

李悅：神聖領土

**Sacred Territory**

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Now the storm of the ‘Safeguard the Diaoyu Islands’ campaign has blown up again, one keeps hearing the slogan “Our sacred territory is inviolable!” I really don’t know why, but every time I hear the words ‘sacred territory’ I can’t help laughing.

It is not that I disapprove of safeguarding the Diaoyu Islands, I have just never been able to see anything sacred about this thing we call ‘territory’.

A country’s territory is similar to a family estate or an ancestral house, which grows when the family has money and power, and shrinks when it falls on hard times: bits get sold or rented out, and the estate becomes smaller and smaller. It is not something one can help. ‘Survival’ comes first, ‘face’ second, there’s nothing ‘sacred’ about it.

For example, during past dynasties the boundaries of our great country have never stopped stretching and shrinking, like an elastic band. When the country was strong and powerful, as it was in the Han, Tang, and early Qing dynasties (originally I intended to include Genghis Khan, but on second thoughts, since the Mongol conquest and the Yuan dynasty were a source of national shame, it seems better not to mention him), it would seize land from its neighbours (strangely, the Chinese have never thought of *that* as invasion). When the country was weak, as it was in

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the Song, Ming and late Qing dynasties, it would swallow its pride and cede territory in order to survive. It did not desist from seizing the 'sacred' land of other nations, nor did it hesitate to cede its own 'sacred' territory.

There is but a single truth as regards national territory: might is right. The currently popular expression 'since ancient times' is not even worth a laugh. How ancient is ancient? When heaven and earth were first divided? Of course not, because any piece of land on earth is immeasurably more ancient than any country or government on it. If we go by the first-come-first-served principle, then all the white, black and yellow peoples in America should go back to their native homes, and even those in Taiwan who call themselves 'Taiwanese' should hurry up and shove off, because the island has belonged to the indigenous hill people 'since ancient times'. \*

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