

Territorial Rights over the Senkaku Islands: The Starting Point and the Historical Process*

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Activities on the Chinese side around the Senkaku Islands have been increasing. Japan has lawfully and validly controlled the Senkaku Islands since it incorporated them into Okinawa Prefecture in 1895. Here, we review the history around the Senkaku Islands with a focus on the 1970s, in particular, the return of Okinawa to the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China to the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China.

The Meeting between Yoshihiko Noda and Wen Jiabao and the Landing on the Senkakus.

The two nations had worked to calm the waters since the collision incident by a Chinese fishing boat with a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in September 2010. During Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's visit to China in December 2011, they avoided referring to the Senkaku Islands and agreed to the establishment of the Japan-China high-level consultations on Maritime Affairs to prevent recurrence. The first meeting was held this May in Hangzhou.

At the same time, there have been new developments in the Japan-China and Japan-U.S. relationships regarding the Senkaku Islands. On April 16, Shintaro Ishihara, the Governor of Tokyo, announced the purchase of the islands by Tokyo Metropolitan Government. At the Japan-U.S. summit on April 30, they confirmed that defense cooperation would be strengthened in view of the Chinese advance into the oceans.

China's fishing surveillance ship "Yuzheng" has been openly and repeatedly violating the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands. China has also increased friction in the South China Sea with Vietnam and the Philippines among others.

Symbolic of the tense relations between Japan and China was the Japan-China summit in May. Prime Minister Noda, who visited Beijing, met Premier Wen Jiabao on May 13.

Wen said in reference to the Senkaku Islands and the independence issue in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region that "it is important to respect the core interests and serious interest of China." Although it is unclear whether he deliberately included the Senkaku Island in China's "core interests," there is no doubt that these were strong words.

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Noda countered that the Senkaku Islands were “the inherent territory of Japan” and pointed out that “the increase in Chinese activities in the seas around the Senkakus are irritating the emotions of the Japanese people” and that “it is not desirable for this issue to affect the overall Japan-China relationship” (*Asahi Shimbun*, May 14, 2012).

On August 15, 14 people including activists from the Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyutai Islands, a private organization based in Hong Kong, conducted a landing on Uotsuri Island in the Senkaku Islands as well as other activities. It was the first landing by Chinese since March 2004. This time, reporters from Phoenix Television in Hong Kong accompanied the activists.

Kenichiro Sasae, the Administrative Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, summoned Cheng Yonghua, the Chinese Ambassador to Japan, and strongly protested the landing. Although the activists were arrested by the Okinawa prefectural police under suspicion of violating the Immigration Control Act, they were compulsorily deported. In China, anti-Japan demonstrations reaching 2010 proportions spread throughout China.

Chinese and Taiwanese Claims

It was by the cabinet meeting on January 14, 1895, that Japan officially decided to incorporate the Senkaku Islands into Okinawa prefecture. Although the First Sino-Japanese War was going on at the time, it was not included in Taiwan or the Penghu Islands, which were ceded to Japan under Article 2 of the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The incorporation had taken place after conducting surveys since 1885 and confirming that they were uninhabited islands that were not under the influence of China.

Although Japan renounced Taiwan or the Penghu Islands under Article 2(b) of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Senkaku Islands were administered by the United States under Article 3, which stated the following:

Japan will concur in any proposal of the United States to the United Nations to place under its trusteeship system, with the United States as the sole administering authority, Nansei Shoto south of 29 north latitude (including the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands), Nanpo Shoto south of Sofu Gan (including the Bonin Islands, Rosario Island and the Volcano Islands), and Parece Vela and Marcus Island. Pending the making of such a proposal and affirmative action thereon, the United States will have the right to exercise all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of these islands, including their territorial waters.

The Senkaku Islands are located at 25°44'-56' North Latitude and 123°30'-124°34' East Longitude and were included in the Nansei Islands. China did not object to this, and Taiwan did not raise the Senkaku Islands in the negotiations for the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty.

In December 1953, the agreement for the reversion of the Amami Islands was concluded between Japan and the United States. The agreement for the reversion of the Ogasawara Islands was also concluded in April 1968, leaving only Okinawa.

What triggered China and Taiwan's territorial claims was a report by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ECAFE). In 1968, ECAFE conducted a survey of the seabed of the East China Sea and published a report the following year that raised the possibility of oil deposits

there.

In 1971, Taiwan, then China, issued territorial claims. On June 11, Taiwan protested the reversion of the Senkaku Islands to Japan. On May 9, 1972, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan issued a statement claiming territorial rights (11-EAP-01521 “Domestic and Overseas Response regarding the Diaoyutai Islands” 019.12/0015; possessed by the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica).

China also expressed its territorial claim in a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 30, 1971.

China and Taiwan were concerned that Okinawa would be returned to Japan including the Senkaku Islands. Nevertheless, on June 17, 1971, the Okinawa Reversion Agreement was concluded between Japan and the United States. The agreement went into effect on May 15 of the following year, and the return of Okinawa to its homeland had been achieved.

The reversion of Okinawa deserves to be called the greatest achievement of the Eisaku Sato cabinet. It is clearly stated in Agreed Minutes of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement that the Senkaku Islands had once again become Japanese territory.

The territory defined in Article I.2 of the agreement is the territory administered by the United States of America pursuant to the provision of Article III of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. As defined by Civil Administration Proclamation No. 27 dated December 25, 1953, it consists of all islands, islets, atolls and rocks within the area enclosed by the straight lines connecting the points with the following coordinates.

- 28° North Latitude, 124° 40' East Longitude
- 24° North Latitude, 122° East Longitude
- 24° North Latitude, 133° East Longitude
- 27° North Latitude, 131° 50' East Longitude
- 27° North Latitude, 128° 18' East Longitude
- 28° North Latitude, 128° 18' East Longitude
- 28° North Latitude, 124° 40' East Longitude

These areas were explicitly indicated by an American civil administration proclamation in 1953, to which China and Taiwan did not register an objection until the early 1970s.

The Negotiations for the Reversion of Okinawa and the True Intentions of the United States

How did Japan position the Senkaku Islands in relation to Taiwan, with which it still had diplomatic relations at the time? Let us clarify Japan policy vis-à-vis Taiwan and other countries at the time by closely examining the Japan-U.S. negotiations for the reversion of Okinawa.

It was Richard L. Sneider, Minister at the U.S. Embassy in Japan, who visited Taiwan and heard their views on the Senkaku Islands. On May 6, 1972, after his visit to Taiwan, Sneider conveyed the following to Bunroku Yoshino, Director-General of the American Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA).

“The Senkaku Islands issue has become an emotional issue in Taiwan and Communist China is exploiting this issue cleverly. I (Sneider) did not debate this matter with Taiwan’s government officials, but I did suggest that they could discuss the issue with Japan since it was also an issue for the Japanese Government.”

(First North America Division, American Affairs Bureau; “Okinawa Reversion Issue (Yoshino-Sneider meeting),” May 6, 1971; “Application of the Status of U.S. Forces Agreement (SOFA) (STG-Facilities and Areas) (5),” B’5.1.0.J/U2A, CD-RH22-011; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

Although Sneider “did not debate this matter with Taiwan’s government officials,” he did “suggest that they could discuss the issue with Japan.”

On May 11, Kiichi Aichi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, had a meeting with Armin H. Meyer, U.S. Ambassador to Japan. Meyer “claimed that the basic position of the United States is that although it will return the areas under its administration to Japan, it will refrain from the adjudication of historical or future territorial claims on that occasion and avoid being dragged into the International Court of Justice in the future.”

Then Aichi stated the following.

“The Japanese side took the position of the U.S.’ side into consideration in not seeking the specific mention of the geographical name Senkaku Islands and conceded its claim to express the areas to be returned in the main text of the agreement and agreed to the Agreed Minutes and there is no fundamental difference with the U.S.’ side, so I believe that the U.S.’ position is fully incorporated by the expression of our proposal.”

(First North America Division, American Affairs Bureau; “Okinawa Reversion Issue (Minister Aichi-Ambassador Meyer meeting),” May 11, 1971, “Okinawa relations 17,” CD-RH22-012, in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

Although the geographical name Senkaku Islands was not included, the Senkaku Islands were included in the area in the Agreed Minutes and there was no difference on that matter between Japan and the United States.

What was the true intent of the United States? William P. Rogers, Secretary of State, had a meeting with Foreign Minister Aichi on June 9 in Paris. Eight days before the signing of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement. Rogers said, “Regarding the Senkaku Islands issue, the Nationalist Government is extremely worried about the response from its general public, and is putting pressure on the U.S. Government. We would be grateful if the Japanese Government could help us on this issue in some manner without jeopardizing its legal position.” Rogers added, “For example, could you indicate your willingness to hold talks as soon as possible to the Nationalist Government?”

The United States appears to have hoped that Japan would contact Taiwan. However, as can be seen from Rogers saying “the Japanese Government... without jeopardizing its legal position,” it meant the notification of the Japan-U.S. agreement, not a substantive consultation.

Aichi replied, “Basically, we are confident that we will be able to handle the matter without

inconveniencing the United States. We have no problem with talking to the Nationalist Government if necessary, but the timing will not be before the signing of the Reversion Agreement and we will be giving an explanation afterwards following the precedent of the Sato-Nixon joint statement 1969.”

(to Aichi from Yoshihiro Nakayama, Ambassador to France, June 9, 1971, “Okinawa relations 17”).

Aichi clearly stated that it was unnecessary to explain to Taiwan before the Okinawa Reversion Agreement. On June 17, Aichi and Rogers signed the agreement.

We Will Have It Clearly Written “So That There Will Be No Room for Any Doubt”: The Treaties Division

Playing the central roles in drafting the Okinawa Reversion Agreement were Toshijiro Nakajima, the Director of the Treaties Division, Treaties Bureau, MOFA, and Charles A. Schmitz, a legal officer in the U.S. State Department.

I interviewed Nakajima, who went on to become Ambassador to China, over more than a dozen sessions. He offered the following memories.

“My point was to clearly confirm that the Senkakus were included in the area over which it exercised administrative powers, since it was clear that the Senkakus were Japanese territory. So the purpose of my negotiations was to have it written in the provisions of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement so that there would be no doubt that the Senkakus were Japanese territory and that the Senkakus would be returned to Japan simultaneously with the revision of Okinawa.

“The United States had no objections to that, so the talks concerned what would be the appropriate way to prescribe this.”

(Toshijiro Nakajima; coeditors Masaya Inoue, Takuma Nakajima, Ryuji Hattori; *Testimonial Records on Diplomacy: Japan-U.S. Security, Okinawa Reversion, Tiananmen Incident*;) Iwanami Shoten, Publishers (2012); pp.243-244).

Nakajima strove to have it written that the Senkaku Islands would be returned as part of Okinawa “so that there will be no room for any doubt” and he says that the United States had no objections.

Nakajima was convinced that an agreement had been reached with the United States regarding territorial rights over the Senkaku Islands with the Agreed Minutes and, like Aichi, did not see the need to talk to Taiwan. Next, I will argue that the China Division did not change either on this point.

“We Have No Intention of Talking to the Government of Any State”: China Division

What was Taiwan’s real view on the Senkaku Islands? In April 1971, Lee Huan, the Chief Commissioner of the Taiwan Provincial Committee, Kuomintang of China, spoke privately to Hiroshi Hashimoto, Director of the China Division.

At the time, Lee was visiting Japan to observe the Tokyo gubernatorial election. It was said that “Lee is a man of power who takes part in policy decisions in the Republic of China as the right-hand man of Vice Premier Chiang Chingkuo.” The following was what Lee said to Hashimoto.

“Yesterday, I received a phone call from Chiang Chingkuo to return home quickly since there had been demonstrations in Taipei, Taichung and elsewhere concerning this matter, so I’ve decided to skip my observation of the presidential election in the Republic of Korea and return home. The Senkaku Islands issue is a huge headache for our government. The students and others are demonstrating and protesting, which I can understand from an emotional perspective, but this is not an easy problem that can be resolved immediately. Communist China will also surely show interest in this issue, which we must also take into consideration and handle the matter with care.”

(China Division, “Private Conversation with Powerful Kuomintang Figures”, April 19, 1971; “Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and China (important material)”, 2011-719; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

Here, Chiang Chingkuo and others can be seen trying to “handle the matter with care” while struggling in the space between the people of Taiwan and the Chinese Communist Party.

When the revised third Sato cabinet was installed on July 5, 1971, Takeo Fukuda became Foreign Minister. The China Division had prepared a report for this day for Fukuda.

According to the report, “The Nationalist Government had recently made an official request to us to the effect that the issues should be resolved by talks between it and Japan.”

The report continues.

“Since it is a fact with no room for debate that the Senkaku Islands are our territory no matter what arguments the Nationalist Government makes, our Government has made it clear domestically and internationally that we have no intention of discussing with the government of any state the territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, and we have explained this to the Nationalist Government as well.”

(China Division, “China Issue (report to the new minister)”, July 5, 1971; “Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and China (important material)”, 2011-719; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

The policy that “we have no intention of discussing with the government of any state the territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands” is the same as the previous Foreign Minister Aichi and Treaties Director Nakajima. It could be called an agreed point of understanding within the Japanese Government.

Negotiations for the Normalization of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations

The Kakuei Tanaka cabinet was established on July 7, 1972. Three days later, The China Division, Asian Affairs Bureau, MOFA wrote in an internal document that “we have no intention of holding talks over the Senkaku Island Sovereignty.”

“Since December 30, 1971, China has begun officially claiming territorial rights over the Senkaku Islands. However, we have held steadfast to the position that since it is a fact with no room for debate that the Senkaku Islands are Japanese territory, we have no intention of holding talks with the government of any state over the territorial sovereignty over the islands.”

(China Division, "Problematic Issues between Japan and China", July 10, 1972; "Prime Minister Tanaka's visit to China", 2011-721; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

It was when Yoshikatsu Takeiri, Secretary-General of Komeito, visited China that China clarified its position. On July 28, 1972, Zhou Enlai stated the following to Takeiri.

"There is no need to touch on the Senkaku Islands issue. Mr. Takeiri, sir, you had no interest in it either, did you? I didn't either, but historians are making it an issue because of the oil issue, and Mr. Kiyoshi Inoue is enthusiastic about it in Japan. There is no need to emphasize this issue. Compared to restoring diplomatic relations according to the Five Principles of Peace, it is meaningless. To write about it in newspapers is to put a monkey wrench in the process."
(eds. Ishii Akira, Shu Kenei, Yoshihide Soeya, *Records and Investigation: Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and China and the Negotiation of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China*, Iwanami Shoten (2003), pp.20-21).

On this occasion, Zhou also mentioned the acceptance of the Japan-U.S. security system including the Sato-Nixon Joint Communiqué and the renouncement of demand for war reparation. You could say that Zhou was showing all his cards from the beginning. China was hurrying the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan from the perspective of its strategy against the Soviet Union.

On September 25, Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, Foreign Minister Ohira, and others visited China. The main points of contention were Taiwan and the legal end to the war.

Since Zhou had given prior notice that there was no need to touch on the Senkaku Islands, there was no need to bring it up from the Japanese side. Neither Japan nor China included the Senkaku Islands in the original draft of the joint communiqué.

It was at the third Tanaka-Zhou meeting, on September 27, when the negotiations in Beijing were about to pass its peak, that Tanaka suddenly brought up the Senkaku Islands.

"What do you think about the Senkaku Islands? There are people who come to me, saying all kinds of things."

As tension swept through the participants, Zhou quietly restrained Tanaka.

"We do not want to talk about the Senkaku Islands on this occasion. It became an issue because oil came out. If oil doesn't come out, neither Taiwan nor the United States will care about it." (*Records and Investigation*, p.68).

Tanaka's intent was to confirm the content of the Takeiri memo, which said that Zhou had stated, "There is no need to touch on the Senkaku Islands." To Ohira and MOFA, Tanaka's words were not part of the script.

Although Tanaka had tried to get Zhou's word on the matter, there was no way that his battle-hardened counterpart would easily oblige. From Zhou's perspective, it should have been easy to use Tanaka's words against him and claim that Japan admitted the existence of a territorial issue. The

reason why Zhou did not do so but instead let it slide must have been because he determined in that instant that there would be no way to reach a conclusion if they started discussing the Senkaku Islands.

If the counterpart had not been Zhou, the meeting could have become complicated with the result that normalization would have been delayed. If the negotiations had become extended and Zhou and Tanaka no longer headed their governments, it is possible that the establishment of diplomatic relations would have been delayed for a long time. Zhou had a major achievement here. Not only was Zhou quick-witted; he was also more of a statesman than any other Chinese politician.

China did not bring up the Senkaku Islands in what was the most important of situations: normalization. Of course, it was not included in the joint communiqué either. The predicate to this is that Japan has territorial rights and there is no agreement on shelving the issues. It cannot help but be deemed that China de facto renounced its territorial rights to the Senkaku Islands at this point.

China was more concerned about the anti-hegemony provision, which had the Soviet Union in mind. Item 7 of the Japan-China joint Communiqué included an antihegemony provision with the premise that it “is not directed against any third country,” Zhou and Deng Xiaoping also expressed their understanding that the Northern Territories were Japanese territory (*Records and Investigation*, 31, p.184).

Negotiations on the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China

The Senkaku Islands reemerged in 1978, during the negotiations on the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China. On April 12, 108 Chinese fishing boats operated around the Senkaku Islands and dropped anchor, and 16 of them entered territorial waters. The following day, the number of boats trespassing on territorial waters increased to 40. Until then, there had been cases of Taiwanese fishing boat trespassing on territorial waters, but this was the first case of Chinese boats doing so (*Asahi Shimbun*, April 13, 1978, morning and evening editions).

How did Japan respond under the Takeo Fukuda cabinet? Let’s relive the moment through an interview of Takashi Tajima, who was the director of the China Division at the time.

At MOFA, Keisuke Arita, Vice Minister, Yosuke Nakae, Director-General of the Asian Affairs Bureau, and other senior officials discussed the matter and decided to “express our strong sense of disappointment and demand the prevention of its recurrence.” Tajima summoned Song Wen, First Secretary at the Chinese Embassy in Japan, and Mitsuro Donowaki, a Minister at the Japanese Embassy in China, and made a demarche to Wang Xiaoyun, Deputy Director-General of the Asia Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The response from the Chinese side was that while “it is disappointing to receive an expression of disappointment since the Senkaku Islands are Chinese territory, “we know nothing about this incident, so we would look into it.”

Tajima called Counselor Chen Kang on the phone and demanded to know the true intent why China was causing such an incident when preparations were under way for the negotiations for the treaty.

Furthermore, Tajima secretly invited Counselor Chen to lunch and insisted forcefully, “The Chinese side should understand that Prime Minister Fukuda is determined to reopen negotiations and coordination within the LDP is under way. When the Chinese side causes incidents such as this under these circumstances, it will be impossible to come up with the treaty that the Chinese side also wants to conclude. Appropriate measures should be taken swiftly to resolve the incident.”

Geng Biao, Deputy Premier, said to Hideo Den, a House of Counsellors member who was visiting China at the time, “That is an incident that just happened to occur. It is a matter of which the center was unaware.”

After considerable time had gone by, Wang Xiaoyun gave a report on the results of their investigation. The content was simple. “This is an incident of which the center was unaware that occurred accidentally. Fishermen go anywhere to catch fish, so it is an incident that just happened to occur under those circumstances.”

The truth about the matter is unknown, but it did not appear that it had taken place under the direction of Deng Xiaoping and other members of the center. China is not a monolith, and there were three factions regarding the negotiations for the treaty: one in support, another in opposition, and another in the middle, and the possibility that one of these factions gave instructions to the fishermen could not be denied according to Tajima (interview with Tajima, November 14, 2011).

On August 10, Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda had a meeting with Deng Xiaoping in China. Sonoda protested the fishing boats incident in April.

“I worked up my nerve at my meeting with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, explained the Japanese position regarding the Senkaku Islands, and asked that such an incident not be repeated. In response, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping said that the incident was accidental, and he wanted us to believe that the Chinese Government would not cause a problem over the islands. Thus, I had passed the final hurdle.”

(Sunao Sonoda, *The World, Japan, Love*, Daisan Seikei Kenkyuukai, (1981), p.184).

According to Chinese records, Deng Xiaoping said the following.

“Such an issue (author’s note: Senkaku Islands) should not be pursued now. Lay it aside, discuss it calmly at a later point, and hold consultations without haste for a way acceptable to both sides. If the method cannot be found by our generation, the next generation, and the generation after that will find the way.”

(Edited by Party Literature Research Center, CPC Central Committee, *Deng Xiaoping Thought Compiled by Year (1975-1997)*, Beijing, Central Party Literature Press (2011), p.154).

According to Tajima, Deng Xiaoping said to Sonoda with regard to the Senkaku Islands that “the Chinese Government will not cause a problem over this issue” and that “this problem should be left aside for ten years, dozens of years, a hundred years. The wisdom to resolve this issue will not be there in 30 years. We should wait until the next generation. If they cannot come up with the wisdom then, they should wait until the subsequent generation.”

Deng Xiaoping argued for shelving the issue, but Sonoda’s intent was to protest the Senkaku

incident and China accepted the protest. Here again, it could not be said that there had been an agreement to shelve the issue.

Yosuke Nakae, who was Director-General of the Asian Affairs Bureau at MOFA looks back on it as follows.

“The main Japanese aim was obviously the abolition of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance. And seeking China’s tacit acceptance on the Senkaku Islands had nothing to do with the antihegemony clause. We had no intention of asking China to “stay silent” on the Senkaku Islands in exchange for Japan accepting the explicit inclusion of the antihegemony clause that was important to China.”

(Yosuke Nakae; coedited by Hidekazu Wakatsuki, Yutaka Kanda, Ayako Kusunoki, Takuma Nakashima, Amiko Nobori, Ryuji Hattori, *The Dynamics of Asia Diplomacy: An Oral History by Yosuke Nakai*, Sotensha Publishing Company (2010), p.185).

While Japan’s main aim was the abolition of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, the antihegemony clause was important to China. But that did not mean that Japan was willing to seek the tacit acceptance of the Senkaku Islands in exchange for accepting the antihegemony clause. The Japanese position that there were no thoughts of talking to another foreign government about it and that it was not a diplomatic issue was maintained here again.

On August 12, Sonoda and Foreign Minister Huang Hua signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China.

The Background to Deng Xiaoping’s Statement

It is well known that on October 25, 1978, Deng Xiaoping, who was visiting Japan to exchange the instruments of ratification, advocated shelving the Senkakus at the Japan National Press Club. The meeting began at 4 p.m.

In response to a question at the JNPC, he responded, “When we normalized diplomatic relations, we promised not to touch on this. This time, when negotiating the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, we agreed in the same manner not to touch this issue... It doesn’t matter if issues like this are temporarily shelved. There is no problem with shelving it for ten years.” (*Asahi Shimbun*, October 26, 1978).

Deng’s explanation at the JNPC contradicted the substance of the Fukuda-Deng meeting that had been held earlier in the day at 10 a.m., where Deng said the following to Fukuda.

(Gesturing as if he’d remembered something.) “I have one more thing that I would like to say. There are a variety of issues between our two countries. For example, there is the issue over what we in China call Diaoyutai and what is called Senkaku Islands in Japan. This is the kind of issue that does not have to be brought up at the meeting on this occasion. As I told Foreign Minister Sonoda in Beijing, we may not have enough wisdom to resolve the issue during our generation, but the next generation should have more wisdom than we do, and will be able to resolve this issue. This issue must be viewed from the overall perspective.”

Deng made the Senkaku Islands an “issue that does not have to be brought up at the meeting” and did so from the Chinese side.

In response, Fukuda said, “I am very happy to have had a frank exchange of views on issues of the world and issues between Japan and China with His Excellency Deng Xiaoping, Vice Premier”, and the meeting ended.

Fukuda did not touch on the Senkaku Islands and so could not be said to have agreed to shelving the issue (“Record of Meeting Between Prime Minister Fukuda and Vice Premier Deng (second meeting)”, December 25, 1978; document disclosed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Information Disclosure Act, 04-1022-4; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

In other words, Deng Xiaoping explained at the JNPC that “we agreed... not to touch this issue.” However, there was nothing “agreed” with Fukuda. This is natural, since Japan does not recognize the existence of a territorial issue, “the kind of issue that does not have to be brought up at the meeting on this occasion.” It appears that he was less insistent on shelving than at the August Sonoda-Deng meeting and seems to have come closer to a de facto renouncement.

Deng Xiaoping appears to have tacked his position at the JNPC to the August position of shelving, perhaps on the advice of the Foreign Ministry among others.

MOFA made the following analysis of the Fukuda-Deng meeting and the statement at the JNPC.

Vice Premier Deng stated with regard to the Senkaku Islands that “this kind of problem does not have to be taken up here” even though the Japanese side had not brought it up. This appears to be a statement intended to preemptively stop the Japanese side from saying anything about it. As for his statement at the press conference, he said that those who do not want friendship between Japan and China are trying to raise this issue, but it is best left to the next generation, and this should be seen as an expression of the utmost attitude that the Chinese side could display. (Ambassador Fu Hao later said to Director Shimada, “That is the maximum for the Chinese side. We do not want to create difficulties for the Japanese side, but the Chinese side also cannot ignore the sentiments of the Chinese public and the overseas Chinese.”)

(Asian Affairs Bureau, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping’s Visit to Japan and Its Evaluation, October 30, 1978; document disclosed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Information Disclosure Act, 01-1980-3; in possession of the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

The analysis is that Deng tried to “preemptively stop” Fukuda from referring to the Senkaku Islands. If Fukuda were to touch on the Senkaku Islands, nothing other than an expression of disappointment at the April incident of the Chinese fishing boats could have been possible, and Deng’s statement appears to have been in anticipation of this.

A Framework for Crisis Management that Presumes Japanese Territoriality

In the 1980s, the Senkaku Islands ceased to be discussed. According to Toshiji Nakajima, the Ambassador to China from 1987 to 1989, “The Chinese Government never brought up the Senkakus

while I was there” (*Testimonial Records on Diplomacy*, p. 253).

However, on February 25, 1992, China adopted the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone and designated the Senkaku Islands as being part of its territory. Promulgated in the name of President Yang Shangkun, the Territorial Seas Act lists Taiwan, Diaoyutai, the Penghu Islands, Dongsha Qindao, Xisha Qindao, Zhongsha Qindao, and Nansha Qindao (*People’s Daily*, February 26, 1992).

Here, China rendered the “shelving” policy that Deng Xiaoping had advocated a thing of the past and escalated its position.

Until then, Japan had made efforts to restore China, which had been isolated as the result of the Tiananmen incident, to its place in the international community through such means as resuming the provision of yen loans to China and having Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu become the first government leader from the West to visit China. China’s Territorial Seas Act was established with no regard for these considerations by Japan. China has been intensifying its activities including in the South China Sea.

It is because of these times that it is important to take a look back through history. Let me summarize it in four points.

First, in Japan-U.S. relations, the reversion of the Senkaku Islands is explicitly stated in the Agreed Minutes to the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, and neither China nor Taiwan protested against the 1953 civil administration proclamation of the United States that formed the basis of this until the early 1970s.

Second, the fact that China did not bring up the Senkaku Islands during July and September 1972 became a basis for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China.

Third, shelving the issue was merely a unilateral claim by China at a certain point in time. Japan has firmly maintained the position that no territorial issue exists, and “shelving” was never agreed to.

Fourth, the reason why China began claiming territoriality over the Senkaku Islands in 1971 was because it had been stimulated by the survey by ECAFE and the claim made by Taiwan. And it has escalated, including the enactment of the Territorial Seas Act, without any relation to Japanese actions.

It is important to be inspired by the past, but it will not be possible to keep responding properly to China, which is executing its maritime strategy, merely by returning to the origins. A new framework for risk management is required that is predicated on Japanese territorial rights.