

Territorial Disputes and Social Activism in Northeast Asia:

The quest for ontological security in Japan, Korea and Taiwan

Alexander Bukh

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

September 2016

Knowledge-Net for a Better World

The East Asia Institute (EAI) is a nonprofit and independent research organization in Korea, founded in May 2002. The EAI strives to transform East Asia into a society of nations based on liberal democracy, market economy, open society, and peace.

The EAI takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the Korean government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

 EAI is a registered trademark.

Copyright © 2016 by EAI

This electronic publication of EAI intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Copies may not be duplicated for commercial purposes. Unauthorized posting of EAI documents to a non-EAI website is prohibited. EAI documents are protected under copyright law.

“Territorial Disputes and Social Activism in Northeast Asia:
The quest for ontological security in Japan, Korea and Taiwan”
ISBN 979-11-87558-05-7 95340

The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, 158 Euljiro
Jung-gu, Seoul 04548
Republic of Korea
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683
Fax 82 2 2277 1684



Territorial Disputes and Social Activism in Northeast Asia: The quest for ontological security in Japan, Korea and Taiwan *

Alexander Bukh

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

September 2016

Abstract

This paper focuses on territorial disputes related civic activism in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. After the end of the Cold War bipolar rivalry, territorial disputes became one of the major sources of friction in the region. Civil society groups are playing an increasingly important role in shaping both discourses and policies related to these disputes in their respective countries. The extant academic literature traces this activism to nationalism directed at the other party to the dispute. Drawing its theoretical insights from the Ontological Security approach, this paper seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of this activism.

Introduction

In 2005, Japan's Shimane Prefecture commemorated Imperial Japan's 1905 annexation of Takeshima islets, which has been administered by South Korea as Dokdo since the early 1950s, with enactment of a prefectural "Takeshima Day". A Shimane based citizens' group participated in the process that resulted in the passage of this symbolic ordinance.¹ Since then it has actively engaged in Takeshima related lobbying and educational activities. The enactment of the ordinance and subsequent symbolic measures had a strongly negative impact upon Japan's relations with South Korea. In 2011, conservative Japanese lawmakers landed in Seoul with the purpose of visiting a South Korean island near Dokdo/Takeshima. However, large-scale protests by South Korean civil

* *Work in progress! Please do not cite without permission from the author!*

¹ Nagai, Yoshihito. "The Process of Establishing Takeshima Day in Shimane Prefecture (in Japanese)." *Hiroshima Journal of International Studies* 18 (2012): 1-18.



society groups pushed the local authorities to deny the group entry.² This incident led to a further deterioration in Japan-Korea relations including a freeze of bilateral security cooperation talks.

The emergence of civil groups as important actors in territorial disputes raises complicated questions. What roles do these organizations play in territorial disputes? How do they shape related domestic discourse and policies? What is the nature of their relationship with the state?

The extent literature on territorial disputes in Northeast Asia is voluminous and diverse in terms of theoretical approaches and arguments.³ With few exceptions however it usually ignores these non-state actors.⁴ This article seeks to fill this gap by exploring the territorial disputes related activism in Japan, ROK (South Korea) and ROC (Taiwan). While paying certain attention to the impact of the activists' demands on policy, the main focus of this article is the relationship between the narratives promoted by these groups and national identities in their respective countries. To explore this relationship the article utilizes the "ontological security" framework which is outlined in the following section. In a nutshell, the argument of this article is as follows. The end of the Asia-Pacific War and subsequent Cold War related events such as the division of the Korean Peninsula, the KMT-CCP rivalry and the incorporation of Japan into *Pax Americana* had profound effects on the national identity constructs in Northeast Asia. The various contradictions that can be traced to these effects manifested themselves in different "critical situations" leading to loss of ontological security. The narratives promoted by activists' groups examined here reconstruct and stabilize their respective national identity constructs and by this contribute to their nation's ontological security.

² "Japanese Lawmakers Refused Entry in Korea", *Chosun Ilbo* 2 August 2011 at http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/08/02/2011080200380.html accessed on 23 May 2016

³ Hara, Kimie. *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia-Pacific: Divided Territories in the San Francisco System*. Routledge, 2006; Lee, Seok Woo. "The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia." *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal* 11, no. 1 (2002): 63-146; Lee, Seok Woo. "Territorial Disputes in East Asia, the San-Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, and the Legacy of Us Security Interests in East Asia." In *Dokdo: Historical Appraisal and International Justice*, edited by Seok Woo Lee and Hee Un Lee, 41-70. Leiden: Brill, 2011; Hellmann, Donald C. *Japanese Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: The Peace Agreement with the Soviet Union*. University of California Press, 1969; Koo, Min Gyo. *Scramble for the Rocks: The Disputes over the Dokdo/Takeshima, Senkaku/Diaoyu, and Paracel and Spratly Islands*. University of California, Berkeley, 2005.; Chung, Chien-Peng. *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China's Territorial Disputes*. Routledge, 2004; Koo, Min Gyo. *Scramble for the Rocks: The Disputes over the Dokdo/Takeshima, Senkaku/Diaoyu, and Paracel and Spratly Islands*. University of California, Berkeley, 2005; Fravel, M Taylor. *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*. Princeton University Press, 2008; Emmers, Ralph. "Japan-Korea Relations and the Tokdo/Takeshima Dispute: The Interplay of Nationalism and Natural Resources" In RSIS Working Paper. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2010; Weinstein, Michael. "South Korea-Japan Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Toward Confrontation", *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (2006). Published electronically May 10 <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Michael-Weinstein/1685#sthash.6C4w5qmN.dpuf>.

⁴ These exceptions include Bong, Yongshik. "Built to Last: The Dokdo Territorial Controversy. The Baseline Conditions in Domestic Politics and International Security of Japan and South Korea." *Memory Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013): 191-203 and Choi, Sung-jae. "The Politics of the Dokdo Issue." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 3 (2005): 465-94. Both articles refer to "protect Dokdo" movement in Korea and locate it in Korea's collective memory of Japanese colonialism.



Ontological Security and Identity Entrepreneurship

In sociology, ontological security, which is seen as a prerequisite for agency, refers to stability, or continuity, in the self-identity of an individual and her social and material environments.⁵ It is the predictability of the outside world and the trust in other people that provide an individual with a sense of safety and stability.⁶ The International Relations (IR) ontological security approach construes the international as a social realm and can be located within the constructivist branch of IR theory. It extrapolates the argument made by sociologists that individuals seek not only physical, but also ontological security, to the state level. Similarly to individuals, states are construed as having an identity which consists of narratives about their past and present that combined establish their existence as what they are.⁷ States need to feel secure in who they are as a prerequisite for agency. Like individuals, they need to have a stable cognitive environment through which they can interpret everyday reality.⁸ This cognitive stability or ontological security is neither a given nor static but continuously reproduced through states' routinized interactions with significant 'others.'⁹ These routines suppress reflection and bind the arena of deliberative choice, making the environment understandable and orderly.¹⁰ Because routines sustain identity, actors become attached to them, and, similarly to people suffering from abuse, may choose to follow them even at expense to their physical security.¹¹

What happens however when these routinized relationships come under threat due to exogenous events beyond the control of the cognitive security seeker? What happens when the basic trust in others on which ontological security depends, is breached? Giddens¹² defines these instances as "critical situations" -circumstances of radical disjuncture that threaten or destroy the routinized relationships. Using an example of a Nazi concentration camp prisoner, Giddens argues that the anxiety that results from ontological insecurity caused by a "critical situation" causes the actors to change their identity compatible with the new routines of social interactions with the new circumstances and relations with "others".¹³ Mitzen also offer a similar answer. Giving an example of an aspiring actor who, for lack of acting job offers, assumes an identity of a waiter, she

⁵ Giddens cited in Zarakol, Ayşe. "Ontological (in) security and state denial of historical crimes: Turkey and Japan." *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2010): 3-23. , p.6

⁶ Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press, 1991. pp.37-39.

⁷ Krolkowski, Alanna. "State personhood in ontological security theories of international relations and chinese nationalism: A sceptical view." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (2008): 109-133, p.112

⁸ Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological security in world politics: state identity and the security dilemma." *European Journal of international relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-370, pp.342-3

⁹ Zarakol, "Ontological Insecurity", p.6

¹⁰ Mitzen "Ontological Security", pp.345-6 and Steele, Brent J. *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR state*. Routledge, 2008, pp. 6-8

¹¹ Mitzen "Ontological Security", p.347

¹² Giddens, Anthony. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Univ of California Press, 1984, p.61

¹³ *Ibid* pp. 62-64



suggests that in such a case, actors may develop other routines that support a less desired “self”.¹⁴

Arguably however, both Giddens and Mitzen describe radical situations rather than critical ones. By “radical” I mean a situation that does not allow the actor much room for maneuver. Due to external or structural circumstances, neither the prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp nor the aspiring actor can take action that will stabilize their identity. They have no choice but to modify their understanding of the “self” and to follow routines that confirm this new construct. Sociologists note however that “(t)here exists in humans a powerful drive to maintain the sense of one’s identity, a sense of continuity, that allays the fear of changing too fast or being changed against one will by outside forces”.¹⁵ Thus we may assume that in case of an ontological insecurity brought about by a disruption in routinized relationships with “others”, if the circumstances allow it, the agent will first attempt to tackle this identity threat by developing other relationships or re-interpreting extant relationships. These can be seen as adjustment measures aimed at re-stabilizing the cognitive environment through accommodation of changes in relationships.

Who are the actors however when it is national identity that comes under threat and needs to be secured? These of course can be governmental agencies that purport to represent the nation but not exclusively so. As constructivist scholarship has shown scholars, writers and public intellectuals play an important role in the construction of national identities.¹⁶ Hence it could be argued that these and other non-state actors can be quite important when it comes to identity/ontological security as well.

Here I will argue that civil society actors engaged in territorial disputes activism (but not limited to it) can be regarded as identity entrepreneurs. By using this term I do not imply that these actors necessarily seek certain social or economic benefits for themselves or the group they represent.¹⁷ They may or may not seek these benefits but for the purpose of this article this question is irrelevant. As Lal¹⁸ has shown in the case of ethnic identity entrepreneurs we need to distinguish between the motivation behind their entrepreneurial action and the broader social or structural effects of these actions. The focus of this paper is on the latter rather than of the former. It will argue that the advocacy activities of the groups engaged in territorial disputes related activism in Japan, Korea and Taiwan have a structural effect of contributing to ontological security of their respective national identities.

¹⁴ Mitzen “Ontological Security”, p.348

¹⁵ Roberta Sigel. *Political learning in adulthood* cited in Kinnvall, Catarina. "Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security." *Political psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-767, p.747

¹⁶ For example, Berger, Thomas U. *Cultures of Antimilitarism: national security in Germany and Japan*. JHU Press, 1998; Hopf, Ted. *Social construction of international politics: identities & foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Cornell University Press, 2002; Wodak, Ruth et al. *The discursive construction of national identity*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

¹⁷ For example, Lal, Barbara Ballis. "Ethnic identity entrepreneurs: Their role in transracial and intercountry adoptions." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 6, no. 3-4 (1997): 385-413 and Leong, Nancy. "Identity Entrepreneurs." Available at SSRN 2574987 (2015).

¹⁸ Lal “Ethnic Identity”



The end of the Asia-Pacific War, the Cold War and Ontological Security of South Korea, Japan and Taiwan

South Korea

Independence, uniqueness and the overlap of the nation with the state are central traits of modern nationalism. The events that led to the liberation of Korea from colonial rule and Cold War politics that shaped the post-liberation political developments on the Korean Peninsula created three major interrelated issues for Korean identity. One was the fact that unlike most of other former colonies, Korea's liberation from the colonial subjugation was achieved by external forces rather than by indigenous struggle. The other was the nature of the new state and the government which was to a large extent created by the American occupation and continued to be strongly dependent on the US. The third was the division of the Korean Peninsula and the Korean nation into two states which not only opposed each other in ideological terms but also engaged in a bloody war.

Mobilization of anti-communism as the main tenet of South Korean identity by the new ruling elites concealed the above-mentioned tensions by constructing South Korean identity in opposition to the communist North. The most important counter-discourse that emerged in late 1970s and 1980s as an integral part of the democratization movement centered on the idea of *minjung* (the masses). *Minjung* was defined as the people in the ruled position (politically, economically or culturally) who, while belonging to different social and economic strata, engage in a struggle against the unjust political power.¹⁹ The *minjung* ideology was strongly influenced by various neo-Marxist theories such as dependency theory.²⁰ However, *minjung* was defined not by certain inherent characteristics but mainly through its oppositional position to the oppressive "others", i.e., the domestic ruling elites and its external supporters, the most important of which were Japan and the US.²¹ In *minjung* narrative, democratization was associated with unification of the two Koreas and the emergence of a new, truly independent Korean nation that would be governed by the cultural values of the people.

Democratization of Korea started with the June 1987 uprising. However, from the perspective of Korea's ontological security a critical situation emerged a decade later and reached its climax during the financial crisis of 1997-1998 (known as IMF crisis in Korea). The reasons for considering this period as a critical disjuncture are as follows. First, it was Kim Dae Jung election to Presidency in 1997 that was construed as evidence of the final victory of the democratization movement. His *Sunshine Policy* of rapprochement with the North destabilized the construction of Korean identity in opposition to its communist neighbor. At the same time however, the prospects

¹⁹ Kim, Hyung-A. "Minjung Socioeconomic Responses to State-Led Industrialization." In *South Korea's Minjung Movement*, edited by Kenneth Wells, 39-60. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

²⁰ Koo, Hagen. "Modernity in South Korea: An Alternative Narrative." *Thesis Eleven* 57 (1999): 53-64.

²¹ Em, Henry. "Overcoming' Korea's Division: Narrative Strategies in Recent South Korean Historiography." *Positions: East Asia Cultural Critique* 1, no. 2 (1993): 450-85 and Lee, Nam Hee. *The Making of Minjung*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.



of national reunification continued to be as remote as a decade earlier or even became slimmer as many realized that the collapse of North Korea is not as imminent as many had hoped. Moreover, the new democratic leadership not only continued to maintain close relations with the US but continued to pursue liberal economic policies. The 1997-1998 financial crisis underscored Korea's embedment and dependency on global capitalist economy. In order to fulfil the conditions of the IMF bailout the government had to adopt even harsher economic policies. As such, the domestic and international events in late 1990s and early 2000s resulted in destabilization of the the pre-1987 mainstream identity construct and the one advocated by the *minjung* narrative.

Japan

The double impact of Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War and the subsequent incorporation into *Pax Americana* on its national identity has been extensive and multi-layered. For the purposes of this paper it is important to note two main features of Japan's postwar identity: victimhood and its temporal removal from Asia.

The notion of Japan's victimhood in the war symbolized by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the hardships of the Japanese people, has been one of the main treads of Japan's postwar identity. This emphasis on the suffering of the Japanese was enabled by the Tokyo Tribunal and the San-Francisco Peace Treaty, neither of which questioned Japan's collective responsibility for the war and the atrocities. The temporal removal of Japan from Asia emerged from its political embedment in the Western camp. As a result of Cold War imperatives, Japan was assigned the role of the economic engine of the "East Asian Co-prosperity sphere", this time under American hegemony.²² It was expected to serve as a role model for newly independent nations in Asia and through this to advance American interests in the region.²³ In the words of Harootunian, the Occupation narrative "remade" Japan as a "free" and "democratic" society, temporally derailed from its course in 1930s, a perfect testimony to the veracity of the developmental theory.²⁴ As such, in terms of identity, Japan's association with Asia became purely geographical. In temporal and normative terms it was relocated to the "West". Katō Shu'ichi's influential *The Hybrid Culture* (1974)²⁵ is emblematic of this construction of Japan's identity. Here Japan is narrated as the West's representative in Asia and is seen as a test tube for universal/Western values in a non-Christian environment.

Needless to say that this hierarchical construction of Japan vis-à-vis Asia was an integral part of Imperial Japan's colonial project. However, the removal of the horizontal thread embedded in

²² Yoshimi, Shunya. "America's Desire and Violence: Americanization in Postwar Japan and Asia During the Cold War." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (2003): 433-49.

²³ Matsuda, Takeshi. *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, p.67

²⁴ Harootunian, Harry D. "America's Japan/Japan's Japan." In *Japan in the World*, edited by Harry D Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi. London: Duke University Press, 1993, p.201

²⁵ Katō, Shu'ichi. *Zasshu Bunka: Nihon No Chiisana Kibō (Hybrid Culture: Japan's Little Hope)*. Tokyo: Goudansha, [1974] 1989.



the “Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere) project and the temporal and normative relocation of Japan re-enforced the construction of Japan as superior to Asian nations in general and Korea in particular. Namely, this time Japan was re-constructed as democratic, industrialized, prosperous and ‘Western’ Japan in opposition to unruly, authoritarian, impoverished and ‘Asian’ Korea, in need of Japan’s guidance and assistance.²⁶ During the following decades and particularly after normalization of bilateral relations in 1965, this construct was continuously reconfirmed in Japan’s relations with Korea through the latter’s reliance on Japan’s capital and technology and continuous efforts to catch-up with Japan.²⁷ Anti-Japanese protests in Korea related to issues such as the ‘comfort women’ and visits by Japanese politicians to the Yasukuni shrine reaffirmed Korean emotionality and unruliness juxtaposed with Japan’s rationality and law abiding nature.²⁸ The Korean TV drama series that became popular in Japan in late 1990s were also interpreted through the extant lens and received as a nostalgic reminder of Japan’s own past.²⁹

From the perspective of ontological security, the critical situation in Japan’s relations with its neighbor started to build up in late 2000s. In 2008, for the first time South Korea was classified as “full democracy” by the influential Democracy Index.³⁰ South Korea became wealthier and much closer to Japan in terms of per capita GDP.³¹ South Korean car and electronics makers did away with their dependence on Japan’s technology and started to challenge the Japanese giants in the world markets.³² Even in terms of pop cultural exports, Korean products have come to rival those of Japan and in many countries, particularly in Asia, gained dominance in local markets.³³ Arguably, this relative parity achieved by South Korea transformed the extant routines in Japan’s relations with its neighbor and presented a serious challenge to its ontological security.

Taiwan

During the Asia-Pacific War, the Kuomintang (KMT) was recognized by all of the Allies as the legitimate representative of China. Its leader Chiang Kai-shek represented China as one of the Allies at the 1943 Cairo Conference and it was his name on the Potsdam Declaration that defined the

²⁶ For a detailed analysis see Tei, Taikin. *Kankoku No Imeji* (the Image of Korea). Tokyo: Chuo koron shinsha, 1995 and Tamaki, Taku. *Deconstructing Japan's Image of South Korea: Identity in Foreign Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

²⁷ James, William. "Trade Relations of Korea and Japan: Moving from Conflict to Cooperation?" (2001). <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/ECONwp011.pdf> and Tamaki *Deconstructing*

²⁸ For example, Yamano, Sharin. *Kenkanryu* (*Hate the Korean Wave*). Tokyo: Shinyusha, 2005.

²⁹ Iwabuchi, Koichi. *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. p.159

³⁰ The Economist. "Democracy Index." (2008). <http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy%20Index%202008.pdf>.

³¹ The Economist "A Game of Leapfrog." *The Economist* (2012). Published electronically 28 April 2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21553498>.

³² Prestowitz, Clyde. "Korea as Number One." *Foreign Policy* (2012). Published electronically 7 June 2012. http://prestowitz.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/06/07/korea_as_number_one?wp_login_redirect=0.

³³ The Economist. "Hallyu, Yeah!" *The Economist* (2010). Published electronically 25 January 2010. <http://www.economist.com/node/15385735>.



terms of Japan's surrender issued in July 1945. As it is well known, the KMT were defeated in the civil war and completely retreated from China's mainland to Taiwan in 1949. The identity discourse of the KMT however did not change much and did not reflect the fact that it controls only Taiwan while China's mainland is controlled by the Communists. The stability of this identity narrative was provided not only by KMT's domestic policies but also through Taiwan's relations with US, Japan and the international community in general. Namely, the KMT was recognized as the sole legitimate representative of China by US, Japan and other states, and it occupied China's seat on the UN Security Council. From the perspective of KMT's ontological security, the possibility of a crisis appeared in late 1960s when the argument that the US needs to be more pragmatic in its relations with Communist China started to gain prominence in US foreign policy establishment. The US-China negotiations that followed and the recognition of the PRC dealt a blow to KMT's ontological security as they abolished the routines that sustained the, rather fictitious, identity of the KMT as representing whole of China.

[Needs to be elaborated further]

Activism and Ontological Security

Korea: Protecting Dokdo

The citizens' movement for protecting Dokdo emerged in Korea in early 2000s. Today, the number of civil society organizations fully devoted to the Dokdo issue or list "protection of Dokdo" as one of their missions, is enormous. Here I will focus only on two of these organizations: Dokdo Headquarters and VANK, which arguably are among the most important actors in the "protect Dokdo" movement.

Dokdo Headquarters (*doktto bonbu*) was the first organization in the movement and it is also the largest one. As of 2013, Dokdo Headquarters (hereafter, DH) has about 4000 to 5000 members. The most important reason for focusing on DH however is its continuous independence from the government. Unlike most of other large "protect Dokdo" organizations, DH does not receive any financial or other assistance from the Korean government and relies solely on donations and membership fees. It was founded by Kim Bong U who was active in the democratization movement in late 1980s and early 1990s, and at that time occupied a senior position in one of the students' organizations. DH was established in December 2000 originally named as "National Movement Headquarters for Recovering of Our Land Dokdo" (*uri ttang doktto chatkki gungmin undong bonbu*).³⁴ The Board of Representatives included a number of artists and academics, Heads of Labor Unions and representatives of other civil society organizations. The Charter of the organi-

³⁴ Uri Ttang Doktto Chatkki Gungmin Undong Bonbu. "Uri Ttang Doktto Chatkki Gungmin Undong Bonbu Baljjoksik (Inagural Ceremony of a National Movement Headquarters for Recovering of Our Land Dokdo)." Seoul, December 2nd, 2000.



zation stated that its main purpose is the recovery of sovereignty over Dokdo, preservation of territory and protection of national independence. In order to achieve the above, the following activities were proposed: informing the public about problems related to the New Fisheries Treaty, expansion of membership and educational activities, activities directed at the Korean government and National Assembly as well as Japan and foreign countries.³⁵

In the letter to the participants of the inaugural ceremony, Kim Bong U explained that Dokdo needs to be recovered and not protected as the government has already given it away to Japan. Strongly criticizing Kim Dae Jung's policy, he argued that the lack of military presence of Dokdo, the prohibition of visits to Dokdo by Koreans and the new Fisheries Treaty with Japan testify to the fact that the government has already given up Dokdo and basically exercises control on behalf of Japan. Recalling 1905 Korea-Japan Treaty that eventually led to Korea's colonization he calls for people to realize that Korea today is undergoing a similar crisis. Kim argued that without Dokdo, the future of Korea is gloomy and economic recovery will be impossible.³⁶

The demands to the government voiced in the declaration adopted at the ceremony were as follows: an official statement by the President that Dokdo is Korean territory, abolition of the New Fisheries Treaty and proclamation of Dokdo as the base point for Korea's EEZ, replacement of Coast Guards with military on Dokdo, enabling free travel to Dokdo for Koreans, apply normal administrative measures to Dokdo and protect it like any other part of Korean territory.³⁷

In a more comprehensive critique of the government published a year later, Doktto Chatkii criticized what they saw as continuous appeasement of Japan by the Korean government. The present progressive government is argued to be similar to all other post-independence governments. Despite calling itself "people's government" it is seen as pursuing of a foreign policy that prioritizes government's interests over those of the state and the nation. Doktto Chatkii seek to bring change this policy. The Korean ruling class is described as economically dependent on Japan and hence is incapable of changing the policy. Hence, it is up to the people to protect Dokdo from Japanese attempts to seize it and failure to do so may lead to loss of sovereignty.³⁸ Later on the government is criticized for its acceptance of IMF assistance arguing that Japan is trying to tie the assistance it provides through IMF with Dokdo issue and acceptance of assistance implies acceptance of Japan's territorial claims.³⁹

In retrospect, it can be argued that DH and other organizations with similar demands managed to achieve some of its goals. While the Fisheries Treaty is still intact and the islands are still patrolled by Coast Guards, the ban on civilians travel was lifted in March 2005, President Lee (I) Myung-Bak paid a visit to Dokdo in 2012 and the government has adopted numerous symbolic measures aimed at emphasizing its control over the islets. For the purposes of this paper however,

³⁵ Ibid, p.3

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-7

³⁷ Ibid., p.16

³⁸Uri Ttang Doktto Chatkii Gungmin Undong Bonbu, *Doktto Neun Hanguk Ttang in Ga* (Is Dokdo a Korean Territory?). Seoul: Baeksan Seodang, 2003, pp.133-4

³⁹ Ibid., pp.181-3



more interesting is the broader narrative on Dokdo and Korean history promoted by DH.

In 2002, the name of the organization was changed to *Doktto yeoksa chatkki undong bonbu* (Headquarters of the Movement for Search of Dokdo History). Writing in 2002, Kim Bong U explains the reason for adding “history” (*yeoksa*) to the name of the organization. He argues that the Dokdo problem occurred because of lack of interest on behalf of the government and the people. This lack of interest is a reflection of spreading individualism and the subsequent loss of national spirit, dignity and autonomy. Recovery of Dokdo is presented as a recovery of the national spirit which is argued to be identical with historical spirit. From now on Kim promises that the organization will work for the recovery of the historical spirit which is an integral part of the recovery of Dokdo.⁴⁰

The historical narrative is fully developed in a later series of booklets titled provocatively as *Korea! Are You Going to Give Dokdo to Japan?! (Hanguk! Dokdo reul ilbon e neomgi neun ga!)*⁴¹ Here the Dokdo problem is construed as a symptom of a broader national crisis that has befallen the Korean since the end of the 7th century. The Dokdo issue is seen as both being a symptom of this national crisis and, in a somewhat paradoxical fashion, its remedy. The main characteristics of the national crisis as depicted by DH are the dominance of flunkeyism (*sadae juui*) among the Korean elites and the general lack of a national consciousness among the members of the nation.⁴² Flunkeyism is seen as one of the main historical ills of the Korean elites and its origins are perceived as going back to the 7th century. The narrative denies the sole responsibility of Japanese colonialism for the ills of post-independence Korean society and traces the roots of contemporary flunkeyism to Joseon dynasty’s relations with China. This characteristic of the Korean elites is seen and the cause of today’s social divisions and mutual hatred along class, education, regional, political, religious, professional lines. DH argues that all the domestic forces that produce these social divisions continue to rely on external powers hoping to gain an upper hand and by this continuously preserve these internal conflicts.⁴³

Another aspect of the national crisis is the lack of proper ‘territorial consciousness’ (*yeongtto insik*) among the Korean people. Territory, it is argued, is a bowl that holds the nation. Without a territory the nation will not be able to function properly and hence there is a need to defend national territory. Korean nation however is lacking a proper understanding of territory which was lost after the fall of Goguryeo Kingdom in the 7th century. The reason for the continuity in this lack of proper understanding of territory is traced to the process that led to Korea’s liberation from the Japanese rule. The liberation, it is argued, was not achieved through indigenous effort. Korea gained its independence as a result of an external intervention and entrusted its fate to the US. Thus during the Cold War, Koreans failed to gain an understanding of the importance of territory for the nation and were preoccupied with the Cold War ideological struggle. Together with flunkeyism, this lack of a proper understanding of the importance of territory is seen as the main rea-

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.138-140

⁴¹ Dokto Undong Bonbu. *Hanguk! Dokdo Reul Ilbon E Neomgi Neun Ga! (Korea! Are You Going to Give Dokdo to Japan?!)* 3 vols, Seoul: Dokdo Headquarters, 2006

⁴² Ibid, vol 1, p.36

⁴³ Ibid., 37-38



son behind the conclusion of the new Fisheries Agreement. If the situation is not changed and the new understanding of territory does not gain dominance inside the Korean society, it is argued, that there is danger of Korea again becoming a victim of Great Powers policy of redrawing borders.⁴⁴

Today's South Korea is presented as a protectorate of the US-Japan Alliance while the North—that of Russia and China. US-Japan hegemony over South Korea is seen as one of the main factors that perpetuate Korean elites' flunkeyism and their subsequent inability to properly respond to Japan's Dokdo related claims. The division of the Korean Peninsula which resulted from Great Powers struggle is seen as another factor in the disappearance of Korean national consciousness. It is argued that the division and the continuous conflict between the South and the North Koreans create and perpetuate a feeling of animosity and distance between members of the same nation.⁴⁵

Dokdo is seen not only as its symptom but also as a great gift that will help the Korean nation to overcome it. Firstly, Dokdo is argued to be the ultimate cure that will enable the recovery of historical consciousness of Korean people. Today, it is argued, Korean historical consciousness of their national history starts with the colonial time. Thus the majority of Koreans perceive their nation as having a very short history. Similarly, the spatial consciousness of their national borders is limited to the Southern part of the peninsula. As, according to DH, the history of Dokdo goes back to at least 6th century, learning this history is the solution to overcoming the problems related to historical and spatial consciousness of the nation. As Dokdo is loved by all of the members of the national community it is seen as a 'treasure' that will enable national unification.⁴⁶

In DH narrative, Dokdo is seen as the solution to all the ills of the Korean society and as the key to national reunification and achievement of true independence. In the context of the above-mentioned critical situation that befell Korea however, Dokdo as narrated by DH has a somewhat different role. In many ways, the broad historical narrative is quite similar to the *minjung* discourse. The Korean nation is juxtaposed with all of the external 'colonial' forces and the domestic elites. The nation is constructed as an organic, ethno-cultural entity whose members include all ethnic Koreans including those living in the North and overseas. The call for re-discovery of Dokdo is comparable to the quest for indigenous cultural values of the *minjung* activists in the 1970s and 1980s. In both narratives historical knowledge is seen as a tool of liberation.

Unlike the *minjung* ideology however, socialist or Marxist arguments are nowhere to be found in the DH narrative. Economic relations and political system are replaced with lack of territorial consciousness and historical knowledge as the main reasons for Korea's perceived lack of autonomy. This modification of the *minjung* narrative or its emptying of any normative contents is made possible by placing Dokdo in the center of the narrative. The centrality of Dokdo in the narrative enables this juxtaposition of the nation with domestic elites and outside forces, void of any social or political values. The unity of the nation is achieved through the love of Dokdo. Dokdo is the nation and the nation is Dokdo. In other words, by characterizing the nation through the love of Dok-

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.13-16

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 20-27

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.22-26



do, a construction of an autonomous nation is achieved without resolving questions related to the ideological differences inside South Korea, North/South confrontation and relations with the US.

VANK (Voluntary Agency Network of Korea) is a different kind of organization, internationally oriented and directing its activities mostly at young people. It originated in 1999 as an individual project of Bak Gi Tae who was a teenager then, to virtually introduce Korea to foreigners. Gradually it developed into a large organization that engages in “cyber diplomacy”. From mid 2000s onwards, VANK gained significant domestic and international attention and became probably the most famous Korean non-governmental organization among those that engage in history related issues. VANK’s main activities include an extensive usage of social media aimed at correcting “misperceptions” about Korea as being a poor and dangerous place as well as about its historical and present relations with its neighbors.⁴⁷ Most of the “diplomatic” activities of VANK consist of quite aggressive lobbying of overseas companies, governmental agencies, publishers and other organizations aimed at “correcting misunderstandings” related to Korean history. These misunderstandings are usually historical events or names of places disputed by Korea and its neighbors.⁴⁸ Dokdo is considered one of these “misperceptions” and VANK are actively engaged in spreading the “correct” information about the ownership over Dokdo.⁴⁹

Domestically VANK organizes various events, seminars and workshops mostly directed at young people aimed at educating them and training them as “cyber diplomats”. According to organization’s website, it currently has 70,000 youth members and 400 VANK clubs.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Bak Gi Tae stated that during the 17 years of its existence the number of people that have been involved in VANK activities stands at 130,000.⁵¹ The organization has become extremely popular among the Korean youth as it promises their members to teach them the means to become virtual ambassadors of their country and global leaders. A person that has closely observed VANK’s activities over a prolonged period of time argued that the potential of using the VANK experience to land a job in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or at an international institution, the opportunity to learn English and to meet foreigners while engaging in “cyber diplomacy”, and of course to learn about Dokdo, are the main factors for the popularity of VANK among young Koreans.⁵² According to Bak, VANK’s activities supplement those of the government. He perceives its members as the future leaders of Korea and argues that VANK provides them with the right knowledge needed to “preserve the peace in Northeast Asia”.⁵³

Whether VANK members actually managed to achieve top positions in the Korean society is

⁴⁷ Bak, Gi Tae. *Saibeo Oegyogwan Bankeu (Cyber Diplomat Vank)*. Seoul: Haneon, 2009, pp.16-17

⁴⁸ Card, James "Korea's Cyber Vigilantes ". *Foreign Policy* (2009).

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/08/koreas-cyber-vigilantes/>

⁴⁹ Bak, *Saibeo*, pp. 193-207

⁵⁰ <http://korea.prkorea.com/wordpress/english/about-us/>

⁵¹ I, Yun Jeong. "17 Nyeongan Bankeu Mingan Oegyo Hwaryak (17 Years of Vank Public Diplomacy Activity)." *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, 29.03.2016

⁵² Interview with Northeast Asia History Foundation anonymous research officer conducted in Seoul, 21.12.2012

⁵³ Interview with Bak Gi Tae conducted on Ulleung-do on 9.8.2012



unclear but it is obvious that Bak Gi Tae himself became a celebrity in Korea. Besides serving on various governmental panels, Bak was also appointed as a public relations ambassador of Seoul City and as of May 2016, even features in a commercial advertisement of Milan hair products.⁵⁴

VANK's international activism has been quite successful as they did manage to get various publishing companies and governmental agencies around the world, including the CIA World Factbook, to change expressions and depictions considered as erroneous in Korea's mainstream discourse.⁵⁵ For its activities, between 2004 and 2010 VANK received numerous domestic prizes from the National Assembly, Seoul City, North Kyongsan Province and other governmental and non-governmental bodies.⁵⁶ It has received certain financial assistance from Korea's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and collaborates with governmental agencies such as the Northeast Asia History Foundation and Korean International Cooperation Agency.⁵⁷ While VANK's activism is evaluated very positively inside Korea⁵⁸, outside of Korea the evaluation is not univocal. Its activities are considered by some as nationalistic spamming⁵⁹ or as being anti-Japanese.⁶⁰

Bak Gi Tae however argues that it is a misunderstanding to consider VANK mission and its slogan "Korea, center of Asia, gateway to Northeast Asia" as nationalistic. According to Bak, the core of VANK's mission is to "share dreams and friendship with all the people in the world". The purpose of these exchanges with people around the world however is to make them love Korea and through this to "spontaneously" accept Korea's leadership in Asia.⁶¹ What are the qualities of Korea that will enable it to achieve the leadership position? Bak's arguments are rather similar to those promoted by DH described above. Namely, Korea's strength and its potential of leadership are derived solely from its geographical position. According to Bak, as a peninsula Korea is capable of communicating with various countries in the age of globalization and through this to achieve wealth, both material and spiritual.⁶² Again, similarly to DH, knowledge about Korea's history and engaging in activities aimed at improving its international image, are seen as a key to solving Korea's political, economic and social problems and enabling its leadership in Asia.⁶³

As part of the effort to educate young Koreans about their national history, VANK published a series of four comic books titled Discovery of History, each aimed at exposing a particular instance of falsification of history by Japan and China. One of them is devoted to the Dokdo issue as

⁵⁴ Milan Skin Products . "Milan Magical Air Skin." Milan 2016. <https://www.milan.co.kr/html/index.php>

⁵⁵ Kim, Tae Gyu. "Cia Corrects Errors on Korea." *Korea Times*, 15.01.2007

⁵⁶ Daum Encyclopedia, "Vank." Daum, 2016. <http://100.daum.net/encyclopedia/view/b08b3990n11>

⁵⁷ Choe, Jong Su. "Koica Bankeu, Segye Simin Gyoyuk Hwakssan Wihae Son Jabatta (Koica and Vank to Cooperate in Expansion of Global Citizens Education)." *The Asia Economy Daily*, 21.04.2016 2016.

⁵⁸ Han, Ji Yoo. "National Reputation by a Non-Profit Organization: How Voluntary Agency Network of Korea (Vank) Affects the National Reputation of South Korea." MA thesis, Suracuse University, 2012.

⁵⁹ Card, "Korea's Cyber"

⁶⁰ News Post Seven . "Kankoku No Hannichi Dantai Chuugokujin No [Hannichi] Intaanshippu Ukeire Mo (Korean Anti-Japanese Organization Offers Anti-Japanese Internship to Chinese)." 2014. http://www.news-postseven.com/archives/20140422_251394.html

⁶¹ Bak, *Saibeo*, pp.12-13 and 20-21

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.13

⁶³ *Ibid.*



well as to the naming of the Sea of Japan which according to Korea's position should be named as the East Sea.⁶⁴

The main characters in the book are a female newspaper reporter and a writer as well as an American genius scientist. All the three characters are funny, likeable and charming. The story starts with news about Japan's Self Defense Air Force reconnaissance plane intruding Korea's air-space over Dokdo and disrupting the peaceful co-existence of birds and Korean border guards stationed on the islets. The three protagonists then depart Seoul on a mission to visit the islets and to protect their peaceful existence by discovering the true history of Dokdo's ownership and writing about it. Needless to say, that the validity of Korean claims is not questioned anywhere in the story. Through meetings with different real and fictional characters, the three friends learn about the history of Japan's "second aggression" against Dokdo⁶⁵, referring to the Shimane Prefecture's Takeshima Day ordinance and the attempted dispatch of scientific vessels to waters around Dokdo in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The value of Dokdo is depicted in both material and historical terms. The islets are presented as a "treasure basket" of natural resources sought by Japan but also as a symbol of Japan's colonization of Korea, being the first part of Korean territory that came under Japan's control in 1905. Particularly noteworthy is the story of a sea lion that appears to tell the protagonists about the tragedy that befell his kind on Dokdo. As a result of excessive hunting by the Japanese they became extinct in early 20th century. The sea lion presents himself as the former owner of Dokdo and appeals to present owners, i.e., the Korean people. The sea lion argues that the tragedy of their extinction happened because of Korea's powerlessness and lack of interest in Dokdo at that time. He appeals to protagonists to remember the mistakes of the past and not to repeat them again.⁶⁶ This is the lesson that the three friends learn throughout their journey and realize the need to appeal to the international society in order to expose Japan's lies and protect Dokdo from Japanese aggression. In the story, the Koreans are presented as somewhat overly emotional but as standing for peace and truth, while the Japanese are presented as cunning, aggressive and lying. Koreans are future oriented but the Japanese refuse to move one by their reluctance to admit their past wrongdoings.

Overall, the narrative in the VANK book differs little from other stories related to Dokdo published in Korea. Its importance however needs to be examined within the broader historical narrative promoted by VANK.

What are the main characteristics of Korean history as presented by VANK? Similarly to DH narrative, Korean history starts from Goguryeo (BC 37-AD 668) period. Korea is presented as an independent country that temporary "lost its identity" during the Japanese occupation period. During the colonial period Koreans "resisted continuously both at home and abroad", until Japan's surrender. After Japan's occupation period, the Korean War broke out and the Korean Peninsula got divided into South and North. Korea has gone through various changes and today it is one of "most connected countries in the world", has one of the fastest growing economies and is also "set-

⁶⁴ VANK. *Yeokssa Ba-Ro Chatkki 4 (Discovery of History 4)*. Seoul: Kinema In, 2009.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.38-54

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.78-83



ting international standards in related industries”. Korean typical family today is presented as consisting of a diligent and hard-working father, a mother that is passionate about the children’s education, a brother that is working at Korea’s IT industry and “myself”-i.e. the teenage reader who is a VANK volunteer, a future diplomat, that will help making Korea into center of Asia.⁶⁷ Quite interestingly, the part that introduces various places of interest in Korea includes Pyongyang (which is only briefly referred to as the capital of North Korea) and other places in the North.⁶⁸

As such, the historical narrative completely omits the role of external powers in liberating the Korean Peninsula and in its post-1945 politics. The domestic struggle against dictatorship, the post- 1987 transformations, the various political, social and economic divisions inside South Korea as well as the continuous antagonism between the two Koreas are also suppressed in this historical narrative. While Korea is depicted as technologically advanced and the Korean nation as having its unique food, clothes, language and historical relics⁶⁹ there are no references to any particular values that characterize the nation, except for the diligence of the “fathers” and the education fever of the “mothers”.

Placed in the context of this broader construct of Korea’s past and present, the role of the Dokdo narrative is quite obvious. Similarly to DH narrative analyzed above, the juxtaposition of “Korea” with “Japan” enables the construction of Korea as a socially, politically and economically homogenous nation while at the same time avoiding the question of values and norms that characterize it. Peaceful and future oriented are the only normative values ascribed to the Korean nation as opposed to jingoistic and past oriented Japan. Furthermore, the emphasis on Korea’s sovereignty and control over the islets conceals the North/South division and the nature of Korea’s complex relations with the United States. Similarly to DH, the Dokdo narrative promoted by VANK enhances Korea’s ontological security by stabilizing its national identity.

Japan: Retrieving the Northern Territories and Takeshima

Most of territorial disputes related activism in Japan has focused on the dispute with USSR/Russia over the “Northern Territories” (known as South Kuriles in Russia). I analyzed the origins of the movement for the return of Northern Territories, its relationship with the government and the symbolic role of the Russia controlled islands in Japan’s identity in detail elsewhere. For the purposes of this article, it would suffice to say that while the movement originated on Hokkaido during the Occupation years and was driven mainly by economic grievances, it was revived by the Japanese government as an integral part of its Northern Territories related campaign in late 1960s. The most probable reason for this campaign was the question of American bases on Okinawa. The campaign was a rather successful effort by the government to divert public opinion from Japan’s relations with the US towards the Soviet Union. Over the years however the narrative about the injustice of the Soviet occupation, the cruelty of the Soviet soldiers and the suffering of the Japa-

⁶⁷ Bak, *Saibeo*, pp.90-112

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.141-148

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.121-160



nese residents of the islands promoted by the government agencies and the “return” organizations, took a life of its own. Uniting the “people” and the “state” under the aegis of common victimhood, it became an integral part in the discourse of Japanese suffering during the war.⁷⁰

Takeshima related civic activism originated in Shimane Prefecture which administered the islets as part of its Oki Island from 1905 until 1945, in early 1950s when representatives of Oki fishing unions submitted petitions to the government and to the prefectural authorities. Emphasizing the economic hardships of Oki residents, the petitions sought the removal of the so-called “MacArthur Line” limitations that prohibited fishing activities by the Japanese vessels around Takeshima.⁷¹ Thus older residents of Oki recall that the conclusion of the San Francisco Treaty in September of 1951 and the subsequent abolition of the Occupation imposed “MacArthur Line” was met with high expectations by the local residents and manifested in a number of festive activities celebrating the expected resumption of fishing on Takeshima.⁷² However, in January 1952, Syngman Rhee’s government declared national sovereignty over the seas within a designated line, known as the Rhee Line which included Dokdo/Takeshima within Korea’s territory. Since then the islets have been under Korea’s administration.

After 1951, Shimane Prefectural authorities continuously lobbied the Japanese government to establish territorial rights over Takeshima. Japan’s official position regarding its rights to the islets was similar and the territorial issue was one of the main issues in bilateral normalization negotiations in the 1950s and early 1960s. The 1965 Japan-Korea normalization treaty basically shelved the dispute⁷³ and the Fisheries Agreement that accompanied the treaty enabled fishermen from both countries to fish in waters around the islets. From late 1960s onwards however, Takeshima gained symbolic importance in Shimane’s relations with Tokyo in the context of the preferential treatment given to the Northern Territories problem.⁷⁴

The nationwide debate in Japan regarding Takeshima was re-ignited only in 2005 after the passage of “Takeshima Day” ordinance by Shimane’s Prefectural Assembly. While the ordinance was a local level initiative directed mostly at Tokyo rather than at Seoul, it was interpreted in South Korea as Japan’s attempt to escalate its Takeshima related policy. The fierce reaction from Korea’s government and civil society groups brought Takeshima to the center of public attention in Japan. Over the following years, the Takeshima issue turned into a valuable political asset, which

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion see Bukh, Alexander. “Japan’s history textbooks debate: National identity in narratives of victimhood and victimization.” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 5 (2007): 683-704 and “Constructing Japan’s ‘Northern Territories’: Domestic Actors, Interests, and the Symbolism of the Disputed Islands.” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12, no. 3 (2012): 483-509.

⁷¹ Oki Fishing Union. “Takeshima Gyoku No Sougyou Seigen No Kaijohou Ni Tsuku Chinjou (a Petition to Lift the Operation Restrictions in the Takeshima Fishing Zone).” 1951.

⁷² Sugihara, Takashi. “Zoku Takeshima No Gyogyouken No Hensen Ni Tsuite (Continued: Transformations in Takeshima Fishing Rights).” *Web Takeshima* (2011.)
<http://www.pref.shimane.lg.jp/soumu/web-takeshima/takeshima04/takeshima04-1/takeshima04-230701.html>.

⁷³ Roh, Daniel. *Takeshima Mitsuyaku (the Takeshima Secret Pact)*. Tokyo: Soshisha, 2008

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion see Bukh, Alexander. “Shimane Prefecture, Tokyo and the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima: regional and national identities in Japan.” *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (2015): 47-70.



came to be exploited by politicians from across the political spectrum.

Despite the increase in public interest and the rise of Takeshima issue to the fore of Japan's political debates related to its relations with Korea, civic activism related to issue (here I exclude right-wing organizations like Zaitokukai) is relatively weak, especially if compared to Korea. Japan Conference (*Nippon kaigi*), Japan's biggest conservative organization with close ties to the hawkish wing of the LDP, embraced the Takeshima issue after the Takeshima Day uproar and occasionally submits petitions to the government demanding firmer stance on the issue, downgrading of economic ties with Korea, enhanced domestic education and other symbolic measures.⁷⁵ [*More research needed.*]

Here however I would like to focus on Shimane based activism. There is only one organization that is fully devoted to the Takeshima issue in Shimane and beyond. Called an "Association for Protecting Prefectural Territory Takeshima" (*kendo takeshima o mamoru kai* hereafter the Association) it was established in Shimane's prefectural capital Matsue in May 2004. The group is comprised of local activists who met while participating in local festive activities during the Emperor's visit to Shimane in March 2003 and headed by a local Shinto priest. Initially, the group was involved in petitioning activities related to people abducted by North Korea. According to the Association's chairman, Suwabe Yasutaka, the group decided to focus on Takeshima after they were expelled from the national Association for Saving North Korean Kidnapees (*sukū kai*) for breaching the non-partisanship rule and supporting a local politician.⁷⁶ Since the escalation in Takeshima related activities and the spread in the domestic interest in the issue, the Association, which according to their own estimates has about 1000 supporters nationwide, has played an important role in organizing events and attracting Diet MPs and scholars to participate in these events. According to the Association's secretary-general, the passage of Takeshima Day ordinance in 2005 is a result of their lobbying activities directed at the Prefectural Assembly members and a demonstration conducted in September 2004.⁷⁷ The actual role of the Association in the passage of the ordinance however is not fully clear. The first Takeshima related official petition submitted by the Group to the Prefectural Assembly dates back only to 2011.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the former Chairman of the Prefectural Assembly stated in an interview that the ordinance was initiated by the Federation of Prefectural Assembly Members for Establishing Territorial Rights over Takeshima and the Association's role in the passage of the ordinance was rather marginal.⁷⁹ It seems that it gained its relative importance after the ordinance's passage in March 2005 and the subsequent rise in the public interest in the issue.

Operating on a rather modest annual budget of about 1 million yen (about 10,000 USD) that

⁷⁵ Nippon Kaigi. "I Myon Bak Daitouryou No Takeshima Jouriku Ni Kan Suru Kougi Seimei (Protest Statement Regarding President Lee Myon Bak's Landing on Takehima)." Nippon Kaigi, (2012)
<https://www.nipponkaigi.org/tag/%E7%AB%B9%E5%B3%B6%E5%95%8F%E9%A1%8C?cat=3&tag=98>.

⁷⁶ Interview with Suwabe Yasutaka conducted in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture on 24.02.2015

⁷⁷ Interview with Kajitani Mariko conducted in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture on 15.01.2014

⁷⁸ Shimane Prefecture. "Heisei 23 Nendo Kara Heisei 26 Nendo No Seigan No Shinsa Kekka (Results of Petitions Review for 2011-2014)." edited by Prefectural Assembly. Matsue, 2015.
http://www.pref.shimane.lg.jp/gikai/ugoki/petition/seigan_h23-h26.html

⁷⁹ Interview with Hara Shigemitsu conducted in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture on 20.01.2014



comes from membership fees and donations⁸⁰, the Association organizes various Takeshima related events in Shimane and beyond and submits petitions to the Prefectural Assembly and to the national Diet. The demands of the Association from the government are identical to those of the Shimane Prefecture- firmer governmental stance on the issue, submission of the dispute to the International Court of Justice, enactment of a national Takeshima Day, nationwide educational activities on the Takeshima issue and establishment of a governmental agency similar to the one in charge of the Northern Territories.⁸¹

Another instance of local activism (broadly defined) includes publication of two children books related to Takeshima. The first book titled “A Tale of a Really Small Island”⁸² was published in Shimane as early as 1995 and re-published as an illustrated book in 2007. The book was written by a local school teacher. The motivation for writing the book came from a question once asked by one of his pupils, whether an island can really be a property of humans.⁸³ In the book the author anthropomorphizes the island and tells the story of Takeshima from its perspective. In a nut shell, the book tells the story of Takeshima living peacefully with sea lions and seagulls. The arrival of humans is presented as a tragedy for the island and its residents as they kill the sea lions and later bomb the island. There are no references to the nationalities of the humans but basically the story refers is to the Japanese sea lion hunting in early 20th century and the usage of the islands as bombing range by the US air in late 1940s.

The “Tale of a Really Small Island” received the regional Sanin Prize for Literature in 2009 and gained certain local level popularity. The reaction of Shimane Prefecture’s Takeshima Research Institute to the book is quite interesting. One of the members of the Research Institute compliments the author for his passion for education but at the same time criticizes the narrative for being too naïve. He argues the importance of the state for protecting people and the importance of territory that enables its existence, emphasizes the importance of international law as the basis for territorial acquisition and concludes by arguing that it is beyond doubt that Takeshima is Japanese territory.⁸⁴

Overall however, the publication of the “Tale of a Really Small Island” was largely ignored by the national media and the government alike. However, it indirectly stimulated a publication of another illustrated book, which gained nationwide recognition and was adopted by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of its Takeshima related educational campaign.

This second children book titled “An Island Where Mechi Lived”⁸⁵ was written by a resident

⁸⁰ Protect Prefectural Territory Takeshima Group. “Takeshima News.” 2. Matsue: Protect Prefectural Territory Takeshima Group, 20.7. 2011.

⁸¹ For example, Protect Prefectural Territory Takeshima Group. “Takeshima News.” 2. Matsue: Protect Prefectural Territory Takeshima Group, 20.10. 2012.

⁸² Miyamori, Kenji. *Aru Chiisana Chiisana Shima No Monogatari (a Tale of a Really Small Island)*. Shimane Prefecture: Poketto shuppan, 2007.

⁸³ Ibid., p.1

⁸⁴ Sugihara, Takashi. “Nihon No Ryoudo to Shite No Takeshima (Takeshima as Japan's Territory).” *Web Takeshima* (2010). Published electronically 7.1.2010.

http://www.pref.shimane.lg.jp/admin/pref/takeshima/web-takeshima/takeshima04/sugi/take_04g30.html

⁸⁵ Sugihara, Yumiko. *Mechi No Ita Shima (an Island Where Mechi Lived)* Matsue: San'in Chuo Shinbunsha,



of Oki Island, whose relatives used to engage in sea lion hunting on Takeshima. According to the author, one of the reasons for writing the book was to correct the “false” portrayal of the realities related to sea lion hunting as portrayed in the “Tale of a Really Small Island.”⁸⁶ The book presents a rather idyllic story of the Japanese sea lion hunting on Takeshima showing the sea lions as being captured peacefully for zoos and circuses, and playing happily with local children. The narrative moves to talk about the richness of natural resources on the islets and the happy life of Oki’s fishermen before, suddenly, they could not fish around Takeshima any more. Similarly to the “Tale” there are no references to nationalities in the story but in the appendix there is brief outline of Japan’s official position on the dispute and its history.

How then does this Takeshima related narrative contribute to Japan’s ontological security undermined by Korea’s political and economic development? Basically, it can be argued that it recreates the hierarchical relationship in Japan/Korea dichotomy. Economy and politics however are replaced with law and nature as the main instances of difference through which the hierarchy is established. In other words, law abiding Japan that lives in harmony with the nature is juxtaposed with law breaking Korea that destroys the natural environment. Interestingly, the argument about the damages to Shimane’s fishing industry and to marine resources in general caused by Korean fishermen has become an integral part of Shimane Prefecture’s Takeshima related campaign. Up until the passage of the Takeshima Day ordinance the territorial dispute and fisheries related problems that stemmed from the New Fisheries Agreement were seen as separate issues by prefectural authorities.⁸⁷ Only from 2006 onwards, that the two issues came to be presented as inter-related in the prefectural campaign.⁸⁸

Taiwan: Defending the Diaoyutai

The extent scholarship on the Diaoyutai/Diaoyui/Senkaku dispute tends to analyze it in the context of China (PRC) and Japan’s relations. No doubt, today the dispute is one of if not the main source of friction in China-Japan’s relations and the focus on these countries is understandable. This said though, this approach tends to overlook the initial centrality of Taiwan in the dispute. Namely, it was Taiwan’s government that made the first claim to the islands in early 1970s and China’s own claim was very much a response to Taiwan in the context of their rivalry over representation of China. Hence here I would like to focus on Taiwan’s Baodiao (protect the Diaoyutai) Movement in early 1970s and explore its role in the critical situation endured by the KMT. *[To be expanded]*

2014. “Mecha” is a local dialect term for sea lion.

⁸⁶ Interview with Sugihara Yumiko, conducted on Oki Island, Goka Village on 29.01.2014

⁸⁷ For example, see pages 1 and 44 in Shimane Prefecture. *Teian/Yōbōsho* [Proposals and Demands], Matsue: Shimane Prefecture Prefectural Administration Documents Division (2002).

⁸⁸ Shimane Prefecture “Takeshima no ryōdoken no sōki kakuritsu ni tsuite” [Regarding swift establishment of territorial rights to Takeshima] in *Kuni he no jūten yōbō* [Key priority demands to the central government], Matsue: Shimane Prefecture Prefectural Administration Documents Division



Tentative Conclusion

This paper argued that territorial disputes activism in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan is not necessarily related to nationalism directed at the other party to the dispute. While the activists do mobilize negative images of the “other” in their campaigns, the narratives promoted by them address broader structural ontological issues that can be traced to the Cold War structure. *[To be expanded]* ■



Author's Biography

Alexander Bukh

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Dr. Alexander Bukh is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations. Alexander was born in Moscow, grew up in Israel and spent over 20 years living in Asia (mainly Japan but also Thailand and Korea) before moving to New Zealand in 2012. Prior to his current appointment at Victoria University, he was an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tsukuba University, Japan.

Research Interests. Alexander published numerous articles and book chapters on Japan's national identity and foreign policy. His first monograph examined the role of Russia in Japan's identity and foreign policy. Alexander's current research focuses on territorial disputes in Northeast Asia. This project seeks to explore the role of civil society groups engaged in territorial dispute related activism in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan in shaping their respective state's foreign policies.

Selected Publications

- "Japan's National Identity, Territorial Disputes and Sub-State Actors: Northern Territories/South Kuriles and Takeshima/Dokdo Compared", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, May 2013, 32, 171-186
- "Constructing Japan's "Northern Territories": Domestic Actors, Interests and the Symbolism of the Disputed Islands", *International Relations of Asia-Pacific*, August 2012, 12(3), 483-509
- "Russian Perceptions of Japan and China in the Aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution: A Comparative Case Study of Boris Pil'niak's Travelogue", *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, September 2012, 26(3), 345-355
- "Reception of the Revisionist Historical Manga in Japan", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, September 2012, 1-16
- Yaponia: Nazionalnaya identichnost' i Vneshnya Politika: Rossiya kak Drugoe Yaponii (Japan's Identity and Foreign Policy: Russia as Japan's 'Other' in Russian), Moscow: Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 280 pp November 2012
- "National Identity and Race in Post-Revolutionary Russia: Pil'niak's Travelogues from Japan and China" in Demel and Kowner eds, *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions*, Leiden: Brill Modern East Asia in Global Historical Perspective series, 2012, pp.177-198
- "Contemporary Japanese Foreign Policy" in McKercher ed, *The Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft*, London: Routledge, 2011, pp.96-106

— From the website of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Knowledge-Net for a Better World

- This working paper is the result of the EAI's main academic and educational activity, the *EAI Fellows Program on Peace, Governance, and Development in East Asia*, which is supported by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange of Taiwan, YBM/Korea International School, and W1°. It is presented at the seminars and lectures hosted by partner institutions of the program. Subsequently it is distributed to those audiences. The PDF document of this article can also be viewed via the EAI website by the wider public. Any citation or quotation is prohibited without prior permission of the author and the EAI.
- The EAI Fellows Program is a scholarly exchange program, for the purpose of promoting East Asian studies and encouraging scholarly exchanges among East Asia specialists. For the information about the program, please visit our website, [\[EAI Fellows Program\]](#).
- This paper and other EAI reports can be found on our website, [\[EAI Working Papers\]](#). The contents of this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the East Asia Institute.
- Young-Hwan Shin, the Executive Director of EAI Fellows Program
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 107) fellowships@eai.or.kr
- Typeset by Young-Hwan Shin

