The publication of this book coincides with a recent international incident that reveals the fragility of the relationship between Japan and China. In September 2010, a Chinese fishing vessel allegedly illegally entered the disputed territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands (the Chinese name of which is Diaoyu-tao) and collided with two patrol boats of the Japanese Coast Guard. It was suspected that the vessel was fishing illegally in Japanese-controlled waters and deliberately collided with the patrol boats that were following it. The fishing vessel, its captain, and crew were arrested and brought to a Japanese port. However, the captain was not released until late September, when political and diplomatic considerations compelled the public prosecutors to make a decision to release the captain and permit him to return to China. At the time of writing this review, the arrest of the captain had caused considerable tension between the two countries. The Chinese, who are known for adhering to their principles, maintained a rather resolute and overbearing attitude and took various countermeasures against Japan. On the other hand, Japan maintained a determined but silent posture by detaining the captain for a certain period of time and dealing with him in accordance with its domestic law. The entire incident appears to have led to a series of misinterpretations and miscommunication between the two countries due to the unstable domestic political and social environment mainly characterized by nationalism of Chinese people. However, unfortunately, neither country was able to avoid the escalation of an accidental maritime incident into a major diplomatic row, at the root of
which lies the territorial dispute over the attribution of sovereignty over the Islands in the concerned maritime area. In this vein, this book reveals not only the reasons and background of the territorial and maritime disputes between China and Japan, but also the geopolitical connotations and future perspectives of the concerned states and the regional relations of other various actors in the East and South China Seas.

The theme of book is the significance of geopolitics in understanding the dynamics of maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. The book examines the disputes among Japan, China, and Taiwan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu-tao Islands, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam over the Paracel Islands, and Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan over the Spratly Islands. In addition, the United States is involved as the sole global superpower and hegemon. The unique aspect of this book is the use of a methodological approach that emphasizes the significance of geography in understanding the patterns of a state’s behaviour and conduct of foreign policy. The author emphasizes the following three geopolitical attributes in order to analyze the maritime disputes: territory, natural resources, and the power distribution. Therefore, the core objective of this volume is to grasp the probable interplay and influence of the above-mentioned three attributes in the respective maritime territorial disputes. Moreover, the book primarily investigates two main aspects: first, the identification of conditions where the interplay of geographical attributes cause a problem to escalate and the reasons for this; and, second, the specification of situations in which a variable is introduced in an attempt to work as a de-escalating or defusing factor. According to the book, the basic underlying cause of all the maritime and territorial disputes in the areas under consideration is the close relationship between sovereignty and energy resources, which are governed by a sense of nationalism. Against this background, a major asymmetrical power distribution has been caused by China as a rapidly growing naval power in this region. China is seeking to possess a counter-capability in the East and South China Sea, among others, in order to possess mobility towards the Pacific Ocean, where the United States has dominant control over maritime matters. The present volume studies the possibility of conflict management and resolution of the maritime
disputes in the East and South China Seas\textsuperscript{1}.

In Chapter 1 of the book, the aspects of geopolitics in international relations (IR) are explained by defining three main geopolitical variables: territory, natural resources, and power distribution. Emmers hypothesizes that these three geopolitical attributes operate and interplay to have a significant influence upon the maritime and territorial disputes in East Asia. In other words, the triangular relationship among these factors tends to determine the characteristics and conditions of the disputes ‘as escalating, neutralizing, or de-escalating forces’ (p. 17). However, in the exercise of practical control and military power, claimant states involved in maritime territorial disputes, as the author puts it, have often ‘misused UNCLOS [the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] to extend their sovereign jurisdiction unilaterally to guarantee their access to natural resources’ (p. 19).

In Chapter 2, the author divides East Asia into two sub-regions: the first one is Northeast Asia - where China, Japan, and Taiwan are the major claimant states; and the second one is Southeast Asia – where, in addition to China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei are the main claimant states. Thereafter, he considers domestic factors such as territorial considerations, energy concerns, and power capabilities of each claimant state in the disputed areas. The Northeast Asian sub-region is strongly influenced and characterised by the relationship between China and Japan in terms of their traditional rivalry, the historical legacy of the Second World War, large economies, and energy and resource demands. The Southeast Asian sub-region is represented by ASEAN member states, who share relatively common economic, cultural, historical and security factors. In light of the diplomatic conflict between China and Japan, the author convinces the reader of his apt and brief observation that ‘China is perceived regionally as a potentially threatening rising power’ in light of the economy and military, ‘while Japan is viewed increasingly as adopting a more assertive foreign policy’ (p. 45).

In Chapter 3, the author conducts a case study on the Senkaku/Diaoyu-tao lands dispute in order to exemplify the role of domestic factors such as nationalist sentiments, threat perceptions, and energy pressures in each claimant state in influencing the dispute. According to the author,
territory, natural resources, and power competition are all driving forces, although their influence has varied from escalating to neutralizing in terms of impact. Emmers relates that since late 2006 the bilateral ties between Japan and China have been strengthened through an agreement on the joint development of gas deposits in the East China Sea, which was signed in June 2008 (p. 63); however, this has been disproved due to the fishing vessel incident in September 2010, which has caused a significant deadlock in the bilateral relations between the two countries. As indicated by the author, ‘China’s naval buildup and its wider strategic aspirations’ (p. 62) in this maritime area – which are currently inevitably also being encountered by US naval presence – as well as its international mobility and strategies may test the current conditions of the disputed islands over which Japan exercises jurisdiction and control, and therefore effectively occupies. The current deadlock between China and Japan is a good example of such a test.

In Chapter 4, Emmers considers the maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea over the attribution of Paracel and Spratly islands, over which six countries - China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei - assert ownership. In these disputes, the three geopolitical variables have had different influences. Although the sovereignty issue is indicated as continuing to be an escalating force in the maritime disputes in this area, the energy and resource factors remain uncertain and are indicated to have a de-escalating effect in light of the signing of a joint pre-exploration survey agreement for oil and gas in the region under consideration. According to the book, although the growing asymmetry of naval power in favour of China does not currently appear to be causing instability in the region, this growing power of China has the potential to cause a transformation in the distribution of power with regard to the maritime dispute in the South China Sea. Thus, ‘China’s recent attempt to avoid antagonizing the ASEAN countries’ (p. 86) will be of great significance for the de-escalation of the disputes over the Islands in this region.

In Chapter 5, the author examines the interplay of the three aforementioned geopolitical considerations in the East and South China Seas in the post-Cold War era on the basis of a comparative analysis of the two case studies conducted in the previous chapters. While there was a convergent and escalating relationship until the mid-1990s in the case of the
dispute in the South China Sea, the dispute in the East China Sea did not end until 2006. Emmers related that despite escalating tendencies, there was no direct clash of arms, and every effort was successfully made by the states concerned to lessen the ‘China threat’. The author observes that although the situation in the region continues to be fragile and volatile, the interplay of the three geopolitical attributes in the maritime disputes must function as neutralizing factors.

After considering the management and possible resolution of the maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, in Chapter 6, Emmers proposes discarding the sovereignty issue and seeking the possibility of joint exploration and development of resources among the countries in the disputed areas. The author maintains that the interplay between sovereignty and natural resources may contribute to defusing tension in the disputed areas, and that the energy attributes could probably function to de-escalate the situation if an agreement regarding a joint exploration and development of resources can be reached with the aim of temporarily resolving the dispute. However, for the author, who appears to be slightly pessimistic regarding the rule of law, ‘UNCLOS in itself cannot be applied to solve existing territorial disputes, particularly as the Law of the Sea starts with the presumption that sovereignty is not an issue’ (p. 122). He indicates that conflict management may be, as is indicated by the practice in certain states, introduced once the diffusion of nationalism eases the political conditions in each claimant state. However, he states that conflict resolution is distant in these regions where the situations in question are fragile, dynamic, and possibly volatile.

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 7, the author compares the maritime and territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas by utilizing and analysing the three geopolitical attributes - territorial considerations, energy concerns, and power calculations - of the concerned claimant states. He asserts that the similarities between these maritime disputes necessitate a comparative examination of the maritime disputes in East Asia and beyond. In order to demonstrate the applicability of the conceptual framework of geopolitical variables that he indicates in previous chapters, the author specifically mentions the dispute over the Tokdo/Takeshima Islands between Japan and South Korea as a comparative case in which territorial sovereignty, concern over energy and resources, and power
distribution combined with historical animosity and emotional nationalism in each country make conflict management and resolution in this case more difficult to achieve (pp. 137-138).

Overall, Ralf Emmers’ book has made a valuable contribution to the widely researched field of geopolitics with the introduction of the concept of an interplay of three fundamental geopolitical attributes, i.e., territorial sovereignty, energy/resources concern, and power distribution. The book under review contains, in its appendix, five maps that illustrate the location of the disputed islands under discussion and of a joint development zone (pp. 139-143). One of these maps could have also indicated the location of Tokdo/Takeshima and the joint development zone of Japan and South Korea, since the author suggested this dispute as a good example of conflict management and resolution in East Asia. The short summary and methodology in the introductory chapter as well as the beginning and concluding portions of each chapter may seem slightly repetitive to the reader. However, the author is considerably clear and unequivocal in stating that the three geopolitical attributes play a significant role in the comparative analysis and demonstrative examination of the territorial and maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas.

See also Min Gyo Koo’s approach and analysis in his recent book, which uses a territorial bargaining game framework with respect to the territorial maritime disputes in East Asia and seeks a path to deeper and wider economic and maritime interdependence through a regional regime building. Min Gyo Koo, Island Disputes and Maritime Regime Building in East Asia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place, Springer, 2010.