

# Japanese National Identity and the Takeshima/Dokdo Dispute: Constructing National Identity Discourse around South Korea

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## **Abstract**

National identity is used as a representation of what a country wants to transmit as its own impression of ‘self’, and usually it is formed around the concept of an ‘other’. Nonetheless, if two national identities are contradictory; it can hinder the development of desirable bilateral relations, which is the case of Japan and South Korea. Taking the Takeshima/Dokdo territorial dispute as a reference of a political symbol that stirs identity sentiments, this thesis aimed to unveil the construction of Japanese national identity regarding its South Korean neighbour as an ‘other’. In order to achieve this, the Japanese government’s discourse concerning its stance over the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute was interpreted using discourse analysis methodology. Government documents such as reports, informational pamphlets, press conferences and statements by high ranked politicians are among the collected data that served as empirical data. Using the national identity and the critical constructivism theories as the main guide, this thesis was able to determine four discourses. The idea that Japan wants to disassociate itself from its shared memories with South Korea as it is following the peaceful and legal path while looking out for internal and external support for recognition is the principal idea behind these discourses.

**Keywords:** National identity, Japan, South Korea, Discourse, Takeshima, Political symbol, Japanese government, Bilateral relations

## **Acknowledgments**

While I was on my way to Incheon Airport in order to spend my Christmas holidays in Tokyo and eventually start my fieldwork, I could observe on the subway screen a pro-Dokdo propagandist video. It displayed a series of discourses explaining why Dokdo is South Korean territory and why Japan's claims of sovereignty are false. At that moment I felt more motivated than ever to start researching about such a stimulating topic as I understood the importance this dispute holds in Japan-South Korean relations. I would like to thank Lund University for giving me the opportunity to carry out an exchange study programme at Ewha Womans University and a fieldwork programme at Waseda University. I also would like to thank Waseda University for its support and assistance during the fieldwork.

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## **Abbreviations**

MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OPPCTS	Office of Policy Planning and Coordination on Territory and Sovereignty
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
ICJ	International Court of Justice

# 1. INTRODUCTION

National identity is a concept that is increasingly forming part of the international relations discipline; this being especially true regarding diplomatic ties between neighbours in East-Asia. Indeed, the roots of Japan and South Korea's tensions are believed by some scholars, like Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder, to stem from clashing notions of national identities (Council of Foreign Relations. 2015). Both countries seem to have constructed their national identity contrasting their own understanding of their shared past and historical memories (Hundt & Roland, 2007, p. 62), creating diplomatic tensions that reach beyond the normative understanding of international relations such as proposed by realist theories (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 5). Understanding the nature of national identities and how they are constructed can be essential in order to interpret the pillars of Japan and South Korea's bilateral relations.

Furthermore, the Liancourt rocks are a set of islands which are located in fishing waters between Japan and South Korea. These islands have been the focus point of a territorial dispute between both neighbours for years that keeps bringing instability to their diplomatic ties. And that is because both Japan and South Korea claim that this set of islands are under their authority, and thus have sovereignty over them. In fact, these islands are named 'Takeshima' on the Japanese side, but are known as 'Dokdo' in South Korea. Because this thesis is going to focus on the islands from the Japanese perspective, and for simplicity convenience, the name 'Takeshima' is the one that will be used in order to refer to the Liancourt rocks. Takeshima, therefore, is the central point in this thesis for the discussion of national identity.

The Takeshima territorial dispute is inevitable related to national identity and this is true for both South Korea and Japan. For South Korea these islands carry the weight of the memories of the Japanese colonial rule (Flamm, 2015, p. 202), whereas for Japan Takeshima has little to do with historical memories and instead has more to do with legality (Bukh, 2013, p. 178). Although Japan has always recognized Takeshima as Japanese, it was the Shimane prefecture in Japan, to which Takeshima was officially adhered to in 1905 and according to Japan still holds administrative rights, which was the most active in turning Takeshima into a central issue. Bukh claims (2015, p. 48): "it was the passage of a 'Takeshima Day' ordinance by the Prefectural Assembly in 2005

that drew national attention to the territorial dispute”. Thus, Shimane prefecture’s initiatives were to a large extent responsible of bringing Takeshima into the spotlight for both the Japanese public and the Japanese government. Due to the Shimane prefecture’s influence, Takeshima became an important political symbol for Japan which to defend and argue over its sovereignty. Bukh (2015, 48) explains how in 2008 the Japanese Government started presenting pamphlets on the Takeshima issue, creating its own ‘corner’ on the MOFA website and even introducing school books referencing the matter. The Japanese discourse concerning their own stance in the Takeshima dispute has several implications on national identity; it implies how the Japanese government has constructed its own national identity as ‘self’; what image it wants to portray of Japan both domestically and internationally; and, how this vision contrasts South Korea’s own national identity as an ‘other’. This thesis aims to address these matters.

### **1.1 Research question**

In order to understand the meaning that the Takeshima dispute holds for Japanese national identity and taking into account the aims I mentioned previously my research question is formulated the following way: *“How does the Takeshima dispute affect the construction of Japanese national identity vis-à-vis the Korean ‘other’?”*

### **1.2 Motivation and Academic Contribution**

Research about national identity and the effects it has on bilateral relations is a topic that comes naturally within international relations studies. Some studies are presenting a correlation between opposing national identities and tensions within diplomatic relations. In fact, the book published by Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder called *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* was one which especially inspired me to focus my research topic the way I did. The issue of contradicting national identities is also true within Japan and South Korea relations and taking into account that concepts such as culture, ideas and values are being appreciated more within international relations discipline I wanted to contribute to the research by finding a correlation between the Takeshima dispute and the Japanese construction of national identity. Additionally, many of the studies talking about Japanese national identity mention that ever since the end of the Second World War Japan experienced a void and a loss of identity, as if it wasn’t really sure what place it belonged to in the international community (Kitaoka, 1998). The research carried out in this thesis aims to

contribute in bringing light to the way Japan intends to project itself and thus to the path its national identity intends to take.

### **1.3 Disposition**

The thesis is organized the following way: the first chapter (1) is the current one, which introduces the reader to the topic of the thesis and with its purpose, the research question. Chapter (2) which provides a general background of the thesis and the contribution it makes to the literature on Japanese national identity, delving deeper into topics such as national identity and the Takeshima dispute. The next chapter (3) lays out the theoretical framework, discussing the different theories and which one is appropriate for the elaboration of the thesis. Chapter (4) explains the methodology that will be used and the data that has been collected for the analysis. Thereafter, the analysis (5) will be introduced, presenting the results, and lastly, chapter (6) brings this thesis to a close with the conclusion.



## 2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sets out a general vision of the background and the literature behind my research topic. Said research topic focuses on national identity and the relationship that certain conflicts or issues, in this case the Takeshima dispute, with other states can affect the construction of said identity. My thesis is set in the Japan-South Korean relations and the clash of identities that rises from these relations. In fact, the initial inspiration for the topic of this thesis was from the book published by Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder called *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*. Through their investigation on Japanese and South Korean relations they come to the conclusion that national identity plays a big role in the state of their diplomatic relations. These authors basically show how “fundamentally incompatible, rapidly changing conceptions of national identity in Japan and South Korea—and not struggles over power or structural issues—have complicated territorial claims and international policy” (Council of Foreign Relations, 2015). Thus, the general concept drawn out from this book is that perceptions of national identity is one element that affects diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, to the point that it is able to turn disputes into historical and political symbols of identity. Therefore, identity is considered the ‘foundation of statehood’ and it hinders the normalization of Japan-South Korea relations, when in fact, there are several foundations on which these countries should be able to build up cooperative ties (Maloney, 2015). This idea of one’s own perception of national identity as a factor that obstructs diplomatic relations is one of the drives behind this thesis. As a result, I decided to focus on the Japanese perception of national identity regarding its neighbour, South Korea and its own perception of national identity, with whom it clashes. Takeshima enters the scene as the arena in which two identities clash and fight for recognition.

This thesis is also based on the constructivist perception that national identities are often constructed in contrast with another one. Bukh (2013, p. 172) describes this theoretical framework the following way: “critical constructivist school focus on broad identity discourses in which the national ‘self’ is hierarchically juxtaposed with its significant ‘others’ through broad historical narratives, depictions of cultural attributes of the ‘other’ and normative analyses of the ‘other’s’ political structures and institutions”. Further information about this theory can be found in the theoretical framework section. Thus, in order to research further into Japanese perception of ‘self’

and construction of national identity I have decided to divide my literature review into different themes. This chapter is divided into three sections: firstly it investigates the construction of the Japanese sense of 'self' or identity; later, it delves into South Korea's representation as an 'other'; and lastly, it finishes up with Takeshima as a dispute in which identity discourse is formed.

## **2.1 Japan's Identity: Construction of Self**

The most prominent theme in this thesis is Japanese identity and how Japan views itself regarding others. This is why it is better to commence with the meaning national identity holds for Japan. A remarkable book that researches about this subject is Taku Tamaki's *Deconstructing Japan's Image of South Korea*, which contains inspiring chapters about Japan and identity formation, and for this theme my focus lies on Chapter 3 named *Contemporary Japanese Identity Narratives*. Tamaki argues that Japanese pre-war identity was closely linked to the concept of 'Kokutai', which is "translates into 'polity': the polity of the state defined through emperor as the father figure, and the people—the subjects—as his 'children' (Tamaki, 2010, p. 63). This discourse became prominent in Japanese identity narratives and "became the very fabric of a familial state headed by the emperor whose divine ancestry justified Japan's 'superiority' over Asia" (Tamaki, 2010, p. 63). Theories over 'nihonjinron', also known as 'theories of japaneseness' cover discourses over cultural identity which can transcend to national identity realm (Kazufumi & Befu, 1993, p. 89). It especially focuses on Japanese identity as being 'unique' due to a range of factor that makes Japan one-of-a-kind, such as its culture, language, character... etc. The origin of these narratives of uniqueness can be due to the geographical fact that Japan is an island, or perhaps it can be due to the influence of the period in which Japan closed itself off from the rest of the world and intended to focus only on itself. Befu claims that 'nihonjinron' theories were put to use in order to fill a spiritual or an identity void left by the catastrophic failure of wartime nationalism built on the divinity of the Imperial line and the invincibility of the Japanese spirit (Coulmas, 2001). Tamaki (2010, p. 62) also argues that after the defeat of the Second World War, Japan decided to reinterpret their identity. Based on their newly added war renunciation clause in their constitution, Japan transformed themselves into a "heiwa- and shonin kokka (peaceful and merchant state)" (Tamaki, 2010, p. 62).

Nevertheless, Tamaki (2010, p. 62) continues to argue that the concept of 'kokutai' did not fully vanish from their identity: "the hierarchic worldview and the associated sense of Japanese 'uniqueness' can be identified within the postwar 'heiwa/shonin kokka' narratives, with their inherent ethnocentrism intact—the hallmark of 'kokutai'—fusing with peaceful merchant role prescriptions". Adding Befu's conceptualization of 'nihonjinron' to Tamaki's argument, it would mean that Japan used to present identity narratives of 'uniqueness' and 'superiority' and in some ways it is still considered that way. "Whether policy makers pursued aggression or peaceful coexistence, what lies underneath is the prevalence of ethnocentrism that tends to trivialize Asian experience of Japanese colonialism, focusing instead on Japan's prewar Asian adventure as Japan's response to realpolitik; and recasts postwar challenges as how to set about future-oriented diplomacy with its former colonies" (Tamaki, 2010, p. 84).

A study which makes reference to such themes is Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson's article, 'Japan and identity change: why it matters in International Relations', published in the *Pacific Review*. In it, the authors address several studies regarding Japanese identity formation and identity change and claim the following: "the articles suggest that Japanese identity is constructed through the drawing of boundaries vis-a-vis several 'Others' and in multiple contexts" (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 2). The authors of this article describe the importance identity has for international relations and the importance it has on Japanese international relations. The fact that Japan has always been given identities from many different international relations theories, such as realism, shows the significance of the construction a national identity. Nonetheless, the point the authors want to make is that "a 'relational' understanding where demarcations between domestic and international, identity and difference, or Self and Other are exactly what constitute identity" (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 5). Another point made is that 'othering' seems to have a negative connotation, but it doesn't always have to be the case. "There are various ways of relating to difference", they observe, including an example in which Tamaki claims that "'Asia' tends to be reified in Japanese narratives as either an opportunity or a threat" (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 7). Overall, this article emphasises the importance of identity the following way: "Identity, then, is fundamentally about agency. If we do not know who we are we will not know what to do." (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015, p. 13). Here is

also noticeable the case in which Japan struggles with its conflicting identities of being considered an aggressor, but at the same time also a victim. Hagström and Gustaffson (2015, p. 17) consider that Japanese identity shifts into being ‘victimized’ by its neighbours and even ‘bullied’ by them. Scott Synder argues (2014): “Japan has its own victim complex, the product of defeat in World War II, the atomic bombing, and a sense of being discriminated against in the postwar accounting of misdeeds. This identification complicates Japan’s concept of its identity, making it difficult for Japan to perceive itself as an aggressor.”

## **2.2 Construction of South Korean Image as an ‘Other’**

Another focus point of this thesis is South Korea as one of Japan’s ‘other’ in their identity. The construction of a specific image of this neighbour can affect the perception Japan has of itself. At this point it should be clarified that there are many different elements that describe Japan’s vision of South Korea’s ‘otherness’, as not everything should be seen as black and white. Nonetheless, for the sake of this thesis’ research, the element within identity that’s going to be the central focus is history and memories of the past. I believe this is one of the key elements to understanding Japan-South Korea bilateral relations and thus also Japanese national identity construction regarding South Korea.

For this matter, Tamaki’s *Deconstructing Japan’s Image of South Korea* brings interesting research to the table. In the chapter 5 of this book called ‘The Politics of Memory’, the author aims to delve into the narratives of South Korean ‘otherness’ by Japan through the memory of history that still lingers in their bilateral relations. Most of the narratives displayed the image of a South Korean ‘other’ clinging to a shared past, especially the colonization past, which Japan sees with the need to move on from. It is thus that many of the conflicts related to memory of history seem to be trivialized by Japan. Tamaki points out that the essence of Japanese identity construction is: “the conflation of sufferings by the people in both Japan and elsewhere, resulting in the trivialization of the claims to sufferings by Asian others”. Tamaki (2010, p. 116) further argues: “The Japanese government felt it reasonable that Tokyo had a significant role to play on the post– cold war world stage, and the hierarchic worldview trivialized South Korean demands as nothing but a nuisance. It was a puzzle, therefore, to see South Koreans clinging on to the bygone days of the war”. Thus, by trivialising their shared history, Japan seems to be adopting a stance of superiority regarding South

Korea. In fact, Tamaki's argument consists on the claims that the dominant Japanese identity narrative is based on belittling the Korean 'other'. Put in his words: "the dominant narratives of Japanese identity are constructed upon legitimacy accorded to a particular story about the Japanese self; and the repeated rejection of Japan's version of history by the Korean other is encountered by an emotional response in Tokyo that seeks to fundamentally delegitimize the counter-narrative through trivialization" (Tamaki, 2020, p. 137).

This notion is not only shared by Tamaki, but other authors support such claims. "In a similar way to Tamaki's treatment of Japanese discourses on Asia, Bukh argues that Japanese identity has consistently been constructed in relation to a notion of South Korea as inferior" (Hagström & Gustaffson, 2015, p. 11). Indeed, Alexander Bukh is another author that has researched on Japanese identity construction regarding South Korea as his 'other'. In his article 'Japan's National Identity, Territorial Disputes and Sub-State Actors: Northern Territories/South Kuriles and Takeshima/Dokdo Compared', Bukh expresses the fact that Japan uses national identity discourses in order to create a perception of 'self' opposed to the image of South Korea. It focuses on the domestic processes that led to nationalistic sentiments regarding territorial disputes, which is a matter that this thesis is not going to get into. Instead, this thesis is going to focus on the construction of Japanese identity via the discourses regarding South Korea as an 'other'. Thus, Bukh contributes to this topic by claiming the way Japan positions itself regarding South Korea. He states that: "There is little doubt that the prefectural authorities sincerely believed that Takeshima belongs to Japan and the ownership of the rocks had little to do with Japan's colonial rule over Korea". This can be related to the previous study in which Tamaki argues Japan's trivialisation of South Korea is a way of undermining their experience and their memory of history. He also suggests that this might be due to the former colonial relationship they shared, as earlier, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of his book he also claimed: "I am not suggesting that the colonial relationship is intact; but neither can we deny the family resemblance in how Japan reconstructs Korean otherness today. The bilateral relations are not colonial relations; but a colonial mindset is somehow visible, indicating that the narratives of Japanese self are still legitimated through the particular reproduction of Korean otherness" (Tamaki, 2010, p. 61). Bukh (2013, p. 185) further argues that, though unintentionally, "Shimane

prefectural authorities created an important symbolic milestone in Japan's national identity construction vis-à-vis the Korean 'other'" regarding Takeshima.

These findings claim that Japanese viewing of a South Korean 'other' can affect the way in which Japan constructs its national identity. This thesis is going to focus on territorial disputes as political symbols of national identity, and thus the territorial dispute between Japan and South Korea that has gained more popular awareness is the Takeshima dispute, as Bukh already researched.

### **2.3 Takeshima Dispute as Identity Discourse**

Bukh's study has also done much of its research regarding territorial disputes and its relations to national identity. Regarding this Bukh (2013, p. 172) claims the following: "Territory is one of the main attributes of a nation and thus any instance of its contestation can be expected to play an important if not central role in the discursive construction of the national 'self' (...) As such, it can be argued, issues that relate to the geographical delimitation of the national 'self' are potent tools in the process of ideational construction of borders that distinguish the 'self' from its 'others'." Takeshima is a territorial dispute that is contested between two different countries, and as such, narratives of national identity have been constructed around it from both sides. Another article from the same author (Bukh, 2015) called 'Shimane Prefecture, Tokyo and the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima: regional and national identities in Japan', further contributes to the constructivist research on Japanese national identity. In this article, the author makes an analysis of what accounts the proclamation of the 'Takeshima day' in the Shimane prefecture for the Japanese identity vis-à-vis the Korean other. He makes the following observation regarding Takeshima: "If, following the post-structuralist branch of International Relations (IR) constructivism, we construe narratives on 'others' as the main building blocks in the discursive identity construction of the national 'self', we can plausibly conclude that today 'Takeshima' has emerged as one of the main symbols in Japan's identity construction vis-a-vis the South Korean 'other'" (Bukh, 2015, p. 48). In this aspect, this author brings to the discussion a few interesting points. For instance, Bukh expresses how this issue, which was once a dispute concerning mostly Shimane prefecture escalated into the national sphere to the point that it was able to influence the Japanese national identity. This suggest that while analysing the data in this thesis it would be

wise to bear in mind that this issue started off as a prefectural identity problem, that nonetheless got adopted into a national one.

Additionally to these ideas, Hagström and Gustaffson also comment about Bukh's ideas regarding Takeshima in the construction of national identity. They claim that Bukh's arguments like on the fact that Japanese identity has consistently been constructed in relation to a notion of South Korea as inferior (Hagström & Gustaffson, 2015, p. 11). Nonetheless, the fact that South Korea has developed economically to the point of becoming like Japan has made it difficult to maintain a Japanese sense of uniqueness or superiority in relation to South Korea in this dimension. Thus, "Bukh argues that this anxiety has been handled by emphasising that South Korea is 'emotional', 'nationalistic' and 'lacking respect for international law' in its behaviour towards the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute and related issues such as education" (Hagström & Gustaffson, 2015, p. 11).

### **3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Before getting into the analytical part of the thesis, this section is going to explain the methodology that is going to be used in this thesis; the way I have collected my data and how I planned to carry out my analysis. It is first going to go through the research focus of the thesis followed by the chosen methodology for analysis; its epistemological and ontological stance; the data collection method, and finally, limitations and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research focus**

My interest for this thesis was researching about national identity in Japan-South Korean relations. At the time I was thinking about the right way to focus this thesis I was in Seoul for an exchange semester. While I was there I realized the importance that national identity has for every country and how it greatly affects the relations they are going to have with other countries. I found that national identity was key in the relations between Japan and Korea and I decided I wanted to find out more about identity and how a state constructs their own identity narrative. I decided to take into consideration all the symbols that can be used to elevate national identity and found that territorial disputes are a big identity focal point. Takeshima especially, is a dispute where Japan's and South Korea's national identities clash. I considered that this issue could bring to light many factor about national identity that I wanted to research, and thus I decided to focus on the Takeshima territorial dispute in order to research the Japanese national identity construction. It would have been highly interesting to research about how Takeshima builds on the South Korean identity discourse, but as I didn't have enough time I decided to focus on the Japanese one only instead.

#### **3.2 Methodology: Discourse Analysis**

The methodology this thesis is using is discourse analysis. This approach is within the qualitative analysis branch and it takes language into account and not exclusive to spoken language only, but also within texts. Bryman (2012, p. 528) considers that there is no definite way to define discourse analysis, nonetheless he still uses the following description: "Discourse analysis 'emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse.'" As the research focus suggests, this study aims to focus on the Japanese national identity discourse, how it is constructed and how the Takeshima territorial dispute builds up on it. Discourse



analysis focuses on the strategies that are being employed by the Japanese government in order to create said discourse. This way it can be known how Japan wants to be represented and the vision it would like others to have of it. For the methodological approach of discourse analysis three factors are necessary which are texts, discourse and context (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 5). It is the connection of these three factors that makes discourse analysis a powerful method. By taking into account the source, the social reality this source was drafted in and the discourse takes a complete meaning, as “discourse analysis presupposes that it is impossible to strip discourse from its broader context and uses different techniques to analyse texts for clues to the discourses within which they are embedded” (Ibid). Thus, discourse analysis is an appropriate method for this thesis as the context of the discourse is an important matter for more accurate outcomes. This methodology also analyses the use made of the language and I will do so in the analysis too. As language is the main tool in discourse analysis, the interpretation of vocabulary is necessary to understanding the discourse. Additionally, this thesis is going to use a series of concepts in the analysis section which need to be defined. For instance, the term ‘discourse’ is going to be frequently used due to discourse analysis being the methodology. According to Kress (1985, p. 67) the term ‘discourse’ refers to: “systematically organized sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of and institution”. As such, this thesis is going to refer as discourse the statement which expresses the views of the Japanese government. On the other hand, the term ‘themes’ will also be used and in those cases theme will mean the subject of the discourse, in other words, the topic that the discourse addresses.

### **3.3 Epistemology**

The epistemology of an issue is concerned to studying knowledge and the theory behind it. In other words, epistemology is related to what is or should be regarded as knowledge within natural science (Bryman, 2012, p. 27). Bryman (Ibid) distinguishes two major doctrines within epistemological positions: positivism and interpretivism. While positivism is centred on advocating the application of the study of social reality, interpretivism takes a more contrasting stance. Bryman (2012, p. 30) describes interpretivism the following way: “It is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.” Basically, interpretivism takes into consideration that people and

institutions act differently and often take unexpected behaviour patterns. As such, studying them through the positivism lenses would be too inflexible, and thus the results would turn out inaccurate. My research takes an interpretivist stance and this way, the national identity narrative that we're going to get from the Japanese government isn't going to be considered an objective truth, but instead it is a discourse that Japan wants to transmit and thus it is subjective and it can change in the future.

### **3.4 Ontology**

Ontology, in opposition to epistemology, refers to the study of being. It asks questions such as 'What things exist or what things are there?' and Bryman (2012, p. 32) considers that these questions are related to the nature of social entities. Bryman (Ibid) also makes two distinctions in ontological considerations: objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism claims that this nature of social entities is beyond the influence of social actors while constructivism states that social phenomena is influenced and revised by them, and thus is constantly it under transformation (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). Additionally, Bryman (Ibid) also claims that: "the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive". In the case of this thesis, constructivism is the most appropriate ontological positioning. After all, the identity narrative is not only constructed by agents but it is also under revision, taking into account different situations and new factors that may arise, and it is probable it will change in the future. Constructivism is also concerned with language and the use made of it. Language serves as an important tool in order to interact and it builds and shapes the social world around us. Bryman (2012, p. 34) also mentions that discourse analysis has a tendency for constructivism.

### **3.5 Data Collection Method**

The research is qualitative in nature, so the data I have sampled goes in accordance to qualitative data analysis. The main sources from which I have drawn out my data are documents, more specifically official documents and reports deriving from the state. These documents are mostly written texts in which the discourse of the Japanese Government regarding Takeshima can be visible. I believe texts are an appropriate source for discourse analysis as a discourse is formed through the collection of several texts. Phillips & Hardy (2002, p. 4) explain it the following way: "Texts are not meaningful individually; it is only through their interconnection with other texts, the

different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption that they are made meaningful”. Other sources that were not necessarily written sources such as texts can also be used for discourse analysis. For instance, pictures or videos are a good source of data collection; however I decided to focus on written documents only as I found that they provided me with the sufficient data I needed. These documents, as I mentioned before, are official documents which were drafted by the Japanese Government or which were directly related to them. In total I collected 122 of these documents, all which were found in Japanese government official websites which are the following: the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (20 documents); the *Office of Policy Planning and Coordination on Territory and Sovereignty* (10 documents); the *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet* (71 documents) and the *Shimane Prefectural Government* (21 documents). The *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet* proved to be a rich source of data and that is because it mainly features press conferences by the chief cabinet secretary, the deputy chief cabinet secretary and the prime minister concerning the issue of Takeshima. Within this data the context has been taken into account. By this I mean that within the timeline that this thesis covers there is a change of government as in 2012 the DPJ lost the elections over the LDP. Some of my data, especially within the section of the *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*, dates back to when the DPJ was in government. I have taken into account this context and decided to stick to this data because the discourse is essentially the same in both governments. Furthermore, I have also added the *Shimane Prefectural Government* precisely due to this context factor within discourse analysis. Shimane is the Japanese prefecture in which Takeshima is affiliated to according to Japan. It is a key player within this discourse of national identity construction because of its high interest in gaining control and administering Takeshima, and thus it would be appropriate to count with their own discourse.

### **3.6 Limitations & Ethical Considerations**

Just like every other methodology, discourse analysis has some limitations which should be taken into consideration. For starters, the documents which I have chosen as my source of analysis may count with credibility limitations leading to a bias. Bryman (2016, p. 550) argues that “The question of credibility raises the issue of whether the documentary source is biased”. This suggests that the use of documents as a primary source has to be done with the idea that it might be biased in mind. It should also be part

of the analysis to figure out where the bias is if there is any or it could also be left to the researcher's interpretation of the document. Nonetheless, Bowen (2009, p. 32) argues that these: "are really potential flaws rather than major disadvantages. Given its efficiency and cost-effectiveness in particular, document analysis offers advantages that clearly outweigh the limitations". Therefore, this method might turn out to be more advantageous than limited, but it is still important to know these challenges. The availability might also be another difficulty, as some documents might not be accessible to any sort of public, including to researchers. Additionally, there was also a language barrier that had to be taken into account as I am working with documents which are originally written in Japanese and many of them could not count with an English translation. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that most of the sources I found were translated English, although it's true that some were in Japanese and thus limiting the amount of data that could be collected. But overall it didn't pose too much of a challenge.

As for the ethical considerations, Bryman (2012, p. 135) mentions 4 areas of ethical principles within social research, which are: whether there is any harm to participants; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy or whether deception is involved. As my data collection sources were official documents I found in Japanese government websites my research didn't involve any participants I could interview or come directly into contact with. Thus, most of the ethical considerations mentioned previously don't really apply to my research. Some of the considerations I had to take care of, for instance, were translation issues. There might have been some meanings which were lost in translation, as the great majority of them were originally in Japanese and I had to count with an official translation. The translation might paraphrase or slightly modify some of the source, thus misleading the original meaning. That is something that I was aware of when I was working with my sources, but overall I felt that the general discourse was untouched by translation errors. Additionally, I had to be aware of my own 'positionality' as a researcher in the field. I consider that my research topic, as it is going to focus on the narratives of identity formation might be a sensitive issue, especially as South Korea and Japan have quite a delicate past that still affects their relations today. Thus, I needed to have this in mind when I had to address the issue during my time in the field. Also, I could come across as having some pre-conceived western conceptions of what identity means for Japan and South Korea and the relation

it creates between one another. These were issues where I had to be aware of my own identity and how it might affect the research.

## **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter is going through the theoretical framework chosen to go carry out the analysis for this thesis. Given the topic of the thesis, which is national identity construction in Japan-South Korea relations, my research is going to principally rely on theories regarding international relations. The theories I delve into are international relations' constructivism and national identity theory. Both of them provide with a vision of identity; the perception states have of themselves and also on others and the meaning this representation holds for them that can be very useful in order to analyse the construction of identity discourses. Although my central framework lies in the constructivist theory, I decided to first introduce the national identity theory instead. I consider it to be necessary in order to have a better understanding of the concept of identity within the international relations sphere and its relevance to the state in order to picture it within the context of the constructivist theory. Following the explanation on national identity theory, I will explain constructivism and how this framework can contribute in the aim of the thesis.

### **4.1 Identity Theories: National Identity**

The concept of identity, which in principle belonged to social and psychological theories start to gain more importance in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rising to the political sphere in form of identity politics or national identity theories and providing a different standpoint in world politics. What is considered identity for a state? How is it constructed, who does it include and how is it valuable? (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 7) These are some of the questions that start to become relevant in order to understand state behaviour towards itself and especially towards one another. Identity is one of the key research concepts of this thesis, thus it would be proper to define what identity is and how is identity viewed from the international relations discipline.

Firstly, identity is quite a difficult concept to define. It is broadly used within constructivist framework, but as it will be seen later on, even constructivists themselves don't have a uniform notion of identity. Alexandrov claims: "There is still no agreement on how to integrate state identity into constructivist analytical frameworks, while the number of empirical studies that rely on the concept is quite limited" (2003, p. 34). Therefore, working with the concept of identity seems to be a tricky task due to its abstract definition. In spite of the wide range of meanings attributed to identity, I will

use this term in the sense of national identity within the realm of culture and values explained by Fukuyama. Fukuyama (2018, p. 8) states that national identity “begins with a shared belief in the legitimacy of the country’s political system” but it can also consist of “the stories that people tell about themselves: where they came from, what they celebrate, their shared historical memories, and their expectations about what it takes to become a genuine member of the community”. National identity brings together the features that this thesis is going to analyse about state identity. It is going to delve into the Japanese construction of national identity; how a state perceives itself through its history, its values and its ideas. Additionally, this thesis is focusing on a territorial dispute in order to research the construction of national identity and that is because geography is a fundamental aspect of national identity. Kaplan & Herb (2011, p. 349) claim that “National Identities was conceived with geography in mind”. After all, national identity can’t be conceived without a territory that is attached to the ideology of that nation. “(...) national identities must always contend with their geographic manifestations” (Ibid). The islands of Takeshima, which are being disputed over by both countries, are not very big and they are barely has any population at all, nonetheless they constitute a big political symbol for Japan and South Korea. Each identify that territory as part of their national identity, and that’s what this thesis is going to analyse.

Fukuyama also points out an interesting point about identity politics and what he calls “the politics of resentment” (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 5). With this he explains how identity can be very important in international politics as “a humiliated group seeking restitution of its dignity carries far more emotional weight than people simply pursuing their economic advantage” (Ibid). This can be particularly true for the case chosen in this thesis, which is Japan and South Korean relations. Indeed, history and shared memories still linger in their interactions and most of the time strains their relations and this is due to the effect of their respective national identities. Fukuyama sets a few examples such as China and their ‘one-hundred years of humiliation’ and explains that “these are all cases in which a group, (...) believes that it has an identity that is not being given adequate recognition—either by the outside world, in the case of a nation, or by other members of the same society. (...) They are all manifestations of a common phenomenon, that of identity politics” (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 6). This is a tendency within the case of Japan and South Korean relations. Within this theoretical framework of

national identity I am going to take into account how these two states have an unresolved issue with their shared history that escalates even to diplomatic levels. South Korean's focus on 'Japanese imperialism' and Japan's own perception of 'victimhood' rather than being the 'aggressor' is an example of their own continuous battle over their efforts of restoring dignity and their craving of receiving recognition that Fukuyama mentions. Indeed, numerous times have 'historical issues' been brought up as a key feature when referring to East-Asian geopolitics. National identity entails this 'resentment' and it shapes each state identity accordingly.

Lastly, national identity is also derived from a combination of internal and external forces, which means that the 'self' is created when there is an 'other' to which contrast itself from. This way that national identity doesn't only stem from within but also in the way it is represented in internationally (Rusciano, 2003, p. 361). This thesis on Japan and South Korea, which have contrasting and opposite national identities, is based on this concept of national identity building regarding the image others have on them, but it is going to be further developed in the following section, which explains the second theory.

## **4.2 International Relations Theory: Constructivism**

Constructivism is a theory that takes a more sociological approach of international relations than any of its other theories do. It is thus considered a 'social theory' within the discipline of international relations (Acharya, 2014, p. 73). According to Acharya (Ibid): "For Constructivists, international relations is shaped not just by material forces, such as power and wealth, but also by subjective and intersubjective factors – including ideas, norms, history, culture and identity". From this perspective it is necessary to look beyond these called 'material forces' and focus more ideological elements in order to see the effects of ideas and beliefs in world politics (Theys, 2018). State dynamics, are thus believed to be socially constructed. Some scholars believe constructivism is more appropriate as a methodology rather than a theory in itself, which is why constructivism has been struggling to be recognized as a robust theory in international relations like liberalism or realism are (Acharya, 2014, p. 73). Nonetheless, Wendt (Wendt, 1992, p. 394) argues that in the anarchy of world politics doesn't inevitably fall into the 'logic' or self-help or power politics; instead these are institutions rather than essential features of this anarchy. That is why he so famously stated that: "Anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1992, p. 395). This theory fits the objectives of this thesis in the way that it



provides the necessary framework to analyse state's behaviour based on norms and ideals. For constructivists norms, once established, "create and redefine state interests and approaches" (Acharya, 2014, p. 73). This means that ideas such as identity can construct or shape state interests, and thus alter their behaviour. This thesis is based on theories regarding the construction of identity and the effects it has in the relationship between two states, in this case, Japan and South Korea, which seem to have opposite and clashing identities. Constructivist theories, thus, give insight into the relationship between these social norms and states' interests.

Constructivists have the following arguments regarding state and identity. They argue that "states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors" (Theys, 2018). As Theys (2018) explains: "A state can thus not act contrary to its identity because this will call into question the validity of the identity, including its preferences". States act according to their identities in relation to other states. Therefore, the perception of its own identity is a very important affair for a state. Wendt (1992, p. 298) describes it the following way: "The commitment to and the salience of particular identities vary, but each identity is an inherent social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another and which constitute the structure of the social world". This also means that state identities can be constructed in opposition to other states or specific states who they are treating with, after all states define their identities regarding the interests of the situation. Hopf (1998, p. 175) claims that identities "perform three necessary functions in a society: they tell you and others who you are and they tell you who others are". This would mean that identity doesn't only help the own state to define its own interests, but it also helps determine what the interests of other states are. Within constructivism, identity narratives, and thus interests, can be shaped according to others' identities. For instance Bukh (2015, p. 48) claims the following: "(...) Following the post-structuralist branch of International Relations (IR) constructivism, we construe narratives on 'others' as the main building blocks in the discursive identity construction of the national 'self'". Post-structuralism, therefore, furthers the constructive theory and adds that "that identity is unstable, always shifting, and is constantly under challenge, pointing out that the boundaries of us-versus them-are always fragile" (Tamaki, 2010, p. 13). This means that a state's perception of 'self' can be influenced by the notion of others. The branch of constructivism that defines identities as changing and taking into

consideration the other state's identity serves as the base for the analysis of this thesis, whose aim is to look into Japan's perception of self in opposition to South Korea as the 'other'.

Additionally, there is a difference within the American school of thought conventional constructivists, such as Wendt, and the critical constructivists, who are from European origin. "Conventional constructivists ask 'what'-type questions – such as what causes an actor to act (...) Critical constructivists, on the other hand, ask 'how'-type questions such as how do actors come to believe in a certain identity." (Theys, 2018). For critical constructivists, communication and language is key in the construction of an identity and a social reality (Ibid). Behraves (2011) argues that critical constructivism: "pays attention largely to the role of 'language,' 'linguistic constructions' and 'social discourses' in constructing social reality, and is dominated by post-positivist or interpretivist scholars who are interested not in explaining the causes and effects of (identity) change through deductive research methods, as conventional constructivists are, but in exploring the conditions of possibility for such change and the ways in which they are created in the first place, using 'inductive (bottom up)' research strategies". In this sense, as critical constructivism resembles the methodology that this thesis is going to follow, this critical constructivism is the most suitable theoretical framework for this thesis to follow. Additionally, critical constructivism has a specific stance regarding identity and its relationship to 'difference'. Indeed, this notion of identity/difference means that in order to make sense of 'one-self' an 'other' needs to be defined (Cho, 2009, p. 90). This difference doesn't necessarily mean that the other is considered 'bad' or 'inferior', but this line of argument tends to rise the moral superiority of the 'self' in order to construct identity (Ibid). Overall, identity is defined by difference, and that is the notion of 'self' in opposition to the 'other'. For this thesis, the identity construction of Japan vi-à-vis the South Korean other is going to be analysed under the critical constructivist theoretical framework.

Overall, this thesis is going to work with the concept of national identity as a construction of how a country sees itself represented and the values it wants to transmit. National identity is often constructed around an 'other' through which a country is able to compare itself to, having thus a clearer idea of what 'self' means. This idea of establishing the difference in order to form the identity is also shared by the critical constructivist theory, which takes into account social norms within the interaction

between two countries. National identity, being one of such norms, carries an important weight for countries, and many times they are constructed around a historical idea, a shared past with another country, leading to the 'politics of resentment' that Fukuyama explains, or certain values, to name a few. In the following analysis, theoretical framework on national identity and critical constructivism are going to be used in order in order to take into account the meaning national identity holds for Japan, what it implies for its bilateral relations and the way in which it is constructed in contraposition to its neighbouring country.

## 5. ANALYSIS

This section of the thesis is where the main question will be addressed, analysed and the results of said analysis will be exposed. The question: “*How does the Takeshima dispute affect the construction of Japanese national identity vis-à-vis the Korean ‘other’?*” entails the Takeshima territorial dispute as the issue around which Japan constructs its national identity discourse. Territory can be considered a very important element of national identity (Kaplan & Herb, 2011, p. 349), thus this territorial dispute can give an important insight of how Japan forms its national identity. As seen in the critical constructivist theoretical framework, in order to define notion of ‘self’, an ‘other’ needs to be defined too. This territorial issue which actively involves South Korea can manifest the way in which Japan portrays itself in front of South Korea and the whole international community too.

In order to have a clear understanding of the following analysis, it is necessary to remind that the concept ‘discourse’ is used referring to a series of statements that create an idea, and the concept ‘theme’ is the subject of the discourse. Through discourse analysis method I detected frequent themes used by the Japanese government in order to justify its sovereignty over Takeshima. These themes are linked to each other, as they all form part of the same discourse, but they all contribute in their own way to the construction of a national identity. Therefore, after analysing the language and the speech, I have selected the most frequent discourses and I will go into detail with them in the following sections. This way, it is easier to identify how the Takeshima territorial dispute serves as a national identity symbol for Japanese discourse.

### 5.1 Analysing the Use of Language

First of all, language in discourse analysis is very important. The words the speaker uses to defend its cause are carefully selected and it gives an important sign of where their positioning lies. Throughout all the collected data I outlined specific vocabulary that I considered important for my research and I was able to identify two specific situations when the Japanese government decides to use a compelling vocabulary, in the sense that the Japanese government adopts an unquestionable stance and that it is not open to debate. Such situations occur when it is claiming its sovereignty over Takeshima and when it makes comments about South Korea’s reactions or responses. Hence, paying

attention to the Japanese government use of language could lead me to more accurate results.

The language used by the Japanese government when it talks about its sovereignty over Takeshima transmits determination and certainty. The words that are frequently used are the following: indisputably, international law, resolute, peaceful, illegal, unilateral and hope. The word ‘indisputably’ is used in all sentences that claim Japanese sovereignty over Takeshima, thus reinforcing Japan’s firm belief in its sovereignty and the full rejection South Korea’s:

“Takeshima is *indisputably* an inherent part of the territory of Japan in light of historical facts and based on international law” (MOFA, 2017).

Words like ‘resolute’ indicate Japan’s determination to claim sovereignty over Takeshima, such as:

“(…) Japanese people share a robust mindset regarding Japan’s sovereignty, and are determined to see to it that its territorial integrity is *resolutely* defended” (OPPCTS, 2013).

The words ‘international law’ and ‘peaceful’ are usually found in the same sentence and that is because they are related to each other. The Japanese government uses those words to legitimize their sovereignty over Takeshima due to the fact that they are a peaceful nation and thus they abide to international law:

“Japan will continue to seek the settlement of the dispute of the territorial sovereignty over Takeshima on the basis of *international law* in a calm and *peaceful* manner” (MOFA, 2014b).

The Japanese government also uses the words ‘illegal’ and ‘unilateral’ to defend Takeshima over South Korea. This choice of words is related to the previous ones: ‘international law’ and ‘peaceful’. By ‘illegal’ and ‘unilateral’ Japan is criticizing South Korea, stating that it is addressing the Takeshima issue the opposite way Japan is. While Japan is trying to keep it lawful, South Korea insists on taking the unlawful path:

“(…) the ROK *unilaterally* installed illegal ‘Syngman Rhee Line’, and began *illegally* occupying Takeshima by force (...) The ROK side may have its own case on Takeshima. By making its case on what one country believes as ‘justice’ *unilaterally*, however, does not guarantee constructive discussions between two countries with different opinions” (Noda, 2012).

Lastly, Japan uses the word ‘hope’ to express their desire for South Korea to follow along Japan’s idea of peaceful resolution:

“Japan *hopes* that the ROK will sincerely act in the interest of mutual cooperation and good faith of Japan” (MOFA, 2018b).

The choice of words used by the Japanese government tends to be critical and stern when it approaches South Korea’s responses or reactions. It involves vocabulary such as: regrettable, unacceptable, disappointing, untenable, no evidence, lack of confidence, highly deplorable, inconceivable and cannot be tolerated. When Japan mentions ‘regrettable’ or ‘disappointing’ it usually is concerning South Korea’s choice of action. Japanese discourse uses the word ‘hope’ towards South Korea’s cooperation and shows disappointment when it doesn’t turn that way, like it is portrayed in the following sentence:

“The reply from the ROK, which did not indicate a specific counter proposal to settle the Takeshima issue, is therefore *extremely disappointing*” (MOFA, 2018b).

Occasionally, the word ‘unacceptable’ is also used to describe Japan’s stance regarding South Korea’s actions:

“(…) it is *extremely regrettable* that the ROK repeatedly engages in words and actions that are *unacceptable* in light of the Government’s position on territorial sovereignty over Takeshima” (Suga, 2018).

Additionally, the word ‘deplorable’, ‘inconceivable’ and ‘cannot be tolerated’ is used in similar context:

“If the ROK President indeed visits Takeshima, this is then very regrettable and *highly deplorable*” (Fujimura, 2012a).

“The return of a letter between leaders is *inconceivable* in terms of diplomatic protocol and *most regrettable*” (Noda, 2012).

“In light of Japan's stance on the sovereignty of Takeshima, the holding of the exercises *cannot be tolerated* and are *extremely regrettable*” (Suga, 2013).

The Japanese government also positions itself regarding South Korea’s arguments, as it considers that South Korea has no real evidence to claim Takeshima and its rejection to the Japanese proposal to settle the dispute under the ICJ jurisdiction shows a clear ‘lack of confidence’:

“The fact that the ROK is trying to discuss this issue in relation to the issue of understanding of history indicates that the ROK *does not have confidence* in the sovereignty over Takeshima” (MOFA, 2018b).

“(…) There is *no evidence* indicating that the ROK has long recognized the existence of Takeshima” (MOFA, 2014c).

This use of vocabulary already suggests the path the Japanese identity discourse is leading. The fact that it uses a resolute language in order to defend sovereignty over Takeshima, yet uses vocabulary such as ‘lawful’ and ‘peaceful’ leads to the idea that Japan believes in its rightful position to claim sovereignty but always within the strict boundaries of law. Consequently, representing Japan as a peaceful and lawful nation. The vocabulary used to criticise South Korea is used in order to discredit South Korea’s claim over sovereignty, arguing that, in opposition to the Japanese stance, it is an ‘unlawful’ and ‘unilateral’ claim, as well as weak and untrustworthy. This conclusion is arrived at using only the Japanese government’s choice of vocabulary. In the following section, the analysis is deepening into the themes which create each discourse and leads to the final results.

## **5.2 Discourses**

### **5.2.1 Discourse 1: “Historically and in light of international law, Takeshima is Japanese territory”**

History is the theme that intuitively is going to be leading the discourse. As it has been seen countless of times before in the past, in Japan and South Korea relations their shared historical memories are brought up whenever there is a disagreement. As previously mentioned in the literature review, this has led many experts to believe that in order for Japan and South Korea to prosper diplomatically they would have to leave behind their historical differences. History, nonetheless, entails traces of national identity for both countries respectively. Takeshima is part of this historical legacy and it can be considered a political symbol of national identity. International law is another theme that is frequently used within this discourse, showing that both history and international law are equally relevant themes that support each other within the same discourse.

This section is going to open up with the most recurring statement used by the Japanese government when it is asked about Takeshima:

“Takehshima is indisputably an inherent part of the territory of Japan in light of historical facts and based on international law” (MOFA, 2018a).

This quote is found in the Diplomatic Bluebook of 2018, but it is also found in the 2017 one, in the MOFA pamphlets, website and even in the speeches and conferences by prime minister or chief cabinet secretary. And that is because it sums up this discourse. As it can be observed, it is quite a resolute and compelling statement. It claims that not only historical facts back up Japan’s sovereignty over Takehshima but international law does too. Thus, claiming that Japan has addressed Takehshima in a strictly legal way. It also serves as a way to emphasize that South Korea is not following the same path:

“Japan has repeatedly made it clear that the ROK’s occupation of Takehshima is illegal and has no international legal basis” (MOFA, 2018a).

Indeed, by pointing out South Korea’s ‘unilateral’ and ‘unlawful’ occupation Japan is differentiating itself from its neighbour. Japan’s argument is based on the fact that while South Korea’s claims over Takehshima have no legal basis, Japan’s does and is also backed up by international law, thus creating the perception that Japan is a strictly lawful country which, in opposition to South Korea, only acts in accordance to international law. Another element that constructs the Japanese discourse of Japan acting under international law is the fact that according to Japan, the U.S recognized Takehshima to be Japanese territory and thus its sovereignty is supposedly supported by them. This goes back to the San Francisco peace treaty after World War II in which the U.S laid out Japanese territories:

“The ultimate determination of territory following a war is done by a peace treaty or other forms of international agreements. In the case of World War II, it was the San Francisco Peace Treaty that legally determined Japan's territories, and the Cairo Declaration does not have any ultimate legal effect on the determination of Japanese territory. It is confirmed in the San Francisco Peace Treaty that Takehshima is Japanese territory” (MOFA, 2018c).

From the MOFA point of view, during the elaboration of said peace treaty, South Korea asked for the sovereignty over Takehshima. However: “the United States unequivocally rejected this request, noting that Takehshima was ‘...never treated as part of Korea...’ but was Japanese territory” (MOFA, 2014c). Additionally, Japan expresses that “The Republic of Korea has never demonstrated any clear basis for its claims that it



had taken effective control over Takeshima prior to Japan's effective control over Takeshima and reaffirmation of its territorial sovereignty in 1905" (MOFA, 2014c). All these claims constitute Japan's argumentation that South Korea has no evidence for its claims over Takeshima, and thus also lack confidence over its assertions. On the MOFA's Q&A document Japan claims that South Korea has never shown any evidence that Takeshima has ever been owned by it:

"As regards to the island of Dokdo, otherwise known as Takeshima or Liancourt Rocks, this normally uninhabited rock formation was according to our information never treated as part of Korea and, since about 1905, has been under the jurisdiction of the Oki Islands Branch Office of Shimane Prefecture of Japan. The island does not appear ever before to have been claimed by Korea" (MOFA, 2018d).

"The ROK side insists that it had established its effective control over Takeshima before Japan, but the wording of the documents the ROK refers to is ambiguous, and the ROK has no unequivocal proof that supports its argument" (Noda, 2012).

The fact that South Korea doesn't, according to Japan, present enough evidence to support its demands over Takeshima is a clear sign of lack confidence in its claims. In fact, Japan suggests that South Korea keeps turning to history in their argumentations precisely because of this lack of confidence:

"The fact that the ROK is trying to discuss this issue in relation to the issue of understanding of history indicates that the ROK does not have confidence in the sovereignty over Takeshima" (MOFA, 2018b).

Here it comes in contact with a vital issue, and that is the one of 'understanding history'. On multiple occasions Japan affirms that South Korea is trying to gain sovereignty over Takeshima by pulling the history 'trump card':

"Although the ROK is trying to associate the Takeshima issue with the issue of understanding of history, it is not appropriate to discuss the Takeshima issue in the context of understanding of history" (MOFA, 2018b).

By this Japan means that this dispute isn't an issue that should be related to their common past, but it is another thing altogether and South Korea is missing the point. Instead, Japan's history theme revolves around historical evidence proving that Takeshima had previously belonged to Japan, and it doesn't want to let Takeshima's sovereignty rely on historical memory and resentment. Like former Prime Minister Noda claimed: "The issue of Takeshima should not be discussed in the context of

‘understanding of history’; it is the problem of whether ROK's act of unilateral occupation is consistent with ‘law and justice of the international community’ (Noda, 2012). By this Japan is trying to disassociate itself from the history issue, which stems from South Korea’s continuous mention of the Japanese invasion and the portrayal of itself as a victim. In one of the press conferences by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, a reporter makes the following claim:

“President Moon mentions that Takeshima in Shimane Prefecture is an inherent territory of the ROK, stating that, ‘Japan’s current denial of this fact [Japan’s occupation] is no different from rejecting self-reflection of the imperialistic invasion’” (Suga, 2018a).

This claim represents the overall vision that South Korea has of Japan regarding history, which is that of an aggressor that hasn’t repented for its past actions and thus is likely to follow the same path all over again. The 2014 ‘We are Tomodachi’ issue makes this remark about South Korea:

“Japan’s claim over Takeshima is often portrayed by the Republic of Korea (ROK) as tantamount to the repetition of the ‘same course of aggression’ as in the prewar history ‘culminating in the annexation of the whole Korea into Japan’ challenging the facts that the islands ‘were restored as Korean territory after World War II.’” (MOFA, 2014d).

Japan is therefore counter arguing this claim by stating that everything it has done so far regarding this dispute is strictly legal, unlike South Korea which is illegally occupying the island. This matter is also closely related to the peaceful resolution discourse, which will be looked into the following section.

“More importantly, there is no doubt whatsoever that we will continue to pursue this path of peace into the future. This path is based on the severe remorse for Japan’s past aggression, and the unwavering determination never to wage war again” (Yamamoto, 2014).

What can be drawn out from this first discourse of Japanese national identity is that it is trying to distance itself from the image that still lingers with their shared past. South Korea keeps bringing up claims about history relating it to the Takeshima dispute, such as Japan not learning from its past mistakes because it is still trying to take over Takeshima. As a response, Japan is surrounding itself with the argument that it is only trying to pursue what is just and legal: “Even if you look back historically it belongs to Japan. Even if you reference international law it [Takeshima] is Japanese territory” (Shimane Prefectural Government, 2018). Essentially, Japan wants to

communicate that Takeshima is not related to memories of the past, but to international law. And as a lawful country, Japan will proudly pursue this path.

### **5.2.2 Discourse 2: “Settlement of the dispute on the basis of international law in a calm and peaceful manner”**

This following section is going to describe the next most-used discourse by the Japanese government about sovereignty over Takeshima: to resolve the dispute in a calm and peaceful manner based on international law. This discourse comes almost immediately after stating that Takeshima is Japanese territory based on historical facts and international law, and that is because it is heavily linked. As seen in the previous discourse, Japan doesn't want to be constantly related to history and the image of an 'aggressor', instead it wants to be perceived as a peaceful country which abides by the law. The theme, thus, is Japan's 'peaceful nature'. In order to embody a peaceful nature just claiming that the country has changed isn't enough, especially since South Korea symbolises the claim over Takeshima as a sign of lack of atonement. This is where this discourse comes in handy, when Japan claims its intention to resolve the dispute in a calm and peaceful manner with an international institution mediating between the two countries:

“The Government of Japan will continue to take appropriate measures to settle the issue in accordance with international law, and in a calm and peaceful way (...) the best way to deal with this dispute is to refer the case to the ICJ and to seek non-biased mediation from the international community” (MOFA, 2018b).

Indeed, Japan finds that the best solution for this sort of dispute is to let the international community intervene through the ICJ. This way, Japan reaffirms its image as a peaceful country and thus defends itself from South Korea's accusations:

“Japan has consistently followed the path of a peaceful nation since the end of World War II, and in order to seek a peaceful solution has proposed no less than three times since 1954 that the dispute of territorial sovereignty over Takeshima be referred to the International Court of Justice” (MOFA, 2014c).

However, South Korea's negative response to this proposal hasn't but strengthened the representation Japan wants to create of itself. As described previously in the theory section, according to the critical constructivism perspective identity can be constructed having an 'other' as a reference. In this case, South Korea's attitude shows that, from Japan's perspective, it is a country that doesn't follow international law, as it

unilaterally occupied Takeshima and also doesn't want to bring the dispute to the ICJ, thus refusing to use peaceful resolution mechanisms. In opposition, Japan is represented as a peaceful nation who is willing to solve this dispute the best way possible. In other words, South Korea's vision of Japan is mistaken:

“Continuing a peaceful existence since the end of World War II, Japan will continue to seek a peaceful settlement of the dispute” (MOFA, 2014b).

In fact, in spite of South Korea's occupation of Takeshima, Japan wants to transmit that it has never opted to the use of force in order to resolve the situation, and instead has decided to take the opposite path, the peaceful resolution one: “In response to these Korean actions, Japan has never opted to use force to resolve the situation, which would be contrary to justice, but has taken the opposite tack, tenaciously pursuing peaceful means to argue against the injustice” (OPPCTS, 2013). This is also a way to stress that Japan has no intentions whatsoever of using force in order to change the status-quo, which is also part of South Korea's concerns. The OPPCTS's advisory report (2013) precisely emphasizes on the need of projecting a positive image of Japan: “a cool-headed country where the rule of law prevails and a peace-loving, future-oriented country with a long track record of contributions to the international community”. The pursuit of values such as democracy, rule of law and freedom of speech are as much significant for this positive projection of Japan as it is to recur to international jurisprudence.

“The most fundamental feature of this international order is, I believe, the rule of law, which, among other things, outlaws any attempt to use force or coercion to change the status quo. This is why Japan has consistently sought, and will continue to seek, peaceful settlements of territorial issues with our neighbours, always in accordance with international law” (Yamamoto, 2014).

This quote by former Minister Yamamoto contributes to understand Japan's positioning in its peaceful path discourse. Japan is emphasizing on two main points: that a change in the status quo through the use of force is out of question as it is a country that has followed the rule of law and that Japan's basic policy is to resolve issues on the basis of international law. At the same time it is also criticizing South Korea's stance. The rejection to the proposal of the Takeshima issue being referred to the ICJ is disappointing because South Korea is a 'global' state and is supposed to adhere to the rule of law:

“As the Japanese Government, it is our strong hope that the Republic of Korea, which aspires to be ‘Global Korea’, will address the [Takeshima] issue with sincerity as a member of the international community” (Fujimura, 2012b).

‘Global Korea’ is an initiative from the South Korean government to become an active participant in the international community. Japan, thus, demands that South Korea acts responsibly as a member of the international community by solving its disputes based on international law, which from Japan’s perspective is done best through accepting the proposal to bring the dispute to the ICJ. Additionally, Japan argues through this proposition that there is, in fact, a territorial dispute, nonetheless “Korea rejected the proposal, denying the existence of a territorial dispute between Japan and Korea. It continues to deny such a dispute even today” (Shimane Prefecture Board of Education, 2013). This is another example of how Japan is ‘othering’ South Korea and how it reinforces its own identity in comparison. By highlighting the denial and the rejection of South Korea, Japan in contrast fortifies its image of doing its best in order to resolve the dispute in a peaceful and lawful way, only to have South Korea hinder this mission. Therefore, the discourse that Japan wants to resolve the dispute in a calm and peaceful manner based on international law is built around the premise that Japan is not a country who wants to challenge the status quo, and unlike South Korea’s accusations, it is a friendly country. Hence, Japan doesn’t agree with the use of armed force and, in contraposition to South Korea; it adheres to legality and pacific methods, such as presenting the dispute to the ICJ and let the international community mediate between them two.

### **5.2.3 Discourse 3: “The Government of Japan intends send out information on the position of Japan on Takeshima abroad”.**

After describing the previous discourses, which I consider to be the two main ones, this discourse is going to display another theme that isn’t as visible as the previous ones but still is present in the majority of the discourses. This theme is about the actions that the Japanese government plans to take regarding Takeshima and how these actions will have an effect on its international representation. It can be interpreted the following way: this discourse is the one that connects the two previous ones together. Historical facts and a peaceful attitude need to have international recognition and that is one of the goals of the Japanese government. The recognition of its national identity lies on the

external support. The actions taken need to be consistent with its previous two discourses and so gaining support over the image created of Japan.

Firstly, the islands of Takeshima carry an important weight for Korea and the Japanese government is conscious about it:

“The Takeshima issue has become a symbol of Korean nationalism, and it is expected that Japan will need to continuously make needed objections to the situation for a considerable length of time” (OPPCTS, 2013).

This means that Japan is aware of the political symbol that Takeshima represents for its neighbouring country and because of this Japan will have to respond to it by openly complaining about it. The appropriate measures they consider in order to lodge their complaints are through diplomatic routes:

“We have lodged a strong protest to the ROK through diplomatic channels, strongly stating Japan’s position on this issue. We will continue to call strongly on the ROK to respond appropriately” (Suga, 2018b).

The government of Japan responds to South Korea’s actions over Takeshima through lodging a protest in diplomatic ways and that is the way to show its peaceful attitude. The quote above is just one of many which reflect the same behaviour over the years: a reporter would ask how the government plans to respond to certain move by South Korea in order to display their sovereignty over Takeshima, and Japan shows a calm and tranquil attitude responding to them through diplomatic channels verbally condemning the action. It is all part of the strategy of showing a peaceful attitude, and more than showing this to their neighbour, the interest lies in showing this to the eyes of the international community.

In the OPPCTS’s advisory panel report (2013) the following is mentioned:

“In the points raised in the recommendations below, they refer to not only the importance of raising domestic awareness of but also the need for a full-fledged strengthening of communications efforts, particularly directed at third-party countries (...) Overseas communications regarding Japan’s territorial integrity need to be conducted strategically and in a concentrated manner, using narratives consisting of topics selected in such a way that makes it easy for members of the public to understand Japan’s positions, including in third-party countries.”

This quote clearly shows the interest to communicate Japan’s position on the Takeshima dispute to the international community as getting their recognition would be

one of their goals. Thus: “communications in English need to be drastically enhanced, targeting internationally influential third-party countries” (OPPCTS, 2013). This could also be the reason why I was able to find so much material in English on the Takeshima issue from Japanese government sources. In order for Japan to correct the perceptions that has been created about itself the third party countries need to understand the its stance, and this way there is a higher chance that Japan can have external support and this includes support to the identity it wants to forge. By conveying its stance that it is a peaceful nation that resolves its disputes through diplomatic ways adhered to international law it can get more support, and so its national identity gains strength.

Additionally, this effort of national identity recognition is not only done for the exterior, but it also important that its own public supports it:

“The support of Japan’s public opinion will be indispensable to advance government policies regarding territorial integrity, and there is a need to enhance domestic awareness, including via stronger cooperation with the education sector” (OPPCTS, 2013).

In this quote a method is mentioned in order to raise public awareness in Japan, and that is the educational sector’s cooperation. This would mean schools, universities or any other educational institution: “To promote further awareness at schools, there is a need to enrich the teaching materials used in the classroom” (OPPCTS, 2015). In other words, the Japanese government needs to produce a body of materials that explains the Japanese stance on Takeshima and its discourse, so that it can be put to use in the classroom. Nonetheless, the final aim is let the whole society know about the discourse: “(...) communications and educational activities should be aimed at enhancing awareness and interest among various sectors of society” (OPPCTS, 2015). This suggests that through education the discourse can spread further into society, and thus, creating a firm national identity. Therefore, the previous discourses and the acts carried out by the Japanese government already strengthen the national identity discourse, but in order to truly establish the national identity it first needs to be recognized by the international community and by the public opinion of Japan itself.

#### **5.2.4 Discourse 4: “The support of the Japanese public is indispensable to the advancement of policies regarding territorial integrity.”**

The last discourse this thesis is going to introduce is the theme that takes public sentiment and the thoughts of the people into consideration. This part of the discourse is

closely related to what was mentioned at the end of the previous one and sometimes it's hard to draw a line between them, but I decided to do it anyways in order to relate public sentiment to the discourse from Shimane Prefecture. As it has been seen previously on the literature review, Shimane Prefecture has a strong interest over the Takeshima dispute due to the fact that it is the prefecture onto which the islands were adhered to. Thus, Shimane Prefecture tends to actively participate in this claim over Takeshima and it shares its own comments and discourses. I decided to take Shimane Prefecture into account when researching about public sentiment about Takeshima because its discourse can have an effect into the general discourse that the Japanese government presents. Much of the construction over the Takeshima discourse has the collaboration of the Shimane Prefecture; therefore comments from this prefecture contribute in the construction of national identity.

Public sentiment is very important in order to support a discourse and a national identity. The majority of actions that the Japanese government or the neighbouring country takes are going to have repercussions in the public opinion. For instance, in a press release the Foreign Minister of Japan in 2012, Koichiro Gamba, said the following:

“Minister Gamba also pointed out that the visit to the island by President Lee has a very negative impact on the public sentiment of the Japanese people toward the ROK and the Japan-ROK relationship” (MOFA, 2012).

With this quote the Japanese government wants to show that the actions that South Korea takes regarding Takeshima is going to affect negatively on the opinion that the Japanese public is going to have of them. Having a negative impact on the public can mean showing support towards the Japanese stance regarding Takeshima, and thus strengthening the discourse. Public support is indispensable in order to claim territory and the Japanese government wants to show that “Japanese people share a robust mind-set regarding Japan’s sovereignty, and are determined to see to it that its territorial integrity is resolutely defended” (OPPCTS, 2013). Relating the Takeshima dispute to a national identity issue is a safe way to guarantee the public opinion’s support.

“Deeper understanding of the Takeshima issue has been achieved in Shimane Prefecture; there is now a need to elevate recognition of the issue on a nationwide scale. Enhancing domestic communications on



Takeshima will be an important part of forming a coherent national viewpoint on territorial matters” (OPPCTS, 2013).

Shimane Prefecture is a central point for the Takeshima issue as a shared understanding in the issue forms cohesion as a nation. Shimane also claimed that “in order to solve the Takeshima problem, it is necessary for the government to make diplomatic negotiations and raise the public opinion that boosts it” (Shimane Prefecture, 2018a).

“To solve the Takeshima issue, it is important to keep the public informed and raise awareness regarding Takeshima. Shimane Prefecture has been studying the Takeshima issue, raising awareness among Shimane citizens, and enriching Takeshima education at schools (...). Also, we need to mention the existence of differences in territorial view between Japan and Korea regarding Takeshima and need to better educate students about Japan's territory, together with the Northern Territories issues" (Shimane Prefecture Board of Education, 2013).

Shimane Prefecture wants the voice of the local people to be heard and in order to do that it finds necessary to disseminate information about it. As seen in the last section, Shimane prefecture also agrees with teaching about the Japanese stance regarding Takeshima in schools. From the Shimane government they also applauded the opening of the ‘Territorial sovereign exhibition hall’ in Tokyo stating that “in order to solve the Takeshima problem, it is indispensable for the citizens and public opinion to rise, and through this facility, we hope that enlightenment and dissemination of information on the Takeshima issue will be actively deployed towards the whole country” (Shimane Prefecture, 2018b). Shimane Prefecture also hosts the polemical ‘Takeshima Day’ and members of the Japanese government are invited to attend. Nonetheless, Shimane Prefecture keeps requesting for the government to elevate the status of the Takeshima day as Tokyo has only sent parliamentary secretaries or vice minister instead of the Prime Minister so far. This is a gesture that should be noted as the Japanese government has been very strong-minded so far over Takeshima, but there are still some limits that it is not willing to cross. But overall, the comments and the opinion from Shimane Prefecture contribute to the discourses that form the national identity, and also contribute in the dissemination of raising awareness so that the notion of national identity is linked to Takeshima within the public.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Takeshima is a political symbol of national identity for both South Korea and Japan. Although national identity interests on these islands might be more visible on the South Korean side, truth is that Takeshima also carries an important weight for Japan's national identity. And this has been evident through the discourses presented by the Japanese government in order to argue sovereignty over these islands. This thesis has made special emphasis on how national identity is constructed taking an 'other' as a reference through which the 'self' can compare and contrast itself with. This is the reason why the research question is phrased the following way: "*How does the Takeshima dispute affect the construction of Japanese national identity vis-à-vis the Korean 'other'?*" The aim has been to interpret the way the Japanese national identity is constructed taking its neighbour South Korea as a reference through the discourses made regarding Takeshima. The result of a discourse analysis of my collected data, which were documents extracted from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and similar governmental sources concerning the Takeshima dispute, is the identification of four intertwined discourses that represent the way Japan has created an image of itself, thus constructing its national identity.

Firstly, the analysis of the use of language is part of the methodology of discourse analysis. The vocabulary used in specific situations and the intentionality behind it is significant in order to identify the meaning of a discourse. The result of said analysis showed a certain pattern regarding on the vocabulary used depending on the theme, which can already give an insight into which path the discourse is going to take. The identified patterns are two concrete themes: the defence over Takeshima's sovereignty and Japan's references towards South Korea's responses or over their actions. On both of these situations I have identified a pattern which shows that the discourse over Takeshima's sovereignty is resolute. There is no doubt from the Japanese stance that Takeshima should be Japanese territory and in their use of words they transmit this security and determination in their position. Additionally, many of the words are used to discredit South Korea's actions in a way that in contrast to them Japan is seen as the legitimate authority. This vocabulary constructs a representation of a national identity that is constructed in opposition to South Korea, which is going to be seen through the discourses.

The first discourse is narrated through the following phrase: “historically and in light of international law, Takeshima is Japanese territory”. This is a very frequent phrased used in many reports, pamphlets and speeches concerning sovereignty over Takeshima. This discourse has historical implications, which is considered to be one of the main disputes between Japan and South Korea that keeps fomenting the differences between them and encourages a national identity formed in opposition to each other. But not only does this discourse bring the history theme up but it also uses international law on its favour. Basically, the discourse shows several arguments in favour why Takeshima should historically and legally belong to Japan and that Japan has strictly followed said law, thus legitimizing its authority over Takeshima. Additionally, Japan shows signs of wanting to break ties with historical memory, which is a frequent argument used by South Korea to gain their right over Takeshima, thus suggesting that Japan is aiming towards a national identity which is freed from burdens of the past.

Next, the second main discourse I identified can be summed up the following way: “settlement of the dispute on the basis of international law in a calm and peaceful manner”. This discourse is usually followed right after the first one in documents and speeches as they are closely linked, and that is because this discourse exposes that Japan is a peaceful and tranquil country which is not interested in breaking the status quo. As suggested previously, Japan wants to move away from the past and thus, from the image visualized by South Korea as Japan being an ‘aggressor’, and in order to do that it wants to portrait itself as the opposite of South Korea’s accusations. One of the argumentations used in order to strengthen this discourse is the fact that Japan proposed South Korea to take the dispute to the ICJ in order to let the international law mediate between them, nonetheless Japan claims that South Korea rejected said proposal. This is a good evidence to show that Japan is trying to resolve the dispute and to abide to international rules as it is willing to let the international community mediate between them; meanwhile portraying South Korea as clinging to the past and even being afraid of letting international jurisdiction decide. Once again, this shows national identity construction in contraposition to the ‘other’.

The last two discourses are related to each other and they can be summarised in two statements: “The government of Japan intends to send out information on the position of Japan on Takeshima abroad” and “the support of the Japanese public is indispensable to the advancement of policies regarding territorial integrity.” The first

one is focused on international support and the second one aimed at the Japanese public opinion in which Shimane Prefecture plays an important role. External support is important, especially in order to have a national identity recognized. The Japanese government is looking for the international recognition through targeting many of their discourses towards the exterior, and it is also looking for domestic recognition through educating on the Japanese stance to the public. Shimane also collaborates on the formation of national identity. It is highly interested in keeping the public informed about its own position regarding Takeshima and that Tokyo voices it too.

Finally, this thesis was aiming to look into the construction of Japanese national identity through discourses presented concerning sovereignty over Takeshima. It identified that Japan has constructed its national identity around the image that it is a country whose intention is to move away from historical ties that binds it to the perpetual image from its neighbours of it being an aggressive and invading country. Through claiming that it strictly follows the international jurisdiction it wants to clean this previous image and transform it into a peaceful and reliable country to its own public and also to the international community. Most of this interpretation comes from the fact that South Korea appears in the Japanese discourse as an 'other' with which to contrast. Thus, the analysis suggests that the image that Japan wants to transmit is created as a response to the vision that South Korea has of Japan. The Takeshima dispute presents a clear arena in which Japan's national identity takes shape vis-à-vis the South Korean 'other'. This way, the Japanese national identity discourse concerning the Takeshima dispute is constructed around South Korea in which both neighbours defend incompatible ideas, and therefore creating an image of the 'other' and the 'self' that clashes together.

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