8.cao.go.jp/ocean/kokkyouritou/yuujin/pdf/h29_kihonhoushin_g.pdf.

All these projects, acts and initiatives support the implementation of the aforementioned four specific Acts for the promotion and development of remote islands, enacted from the early 1950s and covering in total over 300 remote islands: the Remote Islands Development Act (Act No. 71 of 1953) which covers 261 islands, the Amami Islands Promotion and Development Special Measures Act (Act No. 189 of 1954) for 8 remote islands, the Ogasawara Islands Promotion and Development Special Measures Act (Act. No. 79 of 1969) covering 4 islands, and the Okinawa Islands Promotion and Development Special Measures Act (Act No. 14 of 1971) for the 8 Okinawan remote islands, each of which have been regularly amended – as happens to the other acts, programs and initiatives – according to the latest political trends and local necessities.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, in addition to local *matsuri* (祭り), the Japanese traditional festivals) that attracts waves of tourists all year long in many islands, the Japanese Government – mainly through the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications – has been sponsoring and organizing an annual event titled “Islander” (*airandā*, アイランダー), that reached its 31st edition last year and usually take place over two days. The event’s goal is to promote exchanges and connections between ‘island and cities’ and ‘islands and islands’, by giving to the participating remote islands the opportunity to show their cultural and natural environments to those are interested in discovering it.²⁰⁰

Finally, it is interesting to notice that many Japanese remote islands have been enrolled as site of National Treasures or Parks or World Heritage Sites.²⁰¹

199 See: Minister of Land, Infrastructures, Transport and Tourism of Japan <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kokudoseisaku/chirit/index.html>, cit.

200 See: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan, *Shima no saiten ‘Airanda 2023’ kaisai!* (The islands’ festival “Islander 2023” will be held!), https://www.mlit.go.jp/report/press/kokudoseisaku11_hh_000112.html. 国土交通省、島の祭典「アイランダー2023」開催!; Islander 2023, <https://www.i-lander.com/2023/index.php>. アイランダー2023.

201 Eg. CHAKRABORTY, et al., *Natural Heritage of ...*, 2018, cit.

That all demonstrates that various efforts have been made to accord to these restrained areas the importance that they deserve, other than creating opportunities for improving (eco-)tourism and attracting national and international interests towards those islands.

2.2.3.2 The *Nihon Ritō Center* (Japan Remote Islands Center)

The *Nihon Ritō Center* (日本離島センター, litt. *Japan Remote Islands Center*²⁰²) is a public interest incorporated foundation (*Kōekizaidanhōjin*, 公益財団法人) since 2013. It was established in 1966, under the Economic Planning Agency of Japan (the current Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transportation and Tourism), as a base organization for promoting remote islands' development, along with the National Council for Remote Islands Promotion as its parent organization.²⁰³

The aim of the Center is enunciated in its website as follows:

(...) [T]he purpose of this program is to promote and support spontaneous and creative promotion activities on remote islands, to promote the stability of the local residents' lives and welfare, while also contributing to the development of the national economy. (...) to promote exchange and mutual understanding between remote islands and the mainland, as well as between remote islands themselves, in cooperation with the local residents, governments, and other organizations, and to conduct various projects to help the public better understand the reality of remote islands²⁰⁴.

In order to achieve these objectives the Center organizes events and recruits people for various projects and activities *on* and *about* remote islands – such as workshops, lectures, study and training sessions, research and data collections –

202 The official translation in English is “Center of Research and Promotion of Japanese Islands”.

Source: <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>

203 Source: <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>. Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, cit.

204 Editor's translation, from the Japanese version on the site <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/about/message/tabid/64/Default.aspx>: 「 (...) 離島の自主的・創造的な振興活動の推進、支援に関する事業を行い、離島住民の生活の安定と福祉の増進を図り、あわせて国民経済の発展に寄与することを目的としています。これからも引き続き、離島の住民各位、行政関係者はじめ各種機関などと連携を図りながら、離島と本土、離島相互間の交流推進と相互理解のための業務をはじめ、広く国民の皆様に離島の実情を理解していただくための各種事業を実施していく所存です」

with the aim to provide information, support and advice to remote islanders, administrators and researchers, as well as to vehicle the mutual exchange and understanding between islanders themselves and with the mainlanders too.

In an effort to inform the general public on its actions, the Center has been publishing the Annual Report of Remote Islands Statistics (since 1970), along with the trimestral magazine *Shima* (since 1948), that contains reports, articles and commentaries about islands' characteristics, acts, policies and projects (group activities, events, and so on).²⁰⁵

The Center also provides a map (*Shima zu*, シマーズ) and an official guide (“SHIMADAS”) of Japan's remote islands, along with a comprehensive booklet titled “Japan of the Islands” (*Shimajima no Nihon*, 島々の日本) that outlines the number of islands along with the laws and systems related to them, and introduces their natural and cultural diverse environments, including their relationship with the sea, customs and traditional events. The brochure also includes an introduction to the Japan Remote Island Center together with a summary of its actions of promotion towards remote islands over time.

2.2.3.3 The *Nihon Tōsho Gakkai* (Japan Society of Island Studies)

The *Nihon Tōsho Gakkai* (日本島嶼学会, *Japan Society of Island Studies* – JSIS) was founded in 1997 as an academic non-profit society, within the Kagoshima University's International Centre for Islands Studies (*Kagoshima Daigaku Kokusai Tōsho Kyōiku Kenkyū Sentā*, 鹿児島大学国際島嶼教育研究センター)²⁰⁶. It is now composed of more than 200 members, half of which are not university scholars and mostly islanders. The JSIS's activities concern primarily Japanese islands, but also seek international sights.

205 Source: Nihon Ritō Center (Japan Remote island Center), *Shima*, <https://www.nijinet.or.jp/publishing/shima/tabid/253/Default.aspx>. 日本離島センター、「島」。Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit.

206 Source: JSIS, <http://islandstudies.jp/jsis/>. Cfr, Kagoshima University, International Centre for Islands Studies (Kagoshima Daigaku, Kokusai Tōsho Kyōiku Kenkyū Sentā), <http://cpi.kagoshima-u.ac.jp/>. 鹿児島大学国際島嶼教育研究センター。

According to the society's Constitution (Art. 2), its principal aim and activity is to conduct research on islands, strengthen collaborations among the field's actors, engage in inter-disciplinary and inter-professional exchanges, and contribute to the development of *Nissology*.²⁰⁷

The Society is engaged in academic projects through research, conferences and collaborations. It also provides an annual grant for regular members or student members who find difficulties in applying for competitive research funds, as well as two "Japanese Island Studies Award" (*Nihon Tōsho Gakkai Shō*, 日本島嶼学会賞) – one to encourage young researchers and one to celebrate an honorable member – this year in its 11th edition.

The JSIS also publishes (since 2000) a review about research on Japanese islands, titled *Gakkaishi "Tōsho kenkyū"* (学会誌『島嶼研究』, *Journal of Island Studies*).

Owing to this relevant knowledge, the following chapter will then introduce the Remote Islands Development Act: an exemplar piece of legislation made specifically to face the issue of remote islands' development and depopulation – as it is the first act made with this aim. *Chapter III* will therefore outline its historical evolution, its current measures, some consideration on its results and future perspectives as well as the problematics that induced its enactment.

207 Source: JSIS, *Kaisoku* (Constitution), <http://islandstudies.jp/会則/>. 日本島嶼学会、会則.

CHAPTER III. THE REMOTE ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT ACT

*Countries attach geographical, economic, and cultural importance to remote islands as they provide bases for extended territorial claims over land, sea, and airspace; sovereign rights to marine resources in the EEZ and continental shelf; and nurturing grounds for the culture and lifestyles of residents.*²⁰⁸

Introduction

This chapter discuss the Remote Islands Development Act (RIDA), starting with its historical evolution and a detailed analysis of the 2023 amendment (§ 3.2), to pursue by outlining its current measures (§ 3.3) and conclude with some consideration on its results and future perspectives (§ 3.4). To do that, it is necessary to firstly explore the general – as well as unique – socioeconomic challenges and opportunities peculiar to Japanese remote islands (§ 3.1), that induced the formulation of this Act.

3.1 The Issue: Japanese Remote Islands Challenges and Opportunities

As previously illustrated, Japanese remote islands have faced over time several problems, starting with enduring discriminatory policies (including restricting autonomy, voting right, and compulsory education) during Meiji Era (1868-1912), to then being vexed by financial crisis, economic recessions and wars, during the first half of the 19th century.²⁰⁹

Then, the end of World War II marked for Japan a rapid economic growth and radical changes within its socio-economic framework – in remote islands too:

The policy of high economic growth caused the outflow of population from the whole area of remote islands. At the same time, rapid migration occurred from villages to a main city or town in a big island, or from subordinating

208 AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2013, p. 2, cit.

209 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...” 2012, cit.

islands to a main island in the group of islands. Some islands were even deserted.²¹⁰

As a consequence, remote areas suffered of increasingly reducing and aging population (declined by over a half since 1955, «aging rate is 20 to 30 years ahead of the national average»²¹¹), alongside poverty and scarce development – when compared to mainland and urban areas.²¹² Hence, the Japanese government undertook a series of measures to face these issues as it is the case of the aforementioned Act on Emergency Measures for Depopulated Areas or the Regional Revitalisation Strategy (§ 2.2.3.1).

For what concerns remote islands in particular, those policies were based on the Remote Island Development Act, whose (initial) aim was to eliminate “backwardness” «by pouring a lot of national budget» – although it is decreasing in the last decade, oscillating from 1.7 billion yen in 2013, to 2.2 in 2019, to 1.4 in 2022²¹³.

However, despite the consistent support capital coming from the central government, many argue that precisely this national aid «made these islands increasingly politically, economically, and socially dependent on the mainland»²¹⁴.

As a matter of fact, although there is growing emphasis on island’s ‘independence’ and ‘self-reliance’, the requirement necessary to receive such subsidies is

210 Ibidem. For instance, Hachijo-kojima became uninhabited in 1969, Gajajima in 1970, Kazurajima in 1973, Takashima in 1975, and Orishima in 1976. Source: Committee for the Compilation of the Thirty Years of Remote Islands Development (Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi Hensan iinkai hen), *Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi gekan* (Thirty years’ History of Remote Islands Promotion), National Council for the Development of Remote Islands, 1990. 編纂委員会編、「離島振興三十年史 下巻」、全国離島振興協議会、1990年。

211 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectation for the...”, 2013, p. 14., cit Cfr. Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Island Development Division, National Land Policy Bureau, *Ritō no genjō to torikumi jirei nitsuite* (Current Situation of Remote Islands and Examples of Initiatives), April 2022, p. 1. 国土交通省 国土政策局 離島振興課、「離島の現状と取組事例について」、令和4年4月

212 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...” 2012, cit. Cfr. BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, cit.

213 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...” 2012, p.38, cit. Cfr. Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, p. 3, cit.

214 QU, et al., “Island Studies and...”, 2023, p. 230, cit. Cfr. MIYAUCHI, H., “Nihon no jinbunchirigaku ...”, 2006, cit.

‘depopulation’ – therefore the scheme contribute to the maintenance of the *status quo*. In addition, island’s economies dependency on Japan mainland «continues to be formalized through the construction of bridges throughout the country, integrating island municipalities into larger mainland cities»²¹⁵, in a process that deprives many islands of administrative autonomy and political power, which intensify their peripherality while relations between remote islands themselves became weaker and weaker.²¹⁶

Furthermore, it is precisely the isolated condition of Japanese remote islands one of the leading causes of such “backwardness”. In fact, peripherality result in two main problems that challenge the life on islands: high cost of living and services (especially transportation, of both people, goods and resources), and the consequent deficit of both those services (in 2013, 40% of the islands did not have access to medical service) and long-term residents on island (according to the last census, of 2015, remote islands population decreased by 62% from 1955, and the percentage of elderly people is 39% on remote islands, against 27% in the rest of the country).²¹⁷

In addition, the wide range of imported goods and resources (by truck, ship or plane) it has not been balanced by solid export earnings, but it mainly counts on

215 QU, et al., “Island Studies and...”, 2023, p. 230, cit.

216 ATTERTON, et. al, *Approaches to island ...*, 2022, cit. Cfr, CHANG, H., *The resilience of shrinking communities in rural Japan*, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2018; ŌMURA, H., *Geography of Islands: An Introduction to Island Geography*, Daimeidō, 1959. 大村肇、『島の地理—島嶼地理学序説』、大明堂、1959年; FUNCK, C. “Has the Island lure reached Japan? Remote islands between tourism boon, new residents and fatal depopulation”, in MANZENREITER, W., LÜTZELER, R., and POLAK-ROTTMANN, S., *Japan’s new ruralities*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 177-195.

217 Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit. Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...” 2012, cit; BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, cit; KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, cit; MATSUMURA and MIYOSHI, “Forces in the development ...”, 2018, cit; SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, cit; NAGASHIMA, S., “Remote Islands Development Area in Kagoshima Prefecture”, in KAWAI, K., and TERADA, R. and KUWAHARA, S., *The Islands of Kagoshima*, Kagoshima University Research Center for the Pacific Islands, 2013, pp. 73-77; FUNCK, “Has the Island ...”, 2020, cit.

the incomes deriving from the out-migrated workers remittance, tourism, or onto national subsidies (which increase island's dependency on the mainland).²¹⁸

On top of that, the longstanding lack of communication or interaction between remote islands and the mainland has kept islands' societies away from gaining awareness of their backward status and, as a result, prevented domestic development-oriented initiatives from emerging locally.²¹⁹

As a result, the government has been leveraging on the Information and Communication Technology industry (ICT) – which experienced, from its apparition, a rapid growth and diffusion world-wide – since it owns the necessary attributes to facilitate remote islands development.²²⁰ In fact, ICT systems can perfectly tailors on 'remoteness' and 'insularity', since it does not require significant natural resources nor transportation nor heavy technology – that are, instead, essentials for agriculture and manufacturing, for example – and it is also a future-oriented industry, in terms of 'sustainability' and 'digitalisation'.²²¹

As a matter of fact, both the private and the public sector noticed that ICT unfold and foster an area of "policy and research" that is naturally associated with the «urgency and opportunity of tackling the key global challenge of sustainability (...) in previously unforeseen ways and in an unprecedented manner».²²²

Furthermore, one can observe that the general employment of these technologies reinforce island's social cohesion, for example via local radiophonic or TV

218 MAEHATA, A., *Kokunai tōsho ni okeru saiseikanō-energī no kaihatsu dōkō* (Trends in Renewable Energy Development on Japanese Islands), National Diet Library: Japan, 2014, pp. 193-214. 前畑 明美、「国内島嶼における再生可能エネルギーの開発動向」、国立国会図書館、2014年、193-21 ページ。

219 BRIGUGLIO, "The development of ...", 1994, cit.

220 Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit.

221 KAKAZU, "Challenges and Opportunities ...", 2011, p. 6, cit.

222 MEDAGLIA, R., MISURARCA, G., *Introduction to the special section on digital government and sustainable development goals: SDGs as a key challenge for digital government research*, IOS Press, 2024, p. 7. The authors furthermore emphasize the number of «potential benefits of digital government» and call for research «on the design, management and evaluation of policies and implementation of digital government strategies in relation to the UN SDGs at global, national, and local level, and encouraged multidisciplinary submissions from different social science perspectives». Source: Ivi, p. 7-10, cit.

transmissions, through a phenomenon called “communicative ecology”: «the various forms, resources, activities, channels and flows of communication and information used by an island or group of islands»²²³.

Nonetheless, ICT increments island(er)s exchanges with the mainland(er) too, hence contributes to the revitalisation of remote areas in many ways. For instance:

Due to the enhancement of high-speed transportation network and information system, urban people became more nature-oriented, and remote island boom from late 1970s to 1980s brought a lot of tourists to remote islands.²²⁴

Tourism is, in fact, another rapidly expanding sector: as mentioned before, it is a leading entry of islands’ economies, however it poses not a few concerns over its sustainability – both in the short- and the long-term.

Not a few concerns started to emerge with regard to the so-called island’s “carrying capacity”²²⁵, a term, indeed, that can refer to a variety of issues: the excessive inflow of tourists stresses the integrity of the islands’ cultural and natural environment as much as pollution, overfishing, progress hunt, speculative construction, unconditional and uninformed development (regardless of local specificities), and so on.

In addition, some studies demonstrate how «tourism development would not work as a substitute for financial support from the government», revealing that, despite

223 PAPOUTSAKI, E., and KUWAHARA, S., “Mapping the Communicative Ecology of Amami Islands”, special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d’Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017.

224 KUWAHARA S., “The development ...”, 2012, p. 41, cit. Cfr, ISHIKAWA, N., and FUKUSHIGE, M., “Impacts of Tourism and Fiscal Expenditure on Remote Islands in Japan. A Panel Data Analysis”, *Discussion papers in Economics And Business*, Vol 6 (No. 21), 2006.

225 KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities ...”, 2011, cit. Cfr, BRIGUGLIO, L., “A note on optimal tourism control”, *Occasional Papers on islands and Small States*, 2018; FUNCK, C. “Has the Island ...”, 2020, cit; DE KADT, *Tourism: Passport to ...*, 1979, cit; CHEER, et. al, “Tourism and islandscapes ...”, 2017, cit; LOCKHART, and DRAKAKIS-SMITH, *Island Tourism: Problems ...*, 1997, cit.

the tourism sector expansion, continuous financial support from the central government may be needed to maintain island's economies.²²⁶

As mentioned before, island tourism is experiencing an important shift of direction, in accordance with the increasingly global awareness towards the general necessity to behave in a more ecological and sustainable way, for the sake of the world as a whole. For instance, with the advent of relevant trends such as *eco-* and *geo-tourism* (§ 1.1.2), which are more «environmentally compatible and respectful of local communities – as well as economically viable in the long run»²²⁷.

As a matter of course, «[t]he ratio of natural parks against the total land area is 14% in the nation, whereas that of remote islands is 38%»²²⁸, in fact, most of the Japanese remote islands are designated as protected natural and cultural areas: 13 islands are National Parks, 13 Quasi-national Parks, 14 are Prefectural Natural Parks and 35 are Marine Parks; among these there are also 15 active volcanic islands; not to mention the 160 National Treasures (16% of the total) and the 10 (out of 25 located in Japan) UNESCO World Heritage sites.²²⁹

Therefore, remote islands represent an immeasurable natural and cultural treasure, «a national asset that has to be well preserved for the future generations»²³⁰.

Hence, sustainable way of tourism are promoted by a two complementary forces: on one hand, local communities wants to preserve their environment relying on

226 ISHIKAWA, and FUKUSHIGE “Impacts of Tourism ...”, 2006.

227 MUZY, “Ecotourism: a solution ...”, 2017, cit. Cfr, SONG, and KUWAHARA, “Ecotourism and World ...”, cit; D’HAUTESERRE, and FUNCK, “Innovation in island ...”, 2016, cit.

228 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, cit.

229 Committee for the Thirty Years Compilation of Remote Islands Development (Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi Hensan iinkai hen), *Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi jōkan* (Thirty years’ History of Remote Islands Promotion Vol.1), National Council for the Development of Remote Islands, 1989, pp. 300–301. 編纂委員会編、「離島振興三十年史上巻」、全国離島振興協議会、1989年。Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, note 5, cit; HONG, D., “The Role of Ecological Diversity and Identity for Sustainable Development of Islands”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 8 (No. 1), 2019, p. 42; Nihon Ritō Center (Japanese Remote Islands Center), *The vital function of Japan’s remote islands*, 2009; UNESCO World Heritage Convention, *Japan - Document*, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/jp>.

230 KUWAHARA, “The development of..”, 2012, p. 39, cit.

the that «[r]emote islands are blessed with various regional resources such as rich nature, fresh seafood, and rich tradition and culture»²³¹; on the other hand, many outsiders appreciate the “healing” power of remote islands (if preserved from over-exploitation) that «could offer a healthy and affluent life»²³² to those who look for a “balanced life”, far from urban realities.

These acknowledgments allows us to take into account another relevant aspect: the island’s peculiar characteristic of ‘smallness’ can be considered as a relevant advantage, for example when it comes to promote and manage environment-friendly economic activities – that can range from the restoration of traditional livelihood and ecological knowledge, to the more recent ways of reducing environmental hazards such as by recycling, reusing and producing renewable energy –, as well as in terms of building consent easily or having (perhaps) a more cohesive community in comparison to mainland or big cities.²³³

In this regard, one must consider that for most of the Japanese remote islands, energy is nowadays sent from a long distance (the mainland) and, therefore, inevitably high in costs and unstable, without mention the fact that this strengthen the island’s dependence on the mainland.²³⁴

231 Ivi, p. 44, cit. Cfr, BALDACCHINO, “The lure of ...”, 2012, p. 59, cit; PIKE, A., “Brand and branding geographies”, *Geography Compass*, Vol. 3 (No. 1), 2009, p. 192; HONG, “Biocultural diversity conservation ...”, 2013, cit; CHAKRABORTY, *Natural Heritage of ...*, 2018, cit; GRAY, *Geodiversity: valuing and ...*, 2013, cit; ISHIZAWA, “Cultural Landscapes Link ...”, 2018, cit; SONG, and KUWAHARA, “Ecotourism and World ...”, 2016, cit; WHITTAKER, and FERNÁNDEZ-PALACIOS, “Part I: Islands and ...”, 2007.

232 KUWAHARA “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 44, cit. Cfr, Nihon Ritō Center (Japanese Remote Islands Center), *Ritō Shinkō Handobukku* (Remote Island Development Handbook), November 2004. 日本離島センター、「離島振興ハンドブック」、平成 16 年 11 月; BALDACCHINO, “The lure of ...”, 2012, cit.

233 KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities...”, 2011, pp. 3-4, cit. CFR, TSAI, and HONG, “Island development: Local ...”, 2014, cit; Translated from KUROISHI, K., “Tokushū 2 – Tōshochiiki no korekara: tōshochiiki ni okeru jichi to gyōsei (Special Edition 2 - The Future of Island Areas: Autonomy and Administration in Island Areas)”, Toshi Mondai (Municipal Problems), Nihon Toshi Center (Japan Municipal Research Center), July 2021, pp. 47–55. 黒石啓太、「特集 2 一島嶼地域のこれから島：嶼地域における自治と行政」、都市問題、日本都市センター、2021 年 7 月. (Courtesy of The Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research to Discuss Japan – Japan Foreign Policy Forum - <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/>).

234 MAEHATA, *Kokunai tōsho ni ...*, 2014, cit.

Nonetheless, there are some interesting (and innovative) cases of green energy production systems that have been implemented on Japanese remote islands, representing the first realities – together with other islands all around the world – to trial (and succeed in) the implementation of diverse self-supply energy production systems. For example, local energy enterprises in Tsushima (対馬) have developed both wind power plant and woodchip (as biodiesel fuel) factories, similarly to the wood-waste generated energy in Hachijojima (八丈島), or the offshore wind turbines in Gotō (五島) that powers 10% of islands' houses.²³⁵

Such trends have been observed on other remote islands in Japan²³⁶ and are very likely to continue to develop over the next years, thanks to the growing awareness among the concerned communities and to the incentives provided by the central government – not to mention the global engagement towards sustainability.²³⁷

However, although there are international assessment and indicators for sustainability – such as United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) – these are set on developed countries' socio-economic systems and are therefore not suitable for realities such as developing states, or islands.²³⁸

In fact «there is still a very lack of discussion on the assessment and indicators for sustainability of islands in Asia-Pacific region»²³⁹, whereas islands are the most threatened realities by global climate change and excessive development, that are

235 MATSUMURA and MIYOSHI, “Forces in the development ...”, 2018, pp. 74-77, cit. Cfr. Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit.

236 ISAHARA, H., and OKUYAMA, T., “Effects of Improving Public Services for Tourism Developments in Islands: The Case of Remote Islands in Nagasaki, Japan”, *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2015, pp. 114-126. Cfr. KAKAZU, “Challenges and Opportunities...”, 2011, cit; MAEHATA, *Kokunai tōsho ni ...*, 2014, cit; NAGASHIMA, “Remote Islands Development...”, 2013, cit.

237 United Nations, *Millenium Development Goals (MDG)*, <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)*, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.

238 Ibidem. Cfr. HONG, “The Role of ...”, 2019, cit; BOTSFORD, L.W., CASTILLA, J.C., and PETERSON, C.H., “The Management of Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems”, *Science*, Vol. 277, 1997, pp. 509-515.

239 HONG, “The Role of ...”, 2019, p. 41, cit. Cfr. CAMPBELL J., “Islandness. Vulnerability and Resilience in Oceania”, *Shima*, Vol. 3 (No. 1), 2009, pp. 85-97.

causing sea level rise, more frequent natural disasters, marine and environment pollution and – consequently – disappearance of biodiversity and unique regional cultures, including local ecological knowledge.²⁴⁰

Sustainability of the island is possible when the island's environmental ecosystem, the 'biosphere', and the human social system, 'culture', coexist and balance.²⁴¹

Hence, while considering remote islands' situation, it is necessary to take into account the various environmental challenges and the severe climate and natural conditions in which they pour: from isolation and limited resources availability, to typhoons and earthquakes (very frequently occurring in Japan's coastal areas).²⁴²

Once hit by a typhoon, regular ship services, which are the lifeline for remote islanders, would be forced to cancel for a few days, and islanders would suffer the damages on ports, facilities of fishing harbor, private houses and public facilities. Also farmlands would be flooded or damaged by seawater.²⁴³

That is why «it is required to implement ecosystem conservation for the coastal area, construction of infrastructure for islanders and qualitative economic system»²⁴⁴, together with actual measures against excessive pollution and the ongoing climate change.

We can therefore agree on that «it has long been a challenge for Japan to sustain the residential population in the remote islands²⁴⁵»; a challenge that became even more arduous with the worrisome (and increasing) phenomenon of remote island's

240 HONG, "The Role of ...", 2019, p. 41, cit. Cfr, HONG, S., "Bridge and Islandscape: Questions for sustainability and resilience of island societies in Korea and Japan", in HONG, S., and NAKAGOSHI, N., (eds.), *Landscape Ecology for Sustainable Society*, Springer, 2017; MAFFI, L., *On Biocultural Diversity. Linking Language, Knowledge and the Environment*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington & London, 2001; UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>

241 HONG, "The Role of ...", 2019, p. 41, cit.

242 QU, et al., "Island studies and ...", 2023, p. 228, cit. Cfr, KUWAHARA S., "The development ...", 2012, cit; KAKAZU, "Challenges and Opportunities ...", 2011, cit.

243 KUWAHARA, "The development of small islands...." 2012, p. 40, cit.

244 HONG, "The Role of ...", 2019, p. 41, cit. Cfr, KIM, J.E., "Land use patterns and landscape structures on the islands in Jeonnam Province's Shinan County occasioned by the construction of mainland bridges", *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 5, 2016, pp. 53–59.

245 KUWAHARA S., "The development ...", 2012, p. 39, cit.

depopulation, that inevitably take along such trends as aging population and decreasing residing-on-island labor force.²⁴⁶

It is interesting to notice that those latter tendencies are being mitigated by the expansion of (eco-)tourism and ICT, but also – and more recently – by the implementation of local renewable energy production systems and new methods of using the island’s diverse resources. Indeed, the creative introduction of an extended employ of IoT (Internet of Things), robots and/or AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the island manufacturing system, together with the diffusion of recent trends such as the aforementioned *counter-urbanization* and various declination of remote working (*workation*, rental offices, co-work spaces)²⁴⁷, are helping activating local production communities in various ways.²⁴⁸

That is why the national government is supporting the implementation of such innovation in remote islands realities, for instance through the Smart Island Initiative (*sumāto airando nikansuru torikumi*, スマートアイランドに関する取組) program, created to implement new and digital technologies on remote islands

246 To use Briguglio’s words: «The depopulation of the islands is dramatically explained by Ishikuta (1989) who gives the example of Sado Island, belonging to Niigata Prefecture, off the west coast of Honshu. It has ten municipalities (one city, seven towns and 2 villages). In twenty years the population has fallen from 130,000 to 80,000». Source: BRIGUGLIO, “The Development of ...”, 1994, cit. Cfr, SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō* ..., 2022, cit.

247 Ibidem. Cfr, ATTERTON, et. al, *Approaches to island ...*, 2022, cit; SHIRIMOTO, *Jinkōgen-shō chiiki no wākēshon* ..., 2023, cit; DILLEY, L., GKARTZIOS, M. and ODAGIRI, T., “Developing counterurbanisation: Making sense of rural mobility and governance in Japan”, *Habitat International*, Vol. 125, 2022; HASHIMOTO, A., TELFER, D. J. and TELFER, S., “Life beyond growth? Rural depopulation becoming the attraction in Nagoro, Japan’s scarecrow village”, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 16 (No. 5), 2020, pp. 493-512; KLIEN, S., *Urban Migrants in Rural Japan: Between Agency and Anomie in a Post-growth Society*, Sunny Press: new York, 2020; MATANLE, P. and RAUSCH, A. S., *Japan's Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century: Contemporary responses to depopulation and socioeconomic decline*, Cambria Press: New York, 2011.

248 HONG, “The Role of ...”, 2019, p. 44, cit. The author further argues that «[i]n order for the island to be economically viable and rejuvenated, it is very important to revitalize the island’s traditional industries and increase their self-sufficiency». Source: Ibidem. Cfr, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō* ..., 2022, cit.

«to resolve issues they face», thus actively contributing to remote islands development promotion.²⁴⁹

As mentioned, the national interest in preserving and promoting remote islands (and their communities) it is also related to their important role in defining Japan's national borders – owing the fact that, due to very possible and frequent geographical archipelagic ambiguities, «island-based demarcations, especially when involving archipelagos, can also be a challenging process».²⁵⁰

Starting from Meiji Era (1868-1912), in fact, «Japanese leaders realized that Japan's lingering territorial uncertainties could no longer be left unaddressed if their country was to become a contemporary state»²⁵¹. And the process of boundary demarcation lasted for more than a decade.

From an international perspective, the importance of remote islands in this terms further strengthened with the ratification of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (2006), which ensured to Japan national jurisdiction over an incredibly vast Exclusive Economic Zone (§ 2.1.2) which is – therefore – source of territorial tensions with some neighboring countries (as it is the case of Dokdo/Takeshima 竹島, Diaoyu/Senkaku 尖閣諸島 and Kuril islands/Northern Territories 北方領土 disputes, respectively between the Republic of Korea and Japan, China and Japan, and Russia and Japan).²⁵²

As a matter of fact, the promulgation of the aforementioned Act on Special measures Concerning the Preservation of the remote Border Island Areas and the maintenance of local Communities in relation to Specified remote Border Island

249 Smart Island Promotion Platform, <https://smartisland.mlit.go.jp/>. Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Smart Island* (スマートアイランド) <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kokudoseisaku/chirit/smartisland.html>.

250 WALKER, J.B., “Archipelagic ambiguities: the demarcation of modern Japan, 1868-1879”, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 10 (No. 2), 2015, p. 197.

251 Ibidem. Cfr, JOHNSON, “Island narratives in ...”, cit; QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 228; KUWAHARA, “The development of...”, 2012, cit.

252 Ibidem. Cfr, United Nations, *Convention on the ...*, 1982, cit; BALDACCHINO, G., *Solution protocols to festering island disputes*, Routledge, 2017; JOHNSON, “Island narratives in ...”, cit; AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2012, cit.

Areas (有人国境離島地域の保全及び特定有人国境離島地域に係る地域社会の維持), in 2017, manifests precisely the national necessity «to ensure border islands are firmly integrated into Japan’s national defense system»²⁵³, throughout a series of measures that seek to reinforce “border and maritime control” and “inter-island cooperation”, by supporting the improvement of access to islands, employment opportunities, development of tourism, infrastructures and facilities.²⁵⁴

It is particularly interesting to notice that although «as elsewhere in East Asia, the early cartographic record in Japan often takes the form of literary allusions rather than actual map artifacts»²⁵⁵, some of the islands illustrated in the shintō religious myth of Japan’s creation – *Kojiki* (712; § 2.1, 2.2.2) – «are known locations that interconnect myth and place, and (...) often have religious significance that is celebrated through pilgrimage, tourism, and ritual to this day»²⁵⁶.

This aspect – together with the fact that the meaning of *shima* (島, the Japanese word for ‘island’) «also extends to ‘territory’ or ‘community’»²⁵⁷ – demonstrate that «a religious characteristic of islandness in Japan has an inherent connection with Shintō myth (...) [and, n.d.r] permeates geographic, social, and cultural terrains»²⁵⁸.

In this regard, Johnson (2021) insights are particularly relevant to grasp these connections, as well as to introduce the question of territorial disputes that concern some remote islands:

253 Cabinet Office, *Basic Policy on Conservation of Inhabited Remote Border Island Areas and Maintenance of Local Communities in the Specified Inhabited Remote Border Island Areas*, 2017. 内閣府、「有人国境離島地域の保全及び特定有人国境離島地域に係る地域社会の維持に関する基本的な方針」、2017年。

254 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 230-240, cit. Cfr, ATTERTON, et. al, *Approaches to island ...*, 2022, cit.

255 UNNO, K., ‘Cartography in Japan’, in HARLEY, J.B., AND WOODWARD, D. (eds.), “Cartography in the traditional East and Southeast Asian societies, Book two, *The history of cartography*, Vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 346-477.

256 JOHNSON, “Island narratives in ...”, p. 364-365, cit.

257 SUWA, “Becoming Island ...”, 2017, p. 7, cit.

258 JOHNSON, “Island narratives in ...”, p. 364, cit.

Japan's and China's mythical island histories (...) along with related ideas in Korea²⁵⁹, reveals geocultural markers that may have similar features but also express cross-border tension through spatial constructs (...).²⁶⁰

For a regime with a recent history of mainland Asian conflict, and with those neighbours having their own claims to islands off their shores, Japan's jurisdictional claims were envisioned through the *Kojiki* and later works and consolidated through religious and political subjugation.²⁶¹

As a matter of fact, the East Asia context is rising in tensions, especially from 2012 with «American rebalance to Asia and increasing military expenditures»²⁶², not to mention China's naval forces repeatedly breaching Japanese territorial waters (including EEZs), or North Korea's nuclear and missile tests over Japan's air-space.

Once again, islands are the most threatened realities, in this instance due to their strategic location and the frequent presence of military bases or installations on their lands.²⁶³

Nonetheless, some interesting responses to these concerns on regional security have been observed precisely rising from some of the most interested islands within the East Asia region: namely, Okinawa (Japan), Jeju (Korea), Taiwan and their minor islands. Their residents came up with an alternative to military-based security, by organizing the “Peace for the Sea” International Camp: an initiative

259 As Johnson notices in his article, examples of texts that showed similar attention given to islands from China (“one of the Japan's closest neighbours” – JHONSON, 2021, p. 366) are: *Shan Hai Jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas) from the Warring States period (475 BCE-221 BCE) and *Hainei Shizhou Ji* (Records of Ten Islands within the Sea) from the Weijin (220-420 CE) and Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589 CE).

260 Ivi, p. 366, cit.

261 Ivi, p. 376, cit. Cfr. BATTEN, B.L., *To the ends of Japan: Premodern frontiers, boundaries, and interactions*, University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

262 PODLIPSKA, K., “In search of stable peace and security: a three-islands initiative *Peace for the Sea*”, special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017.

263 PODLIPSKA, “In search of ...”, 2017, cit. Cfr. AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2012, cit; JOHNSON, “Island narratives in ...”, cit. +

to gather students, activists and regular people coming from different islands within the region:

[T]o build solidarity among islands and their people, learn and share experiences of each island's struggle against state, corporate and military violence, rethink democracy and find ways towards sustainable peace for people and their environment.²⁶⁴

The Camp has been held non-stop since 2014 – with the only exception of 2020-2022 years of the worldwide Covid-19 sanitarian crisis.

This to say that islands realities are dynamic and resourceful: the “Peace for the Sea” International Camp is just one example among many other attempts of building new or deeper connections between islands, with the aim of growing a network of mutual support, by gathering to discuss, confront, learn *from* and *about* each other, showing to the word that collaborations towards a better future is as needed as it is possible.²⁶⁵

In this regard, it is evident that Japanese islands are among the most active advocates of their important role: the aforementioned “Islander” festival (§ 2.2.3.1) is just one example, but Japanese islands have hosted many academic and political summits with the aim of strengthen international cooperation towards common goals – such as the Islander Summit of Ishigaki, the Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI, Excellence Network of Insular Territories) or the aforementioned Small Island Culture Research Initiative (SICRI), the Global Islands Network (GNI), the Pacific Forum, and so on), positioning themselves as attentive promoters of international collaboration and island conservation.²⁶⁶

264 PODLIPSKA, K., “In search of ...”, 2017, cit. Cfr, Peace for the Sea, <https://sites.google.com/site/peaceforthesea/home>.

265 Ibidem. Cfr, NIVON, M., “Sustainable development is a huge opportunity to create Tomorrow's island societies”, special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; KELMAN, et al., “Islander innovation ...”, 2015, cit.

266 Respectively <https://islander-summit.com/>, <https://www.sicri.net/>, <http://www.globalislands.net/>, <https://pacforum.org/>.

That is the reason why islands are also the perfect spots to trial and implement innovative solutions (§ 1.1.2.) to a variety of issues such as sustainability (of people and enterprises), depopulation, over-tourism, and so on. Therefore, measures and policies in support of islands – such as those included in the RIDA – are expected to go towards this direction.²⁶⁷

Owing this relevant knowledge, I will now proceed on to examine the Remote Island development Act by firstly focusing on its history and evolution, since – in relation to the socio-political-economic changes (both in Japan and the World) – it has undergone radical shifts with respects to its goals, policies, and related projects.

3.2 RIDA's History and Evolution

The Remote Island Development Act is a law that first came into effect in 1953, with the initial aim of improving the fundamental condition to eliminate the backwardness of remote islands and promote their industries, by a “tangible upgrade assistance” provided by the central government.²⁶⁸

However, this act was not covering *every* remote island of Japan: as mentioned – and, of course, excluding the five “mainland” – Japanese remote islands are so diversified that three additional acts were later formulated (§ 2.2.3.1), to cover Amami, Okinawa and Ogasawara archipelagos respectively (Fig.3) – as they were under the US military control at the time.²⁶⁹ In this regard, one must consider a very important aspect:

Thus there have been two types of development act in Japan with regard to its remote islands, reflecting different development policies. The difference of the two acts is in the rate of treasury's share or subsidy, i.e., the rate of

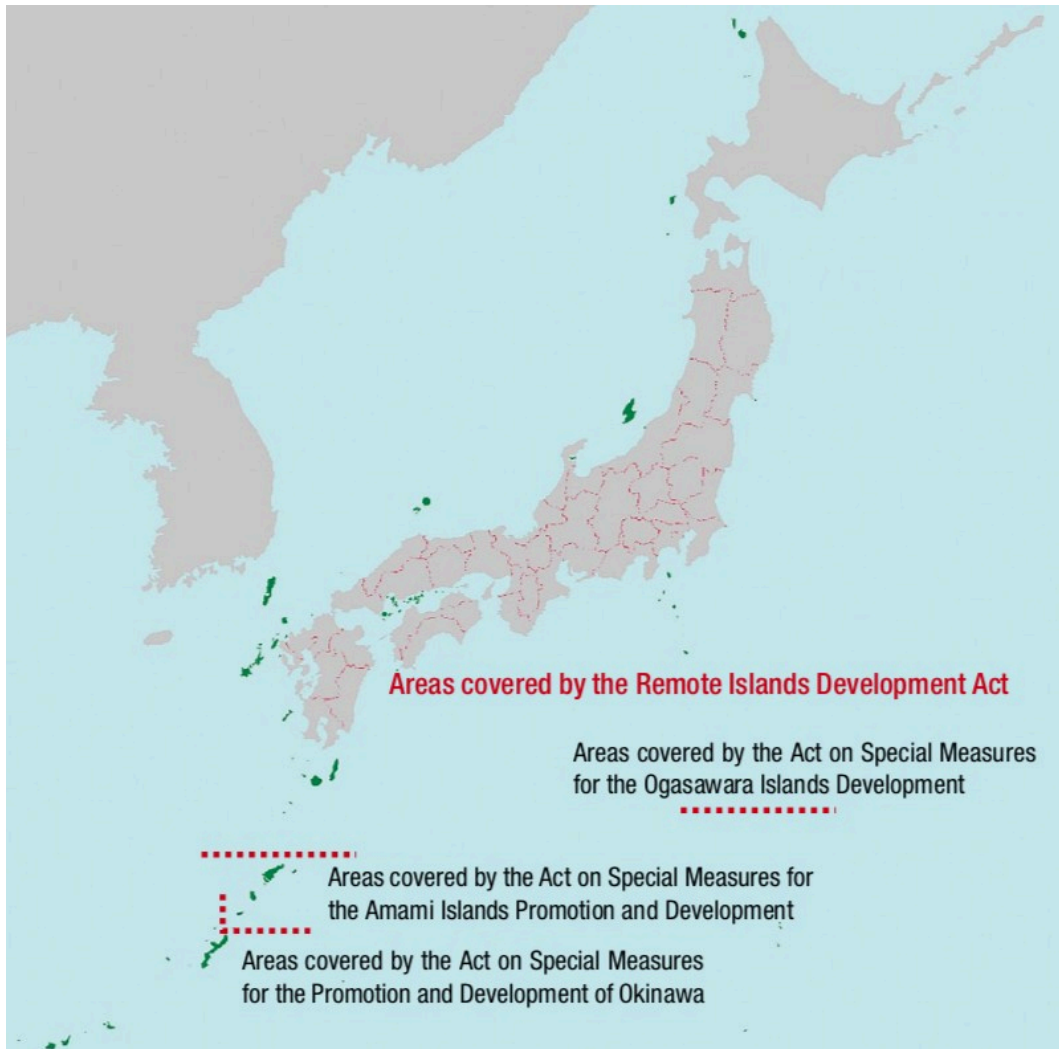
267 SHIRIKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, cit. Cfr, HONG, “The role of ...”, 2019, cit.

268 BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, cit. Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit; Committee for the Thirty Years Compilation of Remote Islands Development, *Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi ...*, 1990, cit; ATTERTON, et. al, *Approaches to island ...*, 2022, cit; QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit; FUNK, “Has the Island ...”, 2020, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Island Development Division, National Land Policy Bureau, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit.

269 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit.

subsidy for Amami, Ogasawara, and Okinawa is much higher than that of the other remote islands.²⁷⁰

Fig.3 Area Covered by the Four Acts related to the Remote Islands Development



Source: SHIRAKAWA, “Expectatinos for the ...”, 2013, p.13, cit.

For what concerns RIDA: it was enacted as a 10-years-limited piece of legislation, and therefore extended regularly since in 1963.

Its first amendment (1963) served to further define the features of the covered remote islands, i.e. peaces of land (i) surrounded by sea, (ii) small and (iii) isolated – from the mainland – with the aim of “mitigate the disadvantages” that

²⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 39, cit.

these realities were experiencing. Such conditions – together with the aging and decreasing population trends – were considered as affecting the economic and social stagnancy, hence impeding regional development and causing the so-called “malignant cycle of poverty” (low production, low income, low purchasing power). Therefore, improving transportation and telecommunication was considered the basic measure to face such problematics.²⁷¹

The second amendment (1973) set a policy agenda towards various issues concerning remote islands, after classify them (more than 250 islands) into 5 categories²⁷² «based on population size, hydrographic conditions, nautical time and distance, the distance from the central city of mainland, and the geographical form of each island»²⁷³. The plan also provides a “guideline for developing industries” aiming at make the most of remote islands’ geographical conditions, by encouraging further collaboration between local industries and tourism (for instance, through marine recreation).²⁷⁴

The 1983 amendment signed a radical shift, by emphasizing the “important new role on the use and control of the resources and space of the surrounding sea areas” as well as the willingness to create a “rich and dynamic remote island society by improving the constraint conditions due to their special circumstances”. Therefore, for the first time, a national role is recognized onto remote islands, however the general (negative) image as “areas in need of special support” is still present.²⁷⁵

271 BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, pp. 4-5, cit. Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit; Committee for the Thirty Years Compilation of Remote Islands Development, *Ritō shinkō sanjūnen-shi ...*, 1990, cit.

272 (i) Inland sea and mainland adjacent islands, (ii) Outer sea and mainland adjacent islands, (iii) Archipelagos, (iv) Isolated large-size remote islands, (v) Isolated small-size remote islands. Source: Nihon Ritō Center (Japanese Remote Islands Center), *Ritō Shinkō Handobukku* (Remote Island Development Handbook), March 1996. 日本離島センター、「離島振興ハンドブック」、平成8年3月.

273 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 42, cit.

274 Ibidem.

275 Ibidem.

The 1993 amendment was similarly disruptive, by openly expressing the important role remote islands play with regard to the “use of marine sources”, while encouraging local-based political and economic initiatives and responsibility, together with increased attention on welfare, education, and cultural development. Therefore, the islands’ residents achieved greater awareness towards their special situation.²⁷⁶

This improved awareness by the islanders of their own problems has had two related advantages, namely the formation of island associations and has given rise to more attention being given by the planners on human needs.²⁷⁷

Among these associations, we here report – and reminds of (§ 2.2): the *Nihon Ritō Center* (日本離島センター, Japan Remote Islands Center), the International Islands Symposium Executive Committee («which has organized a very important symposium on the subject in 1989 and has issued a number of important publications on the remote islands»²⁷⁸), the International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA), established in 1994, and the following *Nihon Tōsho Gakkai* (日本島嶼学会, Japan Society of Island Studies – JSIS), created in 1998.

The 2003 amendment recognizes in head to remote islands a crucial role, due to their strategic position that empowers them to contribute in the defense of national interests such as territorial integrity and preservation of EEZs.²⁷⁹ From this moment on, the negative image of remote islands as “areas in need of special support” *per se*, is replaced by the perception of these realities as indispensable for the nation and – together with all the other international islands – the word: places rich in nature, cultures and possibilities, yet fragile and vulnerable due to

276 To deepen the understanding of this precise extension of the Act, see BRIGUGLIO, L., “The development of the Japanese Remote Islands”, in *Occasional Papers on Islands and Small States*, Vol. 5, 1994. Cfr, SHIRAKAWA, “Expectation for the ...”, 2013.

277 BRIGUGLIO, “The development of ...”, 1994, p. 6, cit.

278 Ivi, p. 7, cit.

279 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit; SUYAMA, “Tōsho chiiki no...”, 2003, cit; SHIRIKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, cit; AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2021, cit.

climate change and over-exploitation of resources, as much as the rest of the world.

The 2013 amendment resulted from the plan proposed by the members of the Workshop to Discuss the Future of Islands organized by the *Nihon Ritō Center*, and establishes many novelties, such as the unquestionable responsibility of the national government to ensure the development of remote islands «by assigning seven additional state ministers-in-charge, and significantly expanding a range of intangible assistance measures»²⁸⁰, while also advocating for the «promotion of maritime and air transport policies and facilities conducive to an environment for settlement»²⁸¹.

This amendment furthermore defined a clear framework in which remote islands's administrations can elaborate developmental policies based on their respective situations and reflecting “the opinion of residents”, to receive the necessary assistance from the government, and provide a legal basis to secure the appropriate budget (so to not lean on the every-fiscal-year budgeting). Other newly established measures include “conservation and regeneration of the natural environment”, “promotion of renewable energy measures”, “promotion of disaster-prevention measures” and assistance to “the enduring settlement of island residents” and for “health and care”.²⁸²

In the meanwhile the Basic Act on Ocean Policy (海洋基本法) was enacted in 2007, which also stipulates (Article 26) «the important roles of remote islands in the development and use of marine resources»²⁸³.

280 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectatinos for the ...”, 2013, p.13, cit.

281 Ibidem.

282 Ibidem. Cfr, House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō* (Remote Island Development Act) (Act No. 72 of 1953) (Amended by: Law No. 234 of 2023). 衆議院、「離島振興法」(昭和二十八年法律第七十二号)(令和五年法律第三十四号による改正)

283 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectatinos for the ...”, 2013, p.13, cit. Cfr, House of Representatives, *Kaiyō kihonhō* (Basic Act on Ocean Policy) (Act No. 33 of April 27, 2007). 衆議院、「海洋基本法」(平成十九年四月二十七日法律第三十三号)

Thus, so far, the RIDA has been amended and extended seven times, every ten years (the latest one in 2022-23, that will be outlined here below), but remains a «non-partisan lawmaker-initiated legislation»²⁸⁴ and seek to «improve island access, industries, welfare, culture, education, tourism, environmental protection, renewable energy, and protection against natural catastrophes»²⁸⁵.

3.2.1 The 2023 Amendment

Before diving into the analysis of the Act's current measures, let us spend a few words on the expectations towards the 2023 amendment, in order to later discuss on their realization (or not): in view of the last amendment, it was desirably expected to plan subsidies mainly aiming at (i) facing the aging and decreasing population trends, by helping the settlement of young people and families on remote islands, therefore (ii) promote an overall expansion of services and welfare policies (not only for elderly people but also for children and pregnant women), to supporting the incoming of new inhabitants, (iii) ensuring a secure (albeit controlled) inflow of tourists, (iv) promoting the revitalization of traditional industries and increasing their self-sufficiency, as well as encouraging small domestically-managed and locally-produced green energy businesses, (v) generally tailoring case-by-case plans, according to local needs and conditions, and (vi) providing «specific budgetary measures and bold deregulation measures»²⁸⁶ for all the topics introduced with the last amendments.²⁸⁷

284 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, p.13, cit.

285 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 230, cit. Cfr, FUNCK, “Has the Island ...”, 2020, cit; Cfr, House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō*, 1953/2023, cit.

286 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, p. 13, cit.

287 Ibidem. Cfr, e.g., KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Shima dukuri no torisetsu – shima no shōrai o kangaeru* (Island Development Tips - Thinking about the Future of Islands), March 2018. 国土交通省、「島づくりのトリセツ～島の将来を考える～」、平成30年3月; House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō no ichibu kaiseisuru hōritsu* (Law to Partially Revise the Remote Island Development Act) (Act No. 92, 2022/11/28). 衆議院、「離島振興法の一部を改正する法律」法律第九十二号（令和四年・一一・二八）; HAY, J.E., FORBES, D.L., and MIMURA, N., “Understanding and managing global change in small islands”, *Sustain Sci*, Vol. 8, Springer, 2013, pp. 303-308; MATSUMURA, and MIYOSHI, “Forces in the ...”, 2018, cit; NAGASHIMA, “Remote Islands Development ...” 2013, cit; ISAHARA, and OKUYAMA, “Effects of Improving ...”, 2015, cit; TORU, N., HIROSHI, K., TAKASHI, S.,

As it will be outlined here below, most of these expectations have been fulfilled and surpassed: the law text received important integrations, especially to enhance telecommunications and promote environmental conservation within various domains (welfare, education, transportation system, local industry) while also underlining the national and local government supporting role. This, to facilitate residents' settlement and daily life as well as preserve/promote local cultural and natural environments.²⁸⁸

It is interesting to notice that such revisions are clearly in line with the national government efforts towards 'digitalisation' – i.e. the integrated improvement of

SHIGEO, I., and JUN'ICHI, S., "Development of Advanced Wind Turbine Systems for Remote Islands", *Sage Journals*, Vol. 28, 2004, pp. 729-761; KOJIMA, T., and FUKUYA, Y., "Microgrid System for Isolated Islands", *Fuji Electric Review*, Vol. 57 (No. 4), pp. 125-130; HIRATANI, Y., HOHASHI, N., "A Comparison Study of Single-Parent Families Living on Remote, Rural Islands and in Urban Settings in Japan", *The Journal of Nursing Research*, Vol. 24 (No. 2), 2016, pp. 145-152; FUNCK, "Has the Island ...", 2020, cit; SHIBATA, A., KANEKO, M., INOUE, M., "Challenges in providing maternity care in remote areas and islands for primary care physicians in Japan: a qualitative study", *BMC Family Practice*, Vol. 19 (No. 114), 2018, 9 pp; KANENKO, M., et al., "Development and validation of a rurality index for healthcare research in Japan: a modified Delphi study", *BMJ Open*, 2023, 11 pp; MIYAZAKI R., ABE T., YANO S., OKUYAMA K., and SAKANE N., ANDO H., "Associations between physical frailty and living arrangements in Japanese older adults living in a rural remote island: The Shimane CoHRE study", *Journal of General and Family Medicine*, Vol. 23, 2022, pp. 310-318; MARUTANI, M., KODAMA, S., and, HARADA, N., "Japanese public health nurses' culturally sensitive disaster nursing for small island communities", *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 15 (No. 1), 2020, pp. 371-386; NOJIMA, Y., KAMAKURA, S., ONODA, K., HAMANO, T., and, KIMURA, K., "Job and life satisfaction and preference of future practice locations of physicians on remote islands in Japan", *Human Resources for Health*, 2015, pp. 13-39; HONG, S., "The Role of ...", 2019, cit; CHANG, *The resilience of ...*, 2018, cit; GRYDEHØJ, A., "A future of ...", 2017, cit; CHEN, B., "Homestead Trees in Island Topography, its Cultural and Historical Context and Present Challenges", special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: "Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management"*, Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; SENJU, T., "Optimum Facilities and Operations for Renewable Energy in Isolated Small Islands", special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: "Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management"*, Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017.

²⁸⁸ House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō no ...*, 2022, cit.

ICT and telecommunication in general – and ‘carbon neutrality’ within 2050²⁸⁹ together with a general trend towards (social and environmental) ‘sustainability’.

As a matter of fact, article 1 (第一条) received some significant integrations, for instance with the addition of expressions such as “the introduction and utilization of various renewable energies” (after “conservation of the natural environment”) or “while making good use of the of human resources outside the island who have ongoing relationships with the remote island” after the already existing “to leverage the local creativity and inventiveness”. As it will be outlined below, such goals can be fully reached by employing ICT and telecommunications in particular.²⁹⁰

In line with the willing of achieving overall ‘sustainability’, article 17 introduces some interesting changes: comma 3 paragraph 1 (第十七条の三第一項) now underlines the necessity to “provide the necessary support to develop renewable energy supply systems from the perspective of effective and efficient use of renewable energy”, while giving appropriate consideration to “local circumstances” (i.e. needs and resources); comma 4 (第十七条の四) and 5 (第十七条の五) talks about the necessity to “build national resilience to contribute to the disasters mitigation and prevention”, and introduces specific provisions to stabilize resident’s lives “in the event of an infectious disease”; comma 6 (第十七条の六) recognize the fundamental role of the environment “for the small remote islands resident’s lives”, and therefore call for its necessary maintenance.

In this regard, the revisions of article 18 comma 2 (第十八条の二) and article 14 paragraph 3 and comma 3 (第十四条第三項 and 第十四条の三, respectively) are similarly interesting: the former underlines the local government’s responsibility to “take into account the natural, cultural, economic and social conditions of the

289 Declared in October 2020, under the government of Yoshihide Suga and continues nowadays with new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Source: Ministry of the Environment, *Datsutanso Portal* (Carbon Neutrality Portal), https://ondankataisaku.env.go.jp/carbon_neutral/about/. 環境省、脱炭素.

290 House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō no ...*, 2022, cit. Cfr, House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō*, 1953/2023, art. 1, cit.

concerned area, as well as possible impacts on local community” when it comes to formulate proposal regarding the review of regulation conducted by the national government and concerning remote islands areas covered by RIDA; the latter – discussing about the necessity to take into account the social changes, when ruling – officially introduces the encouragement of utilizing the newest “advancement in ITC and spreading work styles not restricted by location” (i.e. the aforementioned trends such as *workation*, rental offices or co-working spaces), while also mentioning the utility of including *akiya* (空家, abandoned home) among the measures to secure housing onto remote islands.

Such provisions are part of a wider series of modifications, related to the willing of improving exchanges between remote islands themselves and with the mainland, especially by enhancing telecommunications (“and other advanced technologies”, i.e. ICT) and facilitating private and public transportation “for commercial use, as well as to improve goods distribution” – as it is stated in article 13 headline (第十三条の見出し) and article 12 paragraph 2 (第十二条の二), respectively. For example, throughout the utilization of UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, i.e. drones) as it is the case of Mitoyo city in Awashima (三豊市粟島), or introducing GMS (Green Slow Mobility, i.e. electric public transports) as it is happening in Himakajima (日間賀島) and/or innovative auto-driving and on-demand vans, as in Ōsakikamijima (大崎上島), but also by supporting the maintenance of naval routes and vessels *to* remote islands, and the implementation of antiviral facilities in ships and terminals on-site.²⁹¹

Similarly, both the welfare and the education systems have undergone some relevant modifications as follows.

For what concerns Health Care and Welfare, article 10 paragraph 9 (第十条第九項) introduces the concept of “telemedicine” – which is defined as medical care provided using advanced information and telecommunications equipment and networks (between remote islands’ residents and medical institutions situated

²⁹¹ Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, p. 6-7, cit.

within or outside the area, and/or among those medical institutions themselves, as it is the case of Toba city (鳥羽市) that connect seven clinics situated in both remote islands and the near mainland)²⁹², underling the already existing provision of “develop cooperative systems among medical institutions” – and promote its implementation.

Paragraph 2 of the same article (第十条の二) delves into the matter of disability and in-home nursing care supports by referring to the Act for Comprehensive Support of Daily Life and Social Life of Persons with Disabilities (障害者の日常生活及び社会生活を総合的に支援するための法律, Act No. 123 of 2005), the Child Welfare Act (児童福祉法, Act No. 164 of 1947) and the Elderly Welfare Act (Act No. 133 of 1963) respectively. It states the necessity to “secure the personnel engaged in such welfare service” and upgrade the corresponding offices and “contents”. An interesting example in this regard is represented by the “medical patrol ships” (ships equipped with doctors, nurses and medical services) operating in the 4 prefectures within the Setō Sea (瀬戸内海) – namely, Okayama (岡山), Hiroshima (広島), Kagawa (香川) and Ehime (愛媛). In Ama town of Nakanoshima (海士町中ノ島), the introduction on ICT equipment to monitor the patients’ conditions is helping reducing the burden on caregivers during night shifts. Whereas, the city of Sado, in Sadogashima (佐渡市佐渡島) organized an “overnight experience event” for students in the nursing and health care fields: an initiative to both contribute to the student’s training while promoting the island’s nature culture.²⁹³

For what concerns Education, article 15 establishes diverse solutions to improve the school system. For example, paragraph 2 (第十五条第二項) promotes the introduction of ICT to secure learning opportunities, such as “remote teaching” – as it is the case of Takamatsu city in Ogijima (高松市男木島) – or online collaboration between schools and universities – such as the “Online Islander”

292 Ivi, p. 4, cit.

293 Ibidem.

(「オンラインあいランダー」) initiative between Mie University (三重大学) and remote islands' high schools. Paragraph 3 (第十五条第三項) invites local public entities to attentively considers the teachers' conditions, by also referring to the Act on Appropriate Placement and Standards for the Number of Teachers and Staff in Public High Schools (公立高等学校の適正配置及び教職員定数の標準等に関する法律). Whereas, paragraph 4 (第十五条第四項) outlines the opportunity to spend an exchange period on a remote island's school for elementary/middle/high-school students living in the mainland. In this regard, it is interesting to know that the number of schools located on remote islands that offers exchange programs significantly increased from 44 to 104, and they include a wide range of activities such as “rocket and space” classes or surfing courses (occurring in Tanegashima [種子島]) or “life education” through horse breeding (in Awashima [粟島]) and contribute to island's promotion.²⁹⁴

For what concerns the share of the roles between national government and concerned prefectures, article 1 paragraph 3 (第一条の三) of the new amendment establishes that “the State (...) has the responsibility to comprehensively and proactively formulate and implement measure necessary for the development of remote islands”.

In this regard, amendment furthermore partially revise the acts for the establishment of the three relevant ministers – Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (国土交通省, MILT), Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (農林水産省, MAFF), Minister of Internal Affairs and Communication (総務省, MIC) – by assigning them the role of planning, drafting and promoting “comprehensive policies” for the RIDA-covered areas, as well as – for the MILT – research, coordinate and allocate funds for the implementation plans. Moreover, article 3 (第三条) of the Transitional Measures concerning the National Burden, Assistance and Grants (国の負担若しくは補助又は交付金に関する経過措置) states that MILT, MIC and MAFF shall apply the provisions of

²⁹⁴ Ivi, p. 5

the amended Act to the deemed projects – if applicable – “after hearing the opinions of the relevant prefectures and after consulting with the heads of the relevant administrative agencies”. Finally, article 2 (第三条) of Transitional Measures concerning the Basic Policy for the Promotion of Remote Islands (離島振興基本方針に関する経過措置) provides a framework for the relevant ministers, to formulate, establish and promulgate those basic policies.²⁹⁵

Whereas, paragraph 2 of article 1 paragraph 3 (第一条の三第二項), states that prefectural governments shall:

[E]ndeavor to formulate and implement the necessary measures for the promotion of remote islands in accordance with the natural and social conditions of their areas, and work to ensure wide-area coordination/cooperation among municipalities which are whole or in part concerned by the Remote Islands Development Act, as well as provide such municipalities with the necessary information and assistance.²⁹⁶

Another interesting revision is the establishment – in article 4, paragraph 2, item 2 and 3 (第四条第二項第二号又は三号) – of general “Goals regarding the promotion of remote islands” and a “Planning period” to implement them, as well as – item 18 (第四条第二項第十八号) – a 5-years evaluation term to “consider the status of the enforcement and take the necessary measures based on the results”. This suggests a willingness to (i) provide a clear framework for the increased initiative granted to prefectures and municipalities, as well as (ii) ensure the effective application of the law’s measures.

For what concerns industrial development, two new paragraphs have been added to Article 14 (第十四条): paragraph 3 (第三項), underlines the necessity to attentively considerate the (concerned) remote island area’s peculiarities while promoting its industrial development, while paragraph 4 (第十四条第四項)

295 House of Representatives, Ritō Shinkō hō no ..., 2022, cit. Cfr, House of Representatives, Ritō Shinkō hō, 1953/2023, art.3, cit.

296 House of Representatives, Ritō Shinkō hō no ..., 2022, cit. Cfr, House of Representatives, Ritō Shinkō hō, 1953/2023, art.1-3, cit. And stated as well in art. 4 par 10 (第四条第十項).

define the steps for such promotion, i.e. identify (i) the areas, (ii) the industries and (iii) the contents of the development projects.

Furthermore, the integration under article 7 comma 4 (第七条の四) – dedicated to the implementation of fiscal projects to promote the revitalisation of remote islands’ area – states the necessity to implement “projects to lower the oil products’ price”. This is perhaps the only controversial provision that can be observed in the Act’s last amendment: on one hand it seek to support and facilitate remote islands’ residents’ lives (oil products are still necessary to carry out their daily lives, as it is for the rest of the country and the world), yet it contrast with the (inter-)national efforts towards ‘carbon neutrality’ and ‘sustainability’.

3.3 General Measures

In total, the Remote Islands Development Act composes of 22 articles and a number supplementary and transitional measures. Its provisions covers a wide range of topics, that have enriched and evolved over time (from 1953 to 2023) in line with the various socio-economic and geo-political changes. The following table shows the Act’s composition and resumes its contents:

Article 1	Article 1 (Purpose) Article 1-2 (Basic Principles) Article 1-3 (National and Prefectural Responsibilities)	Outlines the law’s purpose and basic principles (to promote remote island development by improving their conditions and maintaining their natural and cultural environments for the sake of the nation), and distinguishes the responsibilities of both the national government and the local administrations.
Article 2	Article 2 (Designation)	Establishes the responsibility of the competent minister to design the areas that shall fall under the scope of the Act.

Article 3	Article 3 (Basic Policy for Remote Islands Promotion)	Provides a framework for the competent minister's tasks, outlining the matters to cover.
Article 4	Article 4 (Remote Islands Development Plan)	Establishes the responsibility of the concerned prefectures to formulate development plans for remote islands under their jurisdiction, in accordance with the Basic Policies issued by the competent minister, and outlines the matters to cover.
Article 5	Article 5 (Projects Implementation)	Establishes the role of the national government, the local administrations and other entities to implement the designed projects.
Article 6	Article 6 (Financial Measures)	Provides a framework for a transparent financial aids' request (by local governments) and allocation (by the national government).
Article 7	Article 7 (Special Provisions Concerning the Percentage of the State's Contribution or Subsidies) Article 7-2 (Business Plan Preparation for Remote Islands Revitalisation Grants and Subsidies) Article 7-3 (Provision of Grant and Subsidies) Article 7-4 (Proclamation of Revitalisation Projects)	Provide a clear framework: (i) for both the national and the local government to share the expenses necessary to implement the relevant plan and/or to cover disaster recovery and/or public works – by also referring to other relevant laws; (ii) for the local governments to properly formulate the requests to implement remote islands development plans, and (iii) for the national government to (a) provide and (b) announce the such grant/subsidies.

Article 8	Article 8 (Consideration on Local Government Bonds)	Accords a special attention to the local government bonds “issued by local public entities to cover the expenses required for projects to achieve the Remote Islands Development Plan”.
Article 9	Article 9 (Securing Funds)	Establishes the responsibility of local public entities to secure the necessary funds and assistance to anyone “engaged in business that are deemed to contribute to the achievement of remote islands development plans”.
Article 10	Article 10 (Securing Medical Care) Article 10-2 (Securing Long-Term Care Services, etc.)	Provide a clear framework (costs, formulation and implementation) for both the national and local governments to ensure medical care services in the concerned remote islands areas by also referring to other relevant acts and according special attentions to children, elderly people and pregnant women’ needs and rights.
Article 11	Article 11 (Promotion of the Welfare of the Elderly, etc.) Article 11-2 (Reduction of the Residents' Health and Medical Services Burden)	Establishes the responsibility of both national and local governments to (i) provides facilities for children and elderly people (in view of the rapid aging and decreasing population phenomenon) and (ii) reduce the medical care burden on residents (to receive health care, nursing care, elderly care and/or child care services) in order to “rectify disparities” between remote areas and other national areas.

Article 12	Article 12 (Securing Transportation)	Outlines the measures to reinforce maritime, air and land transportation on remote islands, necessary for improving resident’s daily lives and goods distribution (referring also to the Remote Islands Routes Development Act) ²⁹⁷ .
Article 13	Article 13 (Enhancing the Communication System and Facilitating the Circulation of Information)	Outlines the necessity to improve and maintain the communication system and the related facilities and technologies, in order to enhance local industries, public systems and daily lives.
Article 14	Article 14 (Promotion of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Other Industries) Article 14-2 (Employment Promotion) Article 14-3 (Improvement of the Living Environment)	Establishes the responsibility of the national and local governments of overall industrial promotion (from strengthening the production base to improving the distribution and consumption) by enhancing the communication system, securing human resources (and providing “good employment opportunities” for every age-range), as well as improving and maintaining the natural and cultural environments (on which lives and productions depends), according to the local necessities and circumstances.
Article 15	Article 15 (Improvement of Education)	Establishes the responsibility of national and local public entities to improve educational facilities and opportunities on remote islands, according to other

297 Act No. 226 of 1952 (離島航路整備法).

		relevant acts and local necessities and circumstances, as well as considering the opportunities offered by the newest technologies and collaborations with inland schools.
Article 16	Article 16 (Promotion of Local Culture)	Declare the maintenance (conservation, utilization and transmission) of the "diverse cultural assets" existing on remote islands.
Article 17	Article 17 (Promotion of Tourism and Inter-regional Exchange) Article 17-2 (Preservation and Restoration of the Natural Environment) Article 17-3 (Promotion of Energy Measures) Article 17-4 (Promotion of Disaster Prevention Measures) Article 17-5 (Securing Residents' Lives in the Event of Infectious Disease Outbreak) Article 17-6 (Special Consideration for Small Remote Islands)	Provides a detailed framework for national and local public entities to contribute to the natural and cultural conservation as well as the local revitalization throughout various measures, while according particular attention to local ecosystems.
Article 18	Article 18 (Considerations concerning the Agricultural Land Act, etc.) Article 18-2 (Revision of	Provides a framework to promote local development according to the island's specificities (by permitting the application of "exceptions to regulations

	Regulations) Article 18-3 (Development of a Special Zoning System for Remote Islands)	and other special measures", and in accordance with other relevant Acts).
Article 19	Article 19 (Taxation Measures, etc.)	Provides a framework for reducing the regional disparities in terms of costs and services, in remote islands areas, by also referring to other relevant acts.
Article 20	Article 20 (Measures on Local Taxation: Uniform Taxation and/or Exemptions)	Rules the taxation system on remote islands by also referring to other relevant acts and ordinances.
Article 21	Article 21 (National Land Council) Article 21-2 (Reports to the National Land Council) Article 21-3 (Competent Minister, etc.)	Outlines the roles and duties of the National Land Council and designs the competent ministers and their roles and duties, with regard to the formulation and implementation of remote islands development plans.
Article 22	Article 22 (Delegations to Cabinet Order)	Establishes the responsibility of the Cabinet to promulgate orders "for implementing this Act and other necessary matters".
Supplementary Provisions		Include the dates of enactment, promulgation and implementation of the Act and its amendments, as well as the contents of such amendments.

3.4 Considerations

The Remote Islands Development Act is a piece of legislation tailored to address the "backward" status of the (at the time) Japanese remote islands, considering

that «it goes without saying that the remote islands face a real test in terms of determination and ingenuity in their voluntary efforts toward development»²⁹⁸.

However many criticized this tendency to emphasize the problematic aspects of remote islands areas, «constructing a negative image (...) as areas in need of special support»²⁹⁹, which has influenced the academic discussion and research on such islands. Without mentioning the fact that, to obtain subsidies for supporting ‘re-population’ measures, the municipality should “prove” its ‘depopulated area’ status, by thus confirming such troublesome *status quo*.³⁰⁰

Furthermore, if compared with the other three acts covering the remaining remote islands of Japan (Amami, Okinawa and Ogasawara), we already mentioned that there is a significant budgetary difference between these acts and the Remote Islands Development Act – where RIDA has been receiving less subsidies – which can pose some questions on the fairness of such discriminating treatment.³⁰¹

Moreover, many argue that the Act’s wide scope poses some issues: by covering 254 very diverse islands that stretch from the tropical south to the subarctic north – including urbanized as well as almost deserted, very small but also relatively big islands – RIDA has been accused to not accord appropriate attention to local peculiarities, risking to «overlook the unique characteristics of different islands and island regions»³⁰².

As a matter of fact «policies under the [RIDA, n.d.r] Act have had mixed results»³⁰³ therefore «[i]t soon became obvious that remote islands could not be

298 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations on the ...”, 2013, p. 14, cit.

299 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 231, cit. Cfr, SUYAMA, “Tōsho chiiki no ...”, 2003, cit.

300 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit. Cfr, ATTERTON, et. al, *Approaches to island ...*, 2022, cit. Cfr, CHANG, H., *The resilience of ...*, 2018, cit.

301 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit. Cfr, KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 39, cit.

302 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, cit. Cfr, ISHIKAWA, and FUKUSHIGE, “Impact of Tourism...”, 2006.

303 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p.231, cit. The authors furthermore mention that other policies such as the Law for the Development of Comprehensive Resort Areas (1999) and the Law for the Promotion of Ecotourism (2008) “also brought mixed changes to island economies and societies”. Source: *ibidem*. Cfr, D’HAUTESERRE, and FUNCK, “Innovation

improved by adopting uniform remedies nationwide»³⁰⁴. In this regard, the Act is now accordingly provided with several clarifications: one can find – in its various declination – all throughout the law text, the expression “considering the specific conditions of the areas where remote islands development measures are implemented” (*ritō shinkō taisaku jisshi chiiki no shojhōken o fumaе*, 離島振興対策実施地域の諸条件を踏まえ).

In addition, the Act’s historical evolution demonstrates an engaged commitment, on the part of the national government, towards the matter, as well as a significant reconsideration of remote islands themselves: the original (essentially economic) provisions gradually veered from the initial aim of solving the island “backwardness” throughout “development”, eventually broadening to include a whole range of detailed and articulated measures that invests every aspect of island and inlanders’ life (housing, health care, welfare, education, transportations, manufacturing, energy supply and provision, and so on...) including the willing to preserve their natural and cultural environments through the recognition of their (concrete as much as intangible) value, not only for themselves but for the nation as a whole.³⁰⁵

In light of the relevant examples outlined in paragraph 3.2.1, concerning the various projects and measures implemented on many remote islands, it is fair to assert that (i) a number of important advancements have been achieved in order to support and revitalize remote islands realities, and (ii) the new amendment does seem to honor all the expectations that have been reposed in it (perhaps with the only exception of «specific budgetary measures and bold deregulation measures»³⁰⁶).

in island ...”, 2016, cit.

304 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 231, cit. Cfr, MIYAUCHI, H., “Nihon no jinbunchirigaku ...”, 2006, cit; SUYAMA, “Tōsho chiiki no ...”, 2003, cit.

305 Of particular interest in this regard are studies mentioned in note 287.

306 SHIRAKAWA, “Expectations for the ...”, 2013, p.15, cit.

The data speak for themselves:

Since Remote Islands Development Act was enacted in 1953, Japanese government and local governments have conducted development measures strongly and steadily, and made considerable achievements in improving remote islands' basic conditions and industrial infrastructure. The total amount of public works spending related to remote islands development during last 51 years from fiscal year 1953 to 2004 reached to 44,153 billion yen, in which 13,748 billion yen (31%) for fishery infrastructure, 7904 billion yen (18%) for road building, 7757 billion yen (17.5%) for port and harbor, 4903 billion yen (11%) for agriculture and farming, and 2670 billion yen (6%) for seacoast.³⁰⁷

Certainly a significant boost in this sense resulted from two unfortunate events such the (i) sanitary crisis of 2020-2022 and (ii) the recent increasing tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, the recognition of remote islands' national role and the diffusion of behaviors such as counter-urbanization and distance education or work are trends that arose – quite drastically, too, in the case of Covid-19 – from, (i) Japan's perceived land threats and the consequent need to secure its territories, and (ii) the necessary lockdown constraint (especially in 2020-2021, but extended over the following two years as well), respectively.³⁰⁸

This furthermore reflects the legislator's general consideration in modifying the Act's provisions according to the significant changes occurring in the contemporary society – as it is the case of the increased attention accorded to the ICT industry, especially within the last amendment.³⁰⁹

Nonetheless, it is necessary to spend few more words on ecological measures comprise in this Act. The Remote Islands Development Act – as much as the

307 KUWAHARA, “The development of ...”, 2012, p. 42, cit. Cfr, Nihon Ritō Center, *Ritō Shinkō Handobukku*, 2004, cit.

308 AKIMOTO, “The Strategic Value ...”, 2012, cit; PODLIPSKA, “In search of ...”, 2017, cit; SHIRIMOTO, *Jinkōgenshō chiiki no ...*, 2003, cit; DILLEY, et al., “Developing counterurbanisation ...”, 2022, cit; USUI, “Tourism and counterurbanization ...”, 2021, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit.

309 House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō*, 1953/2023, art. 1, cit. Cfr, HAY, et al., “Understanding and managing ...” 2013, cit.

related research³¹⁰ concerning remote islands' vulnerabilities and merits – demonstrates that such complex (sometimes innovative and courageous, certainly urgent and necessary) measures in support of green energy production, sustainable waste management and transportation system, ecologic housing and industries, and so on, are feasible for both the administrations and the concerned citizens. Therefore, if this is feasible for such “disadvantaged” realities as remote islands are, it is likely to be feasible for every other (urban or inland) reality as well, or, to use Hong et al. (2011) words: «[a]ll Asian [and non-Asian, n.d.r] countries should establish the necessary ordinances and regulations to protect their cultural landscapes»³¹¹.

At this regard, and in view of the next amendment, it might be auspicious to make explicitly reference to “traditional ecology” (i.e. «the indigenous knowledge on the use of natural resources»³¹²) in order to empower remote islands' – and rural areas in general – residents and administrations to implement their own sustainable development, according to local needs and features, while depending ever less on mainland's supplies and support.

In sum, to achieve sustainable economic development within the globalized world, remote islands' peculiar resources must be fully, efficiently and value-adding employed, by formulating development plans on a case-by-case basis.

Therefore, we must conclude that the Remote Islands Development Act's measures are comprehensive and extensively detailed to build a framework for the

310 E.g. SENJU, “Optimum Facilities and ...”, 2017, cit; TORU, “Development of Advanced ...”, 2004, cit; KOJIMA, and FUKUYA, “Microgrid System for ...”, cit; HONG, et al., “Island biocultural diversity ...”, 2013, cit; OKANO, T., and MATSUDA, H., “Biocultural diversity of Yakushima Island: Mountains, beaches, and sea”, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 69-77; HONG, “The Role of ...”, 2019, cit; KAKAZU, H., *Tōsho gaku* (Nissology), Kokon Shoin, 2019. 嘉数啓、島嶼学、古今書院、2019年; KAKAZU, “Island Sustainability and ...”, 2018, cit.

311 HONG, “Landscape ecology in ...”, 2011, p. vi, cit.

312 HONG, “The Role of...”, 2019, p. 42, cit.

national and local public and private entities to improve, promote, revitalize, build, maintain remote island's realities.³¹³

313 E.g. Ministry of Land, Infrastructures, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō Shinkō*, www.mlit.go.jp/kokudoseisaku/chirit/index.html, cit; House of Representatives, *Ritō Shinkō hō*, 1953/2023, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Ritō no genjō ...*, 2022, cit; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, *Shima dukuri no ...*, 2018, cit; ISHIKAWA, and FUKUSHIGE, “Impacts of Tourism ...”, 2006, cit; OGURI, TAKANO, “Challenges and possibilities for re-wilding education policy in Japan”, *Policy Futures in Education*, Vol. 19 (No. 3), 2021, pp. 339-357; MATSUMOTO, T., “Natural Disasters in the Ryukyu Island Arc Located in the Western Pacific Subtropical Area”, special issue in *RETI 2017 in Okinawa: “Future Perspectives for Island Society: Sustainability and Self-Management”*, Réseau d'Excellence des Territoires Insulaires (RETI), University of the Ryukyus and International Institute for Okinawan Studies (IIOS): Okinawa, Japan, November 17-21, 2017; and studies mentioned in note 287.

CONCLUSIONS

*The island is also a region where the complex multi-layered issues of environment/society/economy are rapidly increasing.*³¹⁴

Out of the present research it is possible to grasp the complexity of such realities as islands are – including the fact that their understanding «is heavily influenced by governmental, geopolitical, and cultural factors»³¹⁵.

Chapter I, in fact, has provided a comprehensive overview of the issues that (i) islands all over the world, as much as (ii) those (scholars, governors, inhabitants, etc...) engaged in such domain, *have been* and still *are* facing worldwide. In particular, throughout the exploration of ‘island studies’ – from its first appellation as *Nissology*, to its recent affirmation as an internationally recognized field of study, and its latest trends and future perspectives – it was possible to acquire a multi- and inter-disciplinary theoretical background to deal with the matter, thus understanding the necessity to address it from different perspectives and, in particular, with a critical approach towards the risky tendencies to idealize (as intact paradises) or generalize (into fixed categories, with common features) ‘islands’.

Thanks to these researches, national government started to devote special attention to such realities, by recognizing their important roles such as territorial, biological and cultural maintenance – although we here discuss remote islands in particular, montane and other rural areas also play such roles.

In light of that, *Chapter II* and *III*, therefore apply such conceptions to the Japanese context, unveiling the peculiarities of the Japanese case – for example, explaining why, in this context we talk about “remote” islands and not only “islands” – by outlining its political, historical and socio-economic dynamics that led to the formulation of a series of laws and policies, including the Remote Island Development Act (1995/2023). These chapters furthermore analyze the changes of

314 HONG, “The Role of ...”, 2019, p. 43, cit.

315 QU, et al., “Island Studies and ...”, 2023, p. 240, cit.

both the Japanese and the global society, that caused the consequent evolution of (i) the national perception towards its “borderlands”, and (ii) the Act aims and provisions.

As a matter of fact, the legislator – as much as the other concerned public and private entities – has been particularly capable of catching the – increasingly faster – social changes over the years, and incorporating them within the remote islands development plans.

For instance, thanks to the “Smart Island” program, Japanese remote islands are hubs of important implementations of innovations that are susceptible to spread all around the world and became increasingly part of our daily lives: UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) delivering; GSM (Green Slow Mobility) or auto-driving transports; microgrid, off-shore wind turbine, woodchip fuel and other sustainable energies; mobile medical patrol and tele-medical systems; remote education and exchange programs among national schools; and so on, are useful initiatives, not only for the sake of remote areas alone.

These are clear examples of the efforts made by the national government – in accordance with world-wide tendencies – to increasingly consider ICT and sustainability, with the aim of reaching ‘digitalization’ and ‘carbon neutrality’ within 2050.

In this regard, the topic of island sustainability is gaining the interest of island studies scholars too. Although many argue on the difficulty of research, examine and implement sustainability of islands³¹⁶, it is clear that:

In order to maintain sustainability of the earth, the three pillars of the environmental, social and economic system must be complementary to each other to achieve balanced development while maintaining each other’s boundaries.³¹⁷

316 E.g. KAKAZU, *Tōsho gaku*, 2019, cit; HONG, *et al.*, *Landscape ecology ...*, 2011, cit.

317 HONG, *et al.*, *Landscape ecology ...*, 2011, p. 44, cit.

Therefore, to achieve sustainable economic development within the globalized world, remote islands' peculiar resources must be fully, efficiently and value-adding employed, by formulating development plans on a case-by-case basis.

In light of this, we must conclude that the Remote Islands Development Act's measures are comprehensive and extensively detailed to build a framework for the national and local public and private entities to improve, promote, revitalize, build, maintain remote island's realities.

In sum, the present research aimed at providing a valuable example of the effective and complex importance of 'islands' – and their recognition as such – now as (i) ideal laboratories to experiment new solutions and/or find answers to global questions, or (ii) keepers of ancient (ecological) knowledges, useful for both managing local resources and revitalize the region, (iii) location of unique bio-cultural diversities of exceptional value, (iv) fragile as much as resilient places (and communities) therefore needing special attention and support, not merely to achieve some imposed 'progress' or 'development', but on the contrary, to maintain its uniqueness in this globalized world; brief, as "islands in their own terms".

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