

# Maritime Boundaries Revisited. De-bordering of the Taiwanese-Japanese Neighborhood in the Context of (Re-)Bordering Tendencies in the Region of East and South China Seas<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

*The presented article maps processes of bordering, de-bordering and re-bordering in East Asia with maritime borders and territorial claims as the central elements of the analysis. The key question of the investigation is why some maritime territorial disputes are amplified when other are silenced in the region? The author concentrates on two island states, Japan and the Republic of China (Taiwan), testing de-bordering of their neighborhood. This process is taking place however in the context of (maritime) border claims and disputes in the region of East China Sea and South China Sea, with numerous actors involved in the game of controlling space and setting new borders there. It is assumed that to understand the dynamics of the de-bordering processes between the two states, their neighborhood's analysis has to be framed by historical developments, interests' configurations as well as the collective spatial memory/identity component. Moreover, the attempts to intensify cross-border cooperation need to be settled, among others, in the changing geopolitical situation in the region and the growing power of China. Conceptually the paper tries to interpret developments using both neo-realistic and constructivist approach to international relations as well as theoretical models of the (still emerging) field of border studies.*

## Keywords:

**borders in East Asia, Japan, Taiwan, de-bordering, re-bordering**

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## 1. Introduction

Together with the changing international environment in the last decade, undermining post-Cold War global order, borders seem to (re)gain relevance, both in political practice as well as in academic reflection. This process has manifested itself however differently in various global regions. In Europe and North America, fencing tendencies (Newman, Paasi, 1998, pp. 186-207; Wills, 2016) mirror re-bordering as a reaction to external threats, alongside the territorial conflicts that have reappeared in the former. It is Asia, however, that has been claimed a region where state borders especially have gained more importance than anywhere else in the world. This process is often associated with a general change of power relations as well as the Peoples' Republic of China (China) political, economic and territorial aspirations (van Schendel, de Maaker, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, where in other world's regions land borders are the main object of political and academic interest, in East Asia they are the maritime lines that seem to be of key relevance, especially recently (Yee, 2011). These processes manifest themselves very intensively in the case of island states that have been constructing their territoriality not only in the new spatial form, but also in a new narrative logic.

The presented investigation aims at mapping processes of bordering, de-bordering and re-bordering in East Asia with maritime borders and territorial claims as the central elements of the analysis. The key question of the analysis is why maritime territorial disputes are amplified in some cases and silenced in others in the region? The author decided to concentrate on two island states, Japan and the Republic of China (Taiwan) (both being crucial for understanding spatial dynamics in the region), trying to test the de-bordering of their neighborhood. This process is taking place however in the context of (maritime) border claims and disputes in the regions of the East China Sea and South China Sea, with numerous actors involved in the game of controlling space and setting new borders there. It is assumed that to understand the dynamics of the debordering processes between the two states, the analysis of their neighborhood has to be framed by historical developments, states interests' configurations as well as the collective spatial memory/identity component. Moreover, the attempts to intensify cross-border cooperation need to be settled, among others, in the changing geopolitical situation in the region and the growing power of China.

Conceptually, the paper tries to interpret developments using both neo-realistic (Telhami, 2002) and constructivist (Burton, 2010) approaches to international relations as well as theoretical models of the (still emerging) field of border studies (Brunet-Jailly, 2005). Methodologically it is based on secondary source analyses supported with the field research conducted in Taiwan in January

2019 (containing collection of primary and secondary sources as well as the issue background consultation with scholars and practitioners). The text starts with a brief conceptual debate on borders in the case of state islands and settled in the spatial environment of East Asia, and then studies (re-)bordering processes of Japan and Taiwan to finally analyze their neighborhood construction.

## **2. Borders of the island states – spatial environment in East Asia**

The field of border studies has undergone a long and difficult path from classical approaches based on territoriality, state power, conflict and spatial expansion – deeply rooted in realistic thinking (Jones, 1959, pp. 247-248) – to a conceptual shift considering borders as social constructs (Monty, Cavazos, 2016), often de-territorialized, multiplied and discursively created. Moreover, scholars noticed that borders are not static but always very dynamic, which led to the recognition of their “in-motion”-nature (Konrad, 2015), constantly experiencing bordering, de-bordering and re-bordering (Zhurzhenko, 2012). They are understood not only as construction, de-construction and re-construction of borders but also measured with cooperation initiatives and cooperative environment creation or opposite processes initiation and implementation. Additionally, in the last decade, due to the changes in the global political order, classical approaches have again been considered useful in interpreting complex border related developments, often being merged with the recent approaches.

At the same time, maritime borders are again attracting the attention of scholars, with a special focus on cross-border cooperation of the island states and regions (Camonita, 2019) as well as redefining political and identity order together with a new approach to “national” and state waters (Yamada, 2011; Furukawa, 2011). In some regions, as represented by East Asia, this trend is closely associated with the growing importance of seas surrounding states, and consequently increasing the number of territorial disputes related to the division of waters and control. However, as Keiko Tsuji-Tamura claims, in the region the “sea borders have been neglected for a long time by colonial masters and the newly independent governments. That is why maritime issues (...) have been very complicated” (Boyle, 2015, p. 128). When analyzing territorial conflicts in Asia, Francesco Mancini reflects on realistic and constructivist approaches to understanding the developments. The former seems to dominate and is based on state interests, especially being territorial expression of (changing) power relations. The latter is associated with normative order as well, especially regarding the perception of sovereignty, identities, concept of (historical) justice, etc. (Mancini, 2013, p. 5-6). Agata Ziętek states that most of the territorial claims in the South Chinese Sea

have three dimensions: legal (related to procedural aspects of setting boundaries), geopolitical (associated with security and changing power relations in the region) and economic (especially underwater resources and new trade routes) (Ziętek, 2016). All three are believed to be settled in the changing geopolitical environment of the region, followed by the competition for natural resources (Mancini, 2013, p. 7), trade route protection as well as the creation of territorial and political identities of states. Chih-Mao Tang stresses, that “the East Asia regional seas issue concerns not only the maintenance of the sovereignty of the related countries, but it also involves the division of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the distribution of the marine resource development” (Tang, 2016, p. 156). So the territorial conflicts are very often about EEZ, not about islands – their possession and control mainly serves this purpose (Thim, 2013a). Especially that the allowness up to 12 nautical miles of the territorial sea and up to 200 nautical miles of the EEZ (with the right to natural resources) are counted from the baseline, including islands (with economic activities or human life possibilities). It is widely recognized that in the changing international environment some states are able to adapt better to the new circumstances than the others (Lo, 2015, p. 242). And an element of this adaptation is not only a more territorially-oriented approach but also new tools and forms of spatial competition. As Fuminori Kawakubo claims, “while modern borders still represent the power of the nation-state, to some degree, state power is increasingly exercised by delegating practices and authorities of state sovereignty to local, transnational, and private actors, away from the state apparatus” (Kawakubo, 2017, p. 1).

When looking for the very origins of the political order change in the region, the growing political, economic and military position of China seems to be the key factor. Consequently, when neo-realistically oriented approaches stress strategic reasons behind Chinese involvement in the maritime disputes in the region (based, among others, on resources and trade routes’ securing), alternative explanations, rooted in constructivist thinking propose normative and identity-based explanations. For example, Henry Curtis sees them as “motivated by a need to preserve a secure sense of Chinese national identity” as reflected in creating acting self-expectations and the expectation of partner reactions. Following the principle of “Chinese exceptionalism”, this state sees itself as a natural leader of the Asian world (Curtis, 2016, pp. 537, 543).

Both approaches need to be settled in the East Asian traditional understanding of borders. As Agata Ziętek indicates, “in Southeast Asia, the mandala political model (...), featured political units which saw themselves as centers of networks and not as states with defined borders. Additionally, relations between them were fluid and some mandalas overlapped so that less powerful centers

might have had allegiances to more than one mandala” (Ziętek, 2016, p. 28). In the Chinese state tradition, borders are more about territories than lines, with a consequence of difficulties in determining the exact location of state (historical) edges, and relations between states were based on tributary system (Sato, 2012b, pp. 23-25). Well defined state boundaries resulted from western colonialism but, in the maritime context, appeared only recently. However, attempts to more precisely determine the sea space can be dated back to the Japanese late 19th and 20th century applied imperialism. Chinese cartographic official works produced in the 1930’s as well as post Second World War decolonization in the region resulting in numerous newly-independent states with territorial aspirations (Ziętek, 2016, pp. 28-29).

Finally, the waters in the investigated region (constituted in practice by the South China Sea, the East China Sea, but also, to some extent by the Japanese Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk) is marked with numerous maritime border disputes. The South China Sea itself constitutes a space of dynamic territorial and power related processes over the last decades. The current and already solved (often island-related) maritime territorial disputes have included, among others, Malaysia and Thailand (Ko Kra and Ko Losin Islands), Cambodia and Vietnam (Phú Quốc Island), China and Vietnam (Gulf of Tonkin), China and Indonesia (Natuna Islands), Taiwan and China (Pratas/Dongsha Islands), China and Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam (Macclesfield Bank/Zhongsha), China and Taiwan, Philippines (Scarborough Shoal), China and Taiwan, Vietnam (Paracel/Xisha Islands), and China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei (Spratly/Nansha Islands) (Ziętek, 2016, pp. 25-27). In case of the East China Sea – dispute between China, Taiwan and Japan (Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands), in case of the Japanese Sea - Japan and Korea (Takeshima/Dokdo), and when investigating the Sea of Okhotsk – Japan and Russia (Kuril Islands). China is involved consequently in eight cases, Taiwan in six (always alongside China – as claimed by some authors, in practice, expressing Chinese territorial claims (Curtis, 2016, p. 538)), Japan in three.

In the following sections, Japanese and Taiwanese territorial disputes will be investigated followed by the common neighborhood’s de-bordering analysis.

### **3. Territoriality, borders and border disputes in Japan**

Japan as an island state and regional and global power in the first half of the twentieth century, experienced a period of imperial expansion, controlling huge spaces of East Asia and Pacific Ocean. Its territory was reduced to the “Japan proper” as the result of post Second World War and the following pacifistic turn

in both domestic and international policies. However, the last decades have shown another modification here. On the one hand, migration pressure/needs, forced Japan to manage its borders as a tool of incomers' control resulting in new setting of the on the own political and cultural borders (Tarumoto, 2019). On the other, classical relationship between power and space is still noticeable. In his research, Akihiro Iwashita illustrates the changing perception of the Japanese territoriality in the recent time. Until the end of the Cold War, little attention was paid to the state borders, which resulted from security dependence on the US potential, imperial legacy negation and relatively stable regional political and strategic environment. However, the 1990's brought in East Asia silencing the land territorial disputes and the opening of the maritime Pandora box in the region including Japanese (also previously) contested islands with Russia, South Korea and China/Taiwan (Iwashita, 2011, p. 279). A changing international environment and power balance resulted in the fact that Japan is (more visibly) involved in several territorial disputes referring to the small, remote and often uninhabited (or sparsely populated) islands at its peripheries. The reasons behind these conflicts range from security and identity to economic reasons. Conflicts affect relations with all its neighbors in practice. They refer in practice to the claimed Kuril Islands/Northern Territories (with Russia), Takeshima/Dokdo Island (with South Korea) and finally Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (disputed with China and Taiwan). In the following sections two first will be presented, the last will be separately debated in the chapter no. 5.

The Kuril Island/Northern Territories refers to four island Iturup/Etorofu, Kunashir/Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai located north-east of Hokkaido island, consisting of over 4,5 thousand sq km and inhabited by around 15 thousand people. The official Japanese position stresses here that "the Northern Territories are inherent territories of Japan that continue to be illegally occupied by Russia" (MoFA1). The dispute is rooted in the Japanese-Russian Shomoda Treaty of 1855 giving the former state control over the islands, and the Soviet conquer of the four of them on August 28, 1945. In the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, Japan gave up the rights to the Kuril archipelago (without indicating another country as a new possessor), not considering the four islands (labeled as the Northern Territories) as a part of the islands (Gavrilov, 2016). Two of them were proposed to be returned in the 1955 peace talks, but the deal was eventually refused by Japan under American pressure. Between the 1960's and early 1990's, the Soviet Union offered to return two of the islands in exchange for the withdrawal of the US troops from Japan. The 1990's, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, were marked with intensive contacts of both states with the political aim to normalize mutual relations, sign the peace treaty and reach a compromise with regard to the contested islands. This environment was also present at the beginning of the new millennium and under

Vladimir Putin's early presidency (Furukawa, 2011, pp. 301-302). Consolidation of the Russian state after the "time of troubles" have led however to introduction of the new policies towards border management and territorial disputes. Partnership and strategic cooperation with China resulted in both states solving their long-lasting territorial dispute (Jańczak, 2019). President Dmitry Medvedev visited the Kuril Islands in 2010 which created diplomatic tension between both states (Kuroiwa, 2011, p. 283). Eventually, after some further promising talks, president Putin stated that "we don't trade in territories" (Micklethwait, 2016). The negotiations failed in December 2018, similarly to the talks in January 2019, which was followed by the construction of new barracks by Russia.



**Map. 1 Taiwan, Japan and their disputed islands**

1. Kuril/Northern Territories, 2. Dokdo/Takeshima, 3. Senkaku/Diaoyu, 4. Paracel, 5. Spratly  
Source: The author



Except from the interstate relations, engagement from other actors can be noticed. For example, as the research of Yukiko Kuroiwa shows, local communities in north Hokkaido (of expellees' origins) and current archipelago dwellers are much more cooperation oriented than their respective central governments are (Kuroiwa, 2011). On the other hand, the principle of regaining control over the contested islands is much more vivid in Hokkaido than in other parts of Japan, with museum exhibitions and numerous monuments in the island recalling archipelago and Japanese rights.

The island of Dokdo, controlled by South Korea, (Japanese name Takeshima, the English one Liancourt Rocks) are two bigger (of over 168 meters high and area of about 16 hectares) and thirty-five smaller rocks located over 200 kilometers away from both states' coast lines. The rocks were excluded from the Japanese administration in 1948 but the treaty regulations were not clear and left space for territorial claims from both sides. This resulted in further tensions. In 1952, Korea unilaterally declared its own control over the islands (Furukawa, 2011, p. 303). Eventually the Basic Relations Treaty between South Korea and Japan of 1965 stabilized the situation by, among others, mutual recognition of claims. The rocks have been inhabited by single Korean fishermen since the 1960s with currently two civilians and about 40 coast guard officers permanently living there, as well as about 1500 Korean visitors annually. The Korean government constructed permanent infrastructure there, including the lighthouse and barracks. At the same time, the islands are the central point for numerous civic organizations and individuals (Wiegand and Choi, 2017).

The first decade of the new millennium again revived the conflict, this time with a focus on national education in the field of territoriality as well as collective memory. In 2012, the Korean president visited the rocks, causing diplomatic crises with Japan. The latter proposed to solve the conflict in the International Court of Justice, which was not accepted by South Korea. The research by Alexander Bukh shows that the conflict about the archipelago is primarily rooted in symbolic policies of both states. In the case of Korea, it "lies not only in the historical memory of Japanese colonization but it is directly related to post-independence domestic processes in South Korea" (Bukh, 2016).

Both investigated cases clearly show that Japan, after a long period of post-war non-territorial approach and marked with eliminating territorial evidences of imperil past, has been heading towards a new (re-)bordering model. Redefinition of its own territoriality has led to the new perception of where and of what size Japan is. This territorial shift materialized in 2007 and the Basic Act on Ocean Policy in 2007. Japan claimed control (territorial waters and exclusive



economic zone) to about 4,5 million km<sup>2</sup>, which resulted in the fact that only five other states in the world had larger zones. In the next year, the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy was announced shaping the new space policy of Japan (Yamada, 2011, p. 358).

#### **4. Territoriality, borders and border disputes in Taiwan**

Taiwan seems to be split in regards to its self-perception of territoriality between the legacy of the Chinese statehood's deeply rooted in land-continental identity, and its current situation of an island country, with statehood contested by China and not (or no longer) formally recognized by vast majority of states. Taiwanese territoriality reflects consequently both approaches, with the second being more dominant recently.

Taiwanese (or actually Chinese) sea claims refer to its 15th century domination and penetration in the South Chinese See, recalled in 1914 and following rivalry with colonial France and imperial Japan until the end of the Second World War, and then in 1947 together with the "nine dash line" (mapping Chinese claims to over 80% of the South Chinese Sea). France gave up both the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands, and Japan transferred its own rights to an undefined subject in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Vietnam and Philippines claims started in the 1950's, with the former taking over part of the Paracels (Curtis, 2016, p. 538).

Currently both China and Taiwan claim in practice the same territories in the East China Sea and in the South China See. Taiwanese political aim, with regard to territorial claims, suggests, as a consequence, cooperation with China and leaving the implementation of international recognition to this state. On the other hand, China is considered the main political and military threat by Taiwan and taking neutral position seems to be another option. Reduction of China-Taiwan tensions shall lead to joint position in territorial debates with other states, increase in Taiwanese distancing form China (Nordhaug, 2019, pp. 43-44).

Current territorial developments of Taiwan, and consequently territorial claims (Roach and Smith, 2005), are rooted in post Second World War situation in the region, especially deconstruction of Japanese Empire and creation of Peoples' Republic of China.

With regard to the former, both the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco and the 1952 Treaty of Taipei regulated the issue of the previously Japan controlled islands. This state declared in the first agreement renouncing "all right, title and claim to the Spratly Islands and to the Paracel Islands" but no reference to any new sovereign

was made there, and what is even more interesting none of the two actors, China and Taiwan were signatories of the treaties. The latter agreement, between Japan and Taiwan, became the main tool of Taiwanese claims to Spratly archipelago, undermined however together with 1972 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China (Ziętek, 2016, pp. 31-32). Many authors agree that the current territorial tensions in the region result from the fact that “the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 did not clarify the fate of some border islands” of Japan (Iwashita, 2011, p. 280).

The territorial identity of Taiwan is neither only related to the idea of regaining control over mainland Chinese territory, nor to the island nature of its actual territory. It has been controlling however not only the island of Taiwan itself, but also some (parts of) archipelagos located alongside mainland China: (1) Matsu Islands, (2) Wuciou Islands, (3) Kinmen Islands that directly neighbor the continent. Additionally, (4) Penghu/Pescadores Islands in the Taiwan Strait as well as South China Sea Islands located further to the south: (5) Pratas Islands, (6) Paracel Islands and (7) Spratly (or actually just a part of the archipelago). Historically, it was also Dachen Islands near the continent, Taiwan was forced however to evacuate them as the result of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954 (Matsumoto, 2012, p. 91).

Much like the Japanese case, the debate over the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands will be briefly outlined here, where Senkaku/Diaoyu debate will be presented in the next section.

The Paracel Islands, called also Xisha in Chinese and Hoàng Sa in Vietnamese is an archipelago of over 130 islets, rocks and reefs with the total land space of almost 8 sq km and about one thousand inhabitants. The western Paracels' incorporation to the South Vietnam in 1954 was followed by Chinese military annexation in 1974 and then Taiwanese and Vietnamese claims. Some of the Paracels were taken over in 1945/46 by the Republic of China that evacuated its garrison in 1950 after a communist victory in the Chinese civil war. In 1974, South Vietnamese and Chinese troops fought over the islands of the archipelago which let the latter win control over huge parts of the archipelago (Curtis, 2016, p. 539). The new millennium resulted in intensive infrastructure creation by China in the archipelago. In 1999, Taiwan recalled its claims to the contested archipelago. At the same time, Taiwan rejected – alongside China – arbitral tribunal's sentence in 2016, not recognizing Chinese historical claims to the nine-dash line.

The Spratly Islands (referred also as Nánshā Qúndǎo in Chinese, Kepulauan Spratly in Malay, Kapuluan ng Kalayaan in Tagalog and Quần đảo Trường Sa in Vietnamese) are often described as the most contested space in the

South China Sea, covering about 38% of its total space and containing about 230 islands, reefs and rock (Sato, 2012b, p. 72).

With regard to the complex set of conflicts and claims, it has to be stressed that in the post Second World War period, parts of the archipelago were claimed and controlled by the Philippines in 1956 and Vietnam in 1976 with claims since 1956, that in case of Malaysia were signalized in 1978 and Brunei in 1982 (Sato, 2012b, p. 73). Most of the Spratlys have been taken over by China which has been contested by other states of the region. The rest is in possession of Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia that also compete over territory there. Unified Vietnam managed to violently push Philippines out of parts of the archipelago, later being defeated by China in 1988 (Curtis, 2016, p. 539). China experienced clashes with Vietnamese ships during the last years there. The diplomatic fight of Philippines resulted in recognition of their claims by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, that also considered the Taiwanese island of Itu Aba/Taiping as “a rock” that means no claims for 200 miles of exclusive economic zone (that was jointly not recognized by China and Taiwan). At the same time, China has been developing (military) infrastructure in the controlled parts of archipelago, especially in 2015.

As signalized above, Taiwan controls the island of Itu Aba/Taiping, which is the biggest island of the archipelago, of about 50 hectares of land space and over 200 inhabitants, mainly military. The Spratlys were gained by Japan as a part of obtained Taiwan in 1895 and retaken by pre-communist China in 1946. It became a conflict point however between reinstalled Taiwanese troops and Pilipino individuals and authorities, especially in late 1940's, 1950's and 1970's. The new millennium was characterized by infrastructure development, including and airport, strengthening of the garrison and a symbolic visit of the Taiwanese president in 2008. Taiwanese Itu Aba control allows Exclusive Economic Zone claims of 200 nautical miles which collides with claims of other actors (Kuok, 2015, p. 2). This is especially true since Taiwan controls the neighboring Zhongzhou Reef/Ban Than Reef/Centre Cay as well.

In 1990s restricted zones were created, and permanent infrastructure of military character was constructed. Finally, marine police boats were sent to Itu Aba, to protect against fishermen, pirates and smugglers, but also to confirm its own sovereignty over the island. This resulted in the firing of Vietnamese vessels (Nordhaug 2019, p. 47). Despite territorial control limited to the Pratas Islands and Itu Aba in the Spratlys, Taiwan has been claiming further territories in the South China Sea, as officially announced in 1991, including Tungsha (Pratas), Xsisha (Paracels), Nansha (Spratly) and Zhungsha (Macclesfield) islands as reflected two years later in “Policy Guidelines for the South China Sea” document, as following

the 1948 u-line of the pre-communist China. (Nordhaug, 2019, p. 46). In 2014 Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed its claims to “the Spratly Islands [Nansha Islands], Paracel Islands [Xisha Islands], Macclesfield Bank [Zhongsha Islands] and the Pratas Islands [Dongsha Islands], as well as their surrounding waters” (Kuok, 2015, p. 5). This could be considered as one of the reactions to incidents in the claimed waters. For example, in May 2013, a Taiwanese fishing boat was attacked by the Pilipino coast guard in the contested parts of the maritime neighborhood (Thim, 2013a), causing a diplomatic conflict between the states and showing another form of mutual territorial claims in the region. It resulted also in anti-Pilipino attitudes in Taiwan.

What shall be additionally stressed are some forms of cooperation between China and Taiwan with regard to territorial claims observed there. In 1988 clashes between Vietnam and China the latter was supported politically by Taiwan. South China Sea policies were informally coordinated in the 1990's, at least until 1995, including joint exploration of the natural resources, especially around Spratlys and then Pratas (Nordhaug, 2019, p. 48)

### **5. De-bordering of the Taiwanese-Japanese neighborhood**

The main element of Taiwanese-Japanese territorial debate is the Senkaku Islands/Diaoyu Islands issue. It is “under the valid control of Japan” (MoFA2) and is formed by five territories, (Uotsurijima, over 4 sq km, Kubajima over 1 sq km, Taishojima and Minamikojima, 0,3 sq km each and additionally 3 rocks of the territory of about 36,000 m<sup>2</sup>. They are uninhabited. It will be claimed however, that this case represents one of the rare examples of border dispute silencing and consequently de-bordering in the region, which contrasts to the above-presented re-bordering tendencies.

Japanese claims to Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are based on the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895 and the concept of terra nullius. China/Taiwan question Japanese control and stress their own long-lasting tradition of using the waters around for fishing purposes (Kakazu, 2011, p. 15). The control over the islands is executed by Japan as a part of the Okinawa Prefecture. In 1895 it was formally incorporated to Japan, remaining there until 1945 when the US took over control, keeping administratively it as a part of Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands, which was confirmed in the San Francisco Peace Treaty. In 1896, however, the archipelago was rented from the Japanese government by a Japanese businessman who developed a vivid fishing industry there in the 1930 (Sato, 2012a, p. 27). Only in 1971 Ryukyu (and consequently Senkaku) was – based on the US-Japanese agreement – returned

to Japan. (Furukawa, 2011, p. 304). The beginning of the dispute about Senkaku/Diaoyu can be associated with the 1969 UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) report, describing potential gas and oil resources under the waters surrounding the archipelago and Chinese claims to the archipelago in 1971. This was followed by the Chinese exploration of the Chunxiao gas field in this geographical zone (Kakazu, 2011, p. 15). They were not recognized by Japan (Furukawa, 2011, p. 304).

What is relevant is that the archipelago did not seem to play any primary importance in the policies of China (Lin, 2012, p. 34) and Taiwan in the post-Second World War decades. The claims, based on a historical argument, appeared in the 1970. Discovering gas and oil resources in 1968 resulted in Taiwanese-Japanese tensions over the islands. Chinese claims to the archipelago started also in 1970 and manifested themselves in various forms, including armed boats clashes in 1978, Chinese activists landing on the archipelago in 2004 or oceanic vessel expedition in 2008 (Sato, 2012a, pp. 28-29). Together with the 2008 Kuomintang rules in Taiwan, the relations with China improved (e.g. joint oil exploitation projects) and with Japan harshened. In 2008 and 2012 there were incidents with Taiwanese fishing boats and Japanese border guards in the waters of the archipelago (Lin, 2012, p. 31). In 2010, the Japanese Coast Guard ship clashed with a Chinese fishing boat close to the islands (Kakazu, 2011, p. 15). In the same year they were “visited” by activists, from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Nagy, 2013, p. 49). Consequently, the islands were bought by the Japanese government from the local landlord’s hands, which resulted in Chinese harsh reactions (Tang, 2016, p. 157). Both developments were supplemented with symbolic flag raising on the rocks. One of the reactions were Taiwanese vessels massively entering the archipelago waters. At the same time, in 2010 Taiwanese presidential declaration clearly excluded cooperation with China to regain the archipelago (Sato, 2012a, p. 26).

Ching-Chang Chen claims that “the birth of the Senkaku issue as a territorial dispute was not so much a maritime resource competition between China and Japan as a legitimacy competition between Taipei and Beijing over who was the true defender of China’s national interest during which Japan became a useful Other” (Chen, 2014, p. 2). The Japanese-Taiwanese conflict over the archipelago itself has been interpreted in the literature as the geopolitical clash over the resources, distribution of power, etc. (Chen, 2014, p. 3). But, at the same time, “framing the Senkaku Islands as a usurped territory served to demonstrate Japan’s everlasting imperial ambition even after its defeat in 1945 and reminded the Chinese people about the ROC’s heroic Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, hence discrediting the PRC as a legitimate Chinese state” (Chen, 2014, p. 3). Usurped territory became an official name for Japanese claims both in Taiwan and China.

However, besides the conflictive context of mutual relations, there are also visible cooperation tendencies between Taiwan and Japan, revealing a long-lasting de-bordering process. The very nature of these de-bordering tendencies are based on de-construction of the previously separating and isolating character of the border facilitated by numerous cooperation initiatives, building a cooperation-oriented environment. It is observable at several levels and is marked with several peculiarities. On the one hand, Taiwan is the friendliest of the former Japan-controlled territories and the majority of Japanese express positive attitudes towards Taiwan. At the same time, some interest-related issues, represented by fishing rights, are considered more difficult in mutual relations (Lin, 2012, p. 32).

The second decade of the 2000's seems to be marked with compromise oriented attitudes and, consequently, de-bordering tendencies in Taiwanese-Japanese relations. The East China Sea Peace Initiative was proposed by the Taiwanese President Ma in 2012 (Lin, 2012, p. 32) and was based on, among others, refraining from taking any antagonistic actions, a call for dialogue, a respect for international law, a peaceful means of dispute resolution, and collaboration in exploring resources. This constituted a framework to reach compromise with Japan with regard to Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands. It was decided that waters around the archipelago are available for fishermen on both sides, at the same time sovereignty claims were sustained (Kuok, 2015, p. 8). Eventually, in 2013, as a result of the 17th round of the talks a compromise was reached, widening the fishing zone around the archipelago for the Taiwanese. The settlement is often referred to as contrasting to Chinese-Japanese dispute that, especially during the span of 2012-2013 was harsh (Kotani, 2016, p. 38). But in the fishing agreement "a major breakthrough" was evaluated in the Taiwanese-Japanese relations, leaving at the same time China "isolated" in the territorial dispute (Thim, 2013b). Moreover, the success of the negotiation resulted in Taiwan's promotion of the East China Sea Peace Initiative, aiming at cooperation instead of disputes, to be applied to the South China Sea (Kuok, 2015, p. iii).

When Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands have been disputed and debated, there are also examples of other islands in the common borderland, representing different state of relations between both states. Yonaguni Island represents the case. It is located only 111km away from Taiwan (and 117 from the closest other Japanese island) is the westernmost land territory of Japan, being a part of Yaeyama archipelago (less than 30 sq km and 2 thousand inhabitants). Taiwan is in charge of half of the air jurisdiction (air defense identification zone) over the island (Yamada, 2011, p. 358). In addition, the spatial proximity of Taiwan and Okinawa resulted in (economic) cooperation claims and proposals, especially

that both are of peripheral location in the East China Sea context. The twin cities of Yonaguni and Hualien created a project of “Yonaguni-Taiwan Cross-border Exchange Special Zone”, aiming at intensification of the economic development and reestablishment of the intensive economic ties broken in the 1950s (with little success however with regard to its implementation as of 2019). The Yonaguni-Hualien Exchange Development Association initiated and organized first trade projects in the 2010’s, resulting in further initiatives as Taiwan-Okinawa-Kyushu Economic Zone (Kakazu, 2011, p. 11).

## **6. Concluding remarks – towards mapping processes of bordering, de-bordering and re-bordering in East Asia**

To map the (de-)bordering processes in East Asia, one more element needs to be stressed – the role of China in shaping the new maritime-territorial order, especially with regard to its own policy, as well as influencing the policy of Taiwan.

With regard to the former, in 2010 the South China Sea was (eventually) declared in the Chinese official discourse a region of ‘core interest’ (previously applied only to Tibet and Taiwan) (Ziętek, 2016, p. 35). More precisely, Chinese territorial claims refer in practice to several archipelagos (Sato, 2012a, p. 19). Chinese territorial expansion is very often based on inhabiting islands and equipping them with infrastructure (or sometimes “building” artificial islands on the basis of rocks or coral reefs), which has been labelled as s ‘silkworm tactic’ or ‘salami-slicing’ (Ziętek, 2016, p. 30).

With regard to the later, the Taiwanese policy of no contact, no trade and no travel links with China started to erode in the middle 1980’s which resulted in improving the cross straight relations. Despite Chinese stress on unification, the relations were developing until the middle 1990’s. (Nordhaug, 2019, pp. 45-46). As Lynn Kuok claims, “on paper, Taiwan and China share the same claims. The dashed or U-shaped line encapsulating much of the South China Sea appears on both Taiwanese and Chinese maps” (Kuok, 2015, p. iii). Following the policy of one China, China has been supporting all of the situations where Taiwan gets control over contested islands (Kuok, 2015, p. 8). Additionally, China has been trying to “win over” the Taiwanese elites with prospects of economic cooperation, this results in some resistance however (Yuen, 2014, p. 76).

Finally, trying to answer the question of why maritime territorial disputes are amplified or silenced in the region, the above presented consideration – testing Taiwan and Japan – suggest the following: First of all, history matters, at



several levels, starting with the past control over territories, and ending up with spatial legacies and concepts. The structure of states interests, especially related to the natural resources, trading routes but also security considerations push states towards the territorial claims. Finally, the collective spatial memory and identity components are employed by actors involved. Together with the growing position of China, the international environment seems to push the states to activate all the three fields in spatial competition. This results in bordering. De-bordering, as in the Taiwanese-Japanese case is caused by necessity of silencing some of the disputes in order to concentrate on the others. And on both sides, the three enumerated areas above favored the second partner. On the one hand “Taiwan controls the largest land feature in the South China Sea, its vessels regularly patrol the area, and it has one of the biggest fishing industries in the Pacific” and is the key actor in the spatial game in the region (Kuok, 2015, p. iv). On the other hand, Japan, despite its modern non-territorial legacy, has been reconsidering its territoriality.

Moreover, as Ching-Chang Chen claims that the way how China and Taiwan constructed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as “usurped territory” brings to mind the way Japan has been constructing the “Northern Territories” – both seen the islands as manifestation of nations and consequently mobilize identity domestically “even though none of the domestic actors involved in this construction considered the actual return of the islands as its ultimate goal” (Chen, 2014, p. 17). At the same time, neither Taiwan nor Japan are conducting their policies based on territorial nationalism, especially in mutual relations. In case of the former, winning of the fishing rights without gaining territorial control rights was consequently corresponding with its aims. Moreover, the deal located it in a position equal to China and Japan. Japan, despite making concessions, also seem to be the winner. The compromise weakens the Chinese position with the archipelago debate (Thim, 2013b), and to some extent, also in a more general regional power game.

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## **Ponownie o granicach morskich. Deborderyzacja sąsiedztwa tajwańsko-japońskiego w kontekście tendencji (re)borderyzacyjnych w regionie Morza Wschodniochińskiego i Południowochińskiego.**

### Streszczenie:

Zaprezentowany artykuł opisuje procesy borderyzacji, deborderyzacji i reborderyzacji w Azji Wschodniej, z granicami morskimi i roszczeniami terytorialnymi jako centralnymi elementami analizy. Jej kluczowe pytanie to dlaczego niektóre spory terytorialne dotyczące obszarów morskich ulegają intensyfikacji, podczas gdy inne wyciszeniu w badanym regionie? Autor koncentruje się na państwach wyspiarskich: Japonii i Republice Chińskiej (Tajwanie), analizując ich wzajemne relacje. Osadzone są one w kontekście (morskich) roszczeń terytorialnych i sporów w regionie Morza Wschodniochińskiego i Południowochińskiego, z licznymi aktorami zaangażowanymi w rywalizację o kontrolę przestrzeni i ustalanie nowych granic. W analizie przyjęto założenie, że aby zrozumieć dynamikę procesów deborderyzacji pomiędzy opisywanymi państwami, badanie ich sąsiedztwa musi być umieszczone w kontekście historycznych relacji, struktury interesów oraz pamięci zbiorowej odniesionej do tożsamości terytorialnej. Ponadto, próby zintensyfikowania współpracy transgranicznej muszą być analizowane przy uwzględnieniu zmieniającej się sytuacji geopolitycznej w regionie i rosnącej potęgi Chin. Na poziomie koncepcyjnym artykuł interpretuje badane procesy

*przy użyciu zarówno neorealistycznego, jak i konstruktywistycznego paradygmatu stosunków międzynarodowych, a także teoretycznych modeli (wciąż tworzącej się) dyscypliny badań nad granicami.*

Słowa kluczowe:

**granice w Azji Wschodniej, Tajwan, Japonia, deborderyzacja, reborderyzacja**