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Constructing China's "Usurped Territory": Taiwan, the Japanese "Other," and the Domestic Origins of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute

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Constructing China's "Usurped Territory": Taiwan, the Japanese "Other," and the Domestic Origins of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute¹

Ching-Chang Chen*

Introduction

A clutch of eight tiny, uninhabited islets in the Western Pacific, named the Senkaku Islands by Japan and the Diaoyu Islands by the People's Republic of China (PRC),² have become one of the most headline-making flashpoints in East Asia. Administrated by Japan but also claimed by China, the ownership dispute further involves competition for fishery resources, potential oil deposits, and, indeed, a "reputation for resolve."³ In September 2010, a Chinese trawler collided with a Japan Coast Guard patrol boat in waters near the contested islands; to press for the release of the detained captain, Beijing allegedly delayed the export of rare earth metals to Japan.⁴ Tensions continued to build up during 2012, which, ironically, marked the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Following Tokyo's naming of some smaller islets earlier that year, Beijing countered with its own naming amid then-Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro's statement indicating his intention to purchase Uotsurijima, Kitakojima and Minamikojima. To prevent the Senkakus from entering the hands of conservative nationalists such as Ishihara, the Japanese government proceeded to buy the islands from their private landlord in September. This move, in turn, set in motion a series of large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations in major Chinese cities, a slump in Japanese exports to China and in Chinese tourists to Japan, and frequent appearance

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² The disputed islands are called Diaoyutai in Taiwan. The Taiwanese claim considers them as part of Taiwan's appertaining islands since Qing China. Anachronistic it may appear to outside observers, this claim presupposes that the Republic of China (ROC) remains the legitimate representative of all China of which Taiwan is a part.

³ Schelling (1966, 124) coins this term to describe how one coerces the target now will have an impact on how one might have to coerce in the future.

⁴ For an alternative interpretation of the incident as Japan's strategic outmaneuvering over China, see Hagström (2012).

of Chinese petrol vessels and aircraft in the surrounding waters and airspace. With the increasing number of aerial and maritime near-misses and without hotline-like conflict-prevention mechanisms between them, in January 2013, Chinese warships were said to have pointed their fire-control radar at a Japanese helicopter and a destroyer in close distance in the East China Sea. The Sino-Japanese relationship was so tense that some media described them as being on the brink of war (Economist, January 19 2013). The PRC foreign ministry in April referred to the Diaoyus as a part of China's "core interests," a term normally associated with Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, for the first time.⁵ Unabated, Beijing proceeded to include the islands into its self-declared East Sea Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in November 2013.

Some may see the heating-up of the Senkaku issue as a part of China's wider aspirations in its maritime presence within and beyond the so-called first island-chain since the last decade and, so to speak, there are multiple political, economic, and strategic reasons behind the present dispute. I do not take issue with this type of multicausal approach to conflict resolutions. Understanding why this particular territorial dispute with Japan *came to be seen as such* in the eyes of Chinese leaders, however, helps to identify the conditions under which China is more likely to employ coercive diplomacy or even military means (and *vice versa*) against the counterparty. One should not discount the possibility that Beijing's seemingly belligerent rhetoric and/or behavior could be a symbolic performance intended more for the domestic audience rather than for sending real security threats.⁶ Conflating these two purposes and responding in kind would, as Joseph S. Nye has indicated, make the imagined China threat a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This paper seeks to advance a social constructivist perspective that recovers the meanings which leaders of the two rival Chinese regimes, the PRC on the mainland and the ROC on Taiwan, ascribed to their moves in declaring what used to be the Senkaku Islands as a part of China's sovereign territory in the early 1970s. The central contention of this study: the birth of the Senkaku issue as a territorial dispute was not so much a maritime resource competition between China and Japan as a legitimacy competition between Taipei and Beijing over who was the "true" defender of China's national interest during which Japan became a useful "Other." Given the shock caused by the development of the US-PRC rapprochement, the subsequent mounting difficulty of retaining the China seat at the United Nations (UN), and Taipei's increasingly precarious diplomatic ties with the rest of the world in 1971, Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT, or the Chinese Nationalist Party) urgently

⁵ The PRC foreign ministry later modified the record of its press conference, broadly defining China's "core interests" as anything concerning state sovereignty, national security, and territorial integrity. And "The Diaoyu issue is related to the Chinese sovereignty" (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, April 26, 2013).

⁶ Adelman and Shih (1993) demonstrate that historically China has a track record of using force less for acquiring territory or expanding influence but more for showing determination or embarrassing enemies.

needed a new source of legitimacy to sustain its rule in Taiwan. Framing the Senkaku Islands as a “usurped territory” gave the mere discovery of the potential oil and gas reserves there in the late 1960s and the forthcoming reversion of Okinawa to Japan a completely different (and alarming) meaning to all Chinese at home and abroad: the “dangerous, expansionist” Japan is back. This nationalism-inspired anti-Japanese rhetoric, from official statements to news columns, allowed Taipei to portray the ROC as the “real” guardian of the Chinese nation that could stand up to “Japanese militarism,” forcing Beijing to follow suit. Although the extent to which the ROC participates in this legitimacy competition varies (depending on whether the KMT is in power and the background of its leadership), from a path-dependent perspective it is more difficult for the PRC to withdraw from the anti-Japanese performance (initially staged by its archenemy in Taiwan) because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has partly tied its ruling legitimacy to nationalism following the decline of Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist ideology in the 1980s and 1990s.

This analysis is informed by the role theory of (non-)intervention developed by Shih Chih-yu (2012, ch. 8). Intervention here refers to the situation where a nation-state gets involved in what used to be purely another state’s domestic affairs (e.g., making a sovereign claim over certain territory not currently under one’s control). According to Shih, national leaders make their decision of intervention (or not) based on two principles. The principle of sovereignty yields the role component of foreign policy that attends to how well states observe universally applicable rules (e.g., respecting each other’s sovereign integrity), whereas the principle of difference yields the identity component (or self-role expectation) of foreign policy that attends to how well states observe their own values (e.g., nationalism). The latter prevails when a potential intervener seeks to prevent a perceived difference from growing threateningly or to protect such a difference from disappearing. From this perspective, framing the Senkaku Islands as a “usurped territory” served to demonstrate Japan’s everlasting “imperial ambition” even after its defeat in 1945 and reminded the Chinese people about the ROC’s heroic Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, hence discrediting the PRC as a legitimate Chinese state.

It is not the purpose of this paper to judge which side’s ownership claim is “correct,”⁷ or to offer a solution to the Senkaku issue. Rather, it attempts to make sense of why Chinese leaders (those in Taipei in particular) were doing what they were doing at that historical juncture that still has much relevance for contemporary Sino-Japanese relations. Understanding the salience of the Senkaku Islands dispute’s domestic origins will help to reduce the likelihood of mis- or over-interpreting Beijing’s apparently belligerent rhetoric as

⁷ Likewise, the use of the disputed islands’ Japanese name in this paper is not intended to suggest that the Japanese claim is “better” than the mainland Chinese/Taiwanese one.

a genuine security threat, hence conducive to the mitigation (albeit not elimination) of the security dilemma between Japan and China.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. The first section will revisit the literature on the causes of the Senkaku issue, which has been dominated by material interest-based accounts and failed to take ideational explanations seriously. The second section will discuss how a role theory of intervention can help us to address the aforementioned deficiency by empathizing with the political elites of the two Chinas. The third section will then examine a Taipei-initiated discursive construction of the previously ignored Senkaku Islands as a Chinese territory “usurped” by Japan (with US complicity to some degree) for demonstrating the ROC’s nationalist credentials, which, in turn, forced Beijing to participate in this legitimacy competition. The final section will conclude by discussing the scholarly and policy implications of this study for understanding mainland China/Taiwan’s territorial dispute with Japan and the relationship between security and subjectivity in foreign policy.

1. Previous Research on the Senkaku Islands Dispute

In the last four decades, the majority of the literature on the Senkaku issue, be they academic publications or nationalistic commentaries, have attempted to resolve the dispute by “proving” that the islands belong to either Japan or China based on international law or the historical record, but to little avail.⁸ More recent studies recast their focus on factors that may escalate the islands dispute into an armed conflict (Fujioka and Kase 2010) and variables that make it difficult (if not impossible) for the claimants to resolve or shelve the pending dispute (Emmers 2010; Wiegand 2011). In his comparative study of territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, for instance, Ralf Emmers (2010) argues that key attributes of geopolitics such as territory, natural resources, and the distribution of power all deeply affect the disputes and relations among claimants. Moreover, the complex interplay of these geopolitical factors can lead to either direction: the escalation of a maritime territorial dispute or a cool-down of tensions. Although Japan’s edge over China regarding defense capabilities and equipment has been eroded due to the latter’s ongoing military buildup, he indicates that other factors such as the possibility of joint resource exploration and development could serve as a neutralizing or deescalating force in the dispute (Emmers 2010, 54). This was the case in the first few years after Koizumi Junichiro finished his premiership in September 2006. Before then, Sino-Japanese tensions ran high in part because of Koizumi’s insistence on visiting the Yasukuni Shrine where (among many other ordinary soldiers) 14 Class A war criminals were enshrined. After Prime Minister Abe Shinzo assumed office (September 2006-September 2007), Tokyo and Beijing were able to improve their bilateral relations by

⁸ A useful collection of primary and secondary sources, in both Chinese and Japanese languages, can be found in Urano et al. (2001). The most comprehensive work in English language remains Suganuma (2000). See also Valencia (2007).

holding state visits and talks over oil and gas reserves in the East China Sea, accumulated in the signing of a Japan-PRC joint statement on “advancing mutually beneficial relations” during Chinese President Hu Jintao’s visit to Japan in May 2008 and of an agreement to jointly develop natural gas resources in waters outside of the disputed zone in June 2008. Emmers, however, notes that territory remains an important factor that might escalate a given dispute, for territorial claims frequently go hand in hand with nationalism: “nationalist sentiments and movements can be used [by the claimant states] as a diversion, as a legitimizing tool, or even as a replacement for a dying ideology” (2010, 11).

One of the most systematic works on the endurance of the Senkaku issue is written by Krista Wiegand (2011, ch. 5). In her theory of territorial disputes as bargaining leverage, Wiegand argues that challenger states may attempt to play the “border card” by using territorial disputes as bargaining leverage to extract concessions from the counterparty *when* other salient disputed issues exist. Rather than attempting to settle the disputes, challenger states under these circumstances have more incentive to simultaneously adopt a strategy of issue linkage (i.e. linking the territorial dispute with other previously unrelated issues) and coercive diplomacy (i.e. sending diplomatic and militarized threats to the counterparty). Without denying the relevance of two potential explanations for the choosing of territorial dispute strategies, namely the value of territory and domestic accountability (i.e. settling the dispute may be too unpopular and thus risky for leaders to pursue) and mobilization (i.e. an enduring dispute can be used to mobilize public support for the government), Wiegand indicates that China’s diplomatic and militarized confrontations with Japan in 1971-2008 were only in part a result of domestic mobilization, based mainly on nationalist or symbolic value attached to the Diaoyus by the elite and the public. As she puts it, “government officials mobilized domestic support only to the point where the government appeared like it was defending homeland territory, but not enough to provoke the masses into nationalist demonstrations that might threaten the tight control the ruling elite have over the masses” (Wiegand 2011, 115). Domestic accountability is not quite applicable in this ongoing island dispute, since the bulk of criticisms leveled against the PRC government have not been intended for offering territorial concessions or for escalating the dispute, but rather for deescalating the crisis in order not to worsen bilateral ties with Japan (*ibid.*, 114).

Wiegand’s argument that domestic mobilization only offers a limited explanation for China’s refusal to concede or drop the territorial claim is supported by an earlier study by Downs and Saunders (1998/1999, 117), which maintains that Beijing proved willing to absorb “damage to its nationalist credentials” to some degree so as to prevent the Senkaku issue from harming bilateral relations (hence the prospect of economic development as well as the elite’s hold on power). Limitations of the value-of-territory explanation are also obvious, since the disputed islands lack strategic value and their perceived enormous economic value should have led the PRC to engage in dispute settlement attempts with Japan (so that both sides could benefit

from the oil resources located in the disputed area). Beijing's lack of such attempts and continued use of coercive diplomacy suggest that it is something else that prolongs the dispute (*ibid.*, 105-108). Wiegand concludes that the endurance of the Senkaku issue has much more to do with China's effective use of the territorial dispute as bargaining leverage when handling its other important disputed issues with Japan. From 1971 to 2008, Beijing created 28 issue linkages by using the threat of action in the island dispute to compel Tokyo to change its policy or behavior over other disputed issues (US-Japan security agreement and Japan's attitudes toward its wartime history, in particular), and the latter "almost always" gave in on those issues or at least took note of the former's displeasure (*ibid.*, 116-118). In a nutshell, her theory holds that it can be beneficial for the challenger not to resolve a lasting territorial dispute insofar as enough issue linkages are established.

Although the recent literature's primary concerns are factors that may complicate the resolution of the Senkaku Islands dispute, which are not necessarily the same as those giving rise to the dispute, these explanations are common in the sense that they are material interest-based (ranging from the tangible value of disputed territory to the ruling elite's grip on power), driven by rational calculation of costs and benefits ("How to deal with trade-offs between appealing to nationalist sentiment on territorial issues and adopting restrained policies conducive to economic development and regime security?" "Do the benefits of using the islands dispute to obtain bargaining leverage in other disputed issues with Japan outweigh the costs of keeping the territorial claim afloat and issuing diplomatic and militarized threats to Japan?"). Moreover, the aforementioned accounts are implicitly informed by the realist logic of security competition under international anarchy. Seen in this light, the discovery of massive oil and gas deposits under and near the Senkaku Islands in 1968 and the subsequent moves by the ROC and the PRC to make their respective official claims of sovereignty over the islands should come with no surprise, because all states, be they major or lesser powers, want to improve their security position in the international system and the acquisition of natural resources can add to their national power. To be sure, scholars in the field recognize the salience of nationalist sentiments associated with the islands dispute and in broader Sino-Japanese relations, but nationalism continues to be treated as a policy instrument exogenous to the identity of those who "use" it, as if it was a "card" or a "double-edge sword" under the disposal of political leaders with a pre-given identity to tackle challenges from within and outside a pre-existing state (Campbell 1998). How do "card players" come to form their identity in relation to their foreign counterpart, which, in turn, shapes their interest and strategic behavior? In order to mobilize domestic support for the government, can leaders "easily invent or claim" over time the importance of the disputed territory to the citizens of the challenger state to the point that the territory acquires symbolic or nationalist value (Wiegand 2011, 32)?

2. Analytical Framework

To understand why Taipei and Beijing started inventing the symbolic importance of the islands in question (which is separated from their economic value) *in the first place*, Shih's role theory of (non-)intervention (2012, ch. 8) provides a helpful corrective to the current literature as it acknowledges that when actors are involved in an interactive relationship these actors are embedded in the mutual constitution of the self and the Other as well. Intervention here is defined as "actions aimed at resolving, ameliorating, or containing problems within another sovereign border that causes external concerns" (Shih 2012, 134). Shih identifies two basic principles underlying national leaders' decisions of intervention (or non-intervention): the principle of sovereignty and the principle of difference. The former holds that all states are equal and enjoy exclusive jurisdiction within their respective borders; observing this principle leads to a set of rules to manage the peaceful intercourse among states regardless of their similarities or differences in values. By contrast, the latter maintains that states subscribe to certain values, which, in turn, make them differentiable from other states holding different values. Under the principle of sovereignty, a given state is expected to protect its own values and respect those of others, which points to a universal role expectation and mutual role expectations that all state leaders understand. On the other hand, the principle of difference attends to a self-role expectation that produces particular, country-specific behavior (*ibid.*, 136-138).

The principle of sovereignty, then, is associated with the role component of foreign policy that is concerned with how well states follow universal rules of peaceful intercourse, whereas the principle of difference generates the identity component of foreign policy that is sensitive to how well states live up to their respective values. The occurrence of intervention entails incongruence between the principle of sovereignty and the principle of difference, and, so to speak, the intervener asserts the primacy of its own values over its universal role expectation. As Shih (2012, 139) indicates, "[i]ntervention that carries a value usually comprises an identity statement." This is so because the principle of difference "incorporates the force of national identity that helps one define self, its Other, and who should be left autonomous in continuing being Others and *to what extent*" (*ibid.*, 137, my emphasis added). From the perspective of symbolic interactionism in sociology, Shih (2012, 138) goes on, "role performance is a process of honoring an existing order and the associated self-Other relationship while identity formation is a process of denying the Other such a relationship."

When is a different value in the counterparty state so intolerable that the intervener feels the need to rectify? In a nutshell, the decision of intervention reveals the scope of difference by which a given state abides and to what extent. It attempts to prevent a perceived difference from becoming too overwhelming, or to protect a "useful" difference from disappearing (*ibid.*, 138). Identity-driven, external intervention that denies the counterparty state of its

sovereignty claim over a given territory indicates what value the intervener wants the counterparty to follow; it is essentially an act of transformation or conversion (*ibid.*).⁹ US-led promotion of democracy in the Middle East during the majority of the 2000s is one of such example. Post-Cold War China likewise perceives Japanese control of the Senkaku Islands as a proof that Japan has not truly broken away from its past militarism (hence a violation of regional peace and harmony, which is a value cherished by China).

According to Shih (2012, 136), intervention has two prerequisites. First, in order to defend its violation of the principle of sovereignty, the intervener must come up with its normative justification (e.g., irredentism, or basing one's territorial claim on "historical right"). Second, the intervener must have sufficient capabilities. Shih (2012, 137) indicates that rising powers are more likely to launch intervention; their internal values become more salient in international relations, precisely because they are in a position to determine to what extent a difference in values among states is (in)tolerable. Although the second prerequisite is in line with a conventional wisdom in the literature on strategic coercion that the sender's threats are not credible to the receiver without being backed by adequate capabilities, it can be argued that serious internal and/or external pressure may still generate strong enough intention for lesser powers to initiate intervention.¹⁰ Indeed, as will be seen later, it was not capability that created intention for Taipei to intervene. The birth of the Senkaku Islands dispute is unusual in the sense that the ROC's intervention dragged a much more powerful PRC into a territorial dispute with Japan unwanted for Beijing (at least in the early 1970s). The following section will illustrate how the self-role expectation of a besieged lesser power, Taiwan in this case, compelled itself to become highly sensitive toward the way it should cope with an alleged difference as seen in the Senkaku imbroglio.

3. The Discursive Construction of a "Usurped Territory" and the Japanese "Other"

Since the early 1970s, the two Chinas have maintained that the islands in question were discovered, named, and used by the Chinese dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) but they were ceded to Japan, as Taiwan's "appertaining islands," under the Treaty of Shimonoseki that concluded the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Therefore, Chinese sovereignty over the islands should have been restored following the end of World War Two

⁹ Shih (2012, 139) indicates that there are other two types of intervention: external intervention that is not transformational (i.e. no specific value or institutional arrangement is promoted) and internal intervention that seeks to restore or enforce certain value within a perceived sphere of influence. Disaster relief can be an example of the former that invokes neither role nor identity component of foreign policy. By contrast, value-carrying internal intervention (e.g., the Great East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere) is both a role statement to demonstrate one's leadership in its sphere of influence to the external audience as well as identity formation that underlines the self-Other difference. These two types of intervention are not the focus of this paper.

¹⁰ Shih (2012, 141) rightly concedes that "the quest for a proper role for one's own nation does not belong exclusively to a rising power." But it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that intervention can be a national identity quest for lesser powers, too.

and Japan's subsequent renunciation of all claims over Taiwan in the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951). In refutation, Japan holds that its survey found the islands with no signs of formal control and thus it proceeded to incorporate them into Okinawa Prefecture in January 1895 on the basis of *terra nullius*; as such, the acquisition of the islands was unrelated to the Sino-Japanese War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki. In any case, these islands became part of Okinawa Prefecture in 1895 and were later owned by a private landlord. Following the US postwar occupation of Okinawa, the islands were leased to the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands for \$11,000 per annum as a shooting range for the US military. In May 1972, the United States eventually handed over the administrative rights of the islands to Japan as stipulated in the Okinawa Reversion Agreement (1971). Since then, Japan has (re)gained physical control of the Senkakus, although that status quo has been increasingly contested by the PRC (which has never sought any formal settlement but demanded the dispute to be put on the shelf) especially after Japan moved to purchase them from their landlord in September 2012.

The competing (and often agitating) ownership claims over the Senkaku Islands notwithstanding, the disputed islands appeared to be worthless to both the ROC/PRC and Japan prior to 1969. Before then, scholarly and official publications on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait simply did not remember the existence of the Diaoyutais; the Japanese side, too, failed to mention the names of the islands on various occasions, including geography textbooks (Suganuma 2000, 124-129). The turning point came when the ROC, South Korea, and the Philippines formed a committee under the sponsorship of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) and conducted a seismic survey of the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea in late 1968. The finding was sensational: "the shallow sea floor between Japan and Taiwan might contain one of the most prolific oil and gas reservoirs in the world, possibly comparing favorably with the Persian Gulf area" (United Nations Economic and Social Council, Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East 1970, 10). Japan conducted its own surveys in 1969 and 1970, which reconfirmed the ECAFE report that the potentially most valuable part for development is located in the Senkaku Islands and surrounding seabed areas where the Neogene sediment is more than 2,000 meters thick; as a result, the Ryukyu authorities in US-administrated Okinawa received nearly 14,000 applications for drilling rights by May 1969, and the number of applications climbed up to 25,000 by September 1970 (Suganuma 2000, 130-131).

The friction between the ROC and Japan formally surfaced in August 1970, after the state-owned China Petroleum Company (CPC) signed a series of agreements with American oil companies to explore petroleum and natural gas in waters north of Taiwan, including the area around the Senkaku Islands. On August 10, Aichi Kiichi, Japan's foreign minister, indicated in the House of Councilors that the sovereignty of the Senkakus belongs to Japan and thus any unilateral claim by the ROC government over the islands' adjacent continental shelf

should be considered legally invalid. Taiwan's Legislative Yuan scrambled to ratify the Convention on the Continental Shelf (drawn up by the UN's International Law Commission in 1958) on August 21 and passed a statute governing the prospecting and exploring of undersea resources on August 25. The ROC foreign ministry at this stage only explicitly laid claim on those resources located north of Taiwan (Central Daily, August 22, 1970a; Central Daily, August 23, 1970b), and Taipei's newspaper editorials and commentaries were confident about the coverage provided by the Convention against the Japanese claim (China Times, August 13, 1970; Chang 1970). Upon its ratification, the ROC made a reservation with respect to the system of delimiting the boundaries of the continental shelf appertaining to states whose coasts are adjacent or opposite each other, provided for in Article 6, Paragraphs 1 and 2, of the Convention. Taipei maintained that such delimitation should be based on the principle of natural prolongation of land territory, without considering the effect of any islets above the sea. This reservation in effect reveals that the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands was *not* the primary concern for decision makers in Taipei as long as the islands would not be used by Japan to generate an unjustifiable scope of continental shelf at the ROC's expense. Indeed, some earliest commentaries considered these "uninhabited islands" insignificant or even irrelevant to the emerging dispute with Japan. One columnist went so far as to assert that "our country does not have territorial ambition toward these eight lone, surfaced coral reefs" (Chang 1970). Nevertheless, popular discourse in Taiwan already depicted an ambitious, "ungraceful" Japan, which, lured by rich undersea resources discovered by its friend, is now rushing to assert its sovereignty over the Senkakus even before Okinawa's reversion. As an oft-cited editorial of the *China Times* (August 13, 1970) put it:

We believe deeply that, if the Sato [Eisaku] government wants to transform Japan from an "economic great power" to a "political great power" in the 1970s, Japan should have contributed more to international affairs of common concern and fulfilled its duty as a great power rather than repeating its historical mistakes in pursuit of territory, when it just recovered from [war] wounds. This issue involves little benefits [for us], but it matters greatly for our country's sovereignty and commonly observed international principles.

At the onset of a competition for resources seemingly resolvable through diplomatic negotiation and international law, then, ROC-Japan relations had been clouded by Taipei's self-role expectation as the legitimate Chinese government and a victorious power of the Second World War capable of preaching to "greedy" Tokyo about international ethics. Wordings such as "historical mistakes" and "just recovered from [war] wounds" brought back the ROC's wartime identity as a prominent Allied power and later a permanent member of the UN Security Council *vis-à-vis* Japan as an evil fascist country ultimately ruined by war. To be more specific, such identity (re)construction called for an imagined resurrection of

Japan's pre-1945, self-destructive militarism hungry for more oversea territories, which, in turn, prevented an important difference between the ROC and Japan from disappearing in the eyes of Chinese opinion leaders. Understandably, this way of "Othering" Japan may not make much sense to a non-Chinese audience who do not share the same war memories. After all, Japan's postwar reconstruction and rapid development already turned it into a "fragile superpower" (Gibney 1975) by the early 1970s; its Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) lack of significant military capabilities and the country's newly self-imposed Three Principles on Arms Exports had actually made it more akin to a pacifist state rather than a militarist one.¹¹ Tokyo also took great pains to persuade Washington to move nuclear weapons out of Okinawa in its negotiations of the reversion agreement.

By late August 1970, however, some lawmakers and pundits had conflated the ROC's "sovereign rights" (*zhuquan shang quanli*) in international law over undersea resources in the Senkaku Islands' surrounding seabed areas with its "sovereignty" (*zhuquan*) over the islands themselves (Youth Daily News, August 24, 1970; Zhili Evening News, August 28-29, 1970). Given the perceived Japanese violation of Chinese sovereignty that worked to confirm the (re)emergence of the Japanese "Other," an incident broke out in early September when some reporters and sailors from Taiwan erected a ROC national flag on the islands without official sanction. This prompted Aichi to issue another statement on September 10 that reaffirms Japan's sovereignty over the islands, followed by the Ryukyu authorities' removal of the flag (which was returned to the ROC government intact via the US embassy). Pressure thus continued to build up for political leaders in Taipei, as they felt a stronger need to stand up to the ROC's self-role expectation as an experienced, righteous Chinese state that knows how to properly handle Japan. Wei Tao-ming, then-minister of foreign affairs, responded that the ROC "cannot agree" with the Japanese claim but is "willing to exchange opinions with them" (Central Daily, September 12, 1970c). In November and December 1970, Taiwan actively participated in a semi-official liaison committee with Japan and South Korea that sought to promote joint development of maritime resources, without touching upon the sovereignty issue and the existing exploration deals with American oil companies (Central Daily, December 25, 1970d). Believing that the ROC flag was "torn down" by "them" on "our" territory as a sign of the revival of Japanese militarism, however, overseas Chinese in the United States (mainly students from Taiwan) initiated the "*Bao Diao*" ("defending the Diaoyutais") movement and various passionate demonstrations were held outside Japanese consulates in January 1971 (Dai 1971); over five hundred scientists, engineers, and education professionals signed a petition to Chiang Kai-shek in March, urging the KMT government to

¹¹ Under the Yoshida Doctrine, post-occupation Japanese security policy was strictly "defensive defense," relying on its alliance with the United States while seeking to rebuild Japan's latent power by concentrating on economic development. The Three Principles of Arms Exports were first brought up by the Sato cabinet in 1967, which prohibited Japan from exporting weapons and military equipment to Communist countries, countries prohibited from importing arms by UN resolutions, and concerned parties in an ongoing international dispute. The Three Principles can thus be interpreted as Tokyo's veiled disapproval of the US-led Vietnam War.

“resist new Japanese aggression” and not to participate in the aforementioned tripartite cooperation (Central Daily, March 16, 1971a). Chiang’s secretary-general Chang Chun replied that the Diaoyutais have been Taiwan Province’s appertaining islets and their sovereignty belongs to China; as far as dispute matters regarding territorial sovereignty were concerned, Taipei must strive to preserve even “inches of soil and pieces of stone” (Central News Agency, March 18, 1971a).

The question remains as to why the KMT needed a public boost so much so that it started inventing the symbolic importance of the islands. A context is in order. Internationally, border skirmishes between the Soviet Union and the PRC in March 1969 presented a window of opportunity for Henry Kissinger to engineer the ice-breaking rapprochement between Washington and Beijing during the Cold War—at the expense of Taipei—as a way to check Moscow, while the United States was trying to disengage itself from Vietnam. This occurred against the backdrop of an international environment increasingly unfavorable to the ROC. At the end of 1969, seventy states recognized Taipei as the only legitimate government of China; by September 1971, nine of them had switched their diplomatic recognition to Beijing.¹² When Chou Shu-kai brought up the Senkaku issue to Nixon and Kissinger in his last visit to the White House as Chinese ambassador on April 12, 1971, it was just a few days after the State Department’s statement that Washington will return administrative control of the Senkaku Islands to Japan along with Okinawa in 1972 and American oil corporations had been advised to suspend oil exploration activities in the East China Sea (Central News Agency, April 9, 1971b). The statement was followed by more demonstrations in the United States and also in Hong Kong and Taiwan.¹³ Chou told his host that the issue “has to do with the protection of the Chinese Nationalist [KMT] interests. If Taiwan can[not] do that, then intellectuals and overseas Chinese will feel they must *go to the other side*. The State Department statement insisting that this is part of Okinawa has had violent repercussions.

¹² To make the matter worse, the timing of Kissinger’s public visit to the PRC (which paved the way for Richard Nixon’s historic meeting with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in February 1972) was very close to the voting on a proposed resolution in the General Assembly that sought to “expel the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” and permit the PRC to represent China at the UN. As a result, efforts that would have made the exclusion of the ROC an “important question” under Article 18 of UN Charter (which requires a two-thirds majority for approval) did not garner necessary support in the General Assembly on October 25, 1971. A last-minute motion proposed by US representative George H. W. Bush, which attempted to give the PRC the China seat while allowing the ROC to stay as a regular UN member (i.e. dual representation), also failed. To avoid humiliation, ROC delegation, led by Chou Shu-kai, left the hall before the passage of Resolution 2758, which excluded the ROC from the UN system and all associated intergovernmental organizations. Despite of the Senkaku issue, Japan voted to support the ROC’s UN membership. In 1972 alone, the ROC was derecognized by 13 countries, which included Japan. The United States switched its recognition to the PRC in 1979.

¹³ In a report on student demonstrations in Taipei against Japanese forthcoming control of the Senkaku Islands, the US embassy described that “the initiative for the demonstrations has come from the students rather than the government. But the latter probably has given tacit approval out of reluctance to oppose the fruits of youthful patriotism and its own dissatisfaction over our China policy and oil exploration moratorium” (cited in US Department of State Office of the Historian 2006, 292, n. 6).

This will get a movement of overseas Chinese” (US Department of State Office of the Historian 2006, 292, emphasis added).¹⁴

Domestically, indeed, that the KMT had been able to sustain its iron-fist authoritarian rule in Taiwan for two decades was, among other factors, based on the claim that the ROC was the genuine representative of the whole of China on the world stage. While the majority of the international community was willing to entertain Taipei’s pretense, it was possible for the KMT ruling elite (who were predominately “mainlanders,” meaning those who fled the mainland in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War) to monopolize political power and deny constitutional rights to local Taiwanese (who accounted for over 80 percent of Taiwan’s population), since general elections would not have been held in China before the ROC could “eliminate the evil communists” and “restore” its governance on the mainland. Therefore, the loss of the China seat at the UN to the PRC and diplomatic derecognitions by the international community would represent a more-than-serious blow to the national psyche of the ROC on Taiwan—its assumed role as a righteous postwar power derived from its wartime sacrifice and the imagined authentic Chinese-ness would be tarnished by the inclusion of “communist bandits” in the UN system.¹⁵ Have not yet embarked on democratization and before joining the ranks of the four “Asian tigers,” the KMT’s sense of regime crisis was both symbolic and real.¹⁶

How, then, could the KMT demonstrate that the ROC remained the “authentic” China before the domestic and international audience? The Senkaku issue provided Taipei with a much-needed new stage of legitimacy performance, for the dispute allowed it to reclaim credit as the genuine defender of China’s interests and world peace by taking on Tokyo and Beijing simultaneously. Framing the island dispute as the “second Manchurian incident” (Chunghua Magazine, March, 1971), for instance, worked to confirm Japan’s supposedly fascist/militarist identity that required resistance and unity under the leadership of the ROC, which, unlike the PRC (Youth Daily News, March 20, 1971), was the only trust-worthy

¹⁴ In the same White House meeting record, Chow stressed that “the final disposition of the Senkakus should be kept open” (i.e. not under Japanese control), because this issue was “a measure of the ROC’s ability to protect itself” (i.e. ontological security). He emphasized the “symbolic importance of the islands” (cited in US Department of State Office of the Historian 2006, 292, n. 6).

¹⁵ This helps to explain Taipei’s apparent stubborn decision in resisting Washington’s proposal of dual representation until the very last minute. If Taipei accepted the strategy of dual representation rather than important question as the counter-proposal to what later became Resolution 2758 (see note 12), the momentum to retain the ROC in the General Assembly (albeit not in the Security Council) as a regular member might have been saved. Nevertheless, the idea of dual representation was hard to sell for KMT leaders, precisely because it ran against the ROC’s self-role expectation as China’s “real” representative untainted by communism and the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁶ According to the aforementioned meeting record, after Chou left the Oval Office Nixon concurred with him on the need to consider the views of oversea Chinese (US Department of State Office of the Historian 2006, 292, n. 7).

Chinese government with actual nationalist credential (hence legitimate). This logic is well summarized by an editorial of the *Central Daily* (April 22, 1971b):

The leaders and government of the ROC today are the leaders and government that had led our nation's soldiers and civilians to fight the long war of resistance [against Japan], defend national sovereignty, and abolish unequal treaties. We follow truth and justice only and are never afraid of brute force. With all the historical facts, compatriots of the whole nation must be able to rely upon [the ROC]!

For Taipei's supporters, the ROC's word and deed concerning the dispute was thus in sharp contrast to that of the United States, which, unlike its trust-worthy wartime ally, had displayed partiality in deciding the settlement of the Ryukyu Islands without consulting relevant allies; the handling of the Senkakus in favor of Japan, in particular, "violates the comradeship of fighting shoulder by shoulder" (Hong Kong Times, April 20, 1971). Ultimately, Washington upheld its decision to turn over the Senkaku Islands to Japan in the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, which prompted Taipei's foreign ministry to issue a formal statement to register its "extreme dissatisfaction" and declare the ROC's sovereignty over the islands on June 11, 1971.

Although the PRC had been rather silent after the outbreak of the Senkaku issue,¹⁷ Beijing was eventually forced to participate in this anti-Japanese performance staged by Taipei to live up to its own self-role expectation. As a "face" matter, indeed, the PRC could not stay quiet when the ROC was taking the initiative; moreover, Beijing's intervention was an understandable extension of its sovereignty claim over Taiwan, which can be used to generate China's continental shelf.¹⁸ The underlying logic of its rhetoric bears familiar similarity with that of Taipei's. The *People's Daily* launched fierce attacks in December 1970, denouncing American and Japanese "reactionaries" for plundering Chinese and North Korean undersea resources (People's Daily, December 4, 1970a; People's Daily, December 29, 1970b). The Senkaku imbroglio and the Tokyo-Seoul-Taipei trilateral maritime cooperation were framed as *another* piece of evidence of American-cum-Japanese imperialist invasion of China, with the KMT's complicity (People's Daily, May 1, 1971, emphasis added):

Islands located in the northeast of our country's Taiwan Province, Diaoyu, Huangwei, Chihwei, Nanhsiao, Peihshiao and so on, are *like Taiwan*, which have

¹⁷ Considering that Japan was an attractive alternative for the PRC to obtain economic assistance and technological know-how under the US-led economic embargo and after the Sino-Soviet split, Beijing's silence was by no mean "strange" (*contra* Suganuma 2000, 136).

¹⁸ That the ROC-PRC legitimacy competition was an important origin of PRC claim to the Senkaku islands has been noticed in an editorial of the *Mainichi Shimbun* (December 6, 1970).

been China's sacred territories since ancient times and their belonging is undisputable... In this international conspiracy to swallow our territory, the Chiang Kai-shek gang is playing a shameless role. A political mummy spurned by the Chinese people, they are shamelessly selling out China's territorial sovereignty and resources... in exchange for the support of Japanese reactionaries. This proves that the Chiang Kai-shek gang's so-called "preserving of the Diaoyu Islands' sovereignty" is nothing but a lie. Chinese people will never forgive that gang's crime of treason.

With the passage of General Assembly Resolution 2758 on October 25, 1971, the PRC henceforth replaced the ROC as China's representative at the UN. But that "succession" also meant that the former (now as the internationally recognized "real and only one" China) must carry with it the latter's territorial claim against Japan. Beijing's foreign ministry officially declared the PRC's sovereignty over the disputed islands on December 30, 1971.

Concluding Remarks

Taiwan's official *Bao Diao* performance lingered on even after the signing of the reversion agreement and its loss of the China seat at the UN.¹⁹ In his year-end meeting with Kissinger on December 30, 1971, Chou, now serving as foreign minister, raised the Senkaku issue again to the host. The relevant conversation between Chou and Kissinger is quoted as below (US Department of State Office of the Historian 2006, 631-632):

Chou: ... When you talk to the Japanese [Sato Eisaku and Fukuda Takeo] in San Clemente, may I encourage you to consider our position? The Japanese watch very carefully the US role in the Pacific and seek consultation with you. We have a difficult domestic political situation regarding the Islands. Peking wants to develop an anti-American campaign on Taiwan. We need help from our friends. The Islands don't make any difference to Japan but they do to the people of Taiwan.

¹⁹ With Taiwan's democratization and the pro-independence turn that followed since the 1990s, Taiwanese responses to the Senkaku issue are no longer univocal as they used to be during the 1970s. After the KMT regained power in May 2008, President Ma Ying-jeou (who had been involved in the *Bao Diao* movement in 1971 and had written his doctoral dissertation on this subject at Harvard) has shown much greater interest in reasserting the ROC's sovereignty claims over the islands. Although such claims can make sense only if the ROC still considers itself acting on behalf of all China, like the 1970s, Taipei's territorial claims should not be seen as an act to assist Beijing; rather, they are meant to continue the unfinished civil war at another front. In this regard, Ma's "East China Sea Peace Initiative" can be viewed as a ROC show of resolving territorial disputes peacefully before the domestic and international audience, in contrast to the PRC's more high-profile patrolling in the waters surrounding the Senkakus. For the contents of the Peace Initiative and Taipei's reasons for not forming a united front with Beijing, see ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013a; 2013b).

Perhaps you could discuss these withered pieces of rock—there is no oil there—with the Japanese.

Kissinger: We will raise it with the Japanese.

Chow: We hope to keep them quiet about it.

Kissinger: You don't want the Islands back; you just want to avoid a big fuss about them, is that right?

Chow: Yes, that's right. It is like Outer Mongolia. The Japanese have an interest in Outer Mongolia. If we were on the Mainland, we might be over-sensitive about Outer Mongolia and Tibet. The important thing is that they remain politically autonomous.

Unlike Outer Mongolia or Tibet, the Senkakus have been under Japanese control since Okinawa's reversion. But Chou's remark about the conditions under which the ROC/PRC could become over-sensitive toward the islands remains pertinent in the early twenty-first century. Whenever Japan takes actions that appear to confirm an inconvenient reality that the islands are under its control (e.g., inspection by officials, charging detained personnel of intruding fishing boats, ownership transfer to the central government, etc.), an aggressive Japanese "Other" reemerges in front of the Chinese audience who then demands and/or undertakes countermeasures (e.g., street demonstrations, landing on the islands with the national flag, coast guard patrols, etc.), hoping to keep that "Other" "quiet" again.

It is not coincidence that both Beijing and Taipei have been describing the Diaoyutai Islands as a territory "usurped" (*qiezhān*) by Japan in their respective official statements and publications (PRC State Department Press Office 2012; ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012), which functions as a constant reminder about China's identity as a World War Two victor and defender of the postwar status quo *vis-à-vis* Japan as a defeated fascist country and (potential) revisionist by echoing the wording of the 1943 Allied declaration in Cairo.²⁰ Seen in this light, it becomes comprehensible as to why Prime Minister Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 generated a big fuss among Chinese diplomats. As Liu Jieyi, PRC ambassador to the UN, put it, "Abe's homage to those fascist war criminals [is] nothing less

²⁰ The Cairo Declaration stated that "all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa (Taiwan), and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed." By signing the Instrument of Surrender, Japan accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, which stipulated that the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out (Clause 8). The Cairo Declaration has received positive lights among PRC scholars for the document's historic role in the anti-fascist war, while downplaying the ROC's contribution. See Xinhua (December 1, 2013).

than a challenge to the victorious outcome of the war against fascism and a challenge to the postwar international order.”²¹ Ambassador to the United Kingdom Liu Xiaoming likewise held that the shrine visit “raises serious questions about attitudes in Japan and its record of militarism, aggression and colonial rule” (Liu 2014). The perceived difference in Japan was once again deemed too big to tolerate.

Allowing the imagined Japanese “Other” to grow unchanneled may not be healthy for the formation of China’s national identity; it also undermines the effectiveness of China’s foreign policy as it clouds the way Beijing sees its neighbor (and the world) and makes it more difficult to communicate its ideas to those who do not share the same war memories. As Hayashi Keiichi, Liu Xiaoming’s Japanese counterpart in London, replied, not unreasonably, it does not make much sense to outside observers that “a country that has increased its own military spending by more than 10 per cent a year for the past 20 years should call a neighbor ‘militarist’” (Hayashi 2014). But Beijing/Taipei is not the only government that has been turned into a captive of its own creation (i.e. the “usurped territory” discourse). The discursive construction of the meaning of “Northern Territories” as a Japanese national mission, too, evolved “in such a way that the islands came to be identified with the nation has been so powerful that over five decades it successfully prevented any possible contenders” (Bukh 2012, 505), even though none of the domestic actors involved in this construction considered the actual return of the islands as its ultimate goal. By tracing the way Chinese leaders on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait came to form their national identity through the construction of the Senkaku Islands as China’s “usurped territory,” I hope, this study has added to a more enlightened understanding of the origins of the Senkaku dispute as the first step to cultivate much-needed sensibility toward the security dilemma between Japan and China.²²

²¹ Liu was quoted as saying in the *Japan Times* (January 1, 2014).

²² According to Booth and Wheeler (2008), this sensitivity requires actors to learn to empathize with each other’s fears, and understand the role that one’s attitudes and behavior may play into those fears.

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