Claims to territory are among the most prominent sources of conflict between states. This is illustrated by interstate warfare throughout human history in which countless lives have been sacrificed in the effort to expand or to defend “national space” on land, at sea, and, in modern times, in the air. More often than not the justification for such behavior is cast in some historical argument in which the past discovery, occupancy, or access to the “land of the people” takes precedence. Frequently too, such historical justifications easily influence or serve to reflect nationalism or patriotism, in which the territory and the people become synonymous or so closely linked that a threat to one, no matter how distantly removed, becomes a threat to the others. Indeed, in the course of the modern history of the industrial state since the mid-nineteenth century, the association of land, people, and history with the legitimacy of the state is so intimate that fault lines in that relationship invariably threaten the very definition of the state. As such, challenges to the territorial integrity of the state become challenges to the definition of the people and their history. It is in this context that “irredentism,” the claim to territory based on one or another historical “right,” has become a common feature in interstate rivalry in the modern era.

In East Asia, the dispute between China and Japan over the uninhabited Diaoyu or Senkaku Islands, a small group of islets north of Taiwan in the Liuqiu (J: Ryûkyû, or today’s Okinawa Prefecture of Japan) chain (see Appendix Fig. 1), stands out as an especially rich example of the application of irredentist arguments in the rivalry between states. The dispute is made particularly rich by virtue of the long and complex history of relations between China and Japan—
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and even more challenging by virtue of the fact that the subject of the dispute is a group of islands distantly removed from the cores of both societies. The dispute is both territorial and maritime, involving not only the discovery, occupancy, and use of the islands themselves, but also the sea lanes to and, in contemporary times, the water column and seabed near the islands. In short, the dispute over the Diaoyu Islands is a “window” not only on Sino-Japanese rivalries in East Asia, but also on disputes at sea, over marine space, the ramifications of which are broadly relevant. Suffice it to say that, based on the ancient and medieval history of maritime exploration and trade in East Asia, the Diaoyu dispute is quite literally rooted in the historical geography of China and Northeast Asia. The dispute between Japan and China over these islands has been “fought” mainly on irredentist grounds involving debates among scholars across many fields, such as history, law, political science, geography, geology, and economics. As a result, two competing groups have evolved: one is a pro-China irredentist group that emphasizes the use of historical evidence, in particular, from the archives of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Another is a pro-Japan irredentist group based on the “discovery” theory of international law, by which the Japanese “rediscovered” these islands in 1884, as *terra nullius* (unadministered territory or no-man’s-land).

This study serves to explore in depth the case of the dispute over the Diaoyu Islands as an example in applied irredentism. The failure of international law, especially the law of the sea, ultimately led to historical justification of the irredentist Diaoyu issue. The author has provided an analysis of this in the beginning of this research (Chapter 1) as it may apply to this dispute. To that end, the author has sought here to present a virtually exhaustive analysis of the historical literature in China and Japan on the discovery, occupation, and use of the islands (Chapters 2 through 4). By the same token, whatever the biases of the current study, the author has not specifically attempted to justify either the Chinese or the Japanese claims to the Diaoyu Islands and their surrounding seas. Rather, the primary goal of the study has been to analyze the dispute as a case study in irredentism. Whether history *ought* or *ought not* to be a determinant of contemporary state policies and interstate relations, much of the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that history *is* a prime determinant—and especially so in the relations between China and Japan.
State Policies and Historical Justification of Territorial Claims

Many states have used the past to justify current policies toward the acquisition and maintenance of sovereign space. In particular, the use of the past to justify such policies is a common feature of expansionist states, perhaps the most egregious example of which in the twentieth century was Nazi Germany’s claims to the Sudetenland (the modern Czech Republic), Poland, and other parts of the “volk land.” To be sure, territorial expansion comes in many forms and enjoys a variety of rationalizations. In the case of the United States, for instance, Maxwell Research Professor Donald W. Meinig of Syracuse University has identified six different forms of “imperial” expansion. Nevertheless, irredentism, the use of the past to justify contemporary claims to territory, is an especially prominent form—and one that is most favored by states in East Asia. For example, during the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Beijing declared that the Chinese army had the right to defend territories “historically” belonging to China. In 1969, when the Chinese military clashed with the Russians in the Zhenbao/Damansky Islands, China excused its actions by claiming “historical justification” based upon an “unequal” treaty. Similarly, when Japan and China claimed the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, both governments insisted that “a great amount of historical” evidence supported their own claims.

To be sure, such historical claims are seldom related only to territorial space; they also invoke cultural, ethnolinguistic, and other associations with the state and its people. As Alexander B. Murphy points out: “In many instances historical arguments are probably little more than attempts to seek support for territorial designs. . . . [Therefore], justifications for territorial change . . . [are] frequently rooted in ethnic-cum-historical arguments.” Similarly, according to David Knight, “common territory by itself is not enough, for there must also be a complex set of other factors that physically, socially, and especially psychologically link the people who live in different parts of that common territory.” In this sense too, language and language policy is a powerful tool of the state that not only reflects attitudes and values of people, but also helps define the special extent of the state and its sovereign territory. Because one fundamental duty of a state is to protect and to identify its territory, the association between
land, people, and state is equally basic to the maintenance and expansion of the state. Here, the history of the discovery, occupancy, and use of such territory is often critical to the very definition of the state. What this “suggests is that the articulated basis for a state’s territorial claims has a momentum all its own,” and that historical arguments can produce “a powerful emotion, patriotism, which can lead [people] to sacrifice their lives for the ‘fatherland’ or the ‘motherland,’ for survival of the nation is more important than personal survival.” In Andrew F. Burghardt’s terms, historical arguments for territorial claims operate on an “emotional basis.”

At the same time, for one state to claim “new” territories is to simultaneously deny the claim of another state that is holding the territory. Justifications for such claims may be legal, economic, or strategic, but historical arguments are often projected in order to garner maximum domestic and international support. A state seeking to acquire territory outside of its current domain simply cannot hope to receive much international or even internal support if territorial claims are solely based on economic, geographic, strategic, legal, or cultural grounds. Historical justification for territorial claims, however, become the most “plausible” (i.e., convincing) argument within the international community. In other words, historical arguments to territorial space internationally or domestically are more effective as well as more prevailing than any other types of arguments. This is especially true since the beginning of the modern era, when the state and the nation sought to converge. As Richard Hartshorne points out: “If the idea of the state is based on the recognition of the existence of a nation, then the major geographic question to consider is whether there is close correspondence between that area of the nation and that of the state. Are there regions within the state whose population do not feel themselves part of the nation? Are there regions of the nation that are not included with [in] the state—the issue of irredentism?”

In effect, state policy based on historical justifications is the nuts-and-bolts motivation of irredentist movements for claims to “new” territories, and irredentist claims have achieved a quasi-legal status in the international arena. Indeed, state propaganda invariably seeks to create a single cultural and political unity that contains “not only nationalisms and their attendant irredentisms, but also all those ethnic, religious, and other cultural characteristics that bind people
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together.” Similarly, the cultural-political ideal and irredentism lead to the slogan “self-determination,” which has been widely recognized in the international community.

In short, on the one hand, territory is a frequent source of conflict between states. On the other hand, territory itself is not the only source of interstate conflict. Economic, legal, political, and cultural factors also influence such disputes. When all or many of these factors converge, however, and especially where they converge on a particular place, interstate conflict becomes all the more emphatic. Indeed, where such convergence occurs in the context of an irredentist movement, the potential for conflict becomes all the greater. Such is the case in the British-Argentina dispute over the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas, in the case between China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and others over the Nansha Qundao [Spratly Archipelago] in the South China Sea, in the case of the Japanese-Korean dispute over Takeshima/Tok-Do in the Sea of Japan, and so too is it the case of the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea.

What Is Irredentism?

Irredentism is complicated because it is based upon historical recollections of the contenders for the geographical space. These collective memories, whether held by the present population or their ancestors centuries ago, help to define and distinguish territories. Irredentist claims, such as those of the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland, Iraq to Kuwait, Syria to Lebanon, and Japan to the Four Northern Islands, continue to frustrate normal diplomatic efforts and often bring the nations involved to war, allowing “a state to pay lip service to formal international law while proceeding to act in its own territorial interest.”

The Provenance of Irredentism

The term irredentism originated from the Italian language when it was used by Italian nationalists who called for the annexation of Italian-speaking communities in Gorizia, Trieste, Trentino, Istria, Ticino, Nice, Corsica, Malta, and South Tyrol from Austrian, Swiss, French, and British rule respectively. After Italy fought many wars for Italian unification (1859–1866), several Italian-inhabited areas were still held
by Austria after 1866. In 1877, the phrase *Italia Irredenta* ("unredeemed Italy") was first used by Matteo R. Imbriani referring to Austrian-held Trieste. On July 21, 1878, Menotti Garibaldi, the son of the famous Giuseppe Garibaldi, formed volunteer battalions in Rome to conquer the Austrian-held Trieste, the powerful irredentist association. This organization claimed unfounded evidence that Trentino had been conquered by Giuseppe Garibaldi during the war of 1866 and insisted that the district was an "enclave" of Italian territory. Consequently, various irredentist groups within Italy were established, and *Italia Irredenta* became vocal as well as popular. Their activities began to spread over all Italian-speaking territories. Some groups pressed for the liberation of Corsica and Nice, which were held by the French. Others claimed British-held Malta.

During the years of these irredentist movements within Italy, there were two divided groups: those who favored peaceful solutions and those who urged war if necessary. Despite internal disputes, the irredentist movement was a significant force in Italian politics, particularly in foreign policy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially from 1900 to 1914. For example, the irredentists contributed significant pressure influencing the Italian government to enter World War I on the side of the Allies. In addition, Italy's territorial gains at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, including the German-speaking South Tyrol, reflected its irredentist goals. In short, the Italians invented the concept of irredentism, which claims sovereignty of "new" territories by using historical arguments, and irredentism became one of the major Italian foreign policy tools used to acquire "new" territorial space during the first part of the twentieth century.

**Irredentism versus Secessionism**

There are many examples of both secessionism and irredentism in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in the postcolonial world era because most states are ethnically heterogeneous and have territorially tight minorities. Conceptually, secessionism and irredentism are closely related. Although these arguments may be distinguished for analysis, a degree of interchangeability between secessionism and irredentism permits people to choose one or the other, as well as a combination of the two phenomena. Yet, it is important to recognize the specifics of each case, and it is imperative that all irredentists and
secessionist disputes (despite being within separate categories) be "viewed through a similar lens because their commonalities are considerable, their genesis alike, and the issues to which they give rise interrelated."  

According to Donald L. Horowitz, secessionism is the attempt by an ethnic group claiming a homeland to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part, and irredentism is the movement by members of an ethnic group in one state to retrieve ethnically kindred people and their territory across borders. Irredentism comprises two subtypes: an attempt to detach land and people from one state in order to incorporate them in another (such as the case of Somalia’s irredentist movement against Ethiopia), and an attempt to detach land and people divided among more than one state in order to incorporate them in a single new state (such as the case of “Kurdistan,” composed of Kurds now living in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey). In other words, irredentism is a “top-down” phenomenon, initiated and/or maintained by the government, but secessionism is conducted from the “bottom up,” initiated from the grassroots level. But the major difference between secessionism and irredentism is that irredentism subtracts from one state and adds to another state, new or already existing, and secessionism involves subtracting alone.

Secessionism is common, but the victory of secessionist movements is extremely difficult. From the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War, there are only two clear-cut secession cases: the peaceful formation of Singapore, which separated from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, and the formation of Bangladesh, which separated violently from Pakistan in January 1972. Because successful secessionism requires external assistance, which must have sufficient forces and capital to win the war and create a new secessionist state, the secession movement rarely achieves victory. Unlike secessionism, irredentism remains a largely unexplored and ignored concern because it is so difficult to define. One reason for this is that irredentism is rare. Despite this rarity, however, victory of irredentist movements, such as the Italian case, do occur. Often irredentist claims are discounted because they are anachronistic in nature, as opposed to secessionism, which can ultimately end in the modern catch-phrase, self-determination.

Irredentism often can be used as state policy supporting or oppos-
ing *irredentas*. Somalia, perhaps the most persistently irredentist state in the postcolonial era, has endeavored to achieve a Greater Somalia\textsuperscript{34} by adding the Somali-inhabited territories of Ethiopia (Ogaden) and Kenya (the former Northern Frontier District) as well as the state of Djibouti to the Somali nation-state. As former Somali President Haj Mohammed Hussein expressed, because the Somalis are “a people inhabiting a contiguous territory and possessing a common language, culture, history, and tradition, with Islam providing an important ingredient of their common culture,”\textsuperscript{35} Somalia’s constitution maintains the demand for a union of all Somali territories. Therefore, Somalia has fought two bitter irredentist wars with Ethiopia (in 1964 and 1977) and has been involved in guerrilla warfare in both Kenya and Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{36}

When irredentism is considered as a state policy, many questions are raised: Can territory under the effective control of one state be claimed by another state on the grounds that it is of far greater significance to the claimant than to the possessor? What of the Japanese claim to the four islets north of Hokkaido, which have been occupied by the former Soviet Union since August 1945? Should the Diaoyu Islands belong to the Japanese or Chinese territories based on historical evidence? In fact, until mid-1994, there were at least sixty-five irredentist claims (including some minor movements of secessionism) in the post–Cold War era.\textsuperscript{37} Some examples of unsolved irredentist claims (Table 1) may never be solved, either peacefully or politically, because they involve enormously complicated issues that include not only ethnicity and politics, but also culture and history. Some cases have to go back many centuries to verify their history.

**The Redefined Irredentism**

“Irredentism is an abstract notion that hardly ever fits a concrete historical case perfectly”;\textsuperscript{38} therefore, it has been defined in various ways. Some analysts treat irredentism as the liberation of the unredeemed brothers’ suffering\textsuperscript{39} and “the necessary ideology to justify the plundering raids issuing from the frontier.”\textsuperscript{40} Others regard irredentism as “historical studies”\textsuperscript{41} to resolve current political problems. Like Horowitz, scholars such as Naomi Chazan define irredentism narrowly: irredentism “highlights the importance of people and the land they occupy in the determination of the frontiers of the state.”\textsuperscript{42} By following Chazen’s interpretation, the Argentinian claim on the
Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) cannot be considered as an irredentist argument because the islands do not contain an Argentinian population. Similarly, the boundary disputes between China and India and between China and the former Soviet Union cannot be categorized as irredentist claims.43

### Table 1. Examples of Unsolved Irredentist Claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Current Owner</th>
<th>Affiliation to/also Claimed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>Muslims, Croats,</td>
<td>Muslims, Croats, Serbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Greece/Turkey</td>
<td>Greece/Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falkland Islands/</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islas Malvinas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guantánamo</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatay</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem (Palestine)</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Jordan/Palestinian People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuril Islands</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Comoro Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spratly and Paracel Islands</td>
<td>China/Vietnam/Taiwan</td>
<td>Brunei/Malaysia/Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tyrol</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, Karin von Hippel defines irredentism in a broad way: “a historical claim made by one sovereign state to land and/or people outside its internationally recognized boundaries, justified on the grounds that earlier separation was illegal or forced.” In addition to Hippel’s wider interpretation, this research, however, endorses irredentism as “an attempt made by an existing state to redeem territories and peoples it considers its own,” or any state policy of “seeking the recovery and reunion to one country of a region/regions for the time being subject to another country” by reason of ethnic, cultural, or historical ties. In other words, based on historical, cultural, or ethnic reasons, any state policy in any country that considers foreign-ruled territories as belonging to them is called irredentism. This definition, which will be used in this research, is not a restrictive one, and it supports the broader definition of irredentism because so many territorial debates are about land (including uninhabited islands), space, and people, and because the ultimate means for protecting the identity of its territory is seen to be the state. Consequently, there is no question about state policy involving irredentist movements.

In short, the international community is reluctant to support both secessionist and irredentist efforts simply because almost every state has disaffected groups. To be sure, any international law concerning territorial disputes favors the status quo, which for these cases means prolongation of the conflicts. “The contemporary discourse of territorial claim justification reflects the recent ascendency of the principle that a state is not entitled to seize territory from another unless that territory itself was originally wrongfully seized. . . . What this means is that the justifications now offered in support of territorial claims are almost invariably couched in terms of recovery of territory that historically belonged to the claiming state. The disputed territory is rightfully ‘ours,’ the argument goes: it was illegally taken away from ‘us’ and ‘we’ have the right to reclaim it.”

By the same token, irredentism or historical claims are less likely to receive legal sanction by the international community because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is one of the few major international institutions deferred to for verifying available historical evidence; unfortunately, under the agreement granting jurisdiction to the court, the parties involved must agree to submit their dispute for adjudication (see Chapter 1 for details).
The Diaoyu Islands and Sino-Japanese Ambivalent Relations

In September 1996, six members of the right-wing Japan Youth Federation repaired the lighthouse on Diaoyu islet, largest of the Diaoyu group, which resulted in outrage among ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Serious confrontations between the Japanese Marine Self-Defense Force and protesters from Hong Kong and Taiwan continued for months. As a result of these confrontations, David Chan, a Chinese activist, drowned off the Diaoyu Islands. Soon after Chan’s death, governments in Tōkyō and Beijing staked their own claims over the Diaoyu Islands, referring to historical documents for support. The dispute remains unresolved today, although tension over the Diaoyu Islands has subsided since the end of 1996. Suffice it to say, however, that both governments have strong domestically and internationally motivated irredentist movements that continue to claim sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands.

Geographically, the Diaoyu Islands are located from 123°25’ to 124°45’ east longitude and from 25°40’ to 26°00’ north latitude, about 120 miles (200 km) northeast of Taiwan, 180 miles (300 km) west of the Liuqiu (J: Ryūkyū or today’s Okinawa Prefecture, Japan) Islands, and 250 miles (400 km) east of the mainland China coast (see Appendix Fig. 1). The Diaoyu Islands are an uninhabited group of eight small islets (from west to east): Diaoyu Dao or Diaoyu Tai, Bei Xiaodao, Nan Xiaodao, Feilai Dao, Danan Xiaodao/Chong Nanyan, Dabei Xiaodao/Chong Beiyian, Huangwei Dao, and Chiwei Dao. Diaoyu Dao, the largest among the eight islands, has an area of about five square kilometers, and often the name Diaoyu Dao or Diaoyu Tai [Diaoyu Islands] refers to all eight islands (see Table 2).

Until the 1970s, the Diaoyu Islands were essentially “worthless” land for both China and Japan, and neither country appreciated these islands’ value. Only after the discovery of abundant natural resources under these islands in 1969 did the dispute of ownership over them ignite the fuse of territorial confrontations between Japan and China. Today, ownership of these uninhabited islands has become one of the most complicated territorial disputes in the world. The cornerstone of the Diaoyu dispute sprouts from an intricate tapestry of economic interests, geopolitical considerations, symbolic reasons, and historical rights.

The most obvious or immediate reasons Japan and China contest
### Table 2. Physical Geography of the Diaoyu Islands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Disputed Islands</th>
<th>Area(^a) km(^2)/mi(^2)/acres</th>
<th>Maximum Elevation (meters)(^b)</th>
<th>Vegetation</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Diaoyu Dao</td>
<td>4.5/1.7/1,088</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>Palm trees, prickly pear, and <em>Statice Arbuscula</em></td>
<td>Potable water available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Huangwei Dao</td>
<td>1.1/0.4/256</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>No potable water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nan Xiaodao</td>
<td>0.465/0.18/115</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Nicknamed “Snake Island”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bei Xiaodao</td>
<td>0.303/0.12/75</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Little or none</td>
<td>Barren rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Chiwei Dao</td>
<td>0.15/0.06/37</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Barren rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Chong Beiyan/Dabei Xiaodao</td>
<td>0.014/0.005/3.5(^c)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Barren rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Chong Nanyan/Danan Xiaodao</td>
<td>0.005/0.002/1.2(^c)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Barren rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Feilai Dao</td>
<td>0.00006/0.00002/0.014(^c)</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Barren rock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
\(^a\)Total area of the Diaoyu Islands (including all islets) is 6.5 sq. km/2.5 sq. mi/1,575 acres. (1 sq. mi = 640 acres = 2.59 sq. km; 1 sq. km = 247 cres = 0.39 sq. mi)  
\(^b\)This refers to the elevation above sea level.  
\(^c\)The area of the island is based on estimates.  
Introduction

Ownership of the Diaoyu Islands are economic interests. Japan, a country lacking natural resources, is one of the largest oil consumers in the world, spending approximately $25 billion annually to import oil from overseas. This is problematic because Japan is competing with the postindustrial nations of the West and needs natural resources to sustain competitiveness in world markets. At the same time, China, since beginning economic reforms in 1978, has come to recognize that natural resources, especially oil and natural gas, have been increasingly indispensable to the modernization process—not least of all for power generation. Today, shortages of electricity are a major concern for Chinese modernization. In fact, “China’s annual demand for new power stations equals what Switzerland will build in a century.” Without oil, it is impossible for China to maintain energy resources needed to fuel Chinese modernization. Indeed, China has become a net importer of oil since 1993.

Geopolitical considerations are another factor fueling the conflict because the location of the Diaoyu Islands is strategically important for both countries. Since the Diaoyu Islands are located only 120 miles northeast of Taiwan and 250 miles east of mainland China, they constitute a potential strategic base from which a hostile power might threaten China. Indeed, Japanese military bases on the Diaoyu Islands could mean Japanese guns under China’s nose. Presumably the opposite also applies. As a result, the geostrategic location of the Diaoyu Islands is unquestionably important for both Japan and China.

In addition, the unfortunate history of Sino-Japanese relations since the nineteenth century is of symbolic significance. Specifically, the humiliations suffered by China at the hands of the Japanese during the wars in 1895 and 1937 have motivated the Chinese to confront Japan as an overt expression of dignity. Therefore, even if the Diaoyu Islands did not have any natural resources, the Chinese would not relinquish even an inch of what they consider their territory. In the end, China, as former civilization supplier, would not tolerate that its former tributary nation, Japan, took over sovereign rights to the Diaoyu Islands.

Moreover, both Japan and China claim that they have national rights to exercise sovereign control over the Diaoyu Islands. As illustrated above, historical rights have been one of the most important
reasons for both the Japanese and the Chinese to claim ownership of these islands. In both cases, the assertion of historical claims serves as a powerful tool to motivate internal patriotism and nationalism. Historically, there have been many fluctuations in Sino-Japanese relations over the past two millennia. As Chae-Jin Lee, one of the foremost specialists in Sino-Japanese relations, argues, “neither common cultural background nor geographical proximity had any appreciable beneficial effect upon their conceptual deficiencies, political estrangement, or diplomatic confrontation.”

Furthermore, the Chinese always have had ambivalent feelings toward the Japanese. This is in part because once the Japanese finished studying China in the eighth century, they began to challenge the Chinese Empire. The most obvious of these challenges occurred in 1894–1895, when the Japanese won the Sino-Japanese War. The following conversation exchanged tout de suite after the war between the Chinese representative Li Hongzhang and the Japanese representative Ito Hirobumi (then prime minister) reveals the Chinese feeling toward the Japanese:

**Li:** In Asia, our two countries, China and Japan, are the closest neighbors, and moreover have the same language. How could we be enemies? Now for the time being we are fighting each other, but eventually we should work for permanent friendship. If we are enemies endlessly, then what is harmful to China will not necessarily be beneficial to Japan. Let us look at the various European countries which, even though their military forces are strong, do not lightly start hostilities. Since we Chinese and Japanese are on the same continent, we should also imitate Europe. If the diplomatic ministers of our two countries mutually and deeply understand this idea, we ought vigorously to maintain the general stability of Asia, and establish perpetual peace and harmony between ourselves, so that our Asiatic yellow race will not be encroached upon by the white race of Europe.

**Ito:** I am very much pleased with [the] idea of the grand secretary (Li Hongzhang). Ten years ago when I was at Tientsin, I talked about reform with the grand secretary. Why is it that up to now not a single thing has been changed or reformed? This I deeply regret.

**Li:** At that time when I heard you, sir, talking about that, I was overcome with admiration, and furthermore I deeply admired, sir, your having vigorously changed your customs in Japan so as to reach the present stage. Affairs in my country have been so confined by tradition that I could not accomplish what I desired. . . . The soldiers and generals of your honorable country are excellently trained in the model of Western methods; in
all kinds of policies and administration, you are advancing daily to
closer and more prosperous planes.

Ito: “The providence of heaven has no affection, except for the vir-
tuous.” If your honorable country wishes to exert itself to action,
Heaven above would certainly help your honorable country to fulfill
its desires. It is because Heaven treats the people below [i.e., mankind]
without discrimination. The essential thing is that each country should
do its own best.

Li: Your honorable country, after it has been so reorganized by you, sir, is very
admirable [emphasis added].

As illustrated above, the Chinese expressed their envy of the Japanese
success in modernizing their nation and hoped the Japanese would
stop their attacks on China. On the other hand, the Japanese tried to
dictate what the Chinese should do. For centuries, the Chinese image
of the world order caused them to assume that they were superior to
all others. After losing the 1894–1895 war with the Japanese, the Chi-
nese superiority complex suffered.

During the Second World War, the Japanese set up Manzhouguo
[or Manchukuo] in northeast China, creating the “Greater East Asia
Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Although some Chinese collaborationists
hoped that the Japanese would help China become liberated from
Western imperialism, most realized that the Japanese were not much
different from any other imperialists. The Japanese, in fact, did not
liberate the Chinese from Western powers; instead they colonized
parts of China. Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, optimistically stated
that Japan would have complete control over the “defence and secur-
ity” of “Manchukuo;” that Japan would administer the railways, har-
bours, waterways, and airways of “Manchukuo” and could [sic] carry
out further construction; that the supplies and equipment needed by
the Japanese troops would be provided by “Manchukuo;” that the Japa-
nese would have the right to open mines and exploit natural re-
sources; that the Japanese would be allowed to hold office in “Man-
chukuo;” that Japan would have the right to move immigrants into
“Manchukuo;” and many other items.

Even today, the Chinese have ambivalent feelings toward the Japa-
nese despite the fact that economic and cultural ties between Japan
and China have continued to deepen. When Japan normalized rela-
tions with the nationalist Taiwan regime, Jiang Jieshi [or Chiang Kai-
shek] waived reparations for the Second World War. Similarly, when
Japan normalized relations with China in 1972, Mao Zedong, according to the Sino-Japanese Joint Statement (article 5), waived Japan’s reparations for WWII. However, when the Qing government lost the war in 1894–1895 and the Boxer movement in 1900, China paid a total 289,540,000 taels of silver to Japan, despite the weak economy of the Qing dynasty. Even though Japan had great economic power in 1972 (GNP $300 billion), Japan did not pay any money to China for the war. This reparation problem reflects the question of Japan’s morality. To be sure, war reparations are a constant thorn aggravating Sino-Japanese relations.

The ambivalence in Sino-Japanese relations is not one-sided. For instance, since the Chinese economic reforms of 1978, Japan has provided grants for establishing the China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Beijing and the preservation of the Dunhuang Mogao Cave on the Silk Road, yen credits or soft loans for building roads, railways, dams, as well as technological assistance. But assisting in the modernization of China has led many in Japan to fear that someday China will become too strong (i.e., threaten Japan’s security). As a result, Japan has been reluctant to transfer advanced technologies to China. This, in turn, only increases the “stingy” image of the Japanese in China. The Japanese also shoulder burdens of the past and face dilemmas in the future. On the other hand, an unstable China remains Japan’s worst nightmare (i.e., mass refugees). Because of the relatively close proximity of Japan to China (see Appendix Fig. 1), the potential impact of an aggressive China is certainly a concern to Japan. As Regents Professor Allen S. Whiting, a guru in the study of Sino-Japanese relations, points out, the conventional idea of a “love-hate relationship” does not apply to Sino-Japanese relations because there is no “love” on the Chinese side, even though the Chinese have greatly admired the Japanese economic growth and technological modernization. Toward the fin de siècle of the twentieth century, as the two major powers in the Asian region, the stability of Sino-Japanese relations can contribute not only to peace and prosperity in both countries and the Asian region, but also to harmony in the world as a whole.

In sum, if Chinese irredentism is the case, why did the Chinese choose this “place”—the Diaoyu Islands—to emphasize their sovereignty? If historical justification or use of the past is Chinese state policy, why did Beijing decide to shelve the Diaoyu case when China and Japan normalized relations in 1972? Moreover, Deng Xiaoping
declared in 1978 that the issue of the Diaoyu Islands could be solved by posterity. Now that the “next generation” headed by Jiang Zemin has officially taken charge in China, will the Chinese seek a resolution of this dispute in the near future, or has Beijing a broader strategic game plan? If China has a strategic game plan, how might this affect Sino-Japanese relations? How does the Diaoyu Islands dispute relate to Chinese naval development and Chinese oceanic policy? Will the Chinese seek regional hegemony in the twenty-first century?

In addressing the above mentioned questions, this research employs a frame of reference derived from the study of historical geography and geopolitics. The major purpose of this study is to reveal the fact that people living in different places during different periods of time have different concepts of territorial space, and that states have tried to use historical arguments (i.e., irredentism) to justify their current policies. Among the major issues addressed by this study, the first centers on the historical development of the Diaoyu Islands dispute. In particular, to whom do the Diaoyu Islands belong? When did the Chinese and the Japanese become involved in this dispute? Does historical evidence prove who has the sovereign right of the Diaoyu Islands? And how has irredentism become a major state policy in both China and Japan?

A second issue centers on Chinese views of sovereignty and their methods of delimiting the international boundary of the Diaoyu Islands during the Ming and the Qing dynasties. Based on the long history of Chinese administrative geography, the Chinese had their own way to demarcate legitimate political space and marine space in the East China Sea. In particular, the Chinese created the Sinitic world order by networking their investiture-tributary system to demonstrate the Chinese way of hegemony during traditional periods.

A third issue is that the Chinese have their own concept of hegemony that they apply to their international relations or international diplomacy in the international arena today. China might not follow the Western pattern, but it will seek its own way of hegemony with “Chinese characteristics” in the world political system. In particular, China’s strong economic growth means a strong China in the next millennium.

A fourth issue, and one of the more significant threads running through this work, is that the Diaoyu Islands dispute is not an isolated affair, but rather a deeply rooted cultural and historical conflict be-
tween Japan and China, illustrating the long-standing mistrust in Sino-Japanese relations. Moreover, the Diaoyu dispute exposes complicated geopolitical relations among Japan, China, the United States, and Taiwan in the Asian-Pacific region.

Finally, this study discloses the interwoven relationship between history and geography. By analyzing the history of the Diaoyu Islands, many Chinese and Japanese historical geographers contributed their knowledge to their own states as national diplomatic policy and national security policy for centuries. Many of these historians and geographers and their works have been unknown in the West, and it is an underlying purpose of this thesis to expose this material to a Western readership.

In the end, none of these issues is discrete, and they often relate to one another in conjunctive ways. This book demonstrates that the fundamental theme linking all of these issues together is that the irredentist arguments are the major driving force behind state policy by China to contest Japan over the territorial space of the Diaoyu Islands. The dispute may be resolved, whether by negotiation or by warfare; however, the justifications for this dispute will remain deeply rooted in the historical, political, and cultural geography of the Asian region. Because of the failure of international law, it is the primary goal of this research to reveal that historical geography might offer some guidance to the possible resolution of this irredentist dispute. The author sincerely hopes that scholars will turn to this work for generations to come as the primary source for insight into this irredentist Diaoyu issue.