

# Japanese Senkaku islands or Chinese Daiyou islands: A critical analysis of three different Newspaper articles - The Japan Times, The China Times and The New York Times.

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## Abstract

This study shows how newspapers' language influence their readers' comprehension and acceptance of the reality. Newspaper articles on the islands dispute between Japan and China from three different countries, Japan, China and the United States were analyzed.

Different approaches such as transitivity analysis, text analysis and material process were utilized and evaluated to analyze the three newspaper articles used in this study.

It concluded that the same occurrence was interpreted differently reflecting the writers' views on the issue at hand. In other words, writers used different language resources to achieve their objectives of conveying their messages to their readers.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA, discourse, language, power, transitivity analysis, existential and behavioral processes.

## 1. Introduction

Caption these! 'China shows off dozens of fighter jets and hundreds of heavy duty military weaponries in its recent display of military might'. Or 'resurgent Japan can stand toe to toe with anybody'. These are examples of how newspapers play a vital role in gathering and disseminating information in the society and how they influence their readers' comprehension and understanding. While reading newspapers, some people, often relate what they read to reality though they may be aware (or not) of certain stories or parts of the story being omitted and to what extent the real world is mirrored by these stories in the newspapers. According to Fairclough (1995 p.81) reports

are rarely even - handed with all the various voices represented. Some are reported as very important while some are presented as less important. Liao (2012 p.44) wrote that the writers' world-view is either overtly or covertly encoded through linguistic choices in news reports. Thus, reports are presented as important or less important based on the writers' or editors' judgments.

This brief introduction to newspaper writings leads to the island dispute between Japan and China as discussed succinctly in the following section. Also included in subsequent sections in this study are; a review of different literature on Critical Discourse Analysis and Transitivity Analysis, analysis of three different articles using transitivity analysis and a conclusion.

### 1.1 Island dispute between Japan and China

Japan and China have witnessed heightened tensions in their relationship over a chain of islands, uninhabited but believed to be rich in untapped oil and natural gas resources, known in Japan as the Senkaku islands and in China as the Daiyou islands. It intensified a few years ago when the Japanese government decided to buy the islands off from the private owners and nationalized the islands. This angered the Chinese government and its people leading to violent demonstrations in Beijing and its neighborhood with demonstrators targeting various Japanese interests in Beijing, resulting in heavy losses for Japanese individuals and corporations in and around Beijing. In December 2012, the Japanese house of assembly election saw a new prime minister, Mr. Abe, who is considered to be more nationalist and hawkish, been elected. While campaigning, Mr. Abe claimed that these islands are 'Japan's inherent territory' and promised to stop this challenge from China. Thus, at that time, China had an interest in how far or what direction, good or bad, this new Japanese prime minister would take his foreign policy concerning China to. China also had its once-in-a-decade leadership change about the same period elections were going on in Japan. The ruling communist party in China too toughened their rhetoric against Japan heightening nationalism that reminisce their existing and reoccurring regional rivalry in Asia.

In a dangerous twist, sometime in January 2013, a Chinese frigate targeted a Japanese naval ship with its weapon radar, though no shots were fired, prompting a stern response from the Japanese prime minister that China's actions were 'dangerous'. The fear on both sides and amongst other nations was that a hasty and heedless captain could accidentally or ignorantly start a war. Unfortunately, this island dispute stoked a trend of nationalism or extremism in both countries hurting trade and bilateral relationship between China and Japan, the world's second and third largest economies respectively, though both countries were encouraged to resolve this dispute

through dialogue and to avoid any further provocations or unilateral actions.

In the following section, relevant literature on Critical Discourse Analysis will be reviewed. This is necessary because of the influence and importance of language and power in our societies. The different terminologies used will be defined in subsequent sections, too.

## 2. Literature review

Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA, as will henceforth be referred to in this study, has been extensively researched and critiqued by many scholars over the last few years with Billig (2002 p.35) to writing that critical discourse analysis is close to becoming 'an intellectual orthodoxy'. This means that critical discourse analysis is almost becoming a traditionalized discipline having its own particular pattern and established opinions or principle. Furthermore, CDA has been defined variously by different researchers depending on the viewpoints of these researchers. For instance, Wodak (2002 p.6) considers CDA to be a 'research program' while Fairclough (1989 p.2) sees CDA as 'explaining existing conventions as the outcome of power relations and power struggle'. Whichever way we look at CDA, it basically consists of two fundamental points, that is, 'the workings of ideology and power in the society and how language affects or contributes to these workings' (Breeze 2011 p. 494).

Furthermore, there are many distinguished schools or groups in the CDA field and according to Breeze (2011 p.493), they include the initial British approaches as represented by Fairclough (1985) and its later forms as related by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). These later forms include Van Dijk (1991) and his group's 'sociocognitive model', Wodak's (1990) led 'discourse historical school', Jager's (1999) Duisburg school and Maas (1989) approach which examines how contradictions in society are registered in texts. Therefore, it is important to look at CDA from an across-the-board view, that is, from a vast embodiment of theories and researches from the numerous schools within the critical discourse analysis.

Before going into details of what the Critical Discourse Analysis is about, it is equally important to look at various distinct terms such as discourse, language and power and what makes them critical. According to Widdowson (2004 p.8), discourse is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation and text, its product. This means that discourse can be defined by its effect and can also be seen as a way of controlling and organizing what can be discussed and by anyone as well as how

it can be discussed. CD analysts Fairclough and Wodak (1997 p.261) further explained discourses as 'partly realized in ways of using language, but partly in other ways' such as visual. Language, is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it. Wodak (2002 p.10) and Kroger and Wood (2000, p. 4) stated that language is taken to be not simply a tool for description and a medium of communication but as a social practice, a way of doing things. Power includes authority over a gathering of people by another an individual or another gathering of people.

CDA is considered critical because it is not just language-based in its entire scope. The CDA's critical aspect brings scholars with different ideologies together in challenging the use of language. Wodak (2002 p.6) stated that CDA has its roots in "classical rhetoric, text linguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as in applied linguistics and pragmatics". Therefore, CDA can simply be said to be the distinct interest in the interrelationship between language and power and the examination of their social context looking at why and how words, spoken or written, are conceived and expressed and according to Wodak (2002, p.7) has never been seen as 'providing a single or specific theory'.

CDA as 'socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned' as it is (Wodak, 2002 p.8), it is interesting to note that some critical discourse analysts still find some contradictions in its models and standards. For instance, Billig (2002 p.36) views the CDA's new-found status likely to make its reflexivity impossibly an integral part of its critical agenda. Other analysts highlight the internal discordances in CDA among its researchers either clamoring for more talks and discussions before arriving at a definition as a school or those who look at such desire for harmony as misleading, Fairclough and Wodak (1997 p. 271). Hammersley (1997 p.237) criticized the basic assumptions of CDA faulting Fairclough and others of 'affirming the need for a critical approach as though these were more obvious and unproblematic' arguing firstly that orthodox Marxist theory is now discredited and secondly to the analysis of the Frankfurt school as only providing immediate antecedents for CDA while Slembrouck (2001 p.40) stressed that 'CDA continues to be unclear about its exact preferences for a particular social theory'. Martin (2004 p.186) brought appropriate attention to the negative feature of CDA, putting CDA among 'a pathological disjunction in 20th century social sciences and humanities research which systematically elides the study of social processes which make the world a better place in favor of critique of processes which disempowered and oppressed' seeking determined efforts at re-designing or re-adapting CDA in a more positive way.

In concluding this section, it could be argued that the strength of CDA, simply in linking real language occurrence to the operatives of power in the real world, should not be subverted in procedural defects or academic deficiencies.

In the following section, transitivity analysis, used in analyzing the three articles in this study will be discussed because it serves as hypothetical meanings and functions of syntactic components linguistically.

## 2.1 Transitivity Analysis

Transitivity analysis has been widely used to understand the language of speakers and writers Nguyen (2012 p.86). Nguyen stated further that researchers have shown that language structures can produce certain meanings and ideologies not explicitly conveyed to readers using the transitivity analysis. This simply means that transitivity analysis is used to ascertain the relationship (s) between words and their meanings in an article or as spoken. While Simpson (1993 p.88) noted that transitivity simply refers to how meaning is represented in the clause, Kress (1976 p.169) states that transitivity is representation in language processes. Hasan (1988 p.63) affirms that transitivity is concerned with a coding of the goings on: who does what in relation to whom/what, where, when, how and why. This simply means that transitivity helps speakers or writers convert in language their imaginative cogitation of the world and their explanation of their experience of things around them. Furthermore, some three factors ascertain if a clause is transitive or not. Setiawan et al (2011) discussed these three factors as: (a) The process, that is, the activity contained in the sentence itself and disclosed in the form of a verb, (b) the participants, that is, as connected with the process above and disclosed in the form of a nominal subject or object, and (c) the circumstances, that is, the state or condition associated with the process and found in the form of a statement phrase or prepositional phrase. Processes, as defined above, can be distinguished according to (i) whether the verbs describe an action or event, material process, (ii) whether the verb describes what goes on in the internal world of the mind, mental process, (iii) whether any relationship exists between two participants, relational process, (iv) the process of saying, verbal process, (v) intermediate between material and mental process, behavioural process and, (vi) existential process usually recognizable because the subject is present. However, both behavioural and existential processes deals mostly with spoken discourses and will not be analyzed in this work.

## 2.2 Analysis

### 2.2.1 Articles to be analyzed

Here, three newspaper articles from China Times (CT), Japan Times (JT) and New York Times (NYT) will be analyzed. These newspapers have been chosen to reflect languages and biases expected from the two peoples involved, Chinese and Japanese, as well as the western world viewed by the Chinese as pro-Japanese or anti-Chinese. These articles were chosen because of their contrasting styles, The China Times (CT), being pro-government, The Japan Times (JT) seen as neutral, especially among foreigners living in Japan like the writer, and The New York Times (NYT) being business oriented. Also these articles were chosen from different period of time to reflect the rhetoric employed at different periods in these countries. In the next sections, analysis of data will be done in three stages; firstly the identification of processes found in the corpus of the texts. Secondly, analysis of frequencies of occurrence of material process type (such as actors and goals) found within these articles and thirdly, the use of negative verbal process in the three articles.

## 2.3 Text Analysis

Table 1: Process types of the three articles

	Japan Times (JT)	China Times (CT)	New York Times (NYT)
Material	49 (50.51%)	9 (36%)	29 (42.03%)
Mental	18 (18.56%)	1 (4%)	6 (8.7%)
Relational	17 (17.53%)	7 (28%)	9 (13.04%)
Verbal	13 (13.40%)	8 (32%)	25 (36.23%)
Total	97 (100%)	25 (100%)	69 (100%)

The distribution of the process types here gives us a better picture of the types of meanings more commonly used to envision the real world in these newspaper articles. The results of the analysis of the Process types of the three articles are summarized in Table 1 above. In the process types employed, the three articles are similar because material type is the most used and this shows that they all define the world in terms of actions and happening. Furthermore, in the CT and NYT articles, the verbal process type was used more and, in fact, having more than doubled the percentage compared with the JT article showing a degree of difference in realizing events in newspaper articles in these countries.

In the next section, the material process type will be evaluated and the participants (actors and goals) and verbs in this process type will be examined.

Table 2. Percentages of actors of material process in the three articles.

Actors	Japan Times (JT)	China Times (CT)	New York Times (NYT)
Japanese- government, people and its officials	27 (25%)	4 (9.03%)	17 (21.79%)
Chinese- government, people and its officials	31 (48%)	23 (53.49%)	27 (34.62%)
Senkaku islands	4 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.28%)
Diaoyu islands and East China sea	4 (3.7%)	6 (13.95%)	2 (2.56%)
Japanese military and warships	16 (14.81%)	0 (0%)	4 (5.13%)
Chinese military and warships	13 (12.04%)	0 (0%)	10 (12.82%)
Ellipses	10 (9.26%)	10 (23.26%)	17 (21.79%)
Total	108 (100%)	43 (100%)	78 (100%)

As seen in table 2 above, the categorization of actors by their properties (Japanese government and its officials, Chinese government and its officials, Senkaku islands, Diaoyu islands, Japanese military, Chinese military and Ellipses) shows who were included or excluded as an active source of action in these articles. Table 2 shows differences in the frequency of these actors in the different articles.

Firstly, the three articles have higher percentages for the Chinese government and its officials as an actor compared with any other actor categorized. This could mean that the Chinese government and its officials are seen as a principal actor in this island dispute. Examples of this are in the following clauses;

JT- Beijing should endeavor to create a peaceful environment in which China and Japan can resolve the Senkaku island dispute through dialogue.

CT-“The Diaoyu islands are an inalienable part of China’s territory and the Chinese government and it’s people will absolutely make no concession on issues concerning its sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

Next is the frequency of Japanese/Chinese military and warships as actors. It is noteworthy, as shown in table, to find that CT made no mention of Chinese or Japanese militaries or movement of warships even though both countries have destroyers deployed at areas around these disputed islands. However, JT has the third and fourth highest percentages of militaries and warships in its article showing that the Japanese side is more concerned on effects of militarizing this dispute as shown in the clause below;

JT- It is deplorable that the Chinese warships took these highly provocative and dangerous actions. Beijing should realize that such conduct could lead to an armed clash and should order the Chinese military to exercise restraint.

Also of importance here is the frequency of occurrence of Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands in these articles. CT has 0% for Senkaku but has 13.95% for Diaoyu while JT has an equal 3.7% for both Senkaku and Diaoyu as material process actors. It is interesting to find that the writer (s) of CT did not mention or recognize the word "Senkaku" even once though the writer (s) of JT recognized the word "Diaoyu" in equal proportion with Senkaku, the Japanese name for the disputed islands.

Lastly, looking at ellipses as an actor from CT and NYT articles with 23.26% and 21.79% respectively, the frequent use of this actor, ellipse, in passive clauses affects the representation of events by not directly revealing who did what in some clauses as underlined below.

CT- The Chinese government and its people cherish their country's hard-won national sovereignty and dignity more than anybody."

NYT- He did not explain how he defined such hacking attacks, nor say if any were successful.

## 2.4 Material process type used as goals

'Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera disclosed on Tuesday that Chinese warships in January had locked their fire-control radar on a destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force and an MSDF helicopter in two separate incidents in the East China Sea' (JT article). JT article shows the underlined phrase above as the goals receiving actions from a Chinese warship. The language used here shows the Japanese destroyer and helicopter as innocent and the Chinese warship as performing negative actions capable of escalating the already tensed situation around the East China Sea.

Also, 'After the East China Sea incidents were disclosed to the Japanese public,' the Japanese public, is the goal receiving the news of the East China Sea incidence. The use of passive voices in both examples above from JT foregrounds the goals and background the actors, that is, the writer seeks to present the goals as more important while situating the actor in the rear by using the passive voices 'had locked' and 'were disclosed' respectively.

### 2.4.1 Verbs in Material Processes

Here, different interpretations to some verbs used in the material processes of the three

articles will be analyzed. The choice of actor and goal constituents are not the only factors that present reality in these articles, the choice of verbs also affects the presentation of reality. Chen (2005, p.37) defined verbal process as 'demonstrating a certain negativity of feeling on the part of the writer towards the person whose words the verbal process is being used to introduce'. In other words, negative verbal process is prejudicial, detestable and inimical actions to the goals employed by the writer (s). Examples of such negative material process verbs used in the articles are:

'It is deplorable that the Chinese warships took these highly provocative and dangerous actions' JT. By using the verb 'took' here, the writer tends to portray the Chinese warships as performing a negative action supporting this with a stronger adverb, highly, and adjectives, provocative and dangerous.

'Recent signals from China are confusing' JT. Confusing, as used in this clause, also shows the extent to which the writer is biased in favor of Japan on this issue portraying Chinese actions as jumbled or disordered.

'China accused Japan on Thursday of escalating the maritime tensions in their relationship by harassing Chinese ships' NYT. Accused, or blamed, is another negative verb in material process employed by parties in this dispute, in this case China, in their strong rhetorical war. China has presented Japan to readers as the oppressor in this article in the NYT and itself as the oppressed.

Lastly, NYT deviated from the island dispute issue and showed its anti- Chinese side when it wrote that 'Mr. Geng repeated China's denials that it was behind Internet hacking attacks aimed at United States government, corporate and media Web sites'. The word denial, that is a refusal to acknowledge, as used by the writer could have been substituted with a more straightforward word like 'objected'.

### 3. Conclusion

As seen in this study, the transitivity system helps in the analysis of language in action and in substance and shows how the clause (s) and its fragments are likely sources of information. Furthermore, Transitivity Analysis gives readers linguistic clues to buttress their perception of a story in deciding on the story's meaning.

Finally, as observed from the analysis of the three different articles from three different peoples in this work, the same event can be represented differently reflecting the writers' perspective on the issue at hand. This simply means that writers will utilize different language resources to achieve their objectives of conveying their messages to the reading public as seen in the different articles analyzed in this work.

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### EDITORIALS

China's dangerous conduct

FEB 8, 2013 ARTICLE

Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera disclosed on Tuesday that Chinese warships in January had locked their fire-control radar on a destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force and an MSDF helicopter in two separate incidents in the East China Sea.

On Thursday, Mr. Onodera told the Diet that the Chinese action could constitute "a threat of force," which the United Nations Charter calls on U.N. member nations to refrain from in their international relations.

It is deplorable that the Chinese warships took these highly provocative and dangerous actions. Beijing should realize that such conduct could lead to an armed clash and should order the Chinese military to exercise restraint.

Japan lodged a protest with China on Tuesday and requested that it take measures to prevent a recurrence. This is a reasonable response on the part of Japan.

It is imperative for Japan to act in a coolheaded manner in dealing with these incidents and make utmost efforts to diffuse tension. For its part, China should demonstrate sincerity by announcing concrete measures.

According to Defense Ministry officials, at around 10 a.m. on Jan. 30 the MSDF destroyer Yudachi detected that the Chinese frigate Jiangwei II had locked its fire-control radar on it. The two ships were only about 3 km apart.

Fire-control radar is used to aim weapons at a target and once it's locked the weapons can be fired immediately. The radar was locked on the MSDF destroyer for several minutes.

Beijing must realize that the Chinese frigate's action was, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has noted, "dangerous conduct that could have led to an unforeseeable situation."

On Jan. 19, the Chinese frigate Jiangkai I locked its fire-control radar on a SH-60K helicopter from the MSDF destroyer Onami, setting off the helicopter's threat-alarm system. In both incidents, the MSDF ships exercised self-restraint strictly following the principle of defense-only defense, but clearly the crews felt a high level of tension.

According to Defense Ministry officials, following Japan's nationalization of three islets of the Senkaku Islands in September, two Chinese frigates have been deployed in an area 110 km to 130 km north of the islands at all times and MSDF ships are observing their actions. It is imperative that MSDF ships continue to exercise self-restraint.

A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Wednesday said that she learned of the incidents through media reports. She also hinted that her ministry did not know the details of the incidents until it received the protest from the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

It is not known at this moment whether the Chinese leadership, including Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, directed the Chinese Navy to lock its fire-control radar on Japan's MSDF ships or whether the frigates initiated the actions on their own.

Either way, the action by the two Chinese frigates can be regarded as making a threat.

The Chinese leadership should realize that the use of threats will not produce positive results and will only serve to fan nationalism in Japan, thus further worsening bilateral relations. It also should realize that such actions will strengthen a perception in the international community that China is a menace to regional peace and order.

Beijing should endeavor to create a peaceful environment in which China and Japan can resolve the Senkaku Islands dispute through dialogue.

If China continues to adopt a threatening attitude toward Japan, Japanese public opinion of China will worsen. This in turn will reduce the ability of the Japanese government to maneuver to improve bilateral ties.

Recent signals from China are confusing. When Mr. Xi and visiting Komeito leader Mr. Natsuo Yamaguchi met in Beijing on Jan. 25, the Chinese leader said that it is important to solve the Senkaku issue through dialogue and consultations.

In a personal letter that Mr. Yamaguchi handed to Mr. Xi, Mr. Abe said that the Japan-China relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships. According to China's media, the Chinese side highly praised the letter.

When former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama met with former Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan on Jan. 15 and former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama met with other Chinese officials on Jan. 29, the Chinese side stressed the importance of the relations between China and Japan. But it was during this period that the radar-lock incidents occurred.

Because China is in the midst of a leadership transition, there is a possibility that communication between the government and military is rocky. The radar-lock incidents in the East China sea show that Beijing must strengthen civilian control of the military.

After the East China Sea incidents were disclosed to the Japanese public, Mr. Abe called on China to go back to the principle of a "strategic relationship of mutual benefit."

Mr. Abe should try to arrange a meeting with Mr. Xi to discuss this in person.

In addition, Japan and China should immediately establish a hotline between the leaders of the Self-Defense Forces and those of the Chinese military to prevent incidents from spinning out of control.

The China Times (CT). From <http://www.thechinatimes.com/online/2012/09/5010.html>

"Absolutely no concession" on Diaoyu Islands, says Chinese premier

Premier Wen Jiabao said Monday the Diaoyu Islands are an inalienable part of China's territory and China will "absolutely make no concession" on issues concerning its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Despite repeated solemn representations of China, the Japanese government announced Monday it would "purchase" part of China's Diaoyu Islands from "private Japanese owners" and bring the islands under "state control."

Also Monday, Premier Wen pledged China won't back down on issues surrounding the Diaoyu Islands.

"The Diaoyu Islands are an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Chinese government and its people will absolutely make no concession on issues concerning its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Wen said while addressing an inauguration ceremony for a statue of late Chinese leaders Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing.

China has repeatedly told Japan that it holds a firm stance that the Diaoyu Islands and adjacent islets have been an inalienable part of China's territory since ancient times, and that any of Japan's unilateral moves against Chinese nationals is illegal and invalid.

"The Chinese government and its people cherish their country's hard-won national sovereignty and dignity more than anybody," Wen told the students, noting that China has maintained such a firm and unyielding character even in situations of extreme hardship.

The New York Times (NYT). [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/01/world/asia/china-accuses-japan-of-provoking-tensions.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/01/world/asia/china-accuses-japan-of-provoking-tensions.html?_r=0)

China Accuses Japan of Escalating Tensions Over Disputed Islands

By CHRIS BUCKLEY

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HONG KONG — China accused Japan on Thursday of escalating the maritime tensions in their relationship by harassing Chinese ships, continuing a succession of tit-for-tat accusations that reflect increasing distrust between the two countries.

A spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, Geng Yansheng, made the accusations on the same day that the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, likened recent intrusions by Chinese ships into Japanese-controlled waters near contested islands to Argentina's 1982 invasion of the Falkland Islands, which set off a brief war with Britain.

Tensions over the East China Sea islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China, deepened this month when Japan said that a Chinese Navy frigate had briefly used missile-directing radar to lock onto a Japanese military ship.

China vehemently denied doing that.

At a briefing for Chinese journalists in Beijing, Mr. Geng repeated that denial and said he had proof that Japan would be to blame for any mishaps.

"For a long time, Japan has closely tracked Chinese vessels and craft to monitor and interfere with them," Mr. Geng said, according to a transcript on the Chinese Ministry of National Defense Web site.

"This is the source of the maritime security problems between China and Japan," he said.

"The Chinese side has ample evidence of this, and reserves the right to take corresponding measures."

Mr. Geng suggested that Mr. Abe was seeking to raise tensions.

"China has always taken maritime safety very seriously and does not want to see accidents at sea," Mr. Geng said. "But the Japanese leader has repeatedly made provocative statements, exaggerated the China threat and made much of military issues, intentionally provoking military confrontation."

In a speech to Japan's Parliament, however, Mr. Abe used a comparison to the 1982 Falkland Islands war to cast China as the provocateur.

He cited the memoir of the British prime minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher, who said her decision to go to war was an effort to defend the principle that rule of law should prevail over the use of force.

"I want to appeal to international society that in modern times, efforts to change the status quo by the use of force will justify nothing," said Mr. Abe, referring to the standoff with China.

The festering dispute over the islands erupted in September, when Japan bought three of the five islands from a private owner in what it said was as an effort to stop them from falling into the hands of an ardent Japanese nationalist.

China, however, called the purchase a provocative act that effectively denied its territorial claims, and violent protests broke out in dozens of Chinese cities.

In the months since, China has sought to demonstrate its claim to the islands by sending government vessels and military ships and aircraft near them, in areas where Japanese Coast Guard ships conduct patrols.

Last Friday, Japan said it had asked the Chinese government to explain why it had placed several buoys in waters near the disputed islands.

A Chinese official said on Tuesday that the buoys were meant to monitor the weather, despite Japanese news reports that they could be used for tracking Japanese submarines.

At the news briefing, Mr. Geng repeated China's denials that it was behind Internet hacking attacks aimed at United States government, corporate and media Web sites.

He said the Ministry of National Defense Web site and another Chinese Web site devoted to military news were targeted by an average of 144,000 hacking attacks a month from abroad last year, almost two-thirds of them from the United States.

He did not explain how he defined such hacking attacks, nor say if any were successful.

