Part III
Case Study of China’s Current Territorial and Boundary Disputes
Chapter 5

The Sino-Japanese Disputes in the East China Sea

5.1 History of Disputes

In June 2007, when the ninth round of East China Sea Talks between China and Japan failed in Tokyo, the spotlight was once again on the disputes in this area. The semi-enclosed East China Sea, with an estimated area of 480,000 square miles, borders on the west with the PRC, on the east with Japan, on the north with South Korea and on the south with Taiwan. A small group of uninhabited drying rocks, islets and islands located in the southern part of the Sea are the so-called Diaoyu Islands or Senkaku Islands. Actually, the islands, composed of five small islands and three rocky outcrops, have a total land area of only 6.3 square kilometers. The biggest island named Diaoyudao (Tiaoyutai) in Chinese and Uotshuri-Shima in Japanese is just 4.3 square kilometers. They are 200 nautical miles east of the China mainland coast, 92 nautical miles from Taiwan and about 200 nautical miles southwest of Okinawa, severed from the Ryukyu Islands by the deep Okinawa Trough to the southeast.

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1 No substantial breakthrough was made at the eighth round of talks and this stalemate is predictable in the near future. BBC News at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/newsid_6240000/newsid_6241700/6241702.stm> [12 Mar. 2007]. More background information is available at <http://english.china.com/topic/eastseatalk/> [12 Mar. 2007].

2 The Chinese call the disputed islands “Diaoyu Dao” or “Tiao yu tai” and Japan calls them “Senkaku Gunto”. To be impartial, I thereafter call them “Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands”.

3 The eight tiny islands are Diaoyu Dao (Uotshuri-Shima in Japanese, 4.319km²), Huangwei Yu (Kuba-shima, 1.08km²), Chiwei Yu (Taisho-Kojima, 0.154km²), Nanxiao Dao (Minami Kojima, 0.463km²), Beixiao Dao (Kita Kojima, 0.302 km²), Dabeixiao Dao (Okino Kitaiwa), Dananxiao Dao (Okino Minamiwia), Feilai Dao (Tobise). T Okuhara, 15 Japanese Annual of International Law (1971), p. 106. Zhongguo Diminglu (Gazetteer of China), Beijing: Ditu(map) Publisher, 1983.

4 The Okinawa Trough borders the continental shelf in the west and the Ryukyu arc in the East. The Trough is the most striking geophysical character of the seabed of the East China Sea in terms of its location, size and depth. The Trough reaches depths greater than two thousand meters and is therefore much deeper than continental shelves that extend between one and three hundred meters below sea level. See A. Couper. (ed.) The Times Atlas of the Oceans (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., New York 1983). See also K. F. Royer. ‘Japan’s East China Sea Ocean Boundaries: What Solutions Can a Confused Legal Environment Provide in a Complex Boundary Dispute’ 22 Vand. J. Transnat’l L.