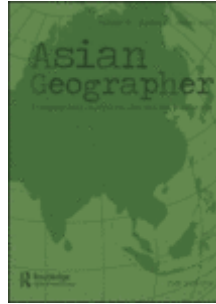


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Media discourses of territorial disputes in Japan

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Media discourses of territorial disputes in Japan

This paper deconstructs Japanese media discourses of Japan's territorial disputes in selected newspapers in English—namely *The Asahi Shimbun*, *The Japan News* and *The Japan Times* from 2002 to 2018. Embedded in critical geopolitics, content and discourse analyses were conducted with the lexicostatistical tool AntConc, using articles available in the LexisNexis and Kikozu II Visual databases. The outcomes illustrate that nationalist geopolitical imaginations are popular among all researched newspapers as demonstrated by a strong dominance of solely Japanese toponyms in the discourses as well as a focus on supporting Japan's obstinate approach rather than promoting solutions.

Keywords: Japan, territorial disputes, geopolitics, discourse, Japanese media

Japan's territorial claims in a changing region

The “Atlantic” or “American Century” has come to an end, and Asia is the new dominant worldwide region; the “Asian”, “Pacific” or “Indo-Pacific Century” has commenced. This post-millennial shift in the center of the global economy from the Atlantic to the Pacific receives a lot of attention in public and political discourses. Whether it is justified or not, Asia is portrayed in various instances as the focal point of emerging countries, China being the prime example. Asia is where economic development is highly dynamic, and it is where states gain political power. It is where differing strategic interests collide, and where tiny pieces of land may trigger conflicts. Japan's claims are situated amidst this scenario with its neighbors, sparking nationalist argumentation and contributing to diplomatic quarrels (Wirth 2016, 80–81). Although territorial disputes are fairly common bilateral interactions in today's nation-state ordered world, with many examples all around the globe, Japan offers an interesting object of study. Imperial history, bilateral relations and recent power shifts combine to constitute major influence upon its territorial disputes, in which its regional neighbors have an increasingly assertive stance.

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3 The setting of Japan's territorial disputes is often seen as a product of the post-
4 World War II international order following the collapse of the Greater East Asian Co-
5 Prosperity Sphere. The territorial shrinkage of Japan to the four core islands and
6 archipelagos with a number of surrounding and remote islets has been reality over the
7 past seven decades. Three different territories are the subject of bilateral territorial
8 disputes: Japan argues with the Russian Federation over the Kuril Islands referred to as
9 the Northern Territories/Hoppo Ryodo (北方領土) in Japan, with the Republic of Korea
10 over the Liancourt Rocks called Takeshima (竹島) in Japan, and with the People's
11 Republic of China (PRC or China) and *de facto* Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan)
12 over the Pinnacle Islands with their Japanese toponym of the Senkaku Islands (尖閣群
13 島).¹ These disputes constitute major issues in Japan's foreign policy and are embedded
14 in its geopolitical discourses.

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17 This article wishes to closely examine how these conflicts are reported and
18 discussed in Japan's domestic newspapers aimed at an English-speaking audience and
19 thus, intends to track the imaginations utilized in the discourses. Firstly, a brief
20 literature review introduces similar studies, followed by the theoretical framework and
21 methodology. Secondly, a short description of the key information relating to the
22 disputes under study is provided. Thirdly, the empirical section elaborates on the
23 discourses in Japanese media in various instances. Finally, reflections on the whole
24 paper and possible avenues for future investigations are presented.

25 26 27 **Mass media and critical geopolitics**

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30 Much research has shed light on the complicated territorial disputes in East Asia. In the
31 case of Japan, various studies concentrate on displaying the conflicts in historical,
32 political, juridical and economic terms, with varying intensity between the three
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3 disputes. The most significant is the dispute with China and Taiwan, which is
4 prominently portrayed within academia, while the issues with Russia and Korea are
5 subordinate. Some of these studies will be used in the brief overview of the disputes.
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7 Discourse analyses have been performed predominantly in the fields of communication
8 and political sciences. In the two subsequent paragraphs, five papers dealing with
9 contemporary discourses in Japan will provide useful insights. All of them focus on the
10 dispute around the Pinnacle Islands.
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20 Firstly, Chan (2012) examines eight editorials/opinions of the China Daily and
21 Daily Yomiuri in September 2010 with regard to the newspapers' underlying
22 ideologies. His qualitative approach compares them through a critical discourse
23 analysis, with the finding that both sides were invoking a collective memory for
24 legitimization and “grouping”: i.e., embracing identity politics in opposition to the other
25 (Chan 2012, 374–75). This includes the devaluing of the opposing party. Furthermore,
26 Yennie Lindgren and Lindgren (2017) interviewed four Japanese politicians and
27 researchers leading the security discourse in 2014. Their convictions link to Chan's, and
28 identified a dichotomous construction between China and Japan, with a strong
29 “othering”. The Japanese interviewees contrasted democracy with dictatorship,
30 peacefulness with aggression, and law-abiding behavior with unruly behavior, moving
31 Japan towards the “Western community” of states (Yennie Lindgren and Lindgren
32 2017, 397–98). Hagström and Hanssen (2016, 283) studied discussions about China in
33 the Japanese Diet in 1972 and 2009–2012. While Japan's identity is continuously
34 connected with peace, China is currently displayed as a menacing counterpart, which
35 enables Japanese attempts to reshape their traditional peaceful image in order to cope
36 with this issue. The dispute over the Pinnacle Islands serves as legitimization for an
37 increasingly confrontational discourse.
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3 Additionally, one chapter in Hollihan's (2014) book comes quite close to the
4 scope of the present thesis: Suzuki and Murai (2014) evaluate the dispute with China in
5 Japanese legacy media. Although they do not disclose their methodology, e.g., what,
6 why and how the articles analyzed were selected, they identify two dominant
7 representations of Japan: Firstly, in accordance with Yennie Lindgren and Lindgren,
8 Japan is portrayed as the victim of the dispute, and as the rational counterpart to an
9 aggressive China (Suzuki and Murai 2014, 146). Secondly, despite this rather defensive
10 imagination, the newspapers disseminate a nationalist stance and criticize the
11 Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) for its mismanagement of the dispute during its rule
12 from 2009 to 2012 (Suzuki and Murai 2014, 150). The same authors further researched
13 how nationalist views are shaped on social media. Radical activists, called "Net Uyoku"
14 (Murai and Suzuki 2014, 172), voiced strong anti-Chinese and anti-Korean sentiments
15 as well as opposed the foreign policy of the DPJ. They contributed to a conservative
16 shift and supported the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) in the 2012 elections
17 (Murai and Suzuki 2014, 187).

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39 Through the above review, we identified three issues. Firstly, a systematic
40 analysis of Japanese media is missing from the Anglophone literature, and only two
41 articles reviewed were concerned with Japanese newspapers. Secondly, every paper is
42 centered on the dispute Japan has with China and Taiwan. There is a distinct lack of
43 studies into the discourse surrounding Russia and South Korea or comparisons between
44 all three conflicts. Thirdly, the authors mentioned have either a background in
45 communication or political sciences. Political geographers do not seem to be involved
46 in discourse analyses of Japanese territorial disputes yet. In Japanese academia itself,
47 critical geopolitics is still quite a new field, and has only started to receive attention in
48 the last decade (Yamazaki et al. 2012). This disinterest is certainly disappointing
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3 considering the importance of the territorial disputes for national identification and
4 geopolitical discourses. However, scholars of critical geopolitics have engaged with
5 mass media in different contexts to study popular consumption of geopolitical
6 imaginations. Dittmer (2005) conducted a content analysis regarding the depiction of
7 “Central Europe” in newspapers published in English, Mawdsley (2008) deconstructed
8 the representations of China and Africa in British broadsheets, and Gong and Le Billon
9 (2014) studied media framing during the so-called food crisis in 2007/2008. This paper
10 follows the conceptual frameworks of these studies to examine the case of Japan’s
11 territorial disputes.
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25 Like critical geopolitics in general, the following theoretical baseline builds
26 upon a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, defining it not only as a summary of
27 speeches, publications or other linguistic materials but also of practices (Foucault 2002,
28 49–50). Foucault rejects essentialist views, i.e., the elements of discourses are not
29 existent *per se*. Instead, discourses are constituted by representations and practices in
30 society, which are strengthened through repeated reproduction. Thus, some discursive
31 formations are hegemonic and can appear almost “natural” (Reuber 2014, 222–23).
32 Although these representations can be very powerful, they are still changeable over
33 time. Therefore, from a poststructuralist perspective, the goal is to pinpoint
34 inconsistencies in the discursive representations and practices (Glasze and Matissek
35 2009, 33). Various scholars apply this theoretical groundwork to the field of geopolitics
36 and question the ideological views of the world by Haushofer, Mackinder, Huntington
37 and many others (Agnew 2003, Dalby and Ó Tuathail 1998, Ó Tuathail 1996). Critical
38 geopolitics attempts to deconstruct geopolitical imaginations with the premise that these
39 are neither absolute truths nor natural implications, but produced, reproduced and
40 artificial. Hence, the dissemination of geopolitical discourses takes place on three
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3 levels: formal, practical and popular (Ó Tuathail 2006, 8). The formal level is concerned
4 with spin doctors and other influential actors in the background. The practical level
5 includes performers of statecraft, from foreign ministers to generals. The popular level
6 encompasses mass media and culture, among others, which constitutes the scope of this
7 paper. These spheres do not stand alone but are intertwined and can influence each other
8 (Mawdsley 2008, 511).
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17 Out of many possible objects of study, language is certainly the most popular
18 one in critical geopolitics. Articles, speeches, and proclamations are commonly
19 researched. Then, for geographers, the spatial aspect of discourses comes into play. The
20 period of imperialism may now be a part of history, but nation-states worldwide still
21 define their territory as an essential part of their dominion, making geographical
22 imaginations a vigorous tool for them to legitimize their current territorial extent, their
23 rejection to external and internal territorial claims, or their pursuits for more territories
24 in territorial disputes. Explaining and deconstructing these imaginations is only possible
25 if their fictitious and alterable character—which does not diminish their impact—is
26 considered. Territorial disputes are in this perspective not simply conflicts about control
27 over a piece of land, but they are manifestations of contrasting geopolitical
28 imaginations. Toponyms play a crucial role in this regard. They are more than just
29 names for geographical places; they are “conceptualized space” (Lefebvre 1991, 38).
30 Naming disputed territories by one term or another intrinsically incorporates affiliations.
31 Is it the Sea of Japan or the East Sea? Is it Takeshima, Dokdo or the Liancourt Rocks?
32 In Dittmer’s (2005, 78) words: “In this way, places in geopolitics are socially
33 constructed, in large part to fit the needs of those actors imbued with, and seeking,
34 greater relational power.” A prime example of these manifestations is maps. The most
35 prominent web-based map service, Google Maps, accommodates each national
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3 geopolitical narrative depending on the location of its viewer (Medzini 2017, 49).

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5 Newspapers contribute to these popular geopolitical discourses and furthermore can be
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7 linked to the toponyms as our analysis will demonstrate.
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10 Japan's disputes solely encompass islands; it does not share a land border with
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12 any other state. Despite the essentially non-escalating character of conflicts around
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14 islands, the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas being the most prominent post-World War
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16 II exceptions, in most cases solutions have stagnated (Gibler 2017, 201). Hassner (2007,
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18 113) identifies "entrenchments" with material, functional or symbolic character; in other
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20 words, disputants entrench themselves through connecting territory materially with
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22 infrastructure, specifying the functional extent of their claims, or symbolically linking
23
24 the dispute to ideological components, such as history, heritage or religion. The last
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26 process can specifically be attributed to Japan. Looking at East Asia in general, all kinds
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28 of entrenchment are apparent: Military bases are built, islets nationalized, or historic
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30 references emphasized. The ambitions behind these actions are often ascribed to having
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32 strategic value; fishing grounds, oil and gas deposits, control of trading routes or
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34 symbols of power. A small formation of sand or rocks can lead to serious diplomatic
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36 quarrels.
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42 The issues surrounding toponyms and entrenchments exemplify two notions that
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44 can emerge from geopolitical discourses regarding territorial disputes. We introduced
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46 critical geopolitics as a theoretical baseline, in a rather simplified and scaled down
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48 manner due to the limited scope of this article. The research subject is Japanese
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50 discourses around territorial disputes, not limited to one but including all three of them,
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52 making comparisons between the discourses possible. Thus, the leading question of this
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54 study is: How are the disputes constituted in the media? We approach this question by
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56 addressing a series of secondary questions, including: Are there differences or links
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3 between the representations of these disputes? Are there differences in their
4 representation across newspapers? What is the role of toponyms in these
5 representations? How are the respective states portrayed? Can symbolic entrenchments
6 be observed in the discourses?
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13 **Analysis of contents and discourses**

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16 Three English-publishing newspapers—*The Asahi Shimbun*, *The Japan News* and *The*
17 *Japan Times*—from the 1st January 2002 to 31st December 2018 provide the foundation
18 for the analysis. The time frame is limited by the availability of articles in the databases.
19 Focusing on the entire 17 years has the disadvantage of losing sight of single events that
20 could have influenced the discourses; yet, major incidents are visible, as this study
21 shows. Additionally, changing meanings of terms are lost, so a comparison of different
22 time frames would be required. Nevertheless, considering the limited extent of this
23 paper, these constraints are unavoidable, as is the use of English media, taking into
24 account the authors' language barriers. However, this Anglophone focus can be
25 qualified: While journalists may try to please an international readership differently to
26 the domestic one, they are still bound by the discursive frameworks of the newspaper
27 agency. If a conservative newspaper does not publish radical articles in the eyes of their
28 editors for the national audience of Japan, they should not act differently for a foreign
29 one.
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50 When working with Japanese newspapers, the two largest—*The Asahi Shimbun*
51 and *The Yomiuri Shimbun*—provide a solid basis, as for example Mikami, Takeshita,
52 and Kawabata (1999), Suzuki and Murai (2014) and Takekawa (2007) used them in
53 their analyses. The two companies not only publish newspapers but also own radio
54 stations and television networks, proving their widespread influence on discourses
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(Suzuki and Murai 2014, 142). Hence, their varying backgrounds must be considered.

The Asahi Shimbun is the second largest newspaper in Japan, publishing daily.

Compared to the others, it is perceived to be a rather left-leaning and pacifist

publication. *The Japan News* is the English version of the largest Japanese newspaper,

The Yomiuri Shimbun, having a more conservative to center-right stance. Despite being

located at different ends of the political spectrum, both promote a nationalist view of the

nation (Takekawa 2007, 78). *The Japan Times* is not linked to any bigger network, but

is the oldest and largest English publication in Japan. Thus, its audience is more

international.

The database of LexisNexis² allows access to all articles from *The Japan Times*

and *The Japan News* during the examined period, while another source, Kikuzo II

Visual³, was used for *The Asahi Shimbun*. In both cases, duplicate articles were

excluded, and no regulation of minimum or maximum word length or type of article,

e.g. editorial, opinion, etc., was made. We implemented a two-step process to identify

how the discourses are being shaped.

Firstly, a comparative content analysis was conducted, assessing the number of articles using different names for the islands, e.g., Takeshima–Dokdo–Liancourt Rocks.

Additionally, differences between the newspapers were examined. This approach deals

with simple proportions, yet it is a valid study into how the disputes are coded in the

discourses, similar to the works of Dittmer (2005, 81) and Gong and Le Billon (2014,

296). Although it basically follows the same procedure as a discursive frequency

analysis, the theoretical background differs. Content analyses imply that the studied

keywords incorporate one clearly identifiable meaning; in other words, the keywords

are interpreted as “indicators of a ‘social reality’” (Dzudzek et al. 2009, 237). In

contrast, a discursive understanding emphasizes the multitude and discrepancies of

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3 meanings. For the first step, it is sufficient to speak of a content analysis, since the
4
5 various geographical terms themselves are not questioned further.
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8 Secondly, an analysis of collocations draws explicitly on discursive
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10 assumptions. To disclose how the disputes are embedded in the discourses, it is
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12 necessary to look at the surrounding terms. “Collocation is therefore a way of
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14 understanding meanings and associations between words which are otherwise difficult
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16 to ascertain from a small-scale analysis of a single text. [...] So in order to understand
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18 the meanings of words, we have to compare them in relation to other words” (Baker
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20 2006, 96). In political geography, this approach has been utilized by Glasze (2007) for
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22 discourses about Francophonie. The usual working process is selecting the range of
23
24 words left and right from a key term and assigning—based on statistical calculations—
25
26 values to significant neighboring words. In this analysis, the three keywords chosen
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28 were the Japanese toponyms “Northern”, “Takeshima” and “Senkaku”. We choose so
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30 for two reasons: first, the Japanese representation of the territories is studied, second, as
31
32 the content analysis shows, non-Japanese terms are only rarely used. Seven words to the
33
34 left and to the right of each keyword were included, with the intention of developing an
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36 understanding of the previous and following sentences. For “Northern”, eight words on
37
38 the right side were chosen as it is usually followed by the term “Territories”. As a
39
40 statistical method, Mutual Information (MI) was chosen, which can be summarized as
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42 comparing expected and observed occurrences of near words and pointing out the
43
44 significant differences: “the higher the number, the stronger the collocation.” (Baker
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46 2006, 101). This process was done using the free lexicostatistical tool AntConc⁴, which
47
48 utilizes the equations of Stubbs (1995) for MI. The final visualizations were created
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50 manually, inspired by the work of Glasze and Weber (2014) on the stigmatization of the
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52 *banlieues* in *Le Monde*.
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3 In summary, firstly, the proportional usage of terms is examined among the
4 disputes and the newspapers, displaying what terms were mentioned and how often;
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6 secondly, the significant words surrounding the key terms disclose how the discourses
7
8 are constituted. The methods are part of a macro-level evaluation and stronger corpus-
9
10 driven evaluation, hence dealing with statistical values and providing an extensive
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12 overview (Mattissek, Pfaffenbach, and Reuber 2013, 272–74).
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18 **Japan's territorial disputes**

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20 One final point should be provided to clarify the research subject, and this is the
21
22 territorial disputes themselves. As mentioned, Japan has three of them (Figure 1); each
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24 will be briefly described.
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29 The conflict with Russia over the Kuril Islands (TD1), specifically the Northern
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31 Territories or South Kuril Islands, which consists of the islands of Etorofu/Iturup,
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33 Kunashiri/Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai, began with the signing of the St.
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35 Petersburg Treaty in 1875. This assigned all of the Kurils to Japan and Sakhalin to
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37 Russia (Weitz 2011, 139). However, after World War II, the Soviet Union took control
38
39 of the Kuril Islands according to the Treaty of Yalta, but without legal legitimization
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41 (Cugrov 1999, 2–3). Despite some efforts during the Cold War to resolve the conflict
42
43 from both sides, no solution has yet been found. Tokyo insisted on the return of all islets
44
45 and refused the possible return of only two, a position which was not accepted by the
46
47 Soviet Union (Hara 1998). Recently the goal of signing a formal peace treaty renewed
48
49 interest in solving TD1 among the political leaders of both countries, but failed to reach
50
51 a conclusion in early 2019. Where Japanese media was speaking of “focusing first on
52
53 the return of Shikotan and the Habomai islet group” (The Japan Times 2018), the
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55 Russian side stated: “the return of Shikotan and the Habomai islet group may be
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3 enough, indicating that the two nations could amicably split the archipelago” (Sputnik
4 2018). This illustrates the different perspectives on how to deal with the islands. In
5
6 earlier Russian geopolitical considerations, territories could be handed over in exchange
7
8 for economic benefits and political influence, challenging the American presence in
9
10 Japan. However, under Putin’s “pragmatic patriotism” (Richardson 2018, 16) territorial
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12 integrity is upheld, diminishing but not eradicating the chances of a solution.
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18 The struggle over the Liancourt Rocks (TD2), Takeshima in Japanese and
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20 Dokdo in Korean, originates from early in the 20th century. With the submission of the
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22 Korean Peninsula in 1905 and its annexation in 1910, the Liancourt Rocks were
23
24 integrated into Japan’s prefectural system (Fern 2005, 80). After 1945, the USA took
25
26 temporary control of the islands, before the Republic of Korea (ROK) effected
27
28 management. The San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 proclaimed that Japan
29
30 “renounces all right, title and claim to Korea, including the islands of Quelpart, Port
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32 Hamilton and Dagelet” (UN 1951, 48) but did not mention the Liancourt Rocks
33
34 explicitly. TD2 has remained unresolved ever since; both parties claim the islets as their
35
36 territory and present their arguments with historical evidence dating back long before
37
38 the 20th century. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Korea provides videos and a
39
40 website in twelve languages to disseminate their point of view (MOFA ROK 2013),
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42 while Japan similarly states that it “has consistently held the position that Takeshima is
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44 indisputably an inherent part of the territory of Japan in light of historical facts and
45
46 based on international law” (MOFA Japan 2017). The diplomatic intensity between
47
48 both sides is exemplified by South Korea’s denial of the existence of any dispute and
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50 refusal to settle the conflict through the International Court of Justice (Wiegand and
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52 Choi 2017, 238).
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3 Looking further south, the third dispute evolved around the Pinnacle, or
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5 Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai Islands (TD3). The differing historiography makes it
6
7 difficult to outline an objective reconstruction of events: Japan argues the islands were
8
9 *terra nullius*, while the PRC sees them as a historical part of Taiwan, and Taiwan voices
10
11 its own demands. Nonetheless, with the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, Japan took
12
13 charge of the islets until the end of World War II (Osti 2013, 3–5). The immediate
14
15 postwar interest in the area subsequently declined. However, in the 1960s TD3 arose to
16
17 more prominence but was mostly limited to diplomatic encounters, whereas in the
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19 1990s the public interest in the issue increased (Fox 2016, 317). In 2012 the dispute was
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21 fueled by the decision of the Japanese government, then run by the DPJ under Prime
22
23 Minister Yoshihiko Noda, to purchase the islets from private hands and *de facto*
24
25 nationalized them, sparking protests in the PRC (Nagy 2013, 50). A similar
26
27 intransigency as in TD2 can be observed, as Japan like Korea does not admit that the
28
29 territory is disputed at all (Wirth 2016, 81). Administration of the Pinnacle Islands is
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31 still undertaken by Japan and recurring incidents, e.g. violations of airspace or naval
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33 confrontations, indicate a continuous struggle, connected to China's growing
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35 interventionist policies and the subdued claims of Taiwan.
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43 All three disputes have distinctive characteristics that should be noted before
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45 continuing with any analysis. TD1 concerns a larger population, thus increasing its
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47 importance in Japanese politics (Lee 2002, 69). On the other hand, the area has various
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49 strategic values for Russia, e.g. its natural resources and its geographical position on the
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51 way from the Sea of Okhotsk and to the Pacific Ocean. Additionally, its resolution
52
53 requires the signing of a formal peace treaty from the Japanese side. TD2 reflects the
54
55 difficult history of Japan with the war crimes committed by Imperial Japan during the
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57 occupation of Korea, and the continuing tensions in regards to this past, such as those
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3 provoked by the annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by some Japanese politicians. The
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5 dispute therefore bears great symbolic character, whereas economic arguments over
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7 fishing grounds or gas deposits are deemed pretextual (Bong 2013, 192–93). TD3 is the
8
9 only conflict in which Japan controls the disputed area. Aside from strategic interests,
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11 narratives are popularized which fosters nationalist sentiments often represented in the
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13 media, similar as in TD2 (Emmers 2009, 63).
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18 **The usage of toponyms**

19 *Comparison of quantities in dispute discourses*

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22 The first part of the analysis is the examination of the frequency of appearance of
23
24 different toponyms in the newspapers. For each conflict, we consider in turn the
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26 toponyms most commonly used in the Anglophone world, Japan and
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28 Russia/Korea/China/Taiwan, i.e., Kuril Islands/Northern Territories/South Kuril Islands,
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30 Liancourt Rocks/Takeshima/Dokdo and Pinnacle Islands/Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai
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32 (Table 1). The filtering of articles takes into account different written forms of a
33
34 toponym, e.g., South/Southern Kurils, Tokdo/Tokto or Tiaooyutai, split up into various
35
36 combinations (Figure 2).⁵ Generally, the discourse around TD3 is the most prominent
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38 by far in the last seventeen years in the three English-publishing Japanese newspapers
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40 with 2,789 articles, followed by TD1 with 978 and TD2 with 795.
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48 In the reporting of each of the disputes, “neutral” labels are rarely used. In TD1
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50 the English version is apparent more often, 39 times and 77 times together with
51
52 Japanese, but that can be explained with the similarity between the English and Russian
53
54 names. “Liancourt Rocks” is mentioned three times and only in combination with the
55
56 Korean and Japanese toponym, as well as “Pinnacle Islands” which was found two
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58 times and always combined with other names. Russian, Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese
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3 labelings are in a similar way mostly linked to the Japanese version. Except for TD2 in
4 *The Asahi Shimbun* and *The Japan Times*, these combinations are always fewer than the
5
6 purely Japanese designations. The results can be seen in the overall proportions. TD2
7
8 shows a binary split between the solely Japanese naming and Japanese combined with
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10 Korean. TD1 and TD3 instead have the vast majority using solely Japanese toponyms,
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12 with TD3 having the highest proportion of over 90%.
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18 Looking at the results of this brief analysis, the dominance of exclusively
19
20 Japanese terms is obvious. Although it may not be completely surprising considering
21
22 the fact that only Japanese newspapers were analyzed, it certainly has its consequences.
23
24 All disputed areas are portrayed as part of Japan, only TD2 is presented as controversial.
25
26 However, solely “foreign” naming never plays a significant role. Claims are naturalized
27
28 through the continuous reproduction of the islands’ Japanese names, regardless of
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30 official control being in the hands of other states in the cases of TD1 and TD2. Since the
31
32 articles were published in English, the primary audience is not necessarily Japanese, but
33
34 an international readership. The total lack of “international” names is especially
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36 striking, as these could be used for a more objective way of outlining the disputes.
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38 Hence, the geopolitical view of the islands as a part of Japan is promoted—wittingly or
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40 unwittingly.
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47 It is critical to note the changing use of toponyms with the example of TD3. Up
48
49 until 2014 to 2015, there was no real difference made between the claims of the PRC
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51 and ROC; the islands were referred to by their Chinese label, mostly “Diaoyu”, if the
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53 other side of the dispute was being presented. However, in some articles “Diaoyutai”
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55 was mentioned for both sides, succeeded by a split into “Diaoyu” and “Tiaoyutai” to
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57 portray the difference between China’s and Taiwan’s claims. This could take into
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3 account the rising awareness of Taiwanese activism, especially after the nationalization
4 of the islands (Zhang 2014, 85). Recently, “Diaoyutai” for Taiwan and “Diaoyu” for
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6 China seems to be the standard. Notwithstanding the attempts to separate these
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8 affiliations correctly, a few articles may have been assigned incorrectly, a risk often
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10 existent when working with big data sets.
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16 ***Comparison of quantities in newspapers***

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18 Reflecting on the discourses in a more complex way, we have identified the differences
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20 among the newspapers’ use of toponyms, which will be briefly elaborated on (Figure 3).
21
22 In general, the corpus is largely dominated by *The Asahi Shimbun* and *The Japan News*,
23
24 *The Japan Times* provides just a small number of articles in the data. All three show
25
26 predominantly Japanese terms; however, *The Japan Times* has the smallest proportion,
27
28 with almost one-third left for other or combined toponyms. It also has the highest share
29
30 of solely foreign naming, although it is still quite a small proportion. *The Asahi*
31
32 *Shimbun* has a little above 80% in the use of Japanese terms, the two articles with only
33
34 English terms are not depictable in the figure. *The Japan News* tops this result with
35
36 close to a 90% share of Japanese names. The first impression that *The Japan Times* has
37
38 a more international outlook compared to a stronger nationalist rendering in *The Japan*
39
40 *News* and *The Asahi Shimbun* seems to be confirmed, as well as the more conservative
41
42 stance of *The Japan News*. All newspapers prove to rely heavily on Japanese toponyms,
43
44 only in TD2 did *The Asahi Shimbun* use combined naming more often. This outcome
45
46 justifies the combination of all sources for further analysis, as differences between the
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48 newspapers certainly exist, but would most probably cause only minor variations in the
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50 results.
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The discourses of the disputes

Collocates of Northern Territories, Takeshima and Senkaku

To identify significant collocations and the contextualization of the disputes, all articles using Japanese toponyms—solely or combined with others—were analyzed. This relates to the goal of analyzing the Japanese perspective and simply to the fact that these toponyms constitute most of the data. The minimum absolute frequency is 50 for TD1 and TD2, and 100 for TD3, considering that there are more than twice as many articles. This ensures that terms with only a few appearances are excluded. From the analysis of hundreds of articles, words which are significant yet appearing only ten times do not have strong validity. The following figures represent all significant terms, and some non-related words were removed. The closer they are to the central key word the higher their statistical value. In the next step, the words were categorized to structure the results and highlight the nature of the most dominant discourses.

In TD1 three categories can be observed, where “conflict” and “localization” are quite popular (Figure 4). The conflict discourse has non-confrontational elements, such as “negotiations” or “talks”, together with the discussion of signing a peace treaty between Japan and Russia. The duality between these two is exemplified in the localization, referring to Soviet control over the islands. The split is further emphasized through using the Japanese “Kunashiri” and “Etorofu”, instead of Kunashir and Iturup. Again, the islets are incorporated in the Japanese geopolitical imagination. The high statistical value of the word “Okinawa” can be explained as the Ministry of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs, is the Japanese political institution dealing with issues regarding the dispute and linking it administratively to Japan. Examining the third category in the figure, Medvedev is the only actor directly mentioned. It is

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2
3 interesting that Putin is not linked to the matter with any significance, since he has been
4 president for thirteen out of the seventeen years the data covers. However, contrary to
5 Medvedev, Putin never visited the islands personally (Richardson 2018, 20). Medvedev
6 did so as president and most recently as prime minister in August 2019, sparking
7 Japanese media attention. The rest of the terms relating to politics are neutral to
8 positive, with “joint”, “visit” or “economic”.

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18 Despite having a relatively open stance, the words surrounding “Northern
19 Territories” make no mistake in portraying Japanese claims. “Projects” or “activities”
20 may seem impartial but often refer to Russian investment in the islands infrastructure or
21 military, thematizing material entrenchment, critically seen by Japan. The word “held”
22 looks equally innocent but is the usual way of describing the ownership of the disputed
23 area: It is “Russian-held”, not owned; “return” brings it all together, implicating that it
24 has been a legitimate Japanese territory all along.

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35 TD2 has a stronger focus on “localization” and “politics” (Figure 5). Conflict-
36 oriented terms are limited to the general “dispute”, “claim” or “issue”. Geographic
37 labels instead show a variety of results. The Korean names, “Tokto” and “Dokdo” have
38 a very high statistical value and hence prove the findings in the previous section for the
39 popularity of using combined naming. Once more, a dichotomy between the two
40 conflicting parties can be observed; on the Japanese side the Shimane Prefecture stands
41 out, which is considered the responsible administration for the islets. Furthermore, it
42 links to politics, since “Takeshima Day” was passed by the Prefecture’s Assembly in
43 2006 (Bong 2013, 199). The celebration takes place on the 22nd of February, the
44 historical date for the incorporation of the islets into the Japanese Empire in 1905;
45 “ordinance”, “Feb” and “day” relate to this issue. Additionally, TD3 is apparent with the
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3 term “Senkaku”, linking the two disputes, which will be discussed in the final part of
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5 the analysis. The second significant event is the trip by the former South Korean
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7 president Lee Myung-bak to Liancourt Rocks in 2012. His whole name as well as
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9 “group”, “visit(ed)” and “president” imply this. This was the first visit by a president
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11 from South Korea. The event was thus widely criticized by Japanese politicians.
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13 However, the visit of then-Prime Minister Han Seung-soo in 2008 does not seem to
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15 have attracted as much attention. Instead, “textbooks” lead to another occurring issue
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17 that caused the withdrawal of the South Korean ambassador in the same year: The
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19 portrayal of territorial disputes in Japanese school books has a long history of a
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21 nationalist presentation (Okuda 2014, 59–62). The coverage is quite controversial, as it
22
23 reports the objections of South Korea and other countries in light of the government’s
24
25 increasing efforts to portray the disputed areas as a part of Japan over the years. An
26
27 article in *The Japan News* in 2017 states that new guidelines will take effect in 2020,
28
29 calling all disputed islands an integral part of Japanese territory and denying any
30
31 conflict over TD3. Although not having sufficient information to illuminate the
32
33 differing stances of the newspapers, *The Asahi Shimbun* seems to express the most
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35 critical view on this practice, arguing in an editorial in 2015 that pupils should be
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37 educated with the best teaching material and not with what is governmentally approved.
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45 To sum up, both sides are represented quite prominently in the discourses, Japan
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47 most symbolically with Takeshima Day, while the ROK has a tangible impact on the
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49 islands with visits from high officials. The mentioning of the Japanese prefecture links
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51 the Liancourt Rocks to the mainland, implying an administrative sovereignty.
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53 Furthermore, the connections to the underlying tensions between South Korea and
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55 Japan are indirectly apparent: Takeshima Day hints at Japan’s imperialist past, and its
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57 occupation of Korea; textbooks do not only encompass territorial disputes, but
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3 generally, Japan's criticized teaching of its history, especially its war crimes.
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6 Compared to the previous discourses, a new category can be identified in TD3
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8 (Figure 6). Based on naval incidents regarding the Pinnacle Islands, maritime terms can
9
10 be found quite often. While "boats", "coast", "ships" and "vessels" have a rather neutral
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12 meaning, they incorporate a more militarized notion together with "guard" and "patrol".
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14 This theme is detectable in the conflict discourse as well, with the appearance of the
15
16 term "incidents" exceeding those observed in TD2. This new dimension adds to a
17
18 different perception of the conflict. Japan is presented in a defensive position and must
19
20 protect its ownership. Although the category "politics" does not have as many words,
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22 "September" and "purchase" represent the previously mentioned nationalization in 2012
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24 by the Japanese government. "Okinawa" as an administrative body is also connected
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26 with this event.
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33 In general, localization differs once more between the two poles of, "Japan" and
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35 "China", while "Taiwan" has a lower statistical and frequency value, supporting
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37 previous findings of its lesser role in the discourse. Furthermore, the link between TD2
38
39 and TD3 is once again evident with "Takehima", combining both disputes. This
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41 discursive imagination can be interpreted in three ways. Firstly, the defensive character
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43 in TD3 could be transferred to TD2, portraying Japan once more as protecting its
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45 rightful claims, which is somewhat contrary to the governmental position of not even
46
47 acknowledging any dispute around TD3. Secondly, the opposing states can be easier
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49 "othered". China and Taiwan are equated with South Korea as adversaries in this
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51 matter. Thirdly, TD1 is apparently not conceived of as being connected with TD2 and
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53 TD3. This could simply be explained by the differing character of the dispute, since the
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55 Kuril Islands involve inhabited land with a larger population, rather than small
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3 formations of sand or rock, and discussions about solving it are at least occurring.

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5 However, it may also be rooted in the diverging reputation of Russia in comparison to
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7 Asian nations.
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11 All three discourses around the disputes have two words with a moderate to high
12 statistical value: “sovereignty” and “part”. The former expresses the claims that the
13 involved countries have on the islands and can express an offensive or defensive
14 character, depending on the current ownership. The latter assigns the disputed areas to a
15 side and exemplifies the struggle that the islets cannot be on their own and must be
16 aligned to someone’s national territory. Both symbolize a nationalist understanding of
17 the bond between countries and the physical space they claim, constituting a “territorial
18 trap” (Agnew 1994). Alternative ideas, for example, the shared or external
19 administration of the islands, do not appear. Most importantly, every discourse produces
20 a binary system between Japan and its adversaries. It is restricted to nation-state
21 interactions; supra-national institutions are not relevant. Being on its “own”, Japan is
22 presented throughout all discourses as ambiguously passive but firm. Stronger
23 confrontational terms are never incorporated, and judgmental adjectives or even
24 emotions are not significant, although looking at different newspapers or approaching
25 the data qualitatively may change that.
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47 **Japanese discourses and prospects**

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49 This paper analyzed the discourses of Japanese territorial disputes with Russia (TD1),
50 Korea (TD2), and China including Taiwan (TD3) in *The Japan Times*, *The Japan News*
51 and *The Asahi Shimbun* from 2002 to 2018. While the high usage of Japanese toponyms
52 could be explained by the domestic viewpoint of the journalists working at the
53 newspapers, the results support the finding of a nationalist stance. All newspapers have
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3 a thoroughly low usage of opposing or neutral names for the disputed islands and do not
4
5 even favor combined naming, except for TD2. Differences concerning the shares of
6
7 toponym usages exist but overall trends are quite similar. Thus, the territories are
8
9 aligned to the Japanese authority in the geopolitical imagination, regardless of their
10
11 factual control. The discourse around TD3 is proportionally the most common topic. In
12
13 comparison, the most frequent mentioning of political actors and the most solution-
14
15 orientated terms are apparent in TD1. Although the actual will to solve the dispute may
16
17 differ, the repeated mentioning of meetings between the countries' leaders and the
18
19 negotiation of a peace treaty are reflected in the media. The news coverage of TD2
20
21 encompasses with Takeshima Day, Lee's visit, and the controversial textbooks three
22
23 distinct political events. It deals not only with the Japanese claims but considers the
24
25 viewpoint of South Korea as well. Nevertheless, the situation of the dispute is highly
26
27 politicized and at an impasse, so no specific approach can be observed; instead a duality
28
29 between the disputants is evident. TD3 is dominated by the most military-orientated
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31 discourse, based on naval incidents. Japan is portrayed in a defensive role, making
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33 China and to a lesser extent Taiwan, the aggressor. Furthermore, the maritime
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35 vocabulary supports the geopolitical discourse formed by the Japanese government via
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37 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
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45 All three newspapers showed, to a varying degree, a strong focus on Japanese
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47 claims and did not present a significant degree of alternative perspectives. This
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49 tendency is not a solely Japanese phenomenon, as other national discourses
50
51 exemplify—Korea and China use a similar approach in materializing domestic stances
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53 against Japan (MOFA ROK 2013; MOFA PRC 2014; Zhang 2014). However, the
54
55 predominant use of Japanese toponyms portrays the islands as an integral part of
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57 Japanese territory. “Real” geographies do not matter, imaginations do. Despite being
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3 located on the periphery of Japan geographically, or actually being closer to other
4 countries, the disputed islands are imagined as a core part of the Japanese heartland—
5 one that suffered severely after World War II when the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity
6 Sphere dissolved and the conquered and annexed territories were lost. The analyzed
7 discourses contribute to this perception, influenced by actual events. In general, Japan's
8 obstinate approach to the disputes is apparent, claiming the islands and leaving little
9 space for diplomatic progress, although military intervention is also never considered.
10 Symbolic entrenchment, to borrow Hassner's terminology once more, is widespread.

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The deep territorialization adds to classical geopolitical ideology. Territorial integrity plays a pivotal role in the imagination of the nation-state. Gaining control over islets, rock or sand formations, perceived as Japanese, is the main goal of Japan's foreign policy in East Asia. In this, the dichotomy between Japan and the other disputants is a recurring element, as Chan (2012) and Yennie Lindgren and Lindgren (2017) proved as well. China is especially portrayed as aggressive, and incidents are highlighted. This adds to Hagström's and Hanssen's (2016) observation whereby Japan uses the PRC to influence the traditional pacifist stance on foreign issues, particularly since the current prime minister Shinzo Abe has called repeatedly for reforming the constitution on this matter. The discourses are more conflict-orientated than solution-oriented; this reflects and also shapes political and public opinion. The use of toponyms that contradict the hegemonic discourses and indicate a more open approach rather than insisting on territorial claims are quantitatively insignificant in the studied newspapers.

Looking through the lenses of critical geopolitics as a theoretical baseline enabled us to examine the geopolitical imaginations concerning Japanese post-war territorial identity. The finding of nationalist sentiments embedded in these imaginations, the dominant Japanese toponyms and pro-Japanese terms surrounding

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3 discourses exemplify how readers' perceptions are shaped within popular discourses.
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5 The conducted study reflected in a unique and underexplored comparative way the
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7 representations of all three disputes in the Japanese media, evolving around categories
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9 of geographical localizations, political events, conflicting stances and military
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11 involvements. The quantitative analysis studied in a broad perspective the geopolitical
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13 discourses, offered for the first time a critical comparison between the popular
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15 discourses of all Japanese territorial disputes, and laid the basis for further
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17 investigations, e.g. using different newspapers or other countries' narratives.
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23 Despite the serious shortcoming of not being able to study newspapers in the
24
25 Japanese language, it is very plausible that the connotations in Japanese media coverage
26
27 would be quite similar, given the fact that the publications of the two largest press
28
29 agencies in Japan were analyzed. Overall, the study conveys that there is still a
30
31 multitude of additional research possibilities. The influence of certain events on
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33 discourses, already indicated in this study with relation to Takeshima Day or naval
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35 incidents, could be highlighted by comparing discursive time frames. Other newspapers
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37 with a different political perspective, e.g., stronger left- or right-leaning, could aid
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39 important observations, as well as comparisons between them. A qualitative approach
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41 could deconstruct geopolitical imaginations in greater detail. More comparisons with
42
43 other national discourses could help understand how public opinion is shaped from the
44
45 other side; currently studies in this area focus mainly on TD3.
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51 Nonetheless, this paper provides with its broad quantitative approach a useful
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53 analysis of the constitution of Japanese national discourses around its territorial
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55 disputes. Keeping in mind the extreme dynamics of the Asian world and the voices
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57 calling for an "Indo-Pacific Century", power struggles will most probably gain
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3 importance on a larger scale. The increasing self-confidence of Japan's neighbors, with
4
5 China leading the way, together with political changes and economic shifts, have
6
7 challenged the former order of a dominant Japan with American support. The question
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9 of whether or not the Reiwa era, where "Japanese people carve out a new era that is
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11 brimming with hope" (Abe 2019) will hold up to its promise will be linked to the
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13 islands left in the midst of Japanese territorial disputes.
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16 17 18 **Disclosure statement**

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21 No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.
22
23

24 25 **Notes**

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27 ¹ Primarily "neutral" toponyms for the islands are used. The authors do not want to
28
29 express any favor for any side. Japanese names are only mentioned first because
30
31 this paper focuses on the Japanese perspective. This text utilizes the toponyms in
32
33 the Modified Hepburn System of Romanization of Japanese Kana (International
34
35 Organization for Standardization 2017). The toponyms used in the media are
36
37 taken in their original forms.

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39 ² <http://www.nexis.com/>.

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41 ³ <https://database.asahi.com/index.shtml>.

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43 ⁴ <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>.

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45 ⁵ Small adjustments due to different uses of Boolean operators in the databases had to be
46
47 made.

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49 Figure 1: Location of Japan's territorial disputes (own figure)

50 Figure 2: Shares of toponyms among the disputes (own figure)

51 Figure 3: Shares of toponyms among the newspapers (own figure)

52 Figure 4: Analysis of collocates in TD1 (own figure)

53 Figure 5: Analysis of collocates in TD2 (own figure)

54 Figure 6: Analysis of collocates in TD3 (own figure)

55 Table 1: Overall toponym quantities (own table)

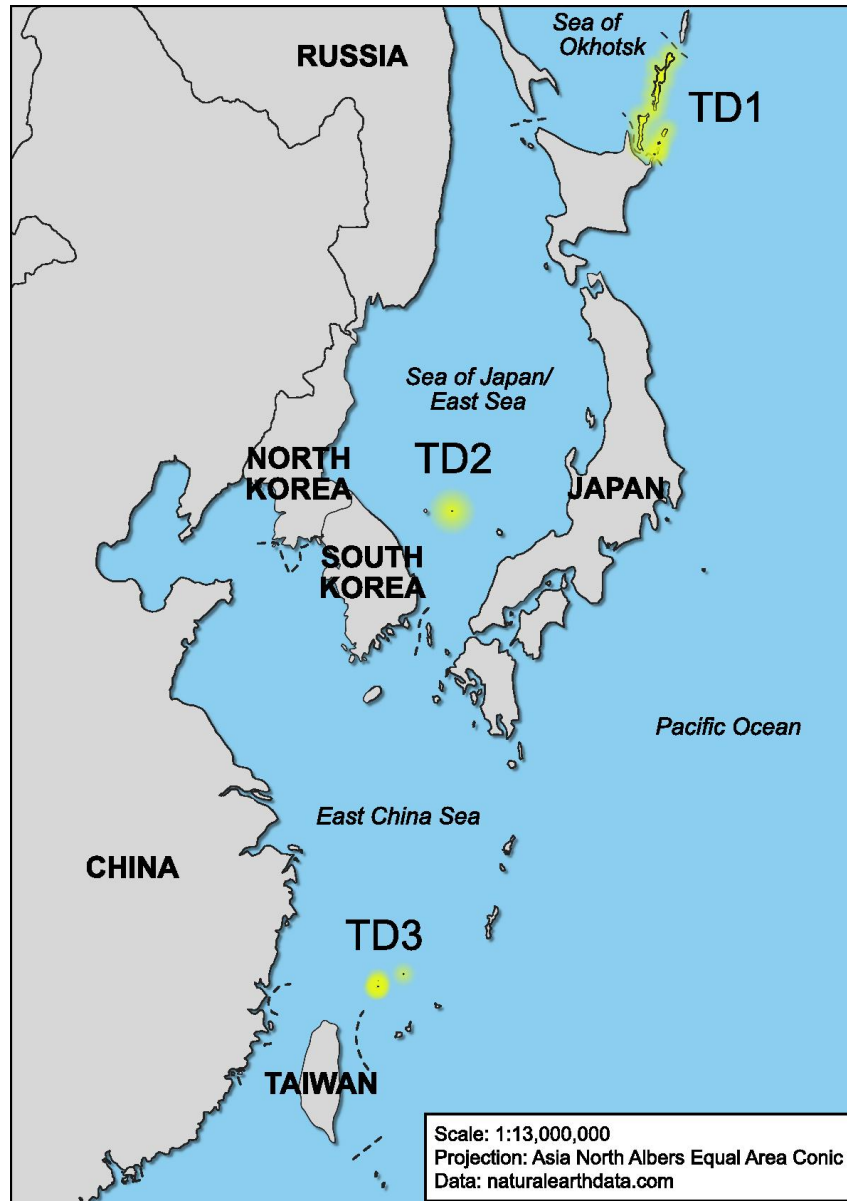
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For Peer Review Only

TD1 (n = 978)	E	E+R	R	J+R	J	J+E	J+E+R				
AS	2	0	0	19	363	24	0				
JN	19	0	2	8	390	35	0				
JT	18	0	1	12	67	18	0				
TD2 (n = 795)	E	E+K	K	J+K	J	J+E	J+E+K				
AS	0	0	0	217	113	0	2				
JN	0	0	0	114	229	0	1				
JT	0	0	1	66	52	0	0				
TD3 (n = 2,789)	E	E+C	E+T	C	T	J+C	J+T	J	J+C+T	J+E	J+E+C+T
AS	0	0	0	0	0	64	0	996	1	0	1
JN	0	0	0	1	0	56	2	1,171	9	1	0
JT	0	0	0	1	0	79	3	376	28	0	0

AS=*The Asahi Shimbun*, JN=*The Japan News*, JT=*The Japan Times*, E=*English*, J=*Japanese*, R=*Russian*, K=*Korean*, C=*Chinese*, T=*Taiwanese*

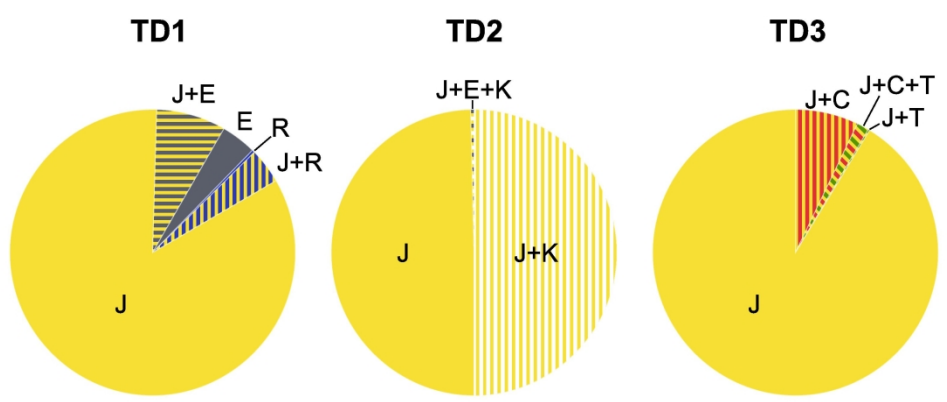
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Location of Japan's territorial disputes (own figure)

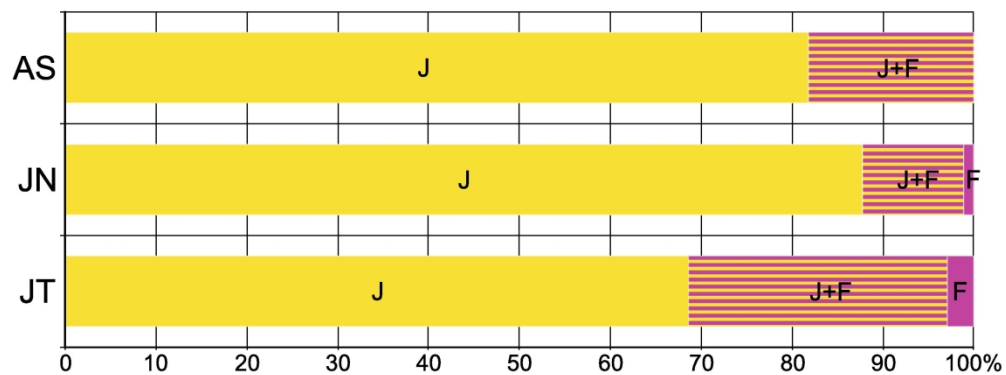
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J=Japanese, E=English, R=Russian, K=Korean, C=Chinese, T=Taiwanese
Categories with less than three were excluded.

Shares of toponyms among the disputes (own figure)
 139x70mm (600 x 600 DPI)



AS=The Asahi Shimbun, JN=The Japan News, JT=The Japan Times, J=Japanese, F=Foreign
F reached 0,1 % in AS.

Shares of toponyms among the newspapers (own figure)

139x70mm (600 x 600 DPI)

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TD1



Stat. value: ■ ≥ 6,0 ■ ≥ 5,0 ■ ≥ 4,0 ■ ≥ 3,0

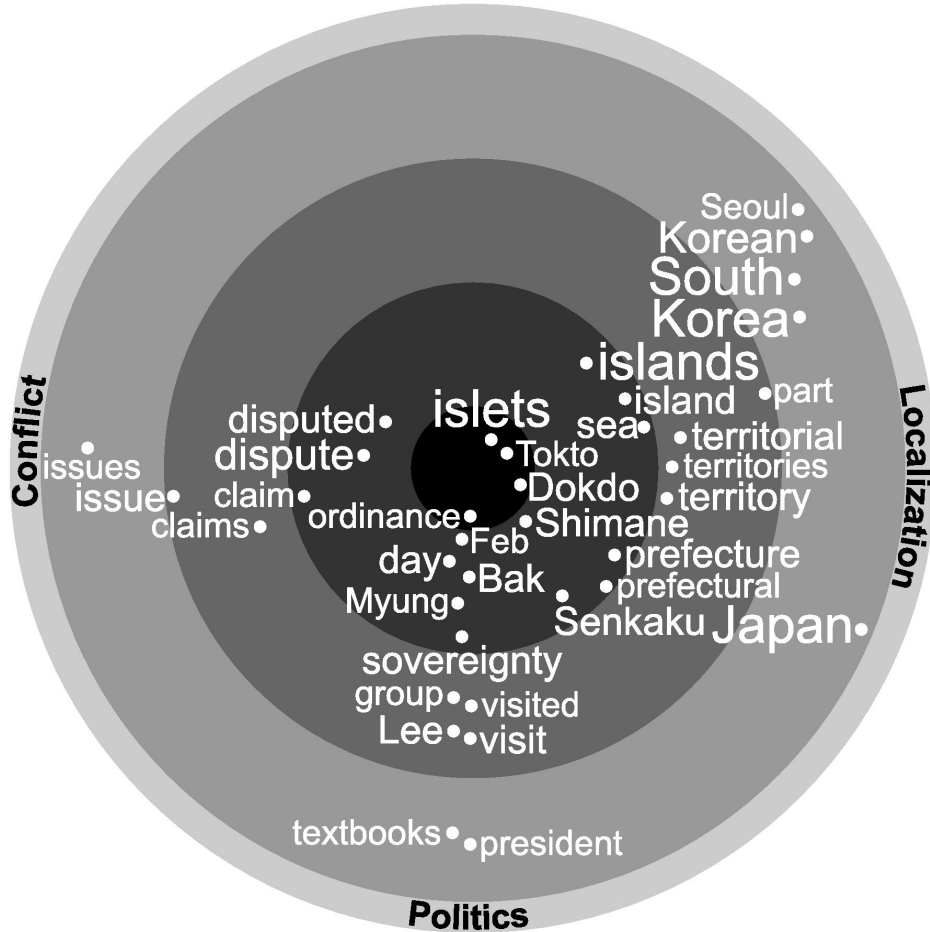
Absolute freq.: Aa ≥ 400 Aa ≥ 200 Aa ≥ 50
Aa ≥ 300 Aa ≥ 100

Analysis of collocates in TD1 (own figure)

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TD2



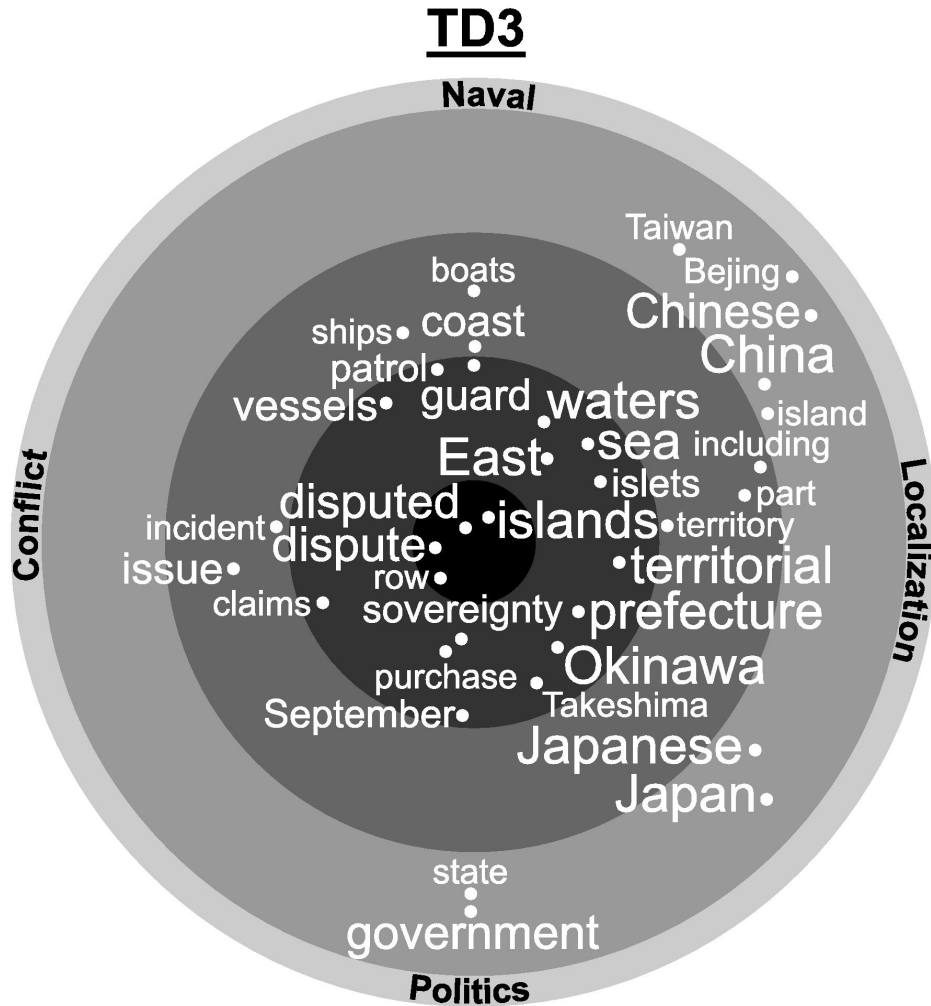
Stat. value: ■ ≥ 6,0 ■ ≥ 5,0 ■ ≥ 4,0 ■ ≥ 3,0

Absolute freq.: Aa ≥ 400 Aa ≥ 200 Aa ≥ 50
Aa ≥ 300 Aa ≥ 100

Analysis of collocates in TD2 (own figure)

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Stat. value: ■ ≥ 6,0 ■ ≥ 5,0 ■ ≥ 4,0 ■ ≥ 3,0

Absolute freq.: Aa ≥ 500 Aa ≥ 300 Aa ≥ 100
Aa ≥ 400 Aa ≥ 200

Analysis of collocates in TD3 (own figure)

80x96mm (600 x 600 DPI)