

Nationalist Entrepreneurs and Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia

Sustaining Public Interest

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Conclusion

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Conclusion

Gatekeepers, not instigators?

So far, this book has demonstrated that territoriality could metamorphose into a convenient snack or a slurpy bowl of noodles and still have as much of a bearing on understanding territorial disputes than the usual provocations among governments. Specifically, this book sought out to explore how public resonance becomes sustained for territorial sovereignty, by emphasizing the importance of personal relevance through efforts at commodification undertaken by local merchants known as ‘nationalist entrepreneurs’: those who take part in market-based activities that simultaneously reinforce nationalism by bolstering sentiments of territorial sovereignty protection. The visibility or scope of these nationalist entrepreneurs tended to track well with public interest (as measured by surveys and monetary donations to the cause) so that domestically, the most publicly salient disputes—the Diaoyu Islands for China, the Senkaku Islands and the Northern Territories for Japan, and Dokdo for South Korea—were the ones inspiring the most conspicuous examples of commodification of nationalism. And sure, while examples like Dokdo bread or Diaoyudao noodles may seem woefully inconsequential for anyone primed to think about territorial disputes as one engaging some mobilization of official state armaments and resources, borrowing the words of the historian Frank Trentmann (2012, 547), “trivial acts, especially when they are embodied through eating and drinking, could at times carry enormous ethical force.” This is particularly salient as I illustrated just how food tended to be popular targets of commodification. Hence, it is *due to* not *in spite of* the bottom-up practices that territorial sovereignty is able to attract and sustain public interest: after all, these nationalist entrepreneurs (unlike large corporations) are part and parcel of the ‘public,’ and why their efforts at commodification represent a creative third way to the orthodoxy of the public as either street-level protestors of nationalism or indirect economic agents by way of boycotts (“punishing businesses for unfavorable behavior”) or buycotts (“supporting businesses that exhibit desirable behavior”) (Neilson 2010, 214). Commodification then is a creative but also truly an embodied and lived practice of nationalism. Through commodification, nationalism becomes *ordinary* (and mainstream) rather than *extraordinary* (and in the fringes); the inconspicuous boundary-drawing practice of nationalist entrepreneurialism represents a kind of normalization of nationalism in terms of its intimate association with the fabric of everyday life.¹

Indeed, commodification really does reveal how the everyday life can represent the “secret yeast of history” (Trentmann 2012, 522).² Take Japan for instance.

According to Young (1998, 57), “like imperial war fevers in Europe and the United States, Japan’s war fever of the 1930s revealed the relationship between an expanding marketplace for cultural manufacturers and the rise of jingoism as a key force behind military imperialism.” Looking at commodification efforts by Japan in the interwar period at around the time of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in the early 1930s,³ there are multiple sensationalized and one-dimensional narratives of heroes of the war that became commodified: for instance, the commercialization surrounding the ‘three human bomb patriots’ or *bakudan sanyushi* (爆弾三勇士) feature strongly in Young’s account of the glorification of militarism and war. [The ‘three human bombs/bullets’ refer to three Japanese soldiers in 1932 that died while detonating explosives on enemy fortifications in Shanghai.] Some examples of ‘human bullets’ products on the market included, ‘three human bomb patriots sake,’ ‘three human bomb patriots bean paste candy,’ and a ‘three human bomb patriots’ food special offered by an Osaka department store with certain ingredients shaped to represent the men and the explosives (Young 1998, 78). During this time of Japan’s conquest of Manchuria, jingoism served as the unofficial propaganda for the empire, with its corresponding marketing of militarism facilitating greater popular support for the Japanese army’s goals of military offensive against China and influencing “the politics of the empire” (Young 1998, 78). Others have documented how in the Tainan region in Taiwan (a colony of Japan at the time of late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century), “the locals manufactured ‘patriotic candy’ and used this enterprise as a national service” (Minowa and Belk 2018, 302–3). The donated candies were then sent to Japanese soldiers in ‘sympathy bags’ and to families of deceased soldiers—here, sympathy bags (*imon bukuro*) refer to the gift ritual that specifically took place during times of war in Japan (in the late 1930s to early 1940s around the second Sino-Japanese war) (Minowa and Belk 2018, 302–3).⁴ There was also an advertisement in Japan for the sake brand, *Kikuka*, a few days succeeding Japan’s invasion of Nanjing on December 19, 1937, that said, “For preparing the victory of the war this spring, send [this sake] as the [*seibo* or year-end] gift” (Minowa and Belk 2018, 308). Indeed, commodification can serve as a fascinating historical microscope.

While commodification was integral to explaining public interest, the overarching argument here was one of co-constitution and entanglement, so that while commodification may retain public interest, that public interest would also plausibly make activities of commodification more attractive so that more people could consider engaging in greater activities of commodification. To examine this dynamic, I capitalized on *trademarks* for their incredibly informative quality, which I very much liken to a genetic marker: one that contains a wealth of information that can link us to the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* of commodification. And just like genetic markers, all actors—including the notoriously challenging context of China—maintain a relatively transparent database on trademarks. Most economies would not function otherwise. In turn, relying on a systematic database with stable cross-comparative meaning (e.g. NICE classification of products and services), I was able to first, compare the raw number of applications with the findings from Chapters 2 and 3 to establish how the volume of trademarks do correspond to their

level of public interest. Second, to establish a timeline of trademark applications for some of the dominant disputes such as the Diaoyu Islands and Dokdo, which made it possible to examine the presence of feedback effects, so that commodification informs public interest and vice versa, thereby reinforcing the overall entanglement or co-constitution between commodification and public interest.

The advantage, of course, of thinking about something as wooly as nationalism in concrete tangible terms such as producers, products, and trademarks is that it becomes much easier to identify agency. That ability to identify agency is critically important as it prevents one from treating nationalism as some free-floating notion, or worse, the conceptual equivalent to Immaculate Conception; it is this very under-specification of nationalist transmission that this book tried to avoid. The added benefit here of being specific about agency and demystifying the ‘magic’ behind nationalism and its continued sustenance is that it forces us to be *precise* about nationalism surrounding territoriality: rather than become complicit in the essentialism of thinking that ‘China’ is nationalistic, we can actually discern important distinctions in the process of nationalism—just as I had demonstrated how the Diaoyu Islands had a much stronger grassroots component unlike the South China Sea that had a remarkable government presence (e.g. Sansha Yongxing Affairs Authority). An operative word here is *process* because commodification is ultimately about treating nationalism as a continual *practice* rather than an isolated *event*, which is why the corresponding focus is on what keeps nationalist resonance going, over the congenital roots of nationalism itself. The same demystifying project could be applied to one’s approach to Northeast Asia and tensions thereof. I had mentioned earlier that history had become the go-to phantom menace for explaining tensions in the region despite the lack of understanding or theorization about what it looks like and how its granular limbs actually work. To reiterate, while nationalist entrepreneurs do not make up the entirety of this phantom’s physiognomy, it can contribute to moving toward being specific about who is doing what rather than relying on abstractions.

Gatekeepers and state-centricity

There are two implications that I want to draw from the findings here that should contribute to a greater understanding of nationalism and territorial disputes: the first concerns the role of governments while the second speaks to the way that we think conceptually about nationalism and contentions over territory.

Governments as gatekeepers

Ascribing governments the role of gatekeepers of nationalist sentiment surrounding territorial disputes picks up directly from the previous chapter regarding trademarks. The data on trademarks—specifically the presence of substantial rejections of applications that capitalized on the name of contested territory—revealed that governments do not necessarily endorse anything and everything that may boost even a standing national agenda like territorial sovereignty protection. It is easy to

slip into the mindset that governments would be wholesale endorsers of any project that is aimed at territorial sovereignty protection because to think otherwise would suggest an ineffectiveness on the part of the government to look out for its national interests, especially in the face of an ‘Other’ that is directly challenging that interest. In that vein, scholars have pointed to government accommodation of growing popular sentiment as fueling greater bilateral tensions between China and Japan.⁵ In a way, the elite manipulation thread in the nationalist discourse also capitalizes on this sentiment: that it pays for elites to endorse nationalism. To be fair, some have pointed out that a part of the reason behind the undue belief in the construction of nationalism by elites is because of “an overwhelming emphasis in research on nationalism on positive cases: cases where nationalism has appeared, ignoring cases where it has not” (Whitmeyer 2002, 321).

Yet, instead of being unconditional supporters of activities that strengthen an official government’s stance on territorial sovereignty, governments were very discerning about which activities to approve or deter based on the fate of territorial-themed trademarks.⁶ In fact, the high proportion of rejections to approvals of trademark applications showed exactly how the government is modulating nationalism. Most recently, Zhang and Ma (2023, 897) have documented a similar phenomenon, where “the [Chinese] state sometimes strategically co-opts some patriotic contents into its own patriotic narratives,” while “it also delegitimizes other undesired ones through labels such as ‘high-level black (*gaoji hei*) or ‘low-level red’ (*diji hong*).” According to these scholars, “These labels were initially used to differentiate meticulously crafted political satire and parody from incompetent, illogical and vulgar propaganda pieces that unintendedly blemish the state’s patriotic campaigns, but later evolved into an exercise of power to distance the CCP from undesired patriotic content” (Zhang and Ma 2023, 897), ultimately showing how Chinese nationalism is shaped by multiple forces that include the state’s agenda, public sentiments, and business interests. Speaking to this multidimensionality, by playing a gatekeeping role, the government is neither a major nor minor character in the nationalist ecosystem; put differently, nationalism is neither a sole state enterprise while commercial activity is not unchecked private initiative; hence, a dialectic relationship.

Both the data on China and South Korea illustrate this. From the Diaoyu Islands dataset, it is possible to examine both the dialectic between the top-down and bottom-up modes of nationalist activity based on the low trademark acceptance rates from government gatekeeping. That there are such few Diaoyu Islands trademarks that are live certainly gives pause to the seductive notion that the Chinese government would support all/any activities that might increase the resonance of a state-wide nationalist agenda like disputed territory, especially in the face of Japanese ‘aggression.’ It is probably wise for the Chinese government to not proactively publicize this judiciousness (because again, that a government might be endorsing rather than stifling territorial sovereignty protection efforts helps with optics), and the fact that the gatekeeping happens to occur within a realm (of trademarks) that does not typically garner a ton of media attention allows for the government to be tight-lipped about its invisible hand.⁷

Yet, there are actually instances where the Chinese public has not simply gone gentle into the quiet night upon hearing of the rejections of their applications; in fact, there is multiple evidence of people eventually becoming plaintiffs against the Trademark Review and Adjudication Board of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (who is ultimately responsible for the rejection) in the Higher People’s Court (the highest local court in China). In 2014, there was a ruling involving a company called Zisheng Hi-Tech Technology Co., Ltd.,⁸ who had appealed after having their Diaoyu-related trademark rejected.⁹ The plaintiff’s appeal was based on roughly three points: that there were errors in the applicable law of the original judgment, that the trademark review board was inconsistent in its standards for ruling, and that the trademark reflected an expression of the “unanimous wish of the people of the country to safeguard national sovereignty” (China Judgements Online 2014). To the plaintiff’s credit, the plaintiff had astutely recognized the inconsistent nature of the approval process for Diaoyu-related trademarks and, to that end, provided a list of registered Diaoyu-themed trademarks as part of its appeal. In the end, however, the court had ruled that other registrations were not relevant to the decision in question and that in effect, precedents cannot establish reason for approval of a particular trademark application. The same kind of logic appears in the court’s rulings on other appeals involving Diaoyu-themed trademark applications, even on those that opt for the graphic route of using the picture of Diaoyu Islands as a logo rather than the words.¹⁰ In sum, the judicial rulings only reinforce the reality of the government’s intentionality to gatekeep and clearly dispel the intuitive notion that central governments are wont to support, not hinder, public efforts that may contribute to national interests like territorial sovereignty protection.

I could make a similar observation about the trademarks data for South Korea. In the previous chapter, I showed how roughly 30 percent or only 140 out of the 459 trademarks for Dokdo were live as of 2019. To offer greater detail, Figure 5.1

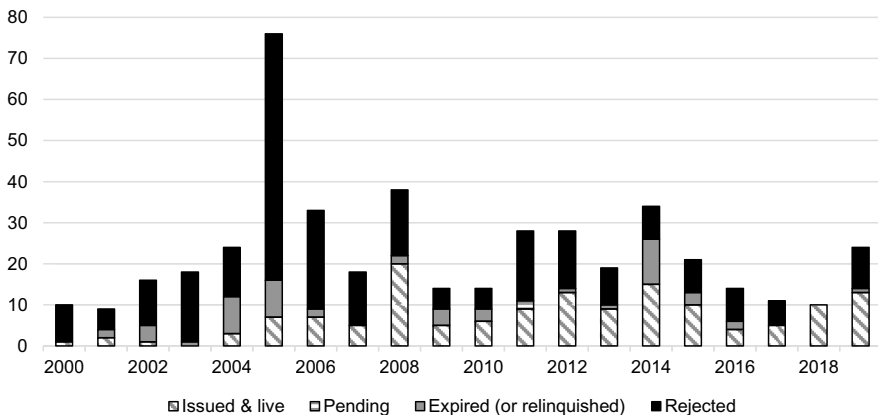


Figure 5.1 Annual status of Dokdo trademarks in South Korea (2000–2019)

displays every trademark application for Dokdo from 2000 to 2019 and its status, wherein a single trademark can only fall into one of four categories: *approved* and *live* (as of 2019), *pending* (which typically means it is still undergoing examination), *expired* or *relinquished* (as of 2019) and *rejected*.¹¹ Overall, including 2005 where the number of rejections clearly overwhelmed approvals, the rate of annual rejections has almost always nudged past approvals. Is it shocking that the South Korean government could be so heavy-handed with deterring nationalist activity on Dokdo, a beloved national cause? Perhaps, but as was the case with China, not much gets publicized regarding trademarks so that government gatekeeping or intervention in this particular realm tends not to publicly collide with the top-down rhetoric concerning greater territorial sovereignty protection. And so, the myth of wholesale government support for territorial sovereignty protection and for the public remains intact.

Even with the small sample size of trademarks data as that of Japan's, there is also evidence to support the discreet gatekeeping power of the state and the top-bottom dialectic. For example, there was an instance in December 2006 where the Japan Patent Office (JPO) had declined the application to register a trademark by the Japanese company, Daito¹² that had produced Takeshima Monogatari (竹島ものがたり or 'Takeshima Story')—a Japanese snack known as a 'manjū' in the shape of the disputed territory of Takeshima—as part of a tourist item for Okinoshima, a town located on Dōgo, in Oki District, Shimane prefecture. This is somewhat reminiscent of the diplomatic spat in 2004 over 'Dokdo' stamps issued in South Korea,¹³ when it was reported that the Japanese government had rejected several applications at around the same time for the issuance of 'Takeshima' stamps, although the Japan Post did honor one request by a private stamp collector (Park 2007, 127). The JPO had initially cited reasons of unnecessarily stoking misgivings between the two countries, citing Article 4, paragraph 1, item 7 of the Trademark Act: "Article 4 (1)...no trademark shall be registered if the trademark: (vii) is likely to cause damage to public policy..." (World Intellectual Property Organization n.d.). In a twist, the JPO had later accepted the application in February 2007 on grounds that it would not be fair to judge a trademark based on the surrounding political context. In contrast to China and Korea then, Japan's situation regarding the state is not as telling through trademarks data, but there are still instances that illustrate the attempt by the state to gatekeep activities of commodification.

As an addendum, there is also a fascinating case of government gatekeeping in Singapore: a country that parenthetically also hosts a live Diaoyu Islands-themed trademark, one that is for tobacco and cigarettes.¹⁴ News hit in late 2012 of a café named 'Diao Yu Dao' opening in Singapore (a non-claimant state in both the East and South China Sea disputes) by a Chinese Singaporean couple, which very quickly took an interesting turn once the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA), and the Singaporean police all started investigations into the café (Lin 2012). In addition to the storefront in the name of the disputed territory, the establishment apparently had displayed more than 30 graphics, maps, and photographs related to the islands on its walls, in addition to information about the islands' history.

The investigation was based on a possible infringement of the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice, which contains the following clause (article 9, paragraph 3): “Advertisements should not adopt or encourage a confrontational approach to resolving societal conflicts or differences. Advertisements should not exploit or fuel conflicts relating to national problems and controversial policies or issues” (Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore 2008). Incidentally, a couple sentences above this article 9, paragraph 3 is the statement that “advertisements should not (a) downplay the importance of patriotism and national unity” (Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore 2008). (Though I gather that patriotism here does not apply to the Diaoyu Islands since Singapore as a state is not an official claimant to the dispute.) A follow-up article in February 2013 reported that the café had put up a cloth to cover its signboard while information regarding the islands within the store was all taken down (the menu meanwhile still bore the name ‘Diao Yu Dao’) (Lin 2013).

What all of these examples converge on is the role that central governments play as discerning gatekeepers, not wholesale endorsers of nationalist activity on territoriality. This is fascinating exactly because it is more common to assume that these actors would support, rather than hinder, their public’s involvement in an issue that directly impinges on a purported key interest of the state. Still, this finding should not be interpreted to mean that the government has some sort of centralized or totalizing regulatory system on the production and reproduction of nationalism. For instance, while not entirely discounting the role of the Chinese state in facilitating anti-Japanese popular nationalism, some have observed that “the Chinese public increasingly plays an autonomous role in shaping China’s Japan policy” (Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016, 265). Early on Kenneth Pyle (2007, 30) had warned of exactly this, by stating that “as it [nationalism] gathers strength as a source of identification and motivation, nationalism easily slips beyond the control of state leadership.” On China, Pyle (2007, 33) described nationalism as a “wild card,” in that “the government struggles to maintain its version of the master narrative.” If anything, there should be greater interest in tracing the shifting power dynamic between the state and the public in the production of nationalism. For now, I will share Yu’s quote that was originally posited against traditional conceptions of producers and consumers in the marketplace sans the state:

a framework for understanding consumption in China, however, must include a third “actor” alongside the producers and consumers—and that is the *state*. This tripartite relationship creates a constant push and pull of often differing agendas, continually shaping and reshaping China’s unique consumption landscape. The relationships between the three players are...complex, and who has the “upper hand” is not always consistent across contexts. Corporations are often beholden to the state in terms of their access to the market...nonetheless, the state’s influence has receded dramatically in the last two decades, replaced by new ideologies of cosmopolitanism.

(emphasis added, Yu 2014, 19–20)

I could elevate this argument about state power to a larger debate about the status of the government amidst increasing forces of globalization. The question of globalization and autonomy, and hence, the contraction or enlargement of state power has been a particularly contentious issue for IR scholar (el-Ojeili and Hayden 2006; McGrew and Held 2007; Scholte 2005). While there have been macro-level theories about the differential impacts of globalization for various regions (Mann 1997; Shaw 1997), or the effects of (non-governmental) actors and transnational ties (Josselin and Wallace 2001; Risse-Kappen 1995), we know much less about how the state has managed to recalibrate itself in the face of such challenges to its projection of power and through what channels it has regulated the private sector (not civil society *in toto*). The commodification of nationalism effectively moderates the traditional ‘statist’ conception of nationalism and the hegemonic role of the state. As a result, I take sides with neither commercial nationalism, where the state still reigns supreme in some ways as it achieves its objective of reproducing nationhood vis-à-vis commercial entities (although it no longer enjoys the monopoly over the means), or with consumer citizenship, where the agency firmly resides with the individuals and the freedom that comes from making voluntary choices in a capitalist market. There seems to be a renegotiation of power for both parties of the government and the private sector so that (1) on the one hand, the government does face some contraction but is still able to gatekeep much of the commercial activity, (2) while on the other hand, the producers of nationalist goods also encounter a regulation of their private activity but retain the creative entrepreneurialism attached to the commodification of nationalism. In that sense, the ‘freedom’ I attach to capitalist activity is slightly reminiscent of Marx’s idea that the “freedom of the market is not freedom at all” (Harvey 2010, 42), since in my equation, nationalism (not just market forces) that no one person controls regulates all. This push and pull between the ‘state’ and its ‘people’ become incredibly important for understanding the nationalist ecosystem where control is distributed across the system and there is no singular entity at the regulatory helm.¹⁵

Moving beyond state-centricity

Speaking of states, both nationalism and territorial disputes are extremely state-based concepts. By this, I mean that both tend to reinforce the primacy of territorial boundaries that in turn leave little room to problematize what goes on either *inside* the state—in the case of territorial disputes with its focus on relations *in between* states—or *outside* the state—in the case of nationalism since its definition typically hinges on a collective bounded by state borders. Commodification should make a case for more fluid movement (or transgression) in and out of state boundaries.

There is a clear value to opening up the black box of the state when it comes to territorial disputes: looking *sub-nationally*, I found multiple years where Shimane prefecture in Japan—the administrative locus for Takeshima—singularly recorded *zero* donations from its public for territorial sovereignty protection of Takeshima. Incidentally, there is incisive scholarship that supports this finding: for instance, Tanaka (2016, 516) found that “Counterintuitively, residents closer to [territorial]

disputes are more likely to support a compromise than those who live further away, because they are more affected by economic considerations.” Similarly, I could provide the sub-national data based on origin of each applicant of a Diaoyu Islands trademarks. At the individual level of provinces, the most prominent region for origin of applications that use ‘Diaoyu’ in its trademarks is Henan, which is well above that of Fujian province located in the southeastern part of the country and close to Diaoyu Islands (Figure 5.2).

At the individual level of provinces, the most prominent region for origin of applications that use ‘Diaoyu’ in its trademarks is Henan, a province in central-eastern China, which takes up about 18 percent of all trademarks from 2000 to 2019. Henan is a notably populous province, which may explain the high number, but even controlling for population, it is well above that of Fujian province located in the southeastern part of the country and close to Diaoyu Islands. At least at the cursory level, it is hard to conclude that public interest follows organically from proximity. There is actually a fascinating study conducted by Lan and Li (2015) on the relationship between economic openness and nationalism, with China as their main empirical testing ground. Basically, they contend that “as a region’s foreign trade increases, its nationalism declines” (Lan and Li 2015, 295). The logic is based on the economic rationale that foreign trade decreases the importance of the domestic market (and its economic interests become more aligned with the foreign

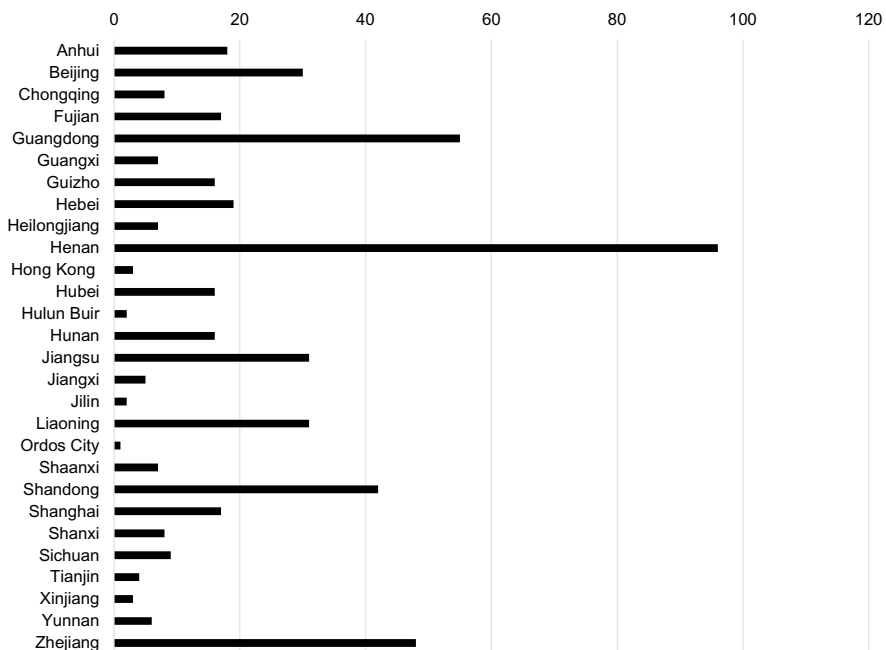


Figure 5.2 Trademark applications for Diaoyu Islands in China based on location of applicant (2000–2019)

market). While this is beyond the scope of this book, the trademarks data provides an interesting counter to the way that economics is treated as a palliative to nationalism rather than its vehicle for greater transmission or amplification. Most importantly, disaggregating the ‘state’ this way provides fascinating information that contributes to the premise that public interest in territoriality is not necessarily organic (otherwise, location or proximity should have a strong resonance on interest).

It is possible to expand on this but in the other direction of commodification *outside* the state. For example, a Chinese beer company—Hangzhou Qiandaohu Beer Co., Ltd—has successfully registered a trademark called ‘Gando-ho’ with the South Korean trademark office.¹⁶ It was also reported that Dokdo ramen was planning to introduce its products to the Chinese market (Cho 2010). There is also a case in the Japanese trademark database of an applicant, Kato Hisashi, located in Fukuoka-shi in Fukuoka prefecture, who successfully registered a trademark under ‘Daemado.’¹⁷ Not only is Daemado not a homonym but also the Korean nomenclature for the disputed territory with Japan. This points to either one of two theories: the applicant is an extremely rare case of someone who supports the ‘other team’ in a dispute involving one’s own state, or in all likelihood, the applicant has ‘appropriated’ Daemado to preempt efforts by foreign nationals within the Japanese market. There is another example in the South Korean trademark platform of an individual, Kim Jong Hak, who applied for ‘Diaoyudao 1403.’¹⁸ In case there are doubts about whether this is related to the territorial dispute between China and Japan, the year ‘1403’ is a significant and common reference point for tracing the earliest written record (a book from the Ming dynasty) of China’s claims to the islands. In fact, the trademark is for a line of skincare, ranging from facial moisturizers to sunscreen, which is highly reminiscent of ‘Dokdo 1025’—a line of Korean skincare from a company called Round Lab (‘1025’ here refers to October 25 and Korea’s commemoration of ‘Dokdo Day’). And perhaps in the most ‘elaborate’ version, a ‘*Senkaku*’ trademark (the Japanese term for Diaoyu Islands) was filed by a *Chinese* individual in Guangdong with the *United States Patent and Trademark Office* (USPTO).¹⁹

What these examples all have in common is that there is a transplantation if you will, of an external platform for commodification of nationalism—a kind of ‘diasporic nationalism.’ And the U.S. is an ideal place to start given its sheer size and diverse presence of immigrant communities. Of course, the same caveat applies here to the process of searching for trademarks in Chapter 4: that trademarks will most likely *under-report* all instances of actual commodification. To elaborate, trademark applications require a considerable amount of effort, which makes its alternative (of using a name of a contested territory without legal protection) quite an appealing option. As someone who has once lived in Koreatown, Los Angeles, there have been more than a few times that I have seen trucks whizzing by adorned with the name, ‘Dokdo Movers.’ So with this caveat, doing a quick search on the USPTO platform at <https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/> for territorial-themed trademarks produces the following results:

- Eight ‘Dokdo’-themed trademarks (two live, six dead)
- Three ‘South China Sea’-themed trademarks (all dead)
- One ‘Diaoyu Island’-themed trademark (dead)
- One ‘Senkaku Island’-themed trademark (dead)
- One ‘Northern Territories’-themed trademark (dead)

Unsurprisingly, the territories for which there are trademarks are the same ones that are popular targets for commodification in their local context of China, Japan, and South Korea. The South China Sea-themed trademarks were submitted by one Malaysian company (Malaysia has territorial claims in the South China Sea), one Canadian company, and an American citizen in California, the Diaoyu Island-themed trademark was submitted by a legal citizen of China living in New Jersey, while the applicant for the Northern Territories-themed trademark was an apparel group based in New York. Looking at the owners of the Dokdo-themed trademarks, four of the applicants are nationals of South Korea, which suggests the continuation of this transplantation of commodification in external markets. In fact, the only live territorial trademarks are the two under Dokdo, which merits some further discussion.

One of the two live Dokdo trademarks belongs to Dokdo Winery in Napa Valley that produces Dokdo Wine.²⁰ There are three interesting facts about this company: (1) while Dokdo Winery only ships within the U.S., it has a South Korean distributor—*The Odd Wine Korea*—located in Seoul, Korea. Incidentally, the head of *Odd Wine Korea* has stated his intent to donate 10 percent of all revenues from the sale of the wine to an NGO that works on increasing awareness of Dokdo (Kim 2015), which echoes some of the trajectory of nationalist merchants; (2) that the winery’s only other non-U.S. distributor is a South Korean company is important, as it implies that South Korea is a critical target audience/consumer market. In turn, while the origin of the product is overseas (in the U.S.), there is still very much a ‘domestic’ component to the consumption of the product (within Korea); and (3) it was reported in 2012 that Dokdo Winery had sent its product to the Japanese consulate in San Francisco to celebrate its successful manufacturing of the wine, which led to an official protest by the consulate and the return of the wine (during a stern visit by the vice-consul to the winery).²¹ Prank or not, there is no mistaking the signifying ‘other’ for this particular company and its interpretation of Dokdo. In this example, however, there is a fascinating extra-national quality—the appropriation of both the U.S. market and its resources (i.e., the physical land in Napa Valley)—for the commodification of nationalism, which suggests an interesting rationale for the ‘diasporic nationalism’ that is untied to traditional state boundaries.

The fluidity of territorial boundaries and hence, the curious hybridity to the conceptual container called the ‘state’ also applies to the substantive content of the trademarks themselves. To give a quick illustration, there exists a ‘Dokdo Hefeweizen’ trademark; the logo shows an oval containing the landform of Dokdo with the words Dokdo and Hefeweizen hugging the oval frame. It is no secret that Hefeweizen is a wheat-based beer with origins in Germany (though it ended up riding the coattails of German immigrants to the U.S. in the nineteenth century).

To have an item strongly evocative of European roots but packaged in the nationalist iconography of Dokdo is telling of how ‘Korea’ does not seemingly stop at the water’s edge: the beer effectively transgresses the territorialized zone or space of what counts as ‘Korea’ and ‘Korean.’ Yet another reason why even thickly state-based concepts such as nationalism and territorial disputes might benefit from treating the state and its boundaries with greater malleability.

Moving forward

Asia is vast, and Northeast Asia is clearly one of many other regions that encompass disputants engaged in unresolved contests over territory. Even shifting the gaze a tiny bit to Southeast Asia, it is easy to pick up on efforts at commodification surrounding territoriality, especially regarding the South China Sea. Illustrative of this is Vietnam, who has stakes in Hoàng Sa (Paracel) and Trường Sa (Spratly). Not unlike China’s own posture regarding the South China Sea, there were reports in 2015 that the Vietnamese government had announced the launch of a six-day ‘sovereignty cruise’ to Trường Sa (Vietnam’s name for Spratly Island) that would be offered to 180 citizens, stating in the promotional guide that “Traveling to Trường Sa...means the big trip of your life, reviving national pride and citizens’ awareness of the sacred maritime sovereignty of the country” (Petty 2015). There are also nationwide competitions hosted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam that solicit ideas for products that fit the theme of ‘Green Trường Sa,’ that are based not only on the artistic quality of the product but also on standards such as determination to protect territorial sovereignty and propaganda value (Quang 2016). Needless to say, the government plays a discernable role in regulating the commercial activities by the public surrounding the disputed territories.

Still, there is a visible market in Vietnam for goods and services related to territorial sovereignty and examples of entrepreneurs and companies taking part in the efforts of commodification: Mr. Bùi Tuấn Minh, the head of GalleWatch and the Director of the Hai Minh Import Export Company Ltd., is one such nationalist entrepreneur. With the help of a Swiss company, he successfully manufactured wristwatches that display the names, Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa on the watch face.²² The motivation purportedly came from the idea that a watch is inseparable from the person wearing it, so every time an individual takes a look at the time, they will inevitably see the image of the country and reassert their feelings of territorial sovereignty (Hoang 2015). Another notable case is 584 Nha Trang Seafood Joint Stock Company (formerly a state-owned enterprise). The company, known for its line of fish sauce, launched a particular brand of fish sauce named after Trường Sa in 2013 called ‘Trường Sa Deep Traditional Fish Sauce’ (Trần 2013). Additionally, the company had announced that it would donate partial proceeds of the first million bottles of its fish sauce sold to a ‘Contributing Stones to Build Trường Sa’ campaign. The ‘Contributing Stones to Build Trường Sa’ campaign was first launched in 2011 by *Tuổi Trẻ* Newspaper of Ho Chi Minh City and Ho Chi Minh Central Communist Youth Union, and it also involved a public component where anyone could text in with the word ‘truongsas’ to a phone number that

would automatically donate VND 16,000 or about USD0.70 to the campaign—apparently more than 2,000 students of Phu Yen University had donated through text message to the campaign in October 2011.²³

Of particular note, there was a flurry of ‘patriotic’ market activity in response to the 2014 China-Vietnam oil rig crisis, involving a Chinese state-owned oil corporation and its drilling activities in the waters near Hoàng Sa (or Paracel island)—paraphrasing, the Vietnamese fishing vessel that was involved in the incident now sits outside the Hoang Sa Exhibition House in Da Nang city, Vietnam (Nguyen 2019a). Taking a step back for a moment, the year 2014 was somewhat of a watershed period for Vietnam in terms of its engagement in territorial sovereignty disputes. To note just one significant development, the ‘*Vì Hoàng Sa—Trường Sa thân yêu*’ organization was founded in August 2014. Headed by Ms. Truong My Ho, a former vice president of Vietnam from 2002 to 2007, the organization’s mission centers on reinforcing Vietnam’s sovereign rights to both Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa; incidentally, the organization grew out of what was initially the ‘*Vu A Dinh Scholarship Foundation*,’ which had granted scholarships to low-income families of naval officers and fishers. In 2019, Johnathan Hanh Nguyen, the president of Lien Pacific Corporation (IPPG), became one of six vice presidents of the organization (Nguyen 2019b), which injected even greater support for an entity that has individuals, companies, as well as government officials as its members.

With this in mind, there were several reports during this time that people were channeling their patriotism through apparel, with the production (and consumption) of t-shirts adorned with themes like a five-pointed yellow star, a (military) boat, and maps of Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa.²⁴ In another local press, there were remarks that patriotic fervor had never been so high, with merchants selling three to seven t-shirts daily (Ninh Thuận Online 2014). According to the local press, many Vietnamese citizens were displaying their love for the disputed islands in their own way and expressing their desire to protect the sacred territorial sovereignty of Vietnam—also noting that such patriotic keywords such as Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa would not only stimulate greater interest in fashion but raise overall nationalism (Ninh Thuận Online 2014). During the same period, an e-commerce company gained some press coverage by launching a campaign selling 1,000 t-shirts emblazoned with the logo, “*Hướng về Biển Đông*,” which would be transliterated into “Towards the East Sea,” but contextually meaning “Protect Our Sovereignty Over the East Sea,” using the profits as proceeds to programs that reinforce Vietnam’s territorial sovereignty (VietNamNet 2014). Its head, Ho Quang Khanh, had stated that “protecting the sovereignty of the East Sea is a common spirit that binds Vietnam. As an entrepreneur, we wish to contribute to this cause by taking practical action” (VietNamNet 2014).

A search for trademarks that use the names of any of the islands or maritime features located in the Hoàng Sa (Paracel) and Trường Sa (Spratly) archipelago on the Industrial Property Digital Library operated by the Vietnamese National Office of Intellectual Property at <http://iplib.noip.gov.vn/WebUI/WSearch.php> returns a relatively short list of applications—a total of 9 and 11, respectively. Though the small sample makes it difficult to conduct any meaningful analysis, it is instructive

that there does not seem to be a huge disparity between the two territories; in part, this could reflect the reality of the lack of interest (and nuance) in territories that are often bundled together under the hegemonic term of ‘Biển Đông’ (East Sea), or ‘South China Sea’ in the Western media. The only searchable key term aside from ‘Hoàng Sa’ and ‘Trường Sa’ was Pattle Island (or Đảo Hoàng Sa) in the Paracel archipelago. So again, there is neither much interest in China nor Vietnam in areas that are rarely mentioned in mainstream media but still part of the contested claims. To be exact, a single trademark—5 SAO VANG THAI HOA VNTH Quần Đảo Hoàng Sa Quần Đảo Trường Sa, hình—actually includes all three disputed territories of Hoàng Sa, Trường Sa, and Đảo Trường Sa, but it is more likely that the trademark was aimed at Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa based on the image of the trademark: a map of Vietnam surrounded by two clusters of what looks to be Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa to the right. Both the trademarks for Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa were approved by the government in 2018 but registered at different times in 2016 by a singular entity called Công ty TNHH VN Thái Hòa (VN THAI HOA COMPANY LIMITED). According to a search on the National Business Registration System (NBRS) online operated by the Vietnamese Ministry of Planning and Investment, the company was founded on March 3, 2014, based in Ho Chi Minh, and specializes in the wholesale of agricultural raw materials, but also items such as clothing, textiles, footwear, food, and beverages. Although there is not much information about the company’s efforts regarding territorial sovereignty, based on the description provided by the Industrial Property Digital Library, it is likely that the territorial sovereignty-related trademarks were used to promote foods made of beans, corn, peanuts, or agricultural products such as rice. In that sense, the use of foods as vessels for nationalist sentiment is consistent with the evidence of nationalist entrepreneurialism from other countries like China and South Korea.

Moving entirely away from Asia, there is evidence still of commodification regarding contested territory. Karen Culcasi (2016, 80) has documented everyday items such as keychains being circulated by shops and street vendors among Palestinian Jordanians in Jordan that inscribe the territorial uprootedness/displacement of Palestine as an entity. Virág Molnár (2016) has provided great detail about what she refers to as “Greater Hungary kitsch”—objects that emblazon the cartographic shape of Hungary and its more expansive borders before the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which reduced its size to a third of its pre-World War I shape:

The Greater Hungary symbol was first widely visible on a seemingly banal object: the car bumper sticker. Car stickers were soon followed by a flood of ordinary objects: key chains, refrigerator magnets, pins, iron-on and sew-on appliquéés, Baby-on-Board signs. Greater Hungary is also an integral motif in the iconography of nationalist tattoos, and various applications of the image enjoy a presence in radical nationalist fashion, from cotton socks to T-shirts to baseball caps. Add to this list: wooden wall clocks, modern self-adhesive wall-decals, and embroidered wall tapestry—all in the shape of Greater Hungary. Somewhat more sporadically, one can encounter the symbol on wine etiquettes, etched into metal liquor flasks, glass carafes, or food trays,

and on various types of toys, jigsaw puzzles, or board games. There is also a small cottage industry among pastry chefs that turns out spectacular Greater Hungary-shaped cakes.

(Molnár 2016)

She also mentions an interesting case of a clothing label called *Harcos* (Warrior), which was started by a car locksmith from a small town in northeastern Hungary. Apparently, the following ‘warning’ label has been affixed to each of its garment since 2009:

WARRIOR (HARCOS) is not only a fashion label, it is [...] a weapon against the system that is governed by the most harmful ideology ever, that of liberalism. We use HARCOS apparel to distinguish ourselves from the grey mediocrity, the slaves of the system who do not feel that the Hungarian people of the Carpathian Basin are one and indivisible regardless of the present borders. For us it is natural to express LOVE FOR OUR HOMELAND and appreciate our ancestors who made unforgettable sacrifices so that we can still raise our head with dignity IN THE HEART OF EUROPE. We who wear HARCOS apparel are fighting for a country in which the national interests of Hungary triumph above all. I recommend my clothing line, THE RADICAL PATRIOTS’ WEAR, to everyone with no age limit, but only to those who identify with the above values.

(Molnár 2016)

Based on the results of the trademarks in Chapter 4, it is not surprising that clothing is a popular target for commodification. Similarly, why the security detail for Irfaan Ali, the President of Guyana, might be wearing shirts reading “ESSEQUIBO BELONGS TO GUYANA” (PBS Newshour 2023) to raise political awareness for Essequibo—a huge oil-rich region that Venezuela has declared its intentions on (as recently as March 2023, there was a nonbinding referendum in Venezuela that approved the nation’s territorial claims on Essequibo).

Based on the findings that are outlined in this book, it may be difficult to imagine how commodification might work to sustain public interest so that it actually brings disputants *closer* together. After all, the commodification of nationalism at its heart involves a process of *Othering*, since territorial contests almost always reinforce the lines that are drawn between outward groups, aka disputants; hence, why these disputes often serve as a heuristic device for the entire bilateral relationship. Though extremely rare, this is not to say that there are absolutely no examples of where commodification surrounding territoriality has been aimed at furthering friendlier relations between state actors. For example, there was an item on the menu at *Stateland Coffeeshouse*, an Asian fusion bistro located in Singapore (which closed in 2019 and reopened in a different space in 2020) that created a dish called ‘Senkaku beef donburi,’ which seemed to have been motivated by the question: “if the islands were inhabited, how would their food taste?” and in the words of the owners, draws “inspirations from the Xi’an ‘Hui’ ethnic flavors and the authentic Japanese preparations,” and ultimately represents a “clash of two

worlds” (Stateland Coffeehouse 2017). While food alone could not cure bilateral disputes, food and its egalitarian nature along with its sociable qualities of bonding and empathy seem like a good place to start bringing disparate publics together.²⁵ If it is true that issues of high politics tend to inspire paralysis and helplessness from the general public more than constructive action, it might be particularly helpful to start with an everyday vehicle like food. There was also a rare case where a mobile game for Android was released in Japan in 2012 that revolved around a simple challenge, where the goal was to see which of the two rabbits (one holding a Japanese flag and the other, Korean) could reach the disputed island of Dokdo/Takeshima first (JoongAng Daily 2012). It was reported that the developer created the app with the hopes of bringing the two disputants closer together and to show how futile it is for the two to be fighting over the territory (JoongAng Daily 2012) (unfortunately, this futility was lost on the Japanese public, who apparently forced the shutdown of the developer’s Twitter account). It was also reported in 2011 that the Japanese government had thwarted efforts by private investors to purchase the trawler from the 2010 Sino-Japanese collision and house it at a “Sino-Japanese Friendship Restaurant” (Hall 2019, 32). (The 2010 collision involved Japan Coast Guard (JCG) patrol ships and a Chinese trawler in the waters surrounding the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.) The twist is that the name was supposedly a play on sarcasm rather than sincere goodwill aimed at better Sino-Japanese relations. This also explains why the Japanese government may have intervened.

Harking back to the earlier implication regarding government gatekeeping, it is probably not lost on these official actors that increased public interest of territoriality is ultimately double-edged: while robust public interest may help legitimacy claims to a contested territory and lend support to any governmental efforts at territorial sovereignty protection, the stickier that public interest, the less room for maneuvering in bilateral negotiations as the government’s hands become tied. For the time being, the presence of commodification of nationalism in Northeast Asia especially by the South Korean and Chinese publics toward Dokdo and the Diaoyu Islands, respectively, suggests that these disputes will continue to sustain bilateral tensions vis-à-vis Japan at least at a homeostatic level unless (a) commodification either sharply ramps up or exponentially decreases, or (b) the governmental actors no longer play the delicate balancing game of gatekeeping public efforts at commodifying nationalism.

To end on a hopeful note, while the existence of expansive commodification may ultimately challenge a settlement over contested territory, territorial disputes can come to a resolution. Most recently in June 2022, Canada and Denmark reached an accord that put an end to their longstanding row over Hans Island (or Tartupaluk in Inuktitut and Greenlandic)—a small uninhabited area in the Arctic—thus closing the chapter on what was colloquially referred to as the ‘Whiskey War’: the name comes from the ritual of both states taking turns beginning in the 1980s of reinforcing their respective stakes to the area by planting their national flags alongside a bottle of liquor—whiskey from Canada and schnapps from Denmark. Upon signing the treaty, the representatives of Canada and Denmark exchanged

bottles of liquor for the very last time (Pope 2022). By 2022, the same spirits had lost their bitterness to finally reveal their sweet notes. It will require immense effort to reimagine nationalist products as fodders for greater inclusivity, but the Canada-Denmark case at least demonstrates how interest in territory is neither organic nor permanent.

Notes

- 1 Even in one of the least commodified issues of Takeshima in Japan, it was reported that a large banner was put up in Okinoshima-cho, Shimane, at around January 2008, which promoted the idea that “there are profits to be had in territorial claims to Takeshima,” which emphasizes the necessity of emphasizing personal stake for resonance (New Daily 2010).
- 2 This is Frank Trentmann’s translation of philosopher Agnes Heller.
- 3 I thank Megumi Murakami and Y. Tak Matsusaka at Wellesley College for pointing this out.
- 4 There is yet again a gendered component here. According to Minowa and Belk (2018, 303), “An article entitled, ‘Feminine gifts,’ by the writer Fumiko Hayashi in the December 8, 1938 issue of *Asahi Shinbun* says that the feminine, sincere heart should be at the core of the gift items for sympathy bags. Soldiers on the front were craving the feminine heart.”
- 5 For instance, He (2007, 3) states the following about the Beijing government in the context of the Sino-Japanese conflict: “The government is compelled to accommodate the popular sentiment, especially when the public raises their demands in the name of patriotism that is now the main ideological underpinning of Beijing’s regime legitimacy.”
- 6 In a way, this ‘judiciousness’ tracks with scholars who have argued that the Chinese government has actually been willing to suppress grassroots nationalist protests in order to reassure its foreign audiences and promote bilateral cooperation. See Chen Weiss (2014). Similarly, others have found empirical evidence for *anti*-elite manipulation, e.g. Zhou and Wang (2016) concluded that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) actually discourages, not supports, Chinese students’ participation in anti-Japanese demonstrations.
- 7 The curious reality of most of the Diaoyu Islands trademark applications (particularly from 2012 and 2013) is that while most of them show a status of ‘awaiting examination’ or ‘pending’ on their main search page, most of them also show in their more detailed procedural update page that they have been sent refusal notices. I take this to mean that the actual rejection rate is much higher than what I recorded using the main status shown for the trademarks.
- 8 Incidentally, the trademark was for NICE category 33: Alcoholic beverages, except beers; alcoholic preparations for making beverages.
- 9 The Trademark Review and Adjudication Board pointed out the contentious relationship with Japan and the political sensitivity of the issue, concluding that the Diaoyu Island trademark would only remind the public of this sensitive nature and potentially cause adverse effects. In the following, the trademark was found to be in violation of Article 10, paragraph 1(8) of the Chinese trademark law, which prohibits any trademarks that could be “detrimental to socialist ethics or customs, or having other unwholesome influences” (China Judgments Online 2014).
- 10 In 2016, the Beijing Higher People’s Court had ruled on a decision regarding the Nanjing Haimeng Construction Engineering Co., Ltd, who had its trademark rejected, citing the same clause [Article 10, paragraph 1(8)] in the trademark law. Once again, the court cited the lack of relevance of other trademarks; hence, the invalidity of precedents (China Judgments Online 2016).

- 11 This would mean that even trademarks that had been initially approved but have expired over time would be counted as expired and relinquished rather than approved and live, though such instances are very few.
- 12 The company is known for infusing the theme of politics into food, as evidenced by their other product of ‘Abenomics Manjū.’
- 13 Koo (2009, 93–94) does a great job covering the spat, also noting that 2004 was actually the third time that the image of Dokdo/Takeshima had been featured on a stamp (the Japanese government was apparently unaware of the second release in 2002). For more on how stamps are generally used in the context of territorial integrity (particularly in East Asia), see Deans and Dobson (2005), Dobson (2002), and Wachman (2005).
- 14 The Diaoyu Islands trademark (number 40201704987Q) is registered to the Singapore Yingmei Tobacco Pte, Ltd. Since the application was submitted on March 28, 2017, and ultimately published on September 29, 2017, the process only took six months. Information on the trademark is available from the official Singapore trademarks search platform hosted by the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore at <https://www.ip2.sg/>.
- 15 Related to this point are the implications of a lack of a singular authority and greater decentralization. As pointed out by one of the reviewers, there is room for intra-governmental tensions to arise from unintended consequences that flow from less direct/overt control. An example is the Northeast Asia History Foundation in South Korea, which is funded by the government, but has in the past been embroiled in tensions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 16 The trademark was submitted on October 28, 2009, and registered on December 13, 2010.
- 17 The trademark was filed in December 2016 and successfully registered the following year. The NICE code is 43, indicating that it fits under the category of services for providing food and drink; temporary accommodation.
- 18 The application was filed in October 2022 and accepted in June 2024.
- 19 The trademark was filed on October 15, 2020, and abandoned on June 8, 2022, by Lu Ruiming in Guangdong China. (Incidentally, Guangdong was the second most popular origin for trademarks in China after Henan province.) The trademark is searchable on the USPTO’s Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS) at <https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/>.
- 20 Technically, there are four wines produced by Dokdo Winery: a merlot, a cabernet sauvignon, a pinot noir, and a red blend. All four are actually labeled as ‘799–805,’ which is the postal code of Dokdo (Dokdo Wine 2021).
- 21 Apparently, the vice-consul had stated that they could not receive the wine for “political reasons” and that they regarded the “joke to have gone too far” (Kim 2015).
- 22 You can purchase the watch online at the GalleWatch website at <https://galle.vn/>, but the watches go for almost USD400 each.
- 23 The university’s dean was quoted as stating that “The Program flames up the patriotic passion in Vietnamese hearts, every citizen desires to show their sense of responsibility to the Nation” (Vietnam Breaking News 2011).
- 24 The reported price of such t-shirts ranged from 35,000 (roughly USD1.50) to 50,000 VND (just over USD2) (Vinh Long Online 2014).
- 25 It is no surprise that there is a discourse dedicated to ‘gastrodiplomacy.’ See Rockower (2012). On a similar note, there is also research on the role that food has on cognition and decision-making, see Spence (2016).

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