

REVIEW

Features of Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia

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Belated Territorial Disputes

Although territorial expansion was an idea common in the past century in Europe, territorial disputes are still taking place today in Northeast Asia. Great Britain—once a colonial giant that expanded its territory by 100 times—has today returned to an island state. Germany twice used military power to pursue its hegemony, but ended up facing defeat and national division. As the territorial disputes in Northeast Asia have heightened the security tensions, the economic dynamics in the region have created an unstable security base. This asymmetry exacerbates the security dilemma because the economy effectively contributes to fueling an arms build-up. To address the territorial issue, we need to identify the specific characteristics of the problem in Northeast Asia. Several recent studies can help in undertaking this task.

An interesting publication in this regard is Dr. Richard Bush's book *The Perils of Proximity: China–Japan Security Relations*. Dr. Bush, director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, served almost five years as the chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan. He has sought to find the reason behind the territorial disputes between China and Ja-

pan by exploring each nation's domestic politics. He has approached the issue from an institutional perspective. Meanwhile, Chien-Peng Chung's article "Resolving China's Island Disputes: A Two-Level Game Analysis" focuses on the role of actors, with particular reference to their interactions at both the international and domestic levels. Alexander Bukh's article, titled "Constructing Japan's 'Northern Territories': Domestic Actors, Interests, and the Symbolism of the Disputed Islands," also deals with actors, but focuses on the domestic purview. He used a constructivist perspective to address the ideational aspect of Japanese demand concerning the Kuril territorial dispute.

These publications reflect two mainstream approaches dealing with social phenomena in contemporary academia—namely, structure and actor. The set of factors related to the structural approach includes geography, history, and institution, among others. Structure is considered a long-term factor that plays a role in the environmental influence of the behavior of actors. The set of actor-related factors includes central and local governments, nationalist NGOs, and international mediators. Accordingly, the unique features of territorial disputes in Northeast Asia can be explained from these two perspectives.

Maritime Disputes

The territorial issues in Northeast Asia have the characteristics of maritime disputes. Land borders are marked by mountains or rivers that more or less clearly separate two countries whereas no natural frontier is evident in the sea. Not surprisingly, no serious territorial issues exist among Korea, China, and Russia, and the territorial dispute between China and Russia has been successfully settled. Meanwhile, Japan as a maritime state has territorial disputes with all of its neighboring states.

The importance of islands has considerably increased since the enactment of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1994. This treaty permits states to claim up to 200 miles around islands as their territorial waters or exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Yet Article 121 of the UNCLOS states that rocks that cannot sustain human habitation or economic life have no EEZ. Maritime territory is also important for making sea lanes secure, which is especially important for Korea, Japan, and China as they are all heavily dependent on international trade.

Divergent Regime Types of Conflicting Parties

The regime types of Northeast Asian countries are so diverse that democratic and

authoritarian states exist together. Dr. Bush has broadly surveyed the domestic politics of China and Japan, including their military institutions, bureaucratic organizations, and government's decision-making processes. Based on these divergent features, he has argued that these institutional factors significantly influence the perilous relationship between the two countries. With regard to civil–military relations, Northeast Asian countries show intriguing contrasts in such a way that the military has too much autonomy in China, has too little autonomy in Japan, and controls the state in Russia.

Although the regime types converge on democracy, the security tension concerning territorial disputes might not be likely to diminish. Chung argued that, due to the developing pluralism, it will be more difficult to make and conduct foreign policy in China in the future, especially with regard to sensitive issues like territorial disputes. He contrasted the recurrent bargaining failures over Diaoyu/Senkaku with successful bargaining with Russia over the Zhenbao/Damansky border area, finding an explanation for the dispute settlement between China and Russia in the possible disconnection between governments and their domestic nationalist groups.

After the Soviet government expressed willingness to yield the disputed islands along the Ussuri River to China, the border negotiations proceeded rather smoothly and achieved results within four years because the central government in the Soviet period exercised its ruling power effectively whereas the sub-state nationalist groups such as local governments or nationalist NGOs were not yet accustomed to influencing foreign policies. In the case of the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, Deng Xiaoping could shelve the territorial claim when China established diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972. As the political system is becoming more pluralistic today it is difficult for the Chinese government to suppress the growing voices on sovereignty issues in society.

Chung explained Chinese behavior toward its territorial disputes based on Robert Putnam's two-level games framework. According to the two-level games theory, foreign policy makers involved in international bargaining have to negotiate not only with their foreign negotiating counterparts (level 1), but also with domestic constituents (level 2) who can block the deal at home. He explained that the territorial dispute between China and Russia was successfully settled because the negotiation was a one-level game taking place at the international level. In contrast, the dispute between China and Japan has begun to take on the aspect of a two-level game. In this case, the size of the win-sets in the international negotiation has been reduced by domestic-level interests shaping state leaders' foreign policy choices with respect to territorial disputes.

Dr. Bush agreed with Chung's view, observing that under pressure from the

public, the Chinese leadership has increasingly reacted to the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute in a vigorous fashion. Thus, democratization in China would play a counter-productive role in preventing the escalation of any clash from the current island dispute.

These findings from the Northeast Asian cases study challenge the theory of democratic peace. According to this theory, political leaders in democracies are more responsive to public opinion than their authoritarian counterparts, especially on sensitive issues like territorial sovereignty, which triggers nationalistic groups to politically mobilize people negatively affected by any compromise.

Economic Interdependence of Conflicting Parties

In addition to the democratic peace theory, the theory of economic interdependence does not account for the Northeast Asian puzzle of why territorial conflicts have worsened as cooperative economic efforts have increased over the last decades. The increasing trade and investment in the region and the collective efforts of economic integration seeking a trilateral FTA today have not helped reduce the security tension. This disproves the liberal argument that economic interactions should bring peace to international relations because no country is willing to carry out a war with its economically important partners.

Nevertheless, the deepening economic interdependence among the Northeast Asian states is likely to have some positive effect of limiting the damage of their broader relationship. It is expected that the risk of a territorial dispute escalating into a military conflict will remain relatively small because increasing economic interdependence will induce not only political leaders, but also domestic groups to prefer cooperation to confrontation.

Nationalistic Sentiment

The main reason why both the theory of democratic peace and the theory of economic interdependence can hardly be applied to the territorial dispute in Northeast Asia lies in the prevailing public nationalism. The territorial conflicts in the region were created by the occupation and return of Japan. In China and Korea, anti-Japanese nationalism strongly influences policy outcomes. People in these countries have particularly negative historical memories due to tragic experiences in the past century. In the long term historically, a Sino-centric World Order locating China in the center and Korea in the semi-periphery has been established in Northeast Asia.

The Chinese and Korean people feel a deep sense of national humiliation because they were defeated by the peripheral Japan and their weakness was exploited.

Interestingly, the defeated nationalism also plays a role in the Japanese territorial claim. Japan persistently demanded the return of four of the Kuril Islands occupied by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of its defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. They wrapped the territorial issue in national identity so that the four islands came to be known in Japan as the Northern Territories from 1960 onwards. Bukh explored the formation process of the idea of the Northern Territories and sought to contribute to constructivist study devoted to the role of the ideational factor in foreign policy.

The symbolic meaning attached to the islands was generated by the fusion of different interests of various domestic actors. The Hokkaido Prefecture advocated the return of all the Kuril Islands whereas the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government supported the return of the four islands in the struggle with the Socialist opposition party. The local NGOs were interested in improving their economic conditions and, thus, were occasionally engaged in the territorial claim.

After the idea of the Northern Territories was entrenched in the domestic discourse, it became a national mission. Consequently, the stance of the Japanese government in the territorial dispute with Russia became consistently non-compromising. Therefore, Japan's refusal to accept a compromising solution to the dispute cannot be explained by material interests, but rather by the ideational value.

The history of Europe is a history of territorial war. After this long experience of war, Europe overcame the nationalistic sentiments and today enjoys peace and prosperity by removing borders. Northeast Asia needs to share such values as transnational cooperation. Generally, no country is willing to make the slightest concessions in territorial issues. Thus, the revision of borders cannot be a solution to territorial disputes. In Northeast Asia, we first need to respect the principle of territorial integrity. The European experience shows that ending territorial disputes helps move on to regional integration.