

# Japan's territorial-disputes policy

## Success or failure?

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### Introduction

This chapter examines Japan's state-level policies related to its territorial disputes and analyzes whether the goals of these policies were achieved or not. Today, Japan has territorial disputes over groups of islands with all of its neighbors. The origins of these disputes can be traced to the politics of the Cold War. The territorial provisions in the main legal document that stipulates postwar Japan's borders—that is, the Treaty of Peace with Japan—are rather vague and leave room for conflicting interpretations regarding the ownership of the islands in question. As Hara (2006) has persuasively argued, this ambiguity can be connected with the Cold War policy of the United States, which was the main occupying power of Japan and the most significant power behind the structure of the postwar settlement. As a result, Japan has a dispute with Russia over the 'Northern Territories' (known as South Kuriles in Russia), with South Korea over the Takeshima (Dokdo in Korean) islets and over the Senkaku (Diaoyu or Diaoyutai in Chinese) islands with China.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the disputes with Russia and South Korea, Japan is the one that demands the return of a territory it argues to be illegally occupied by the two countries. In the case of the dispute with China, Japan administers the islands claimed by both the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) and officially denies the existence of a dispute.

There are different ways of evaluating the success or failure of a certain policy pursued by the government. The approach taken in this chapter construes policy success as simply an achievement of the goals set by the policy makers. Territory and exclusive control over it are among the main attributes of a modern state. Thus, it may seem that in the case of territorial disputes policy goals are rather obvious—retrieving the lost territory and maintaining control over territory claimed by others. If this was the case, the answer to the question regarding success or failure is simple: as of 2016, Japan failed to regain control over the Northern Territories and Takeshima but succeeded in fending off Chinese claims to the Senkaku islands. As this chapter will show, however, retrieving or retaining the territory in question has not been the only, and at times not the main, goal of policies developed and pursued by the Japanese government. The specific goals and related policies emerged in the context of a broader conception of Japan's national interests as construed by the policy-making elites.

During the Cold War years, the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party)-led Japan was an integral part of the Western camp. The LDP and conservative pundits viewed the Japan-US Alliance as the

main pillar of Japan's foreign policy. It was seen as vital for maintaining Japan's independence, peace and economic prosperity as well as a major factor in sustaining stability in the region (e.g. Kosaka 1963). Needless to say, maintaining good relations with other non-Communist countries and especially US allies in the region and beyond was also an important part of Japan's Cold War foreign policy. Today, relations with the US and the bilateral security alliance are still the primary focus of Japan's international relations. However, the rise of China, the relative decline of US power and the changes in the LDP leadership brought about significant changes in the way Japan's policy-making elites see their country's position within this alliance. While during the Cold War, pursuit of economic prosperity under the so-called 'Yoshida doctrine' was the key priority of Japan's foreign policy, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government seeks to turn Japan into a more equal partner of the US, an active player in security arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It is within this broader context that the specific policy goals related to the territorial disputes were set and pursued. Furthermore, as a result of various domestic and international developments, these goals and the ways to achieve them varied from one dispute to another and changed over time as well.

### Northern Territories/South Kuriles

The Northern Territories are comprised of three islands: Etorofu (Itrup), Kunashiri (Kunashir) and Shikotan, as well as the Habomai islets. The overall territory of the disputed islands is about 5000 square kilometers. Today, there are over 16,000 Russian residents on these islands, who engage mainly in fishing, fish processing, forestry and farming. In 1945 there was a roughly similar number of Japanese who resided on these islands.

Between 1855 and 1905, Japan and Russia concluded a number of treaties that involved changes in the border between the two countries, but the four disputed islands were never administered by Russia prior to 1945 and therefore the roots of the dispute are political rather than historical.

During the February 1945 Yalta summit it was agreed that the Soviet Union would get the rights to Southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles (without specifying the exact scope of the Kuriles) in exchange for the Red Army's participation in the war against Japan. The Soviet Union joined the war against Japan on the August 9, 1945 and completed the occupation of the Kurile chain in September 1945. In 1947–8, the Soviet authorities expelled most of the remaining Japanese residents and unilaterally incorporated the islands into Sakhalin Oblast.

Japan renounced its right to the Kurile Islands and to Sakhalin in article 2 (c) of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, signed on September 8, 1951. Importantly, the treaty did not stipulate the scope of the 'Kuriles'. This omission has been traced to the Cold War policy of the US, which prioritized close relations with Japan over those with the Soviet Union and construed a territorial dispute between the two countries as beneficial to its interests (for details, see Hara 2006). In his speech at the conference, Japan's Prime Minister, Shigeru Yoshida, referred to Kunashiri and Etorofu as never being part of Russia and to Shikotan and the Habomais as being part of Hokkaido. However, prior to and after the conclusion of the treaty, the Japanese government's goal remained the same and concerned mainly the return of Shikotan and Habomais (Berton 1992; Hara 1998: 24–33).

The Soviet Union did not sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty and, instead, bilateral peace-treaty negotiations took place in 1955 and 1956. In terms of the scope of the territory Japan sought from the Soviet Union, the initial threshold for concluding the treaty was still limited to the two islands. This condition was generally acceptable to the Soviet side and the two parties were close to the conclusion of a peace treaty. However, due to domestic intra-conservative

Alexander Bukh

rivalry in Japan and subsequent pressure from the United States not to compromise and accept only the two islands—aimed at preventing bilateral rapprochement—Japan's territorial demand evolved into four islands. Hellmann (1969) and Hasegawa (1998) trace the demand for the four islands to the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet sentiments of the right-leaning faction of the recently formed Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which was against reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union—that is, the demand for the four islands was utilized by the conservatives and their supporters in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to undermine the negotiations. Japan's legal justification for the four-islands claim, which emerged during this period and remains intact today, states that the two islands of Kunashiri and Etorofu belong to the South Kurile (Minami Chishima in Japanese) islands that are not included in the 'Kurile islands' renounced in the Peace Treaty, and that the Habomais and Shikotan are part of Hokkaido (e.g. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

The demand for four islands was rejected by the Soviet Union and thus the goal of the conservatives inside the LDP was at least partially achieved. The negotiations did result in a restoration of diplomatic relations stipulated in the Joint Declaration but did not bring a resolution to the territorial dispute (for a detailed discussion see Matsumoto 1956; Hellmann 1969; Berton 1992; Hasegawa 1998; Hara 1998; Wada 1999). According to the Declaration, the Soviet Union would transfer the two small islands, Shikotan and Habomais, to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty. In 1960, however, after revision and renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty, the Soviet Union refused to carry out transfer of the islands, citing a change in circumstances. Nevertheless, after 1956, the dispute did not feature high on the agenda of the ruling LDP or any of the other parties, and while Japan's official position maintained the four-islands demand vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, there was little interest in the dispute. Overall, from 1960 until the late 1980s there were hardly any developments in the territorial-dispute-related bilateral relations between Japan and the Soviet Union (Tsukamoto 2011b: 7).

The general public also lost interest in the dispute. Results of a public opinion poll conducted on Hokkaido in 1966 show that despite the proximity of the islands and the relatively high number of former residents of the islands living on Hokkaido, the interest in the issue was very low. Fifty-five percent of those polled said they did not have any knowledge regarding the history of Japan's negotiations with Russia that justified Japan's possession of the 'Northern Territories'. Asked about contemporary international issues, only 9% of those polled stated that they were interested in the 'Northern Territories' (and only 6.3% in fisheries-related negotiations with the Soviet Union), as opposed to, for example, 44% that expressed interest in the Vietnam War (Hoppōryōdo fukki kisei dōmei 1966: 2–12).

Japan's governmental policy on the territorial dispute with the Soviet Union started to evolve in the mid 1960s, but it was directed internally rather than toward the Soviet Union. In 1963, the term 'Northern Territories' was officially adopted by MOFA and from that point onwards became the official term of reference to the disputed territories (Iwashita 2005). The references to the islands as 'northern' implies the importance of their location vis-à-vis Tokyo, as opposed to their eastward location from Hokkaido, the official administrative center. In 1969, a new quasi-governmental agency in charge of domestic policy related to the Northern Territories, the Association for Countermeasures related to the Northern Territories (ACNT), was established.

In 1973, for the first time, the Diet adopted a resolution demanding the return of all four islands. In 1978, again for the first time, MOFA published a booklet titled 'Our Northern Territories', which provided detailed explanations regarding the illegality of the Soviet occupation and Japan's inherent rights to the four islands. In the late 1970s, the government also built a number of Northern Territories-related educational facilities, including the hundred

million yen observatory cum museum on Hokkaido's Nosappu Cape. In 1981, the Diet designated February 2 as a national Northern Territories Day.

As such, while there were hardly any significant Northern Territories-related developments in Japan–USSR relations, Japan's domestic policy evolved significantly. The official documents examined by the author do not carry any direct references to the goals of this domestic campaign besides the need to spread the knowledge and educate the public about the territorial dispute. However, David L. Osborn, at that time a Minister at the US Embassy in Tokyo, reported that the establishment of the ACNT in 1969 had little to do with facilitating the return of the islands. The actual reason, Osborn argued, was related to domestic politics and to the Japan–US negotiations regarding the reversion of Okinawa. Namely, through the ACNT, the LDP-dominated government was hoping to sway public support away from the Socialist Party, which opposed the reversion of Okinawa with American bases (cited in Ikeda 2003: 42–3). The parliamentary interpolations related to the rationale behind the establishment of the Association and of Northern Territories Day suggest that the need to 'enlighten' the public regarding the Northern Territories prevailed over the need to assist the affected residents or to reach an actual solution to the dispute (e.g. Special Committee for Okinawa and Northern Territories 1969). In other words, the emphasis was put on the creation of a national symbol rather than on a solution to the dispute and related issues.

Overall, it can be argued that the main goal of this prolonged campaign was to consolidate the people around the LDP and to direct their nationalist sentiments in opposition to the Soviet Union rather than the United States and the bases. If this indeed has been the main purpose of the campaign, it can be seen as generally successful. The demise of the once powerful Japan Socialist Party started in the late 1960s, behind which there were numerous factors, but the Socialists' relatively warm relations with the Soviet Union were one of them. The comprehensive educational campaign about the dispute also bore fruit. In a public opinion poll conducted by the government in 1969, only 4.7% of those polled mentioned the Northern Territories problem among the issues in which they were interested (Cabinet Office 1969). Contrastingly, in a similar poll conducted in 1973–4, the Northern Territories and Soviet Union-related policy in general received the highest number of voices for issues that should be prioritized by the government (Cabinet Office 1974).

The government also managed to create a single coherent 'return of the Northern Territories' movement by utilizing its broader practice of subordinating associations and turning them into vehicles of its own policy through subsidies (Pekkanen 2006). Most of the numerous grassroots groups engaged in activism related to the Northern Territories dispute, which were active mostly on Hokkaido in the 1940s and 1950s, ceased to exist. The exact process that led to their disappearance is not fully clear but probably lack of funding, fatigue and lack of attention from policy makers were the most important factors. The three organizations that survived and exist today are the above-mentioned ACNT, the Alliance for Achieving the Return of the Northern Territories and the League of the Residents of Chishima Archipelago, and they have overlapping membership. ACNT was established by central government and despite its nominal independence is fully financed and controlled by it. The other two are also financially and structurally dependent on central government, as well as the Hokkaido prefectural governments (Williams 2010). As such, during the Cold War years the policy of turning the territorial dispute into a symbol of Japan's suffering at the hands of the Soviet Union shared by the relevant non-state organizations and the majority of the public was rather successful.

Importantly, though, in the process of creating a national symbol out of the disputed territories, the idea of the 'Northern Territories' took on a life of its own and became closely associated with Japan's basic principles and norms (for a detailed discussion see Bukh 2012). As such, when

Alexander Bukh

the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Japan's policy toward Russia became a mirror of the domestic campaign. Subsequently, despite the fundamental change in regional and global politics, the return of all four islands continued to be the main goal of Japan's Russia policy.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, there were numerous bilateral negotiations aimed at resolving the dispute. On the eve of the March 2001 Irkutsk summit with Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, Russia's President Vladimir Putin came out with an unprecedented statement that was in effect the first explicit acknowledgment in 40 years by a Soviet/Russian leader of the validity of the 1956 bilateral declaration stipulating the transfer of Shikotan and the Habomais. Russia was now openly showing its readiness to honor the agreement and to transfer the two islands to Japan, along with conclusion of the peace treaty. On the Japanese side, the dominance of the pragmatic approach in shaping Japan's Russia policy led to a proposal for 'simultaneous parallel negotiations' that envisaged a separation in negotiating the status of the two smaller islands, the return of which was agreed in the 1956 Declaration, and the two larger ones.

This approach, however, did not survive for long due to the eruption of a series of scandals in MOFA in December 2001. The scandals resulted in a purge of many of the Russia specialists in MOFA and brought an end to the behind-the-scenes negotiations, virtually paralyzing Japan's Russia policy. Negotiations on the status of the islands and toward the conclusion of a peace treaty entered a 'dormant season'; Japan's position relapsed into that of the Cold War era—the simple demand for the return of the four islands (Sato 2003: 263; Iwashita 2005: 10–14).

Since then, the leaders of the two countries have met a number of times and pledged to resolve the territorial dispute, though no actual progress was achieved. The most recent development has been Prime Minister Abe's announcement of a 'future oriented, new approach' in the territorial negotiations, after his meeting with Putin on May 6, 2016 (Nikkei Shimbun 2016a). There is no doubt that the most important factor in Abe's attempt to solve the territorial dispute and improve relations with Russia is the China factor. Today, the territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands with China and the broader rivalry between the two countries for leadership in Asia is the most important concern of Japan's defense and foreign policies. Thus, most of the pundits agree that fostering better relations with Russia should be seen as an attempt to weaken Russia's partnership with China and prevent the emergence of a China–Russia military alliance in East Asia (Yamakawa 2016). Recently, the Japanese media reported that Abe's 'new approach' involves a plan for extensive economic cooperation and assistance with the development of the Russian Far East. In terms of the actual territorial dispute, the media reported that the government has considered a plan for a return of the two small islands and joint administration of the other two (Nikkei Shimbun 2016b). Officially, however, Japan's government has stated that there has been no change in its demand for the return of all four islands, and President Putin has stated that he has no plans to 'sell' the Kurile islands to Japan (Mano 2016). As such, the exact details of the 'new approach' are not completely clear but, nevertheless, the possibility of the two leaders reaching some kind of a compromise in the near future cannot be ignored. However, the resolution of the territorial dispute will hardly lead to close defense-related cooperation between the two countries. China's power is indeed a matter of long-term concern for Russia's policy makers, but as long as the security treaty with the US remains the main pillar of Japan's foreign policy and Russia and China remain in a 'soft' alliance directed at the US, close security ties between Japan and Russia are rather improbable.

### **Takeshima/Dokdo**

Takeshima (Korean name: Dokdo, also known as Liancourt Rocks) is a group of two main islets and a number of small rocks in the Sea of Japan. Its territory is less than 200,000 square meters and

it is located 150 kilometers from Japan's Oki Island and 90 kilometers from Korea's Ulleung Island. The islets are volcanic rocks with a very thin layer of soil. They have fresh spring water which is not drinkable due to guano contamination. There are only two permanent Korean residents on the islets and about 35 Korean coastguardsmen who rotate every few months. The islets do not have significant economic value, though the surrounding seabed may contain natural gas and mineral deposits.

The islets were incorporated into Japan's Shimane Prefecture by a Cabinet Decree in January 1905. They were administered by Shimane Prefecture until the end of the Asia-Pacific War. In September 1945, as a result of Japan's surrender, hostilities were brought to an end, and the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers (SCAP) became the highest authority in occupied Japan. In June 1946, SCAP issued a decree (SCAPIN 1033) that restricted the areas of fishing, whaling and other similar activities by the Japanese. This decree placed Takeshima outside the restricting line that came to be known in Japan as the 'MacArthur Line', named after General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the occupation authorities. The purpose of these boundaries was of a purely administrative nature and did not purport to demarcate Japan's borders.

In January 1952, in the midst of the Korean War and three months before the peace treaty with Japan came into force, South Korea's Rhee Syngman government issued a 'Presidential Proclamation of Sovereignty over the Adjacent Seas'. In this proclamation, South Korea declared national sovereignty over the seas within the designated line, known as the Peace Line or Rhee Line. The purpose of the line was to replace the MacArthur Line that limited the fishing activities of the Japanese vessels during the occupation period. Since then, Korea has exercised effective administration over the islets and Japan has persistently demanded their return.

Similarly to the Northern Territories, the origins of the dispute over Takeshima are more political than historical. Namely, despite the fact that both sides made claims to the islets during the negotiations of the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan, article 2a of the treaty, which depicts the territory of the newly independent Korea, does not mention the islets. While preparing the final peace treaty with Japan, various drafts were produced by the US authorities. In the early drafts, compiled in 1947–9, ownership of the islets was allocated to Korea. Later drafts, however, either allocated them to Japan or did not mention them at all. There were probably numerous reasons for this change but, arguably, the politics of the Cold War played the decisive role in this transformation. In June 1950, North Korea invaded the South, starting the Korean War that lasted until July 1953. In the early 1950s, then, the US officials involved in drafting the peace treaty could not be sure that the whole Korean Peninsula and adjacent islands would not fall into the hands of the Communist forces. Furthermore, the Korean War increased the strategic importance of Japan in the ongoing struggle with Communism in Asia. Thus, US policy makers believed that it was in the interests of US Cold War policy in Asia to retain potential sources of discord between Japan and its neighbors (for a detailed discussion see Hara 2006).

The differences regarding the ownership of the islets in the various drafts that preceded the treaty and the omission of the islets from the final text enabled the two sides to come up with contradictory interpretations of the peace treaty. Japan's official position cites the lack of reference to Takeshima in the peace treaty as justifying its claims. Furthermore, it argues that the 1905 incorporation was simply an act of confirmation of historical possession. Korea became Japan's protectorate in November 1905 and a formal colony in 1910. The fact that the incorporation of the islets happened prior to Japan's official colonization of the Korean Peninsula as well as the history of the islets' administration by Shimane Prefecture and not the colonial Government-General of Korea are used by Japan's government today to support its claims to the islets (Tsukamoto 2011a). The Korean government refers to the Cairo Declaration and earlier drafts of



Alexander Bukh

the peace treaty and documents of the occupation authorities that support its claim to ownership. It sees the 1905 incorporation as an illegal occupation of an integral part of Korea and construes it as the first step in Japan's colonization of the peninsula (Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016).

Since the early days of the dispute, the Japanese government's goal has been to recover the islets it believes belong rightfully to Japan. Thus, the government protested immediately after the announcement of the Rhee Line, arguing territorial rights to the islets (Kim 2004: 202–4). A few months later, Shimane Prefecture issued a Prefectural Fisheries Regulation which indirectly suggested that Takeshima is part of its prefectural territory. In the early 1950s, there were a number of clashes on the islets and in the adjacent waters that involved Japanese and Korean fishermen and coastguardsmen. A number of Japanese fishing vessels were seized by the Korean side and the fishermen detained (Kataoka 2006: 17–18). In the process, the two governments exchanged numerous protests in which they argued their respective rights to the islets and condemned the actions of the other side as illegal. In 1954, Japan suggested they refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but the Rhee Syngman government refused (Kim 2004: 209–14). Japan did not make any attempts to recapture the islets by force and the Dokdo islets have remained under South Korean control.

Similarly to the Soviet Union, South Korea was not a party to the San Francisco Peace Treaty and thus there was a need for a separate treaty to determine the basic principles of postwar Japan's relations with its former colony. The negotiations started in 1952, but the parties could not reach an agreement on many issues, most of which had to do with the legacy of Japan's four-decade colonial rule.

The negotiations gained momentum after the May 16, 1961 military coup in Korea, carried out by Park Chung Hee. An agreement was eventually reached in 1965, when the Basic Treaty between Japan and the Republic of Korea was signed. The territorial issue was one of the main stumbling blocks in the normalization negotiations. During the negotiations that led to the eventual conclusion of the treaty, both sides realized that the economic importance of the islets was negligible and secondary to their common Cold War struggle against Communism and the economic benefits to be reaped from closer cooperation (Roh 2008). This view was voiced by Banboku Ono, at that time Vice-Chairman of the LDP, who in December 1962 publicly suggested that Japan and Korea exercise joint ownership of the islets (Asahi Shimbun 1963).

Neither the Japanese nor the Koreans, however, could yield to the other side's demands, for domestic political reasons. Park Chung Hee's dictatorial rule was perceived as illegitimate by many of his countrymen. Furthermore, his policy of rapprochement with Japan was not popular domestically, and there were numerous demonstrations by the opposition against Park's Japan policy (Hyon 2006: 118–19). Arguably, Park did not want to further provoke his fellow countrymen by conceding to Japan's demands to return the islets. In Japan, the ruling conservative LDP faced strong criticism from the Socialist Party, which was opposed to closer relations with South Korea's military dictatorship. Ono's statement was met with strong criticism (e.g. Nakamura 1965) and it became obvious that giving up the claims to islets would enhance the opposition.

Thus, the final text of the treaty did not touch on the territorial dispute and both governments have continuously made opposing interpretations of its clauses. Based on interviews with and memoirs of the politicians and bureaucrats involved in the bilateral negotiations that led to the conclusion of the 1965 Treaty, Roh (2008) argued that the sides had actually reached a tacit agreement: both governments would continue to hold their respective interpretations regarding the ownership of the islets but avoid escalation of the dispute and challenges to the status quo. Despite official refutations of the agreement from both governments, Roh's argument seems reasonable if one considers the Cold War foreign policy priorities of both Japan and Korea.

Moreover, the existence of this tacit understanding between the two countries was recently confirmed by an LDP heavyweight, Yasuhiro Nakasone, who participated in the normalization talks (Nakasone 2012: 160–2).

The territorial issue could not be successfully shelved, however, without resolving the question of fishing rights in the waters surrounding the islets. This question was addressed in the Agreement on Fisheries that accompanied the Treaty. Under this agreement, a Joint Regulation Zone that included waters surrounding the islets was established. The Agreement enabled fishermen from both countries to fish in the zone, where rules are enforced by the party whose flag the vessel flies.

As such, from 1965 onwards, the Japanese government's goal regarding Takeshima underwent a drastic change. If, until the conclusion of the normalization treaty the goal was to retrieve the islets, from 1965 onwards Japan's broader interests suggested that maintaining the status quo and excluding the Takeshima issue from domestic debates should be the main goal of the government.

Overall, it can be argued that the government's policy of minimizing the domestic debate regarding Takeshima and the importance of the issue in Japan's relations with Korea was successful. This is despite the fact that, between 1965 and the early 2000s, the dispute did resurface a couple of times in Japan's relations with Korea. In 1977, following the US and Soviet declarations of 200-mile exclusive fishery zones, Japan and Korea declared 12-mile territorial waters and 200-mile exclusive fishery zones. In this context, the question of territorial rights to Takeshima surfaced again in the domestic debates in both countries and resulted in exchanges of rival claims and denouncements (Kajimura 1997). Tokyo, however, was eager to subdue the tensions and promptly announced the exclusion of Korea and China from the application of the 200-mile rule. The issue of ownership over Takeshima rose to the fore of the bilateral agenda again in 1996 when both Japan and Korea ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and declared their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). In accordance with their claims, both countries included the islets as their sovereign territory. This led again to Japanese and Korean politicians arguing their respective country's historical rights to the islets and denouncing the other side's claims. After two years of exchanges, the parties reached a solution not dissimilar to the 1965 one. They agreed to separate claims of sovereignty from fisheries-related issues and demarcated their respective EEZs in a new Fisheries Agreement, which came into force in 1999 (for details, see Bukh 2015).

Otherwise, the Takeshima dispute played a minimal role in Japan's relations with Korea, and the domestic political discourse has all but ignored the issue. This silence can be witnessed in multiple fora. For example, in the early 1950s, conservative MPs from Shimane often raised questions related to Takeshima in parliamentary interpolations devoted to negotiations with South Korea. A decade later, no LDP MPs, including those from Shimane constituency, raised the issue of Takeshima during numerous debates in the Diet on the forthcoming treaty with South Korea. Also, in the midst of Japan–Korea negotiations, the Society for Support of Compatriots in the South, which until the 1970s was the sole semi-governmental agency devoted to Japan's territorial issues, published a booklet on Japan's territories under foreign administration (Nanpō dōhō engokai 1965), which, while it discussed Japan's rights to Okinawa, the Bonin (Ogasawara) islands and the Northern Territories in detail, simply omitted Takeshima. Similarly, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not publish anything related to the Takeshima issue until 2008; and the first official public opinion poll on the Takeshima issue was conducted only in 2013. Incidentally, in 2005, only 13% of respondents in a *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll believed that Takeshima was an important issue in Japan's relations with South Korea (cited in Nakajima 2007). The Takeshima issue was absent not only from the official discourse but also from the public discourse in general. For example, one of Japan's major



Alexander Bukh

magazine-article search engines, Oya Bunko, gives only 82 hits for a keyword search of “Takeshima” and “problem” for the period between 1951 and 2004.

As such, the post-1965 LDP/governmental policy of keeping the territorial dispute on the back-burner of Japan’s relations with Korea was quite successful. The turning point came in 2005, when Shimane Prefecture passed an ordinance that designated February 22 as prefectural Takeshima Day. The immediate trigger for this ordinance was the Korean announcement in 2004 regarding issuance of a Dokdo memorial stamp. The ordinance however was a culmination of five decades of Takeshima-related activism by the prefectural authorities and had more to do with domestic center–periphery relations than with relations with Korea (for a detailed analysis see Bukh 2015). Importantly, LDP heavyweights including Shinzo Abe, who was later to become prime minister, were against this Takeshima Day initiative and turned down a request for a national Takeshima Day that preceded the prefectural ordinance (Yokota 2005). At that time, the LDP likely did not see any reason to breach the above-mentioned tacit agreement, as it did not want to further aggravate Japan’s relations with Korea, which were already tense because of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine.

South Korea’s fierce reaction to the Takeshima Day ordinance and its wide coverage in the media brought Takeshima to the center of public attention. Over the following years, the Takeshima issue became firmly embedded in Japan’s political debates regarding relations with Korea. According to a 2013 public opinion poll conducted by the government, 94.5% of respondents knew about the Takeshima issue and 71.1% stated that they were interested in the issue (Cabinet Office 2014). As the Takeshima issue gained importance, it came to be exploited by politicians from across the political spectrum. It was quite visible during the 2012 election campaign and possibly contributed to the return of the LDP to power after three years of absence. The re-emergence of Takeshima as one of the main issues in Japan’s Korea-related policy debates undermined the initial goal established in the 1960s of preventing the territorial dispute from hampering bilateral ties with Korea. In fact, after the conclusion of the December 2015 agreement on the so-called ‘comfort women’ controversy, the territorial dispute became the main stumbling block in bilateral relations. Its impact on Japan’s economic relations with Korea has been rather limited but, together with other history-related issues, the territorial dispute does indeed hinder security cooperation between the two countries (Yamamoto 2012). Bearing in mind the recent inclusion of Takeshima in the middle- and high-school curriculum guidelines for Japanese schools by the Ministry of Education, it seems that the current government cannot or does not want to decrease the visibility of the dispute in the public discourse. As the Korean government, media and civil-society groups closely monitor Japan’s domestic policies related to Takeshima and respond accordingly (e.g. *Donga Ilbo* 2014), the dispute will probably continue to hamper bilateral relations in the foreseeable future.

### Senkaku/Diaoyu

The Senkaku (PRC name: Diaoyu; Republic of China (ROC) name: Diaoyutai) dispute between Japan on the one side and the PRC and ROC on the other is about eight islands located in the southern part of the East China Sea. The total territory of the islands is about 6.3 square kilometers, and they are located in a very important strategic position approximately 170 kilometers from Japan’s Ishigaki Island and from Taiwan. The islands were incorporated by Japan into its Okinawa Prefecture in January 1895 during the Sino-Japanese War. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, there was some economic activity on the islands but they have been uninhabited since the 1940s. Along with the rest of Okinawa Prefecture, the islands were administered by the United States between 1945 and 1972. Today they are administered

as part of the Japanese Okinawa prefecture and claimed by both Beijing and Taipei as being historically part of China.

In the period preceding the conclusion of the peace treaty, the dispute between Japan and China (mostly the ROC) was about Okinawa (Hara 2006). In the early 1970s however, after a publication of a study that found gas and oil deposits in the vicinity of the Senkakus, both Chinas made claims to the islands, arguing that they were historically part of Taiwan, illegally annexed by Japan in 1895. In 1972, Japan's MOFA published a document that explained Japan's position regarding its entitlement to the islands. It argued that the 1895 incorporation of the islands was that of *terra nullius* conducted after a careful examination that produced no evidence of ownership by China (Toyoshita 2012: 47–8). In the same year, the US government returned the islands together with the rest of Okinawa Prefecture to Japan's control. While there was an understanding among US policy makers that the Senkakus are part of Okinawa, the Nixon administration decided not to take a position on issues of sovereignty as a reflection of the various developments in US Cold War interests vis-à-vis Japan and both Chinas (Hara 2006). Since then, Japan has administered the islands while both the PRC and ROC claim them as being part of Taiwan. A recently published analysis of both sides' claims suggests that while the Chinese side may have a valid historical claim, from the perspective of contemporary international law Japan's position is much stronger than the Chinese one (Midford 2015).

From the early days of the postwar era, trade with mainland China was perceived as crucially important for Japan's economy (see Soeya 1999 for a detailed analysis). Japan's normalization negotiations with the PRC, however, started only in late 1971 after the so-called 'Nixon shocks' and culminated in the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in August 1978. Similarly to Japan–Korea negotiations in the early 1960s, the territorial dispute was one of the stumbling stones in the negotiations, raised mainly by Japan, but economic interests prevailed, and it seems that the sides reached a tacit agreement to shelve the dispute to prevent it from destabilizing bilateral relations (e.g. Higuchi 2013; Toyoshita 2012; Drifte 2013; Tomabeichi 2015). While Japan's MOFA continues to deny the shelving agreement, recently its existence was confirmed by Takakazu Kuriyama, who served as Director of MOFA's Treatise Division during the negotiations (cited in Drifte 2013: 20–1). At that time, the shelving agreement was obviously in favor of Japan as the country *de facto* in control of the islands. Thus, it may be argued that since the conclusion of the 1978 Treaty, Japan's goal was to prevent the dispute from damaging bilateral relations while maintaining control over the islands.

The dispute went through a number of ups and downs in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s (Wiegand 2009). In the 1990s, the ratification of UNCLOS by both Japan and China, and China's oil and gas developments, contributed to the erosion of the shelving agreement (Drifte 2013: 23–6), but both governments cooperated to avoid escalation of the dispute (O'Shea 2015: 565). It was after the 2010 and 2012 incidents, however, that the dispute rose to the forefront of Japan–China relations and came to be seen as potentially leading to an armed conflict between the two countries (Smith 2013).

The September 7, 2010 confrontation between a Chinese trawler that was fishing in the waters near the islands and the Japanese Coast Guard shocked the Japanese public and policy makers alike (Smith 2015: 189). The captain of the trawler was detained after refusing inspection and ramming two Coast Guard ships. The incident escalated into a major diplomatic crisis after the Japanese authorities decided to prosecute the captain. China demanded immediate release of the captain and applied pressure on Japan through economic sanctions and detention of Japanese citizens. The Japanese government released the captain in late September and the tensions receded (Smith 2015: 190–4).

The second crisis started in September 2012 when the government of Japan decided to nationalize three of the Senkaku islands, which were privately owned and leased by the

Alexander Bukh

government. The decision came as a response to Tokyo's right-leaning Governor Shintaro Ishihara's initiative to purchase the islands and put them under the jurisdiction of Tokyo and was intended to prevent further escalation of the dispute rather than induce it. In the aftermath, government officials claimed that the rationale behind the decision to nationalize the islands was conveyed to the Chinese side and was met with understanding (Yoshino 2016). However, the Japanese government obviously either misunderstood the Chinese response or miscalculated the possible reaction. In China, nationalization was construed as Japan's attempt to strengthen its position in the dispute. Many cities in China saw large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations, attacks against Japanese businesses and individuals and looting and burning of Japanese property. Numerous official events between the two countries were suspended on China's initiative, and incursions by Chinese official and private vessels into waters surrounding the islands became frequent (Nakauchi 2012: 77–78). In November 2013, China announced its Air Identification Zone, which included airspace over the Senkaku islands and was met with strong protest from the Japanese government.

Since then, Japan's Prime Minister Abe and China's President Xi Jinping have met a few times on the sidelines of various multilateral groupings, but a purely bilateral meeting is yet to happen. As such, while it seems that the impact of the Senkaku problem on bilateral economic ties has been quite limited (Seguchi 2014), the territorial dispute did become a major issue in Japan's relations with China. Thus, it can be argued that Japan's policy of preventing the Senkaku issue from affecting bilateral relations has failed to achieve its goal. However, in order to fully understand the effects of the recent escalation on Japan's policy, it is important to look at Japan's domestic politics and the important changes in Japan's foreign policy doctrine.

The 2010 and 2012 Senkaku crises occurred during the short-lived rule of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which interrupted the almost continuous rule of the LDP since its inception in 1955. One of the main policy goals voiced by the DPJ was to enhance Japan's relations with Asian countries and even to create an 'East Asian Community'. Needless to say, the emergence of the Senkakus-related problems and the poor management of the two crises by the DPJ government further underscored its inability to deliver what it promised. Relations with China were not the only issue that worked against the DPJ in the December 2012 elections, which resulted in a landslide victory for the Abe-led LDP, but, without doubt, it was one of them (e.g. Hrebennar and Haraguchi 2015). As such, the escalation in the territorial dispute with China contributed to the LDP's main goal in 2012—that is, the return to power. Furthermore, the LDP under Abe differs significantly from the LDP of the previous century. Abe's main foreign policy goals have been to do away with the restrictions of the 'peace constitution', to develop a more assertive security posture for Japan and to deepen Japan's security ties with the United States (Hughes 2015: 2). There is little doubt that the escalation in the Senkaku dispute contributed to furthering this agenda. The Abe cabinet used the 'China threat' extensively as one of its arguments to increase Japan's defense budget and to revise the interpretation of Article Nine of the Constitution to allow collective self-defense (Mainichi Shimbun 2015).

Japan's security alliance with the United States also received a boost. Various US officials referred to the Senkaku islands as falling within the scope of the US–Japan Security Treaty, but Barack Obama was the first US President to state this clearly, during his April 2014 visit to Tokyo. The US government also condemned the Chinese unilateral declaration of ADIZ (air defense identification zone), and the US Marines conducted exercises with Japan's Self Defense Forces in retaking remote islands (Hughes 2015: 69–70). The confrontation over the Senkaku islands also enabled Japan to strengthen its cooperation with those Southeast Asian countries that also have territorial disputes with China, such as Vietnam and the Philippines. While Abe probably did not manage to achieve the encirclement of China (Hughes 2015: 86–8), Japan's role in the region has

definitely changed from being purely that of an economic powerhouse to that of one of the leading players in the realm of security. As such, the escalation in the Senkaku dispute has contributed to the Abe-led LDP furthering its main foreign and defense policy-related goals.

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced Japan's territorial disputes and examined both the domestic and the international policies related to them. These policies emerged against the background of Japan's broader interests and international relations. The chapter showed that the territorial-disputes-related goals and related policies were not static and evolved over time, reflecting changes in ruling elites' priorities, domestic politics and structural changes on both regional and global levels. It also showed that successful achievement of a certain policy goal can lead to failure at a later stage and vice versa. For example, the domestic Northern Territories campaign helped in consolidating the rule of the LDP and diverting public anger away from the US bases on Okinawa. However, this successful promotion of the idea of the Northern Territories became the main obstacle in attempts to solve the dispute in the post-Cold War era, when Japan could benefit from improved relations with Russia. Contrastingly, the escalation in the Senkaku dispute, which followed the failure to keep it on the back-burner of Japan's relations with China, helped the LDP to return to power in 2012 and facilitated the implementation of its security agenda.

As these cases illustrate, it is impossible to make univocal assessments of Japan's territorial-disputes-related policies as either successes or failures. Policy goals varied depending on the period in question, and the results of these policies had unexpected effects on the subsequent agenda. It remains to be seen whether Prime Minister Abe and President Putin will manage to find a solution to the Northern Territories dispute. As argued above, however, resolution of the dispute will probably not lead to significant changes in Japan–Russia relations, especially in terms of security cooperation. In the case of the dispute over Takeshima, domestic politics in both countries do not allow much room for a compromise and the dispute will probably continue to play a certain role in Japan–Korea relations in the foreseeable future. Today, the territorial dispute over the Senkakus is the most important among the three as it has the potential to cause an armed conflict between the two major actors in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the tensions carry certain benefits for leaders in both Japan and China. In the case of the former, they are utilized to create a more assertive security policy, while for the Chinese leadership they are utilized to boost their legitimacy. Whether the policy makers on both sides will manage to prevent the tensions from 'boiling to the point of overflowing', to borrow from a song by Papercut Massacre, is a question of major concern for pundits and people in the two countries and beyond.

## Note

- 1 As this chapter focuses on Japan's policies, Japanese names of the disputed islands are used. This is done purely for the sake of convenience and should not be interpreted as a support for Japan's position in the dispute in question.

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Alexander Bukh

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