

# Dokdo Is Korean Territory

Lee Sang-tae

## Dokdo Is Korean Territory

By Lee Sang-tae

*[Korean and Japanese claims to sovereignty over the tiny islets known respectively as Dokdo and Takeshima renewed in intensity this past winter and spring. This is an argument with at least a century's history of conflict and vituperation. Korea's claim is straightforward and meshes with a broader, global post-colonial discourse: "These have long been our islands. You colonized us illegally, and part of that illegal act was the seizure of territory that is demonstrably ours on old maps and in ancient records." As a sizeable advertisement sponsored in part by the Korean government in the July 27 The New York Times makes clear: "DOKDO IS KOREAN TERRITORY." Japan counters with a complex, legalistic explanation involving the validity of the 1910 takeover and the terms of the post-colonial emancipation. On top of this, Japan knowingly holds the diplomatic wildcard, meaning that it was the United States' unwillingness to resolve this issue in 1951 in its peace treaty with Japan that has sustained the mess. In the absence of Japanese renunciation of claims to the islets, any conclusive judgment would, therefore, require the United States to take a stand. In the midst of this, of course, the United States maintains separate — and in the case of these islands competing — national interests in its discrete, bilateral security treaties with Korea and Japan. The following article by Professor Lee Sang-tae presents the numerous historical documents supporting Korea's historical claims to the islets, as well as introducing the issue of American involvement. Japan Focus.]*

Located at 37 degrees 14' 18" N latitude, 131 degrees 52' 22" E longitude, Dokdo has been Korean territory since 1,500 years ago. Evidence of Korean sovereignty over Dokdo is clearly recorded in many history books of Korea. However, the Japanese ignore this historical fact and claim title to Dokdo. But the Japanese claim is unfounded and invalid.

### 1. Where are the islands of Dokdo located?

Dokdo is the easternmost territory of the Republic of Korea. Administratively, its address is San 1-17, Dokdo-ri, Ulleung-eup, Ulleung-gun, Gyeongsang-buk-do province. It is located about 92km southeast of Ulleungdo and about 160km (about 86 nautical miles) northwest of the nearest Japanese island, Oki Island of Shimane Prefecture. Dokdo comprises two main islets - Dongdo and Seodo - and 36 rock formations surrounding the islets. It covers an area of 186,121m<sup>2</sup>, with Seodo and Dongdo rising 174m and 99.4m above sea level, respectively.

### 2. Since when has Dokdo been Korean territory?

Dokdo became the territory of Korea about 1,500 years ago when King Jijeung of Silla ordered Isabu to incorporate Usanguk into Silla in the 13th year of King Jijeung (512). It is recorded in Samguksagi (The History of the Three Kingdoms) as follows: "In June of the 13th year of King Jijeung, Usanguk submitted to Silla and decided to offer local products every year. Usanguk is an island due east of Myeongju (Gangneung today), and also called Ulleungdo." It is also recorded in Goryeosajiriji (Geographical Record of the History of Goryeo)

that: "Usando and Mureungdo are two islands which are not far away from each other, so they can be seen when the weather is clear and no wind blows." Sejong-sillok-jiriji (Geographical Record of the Annals of King Sejong) includes an entry: "The two islands, Usan and Mureung, are in the sea due east of the prefecture. They are not far away from each other so they are visible in clear weather. They were known as Usanguk in Silla." It is clearly recorded in the above-mentioned three historical references that Dokdo was incorporated into Korea during the reign of King Jijeung of Silla and that Usanguk encompassed Ulleungdo and Usando (Dokdo today).

The Japanese document in which Dokdo was mentioned for the first time is Onshu shicho goki (Records of Observations of Oki Province), published in 1667. This was a report prepared by Saito, an official of Izumo (former name of Shimane Prefecture) who made an inspection trip to Oki Island in 1667 at the behest of his feudal lord. In the report, Dokdo was mentioned for the first time as Matsushima, and Ulleungdo as Takeshima. The report noted: "Onshu (Oki Province) is located in the middle of the northern sea. So, it is called Oki Island. When one goes northwest for two days and a night from the island, there is Matsushima. There is Takeshima at a distance of a one-day trip from there. It is also called Isotakeshima and there are many bamboo trees and sea lions. The two islands (Matsushima and Takeshima) are uninhabited, and the viewing of Goryeo can be compared to that of Oki (Oki Island) from Unshu. Therefore, as for Japan's northwestern region, this province (Onshu: Oki Island) is considered to be the limit." This report is the first written record of Japan in which Dokdo was mentioned, and it recognized both Dokdo and Ulleungdo as being the territory of Joseon.

3. How was Dokdo administered during the Goryeo Dynasty?

During the period of Goryeo, Ulleungdo paid tribute to the Goryeo Dynasty numerous times. The Goryeo Dynasty sought to establish an administrative district in Ulleungdo to directly oversee the region several times, but this was not realized due to the long distance and rough seas. During the period of Goryeo, Usanguk was also known to be composed of Ulleungdo and Usando.

4. Donggungnyeo-jiseungnam and Mangiyoram



Dongnamdo is a map attached to Donggungnyeo-jiseungnam published in 1531.

Ulleungdo is designated as Ulleungdo and Dokdo as Usando. Dokdo was located close to the Korean peninsula because of a lack of accurate geographical knowledge about the area. After the incident of An Yong-bok, who defended Dokdo against Japan in the 17th century, Dokdo started to be correctly situated to the east of Ulleungdo. In the Uljin Prefecture section of Gangwon-do province in Donggungnyeo-jiseungnam, the representative geography of early Joseon, it is recorded: "The two islands, Usando and Ulleungdo (also called Mureung or Ureung), are located in the middle of the sea due east of the prefecture." The book made it clear that the two islands, Usando (Dokdo) and Ulleungdo, belonged to Uljin

Prefecture of Gangwon-do province administratively, and therefore was the territory of the Joseon Dynasty. In the section of military affairs of Mangiyoram published in 1808, it is written: "According to Yeojiji, both Ulleungdo and Usando are the territory of Usanguk. Usando is what the Japanese called Matsushima." Yeojiji is a geography book written by Yu Hyeong-won in the 17th century, which clarified that Usanguk included Ulleungdo and Usando, and that Dokdo was the territory of Korea. In noting: "Usando is known to the Japanese as Matsushima," the book made clear that Usando was Dokdo.

## 5. Annals of the Joseon Dynasty

The Ulleungdo region was regarded as Usanguk until the early Joseon period. Ulleungdo was known as Mureungdo or Ulleungdo, while Dokdo was called Usando, Yodo, or Sambongdo. King Taejong issued an evacuation order to curtail Japanese piracy and prevent draft dodgers and criminals from fleeing to the islands. About 150 people lived on Ulleungdo in early Joseon, but all residents were relocated to the mainland for resettlement and Ulleungdo was unoccupied thereafter. In this process, the existence of an island other than Ulleungdo was discovered and it became known as Usando (Dokdo). Known as Usando from early Joseon, Dokdo was always charted next to Ulleungdo in old maps of Korea, including Dongnamdo. Usando was mapped between the mainland and Ulleungdo in early Joseon. Usando started to be accurately mapped to the east of Ulleungdo, as in today's Dokdo, when people came to acquire accurate geographic knowledge about Dokdo after An Yong-bok's efforts to defend the islands.

## 6. Japanese government's claim to Dokdo

Japanese claim is based on the authority granted by the Tokugawa Shogunate to cross the sea to Takeshima (Ulleungdo) in 1618 and

Matsushima (Dokdo) in 1661. A Japanese named Otani, who lived in Yonago of Hoki Province, took refuge on Ulleungdo during a typhoon. Ulleungdo had been vacant since early Joseon because of the island evacuation order. Unaware of this, Otani believed Ulleungdo to be unoccupied. Along with Murakawa, who enjoyed a close relationship with officials of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Otani sought authority to sail to the island in 1616. Consequently, the governor of Hoki Province and officials of the Tokugawa Shogunate granted travel authority to the two families of Otani and Murakawa in 1618. They also applied for authority to travel to Matsushima, near Takeshima, which was granted in 1661. If Ulleungdo and Dokdo were the territory of Japan, why would special authority have to be granted to visit their own territory?

## 7. How did An Yong-bok defend Dokdo?

An Yong-bok and some fishermen from Dongnae fished at Ulleungdo, in the 19th year of King Sukjong (1693), where they clashed with Japanese fishermen dispatched by the Otani family of Japan. The Japanese abducted An Yong-bok and brought him to the governor of Oki Island. Pointing out that Ulleungdo was the territory of Joseon, An Yong-bok strongly protested: "Why do you abduct and detain Joseon people who go to the land of Joseon?" The governor of Oki Island transferred An Yong-bok and his group to the governor of Hoki Province. The governor of Hoki Province found the case beyond his authority and sent them to his superior, the Kanpaku (supreme ruler) of the shogunate in Edo (Tokyo). After questioning An Yong-bok, the Kanpaku of the Tokugawa Shogunate had the Hoki provincial governor issue a notice saying that "Ulleungdo is not the territory of Japan".

So Yoshimichi, the new governor of Tsushima, paid a courtesy call on the shogunate general in January of the 21st year of King Sukjong (1696). The general grasped the situation

through discussions with the new governor and issued the following orders: "First, Takeshima (Ulleungdo) is about 160 ri from Hoki of Japan, while about 40 ri from Joseon. So it should be regarded as the territory of Joseon. Second, Japanese are hereafter forbidden to travel to the island. Third, the governor of Tsushima should dispatch an official to notify Joseon of this decision."

An Yong-bok went to Ulleungdo again in the 22nd year of King Sukjong (1696). Seeing Japanese ships at anchor at Ulleungdo, he lashed out at the Japanese fishermen: "Ulleungdo is our territory. How dare you trespass? You deserve to be arrested." The Japanese tried to lie: "We originally lived on Matsushima (Dokdo). We happened to come here while fishing, but we will surely return there." An Yong-bok drove them out, saying: "Matsushima is Jasando, and it is also our territory. How dare you say you live there?" An Yong-bok then chased the Japanese fishermen back to Hoki Province via Oki Island. He called on the governor there to protest the incident. The governor of Hoki Province then punished the 15 Japanese fishermen who were driven out by An Yong-bok. He assured An Yong-bok: "As the islands belong to your country, I will severely punish any Japanese who may intrude there." The controversy came to an end when the Hoki provincial governor reconfirmed in the 22nd year of King Sukjong that Ulleungdo and Dokdo were the territory of Joseon.

8. How was Dokdo administered after the An Yong-bok incident?(Illustration) Sangoku tszuran zuestu



Illustrated General Survey of Three Countries) by Hayashi Shihei.

In Hayashi Shihei's map of Joseon, prepared in 1785, Ulleungdo and Dokdo are colored yellow to indicate that they are Korean territory. It is recorded that the two islands belong to Joseon.

The government of Joseon concluded that the Japanese laid claim to Ulleungdo because the island remained unoccupied for a long time. So the government decided to dispatch a local official once every three years to inspect and oversee the situation of Ulleungdo and Dokdo. Jeon Hoe-il, a military official of Wolsong in Gangwon-do province, was dispatched for an inspection of Ulleungdo in the 25th year of King Sukjong (1699) and Yi Jun-myeong, a military official of Samcheok, in the 28th year of King Sukjong (1702). Local officials, however, made excuses and tried to avoid on-



site inspections because the waters around Ulleungdo were treacherous and some officials were killed en route. The dispatch of officials was temporarily suspended when Gangwon provincial governor Yi Man-gyeon suggested in the 43rd year of Sukjong (1717) that the inspection of Ulleungdo be terminated because of various problems involved. However, the inspections were resumed in order to prevent trespassing by the Japanese.

#### 9. The Meiji government and Ulleungdo and Dokdo

The Meiji government also recognized Ulleungdo and Dokdo as the territory of Joseon. The first evidence is Chosenkoku kosaishimatsu naitansho (Confidential Inquiry into the Particulars of Korea's Relations with Japan) prepared in 1869-1870 and filed in the third volume of Japan's Diplomatic Documents. Upon its establishment, the Meiji government sent officials, including a high-ranking official of the foreign ministry, Sada Hakubo, to Busan in December 1869 to secretly investigate the situation of Joseon to assess the possibility of an expansion of diplomatic relations with Joseon and the potential to "conquer Joseon." One issue was the circumstances under which "Takeshima and Matsushima had become the territory of Joseon." After their return to Japan, the officials reported that Matsushima (Dokdo) was an island adjacent to Takeshima (Ulleungdo), and the two islands, although uninhabited, were the territory of Joseon. This official document clearly stated that Ulleungdo and Dokdo were the territory of Korea.

The second evidence involves a countrywide land survey of Japan conducted by Japan's Ministry of Home Affairs to prepare an updated map in 1876. At that time, an official in charge of the survey of Shimane Prefecture inquired of the ministry about whether Takeshima (Ulleungdo) and Matsushima (Dokdo) in the East Sea should be part of the map of Shimane Prefecture. After a five-month investigation, the

ministry concluded that Ulleunddo and Dokdo were not part of Japan but were the territory of Joseon, and thus instructed that the two islands be excluded from the land survey.

#### 10. Why did Japan refer to Dokdo as Liancourt Rocks?

In 1876, a Japanese named Buto claimed he discovered a new island in the East Sea, other than Takeshima (Ulleungdo), and requested authority to develop the island, Matsushima. Japan's Navy Ministry dispatched a warship, the Tenjo Maru, to investigate in 1878 and 1880, and determined that the Matsushima, which Buto claimed to have discovered, was in fact Ulleungdo. Since then, Ulleungdo came to be called Matsushima. Such being the case, Japan needed a new name for Dokdo, which had previously been known as Matsushima. So, Japan started to identify Dokdo as Liancourt Rocks, after the name used by a French whaler as a directional reference. Japanese fishermen, who used such charts, called it "Ryanko Islands" for short. Dokdo was known to the French as Liancourt Rocks from 1849, Manalai and Olivutsa to the Russians from 1854, and Hornet Rocks to the British from 1855.

#### 11. How did the Joseon authorities administer Ulleungdo in modern times?

Entering modern times, the Joseon government continued to implement a policy of leaving Ulleungdo unoccupied. Taking advantage of this situation, Japanese nationals continued to engage in illegal fishing and forestry on Ulleungdo amidst an increased presence of Japanese warships. The government of Joseon appointed Yi Gyu-won as Ulleungdo gamchalsa (inspector) to determine whether the evacuation policy should be rescinded so that Ulleungdo could be developed.

Yi Gyu-won led a large inspection team comprised of 102 members in three ships to conduct a survey of Ulleungdo. After a detailed

survey of the island over six days from April 29, 1882, he submitted a report, which included the following major points: A total of 140 people from Korea were residing on Ulleungdo - 115 (82%) from Jeolla-do province, 14 (10%) from Gangwon-do province, 10 (7%) from Gyeongsang-do province; and 1 (0.7%) from Gyeonggi-do province; Of these people, 129 (92.2%) were engaged in shipbuilding, 9 (6.4%) in gathering medicinal herbs, such as ginseng, and 2 (1.4%) in harvesting bamboo; There were 78 Japanese intruders on Ulleungdo; At Jangjakjipo on Ulleungdo, a signpost that read "Kikoku, Matsushima, Japan. Erected by Iwasaki Chusho on February 13 in the second year of Meiji"; Six to seven areas, including Naridong, where residents had settled, were surveyed.

12. How was the development of Ulleungdo implemented?

Kim Ok-gyun was appointed as an official in charge of developing southeastern islands and whaling in March 1883. An initial group of 16 families of 54 individuals was resettled there in April 1883, and all 254 illegal Japanese occupants were returned to their country. A dojang (island chief) was appointed to administer Ulleungdo and was later changed to a dogam (island inspector) in 1895.

13. What modern-day documents prove that Dokdo is Korean territory?

Great Han (Korea) Empire Ordinance No. 41 formally established Uldo-gun (county). Under Article 1 of this ordinance, Ulleungdo was renamed Uldo and its former dogam (island inspector) upgraded to gunsu (county governor), as of October 25, 1900. Article 2 stated that the areas under the jurisdiction of Uldo-gun would include all the islands of Ulleungdo, Jukdo, and Seokdo. In this ordinance, Jukdo refers to Jukseodo of today, which is adjacent to Ulleungdo, while Seokdo means Dokdo. In the Korean dialect used in

Jeolla-do province, dol (stone or rock) is referred to as dok, so dolseom (seom: island) means dokseom. Dokseom is also called either "Dokdo" (do: Sino-Korean character meaning island) or "seokdo" (seok: Sino-Korean character meaning stone or rock).

14. When was the name Dokdo adopted?

Dokdo was long known as Usando in Korea. The first reference to "Dokdo" was found in the logbook of a Japanese warship, Niitakago, which surveyed the area in 1904. The logbook entry stated: "People on Matsushima (Ulleungdo) call Dokdo Liancourt Rocks, while the Japanese fishermen call it Ryanko Islands." As for Korean documents, the name "Dokdo" was first found in a report prepared by Ulleung county governor Sim Heung-taek in 1906. The entry in the Niitakago logbook indicates that the Korean people living on Ulleungdo used the name "Dokdo" before 1904.

15. How did the Russo-Japanese War affect Dokdo?



When the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, Japan recognized Dokdo as a highly strategic site for observing the movements of the Russian fleet. Of the 20 observation towers built by the Japanese navy, two were on Ulleungdo and one on Dokdo. Japan revealed its imperialistic interest in Dokdo when it recognized the strategic value of Dokdo during the Russo-Japanese War.

1) Account of the incorporation of Usando in Samguksag (The History of the Three Kingdoms)

An account of the incorporation of Usando as part of Silla in the 13th year of King Jijeng (512)

## 2) Photograph of Sim Heung-taek

Japan sought to illegally seize Dokdo in 1905 and failed to notify Joseon of its actions. The Japanese officials, who happened to visit Ulleungdo after inspecting Dokdo in 1906, made this known to Sim Heung-taek, the Uldo county governor. Startled by this news, Sim immediately reported the situation to the central government. Shown in the rear is Sim Heung-taek in official costume unfolding a large national flag of Korea.

## 3) Great Han Empire Ordinance No.41

Under this ordinance of 1900, Uldo County was established, with jurisdiction including Ulleungdo, Jukdo and Seokdo (Dokdo).

## 16. The purpose of Nakai's exclusive license for fishing off Dokdo

Nakai sought to secure exclusive fishing rights to Dokdo because the hunting of sea lions around Dokdo was lucrative. The Japanese government supported Nakai's plans to utilize Dokdo so that it could be used as a strategic site. Nakai knew that Dokdo was Korean territory, so he first attempted to obtain permission to use Dokdo from Korea. However, Japan's naval ministry, which was waging the Russo-Japanese War, encouraged Nakai to submit "an appeal for incorporation and lease of Ryanko Islands" to Japan's ministries of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Agriculture and Commerce, given Dokdo's strategic importance. The Ministry of Home Affairs was prepared to turn down the appeal in light of the Korean government's opposition and international opinion, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively supported the appeal and eventually approved it.

## 17. How did the Japanese government announce its 'illegal seizure of Dokdo'?

The governor of Shimane Prefecture enacted Ordinance No. 87 on February 15, 1905 and then posted a formal notice on the prefecture's bulletin board. The notice read: "An island located at 37 degrees 9' 30" N latitude and 131 degrees 55' E longitude, and 85 nautical miles northwest of Oki Island is to be named Takeshima, and from now on placed under the jurisdiction of the governor of Oki Island, which is administered by Shimane Prefecture under Ordinance No. 40 of February 22, 1905." The announcement was quietly reported in the local newspaper, Sanin Shimbum, on February 24, 1905. This action was not announced by the central government or reported by national newspapers for the following reasons. First, Japan sought to avoid criticism from the world powers because of the incorporation of the tiny islands of Dokdo. Second, Japan was afraid that it might face strong protest from Korea if this action became known to the Korean government.

## 18. When was the government of the Great Han Empire notified?

A group of Shimane Prefecture and Oki Island officials had to land on Ulleungdo because of rough seas on their way back home after an inspection trip to Dokdo on March 28, 1906. They visited Uldo county governor Sim Heung-taek and indirectly mentioned the incorporation of Dokdo by Japan. However, no official diplomatic document was submitted to Korea to verify the incorporation.

## 19. Measures undertaken by Uldo county governor Sim Heung-taek

Sim Heung-taek was surprised by this news and immediately reported the matter to the governor of Gangwon-do province on March 29, the following day. He stated in his report: "Dokdo, which belongs to this county, is about a hundred ri from here... Japanese officials

visited us and said that they came to inspect Dokdo because it has now become the territory of Japan." The Gangwon-do province governor reported this to the central government. The government ministers contended: "It is unreasonable for Japan to regard Dokdo as its territory." Sim Heung-ta was thus ordered to closely monitor and report on Japanese activities.

Daehan Maeil Sinmun and Hwangseong Sinmun, reported the Japanese action. Hwang Hyeon wrote in his Maecheonyarok: "There is an island 100 ri east of Ulleungdo that originally belonged to Ulleungdo. But the Japanese have unjustly claimed it as their territory and made an inspection trip there." The Korean government failed to officially protest Japan's illegal seizure of Dokdo because it was forced to sign the Eulsa Treaty with Japan in November 1905, which ceded full authority over diplomatic affairs to Japan. In addition, Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was closed in January 1906, while the Resident-General's Office, established in January 1906, intervened in the domestic affairs of Korea as well. Under these circumstances, the Korean government was unable to take proper measures.

20. Why was Dokdo omitted from the Peace Treaty of 1951?

Dokdo was specified in the first draft (March

20, 1947), the second draft (August 5, 1947), the third draft (January 2, 1948), the fourth draft (October 13, 1949), and the fifth draft (November 2, 1949) of the Peace Treaty negotiated after World War II. However, it was described as a territory of Japan in the sixth draft (December 29, 1959) after Japan's persistent lobbying efforts. Such Allied Powers as Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. strongly protested this inaccuracy of the sixth draft. The U.K. submitted a corrected draft three times and made known its protest to the U.S. side. It also presented a map that clearly identified Dokdo as Korean territory. Embarrassed by this development, the U.S. negotiators prepared a joint draft (May 3, 1951) that deleted any reference to Dokdo, thereby failing to clarify the sovereignty of the islands.

21. What is the value of Dokdo?

First, Dokdo is a key forward base to assure Korean sovereignty over its territorial waters and EEZ, and to protect its fishing rights. Second, it is a vast treasure trove of underground resources, such as solidified natural gas. Third, it is a potential source of drinking water from deep underground.

*Lee Sang-tae, National Institute of Korean History. This is a slightly abbreviated version of an article that appeared in The Korea Foundation Newsletter, 14, 2, May 2005. Posted at Japan Focus July 28, 2005.*