# JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS:
## THE TAKESHIMA (竹島) ISSUE FROM THE JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE

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# Executive Summary

1. In mid July 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Education (*Monbusho* or 文部省) announced the implementation of a new supplementary education guideline on social studies textbooks for use at junior high schools from the 2012 school year by teachers and publishers of textbooks.

2. The guideline refers to a set of islets located about 211 km from Shimane Prefecture which Japan claims sovereignty. Known as Takeshima (竹島) in Japanese or Dokdo (독도/獨島 or Tokto) in Korean, the islets consist of two main outcroppings and dozens of surrounding small reefs (0.21 sq. km in size).

3. The Japanese government cites historical documents in their favour, including the Revised Complete Map of Japanese Lands and Roads (改正日本輿地路程全図 or *Kaisei Nippon Yochi Rotei Zenzu* dated 1779) by Sekisui Nagakubo (長久保赤水 1717−1801), which is considered the most prominent published cartographic projection of Japan by the Japanese.

4. Tokyo accused South Korea of occupying the islets illegally since they are Japan's inherent territory in light of historical fact and international law. The Foreign Ministry (*Gaimusho* or 外務省) claims Japan began to use the islets in the 17th century as a stopover en route to nearby islands and as fishing grounds, establishing sovereignty by the mid-17th century and reaffirming sovereignty with the incorporation of the islets into Shimane Prefecture (島根県) in 1905.

5. Other than historical records, most importantly, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, during the drafting process of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, signed in 1951 and stipulating Japan's recognition of Korean independence, the U.S. rejected the Korean request that Tokyo give up the islets.

6. The Ministry also pointed out that the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee that was established in July 1952 for the purpose of implementing the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty had designated Takeshima as one of the maritime exercise and training areas for U.S. Forces stationed in Japan based on Japan-U.S. Administrative Agreement of that time. This shows that Takeshima was treated as a facility or area "within Japan."

7. The revised document sparked controversy because it refers to Takeshima for the first time and, currently, only one of six textbook publishers mentioned Takeshima in one of its textbooks. The guidelines thus increase the prospect of inducing more school textbooks in Japan to mention Takeshima by name.

# JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS:
## THE TAKESHIMA(竹島) ISSUE FROM THE JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE[1]

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### Tension in Japan-Korea ties

1.1 It is no secret that there are inherent frictions between the three main players in Northeast Asia – China, Korea and Japan. Bilaterally, differences between Japan and China are manifested in the use of textbooks, visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) dispute. Both Koreas also have border issues with China over what the Koreans called Baekdu-san (백두산, 白頭山 or "white-headed mountain") or Changbai Shan (長白山/长白山) by the Chinese.

1.2 But perhaps comparatively less well-known is the sovereignty issue between Korea and Japan over the islets of Dokdo (or Tokto) (독도/獨島) in Korean and Takeshima (竹島) in Japanese. Apparently more important to Korea than to Japan, the bigger power here, the issue has sparked off Korean nationalism, a stark reminder to Japan of the need to be sensitive to neighbouring states in its foreign policy.

1.3 What triggered the uproar? In mid July 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Education (*Monbusho* or 文部省) announced the implementation of a new supplementary education guideline on a set of islets, located about 211 km from Shimane Prefecture, which consisted of two main outcroppings and

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[1] Part I (*EAI Background Brief No. 408*) is on South Korea's perspective on the Takeshima/Tokdo issue.

dozens of surrounding small reefs (0.21 sq. km in size) known as Takeshima (竹島) in Japanese and Dokdo (or Tokto) (독도/獨島) in Korean.

1.4 This immediately caused a diplomatic furor between Japan and South Korea. In the Japanese policy circle and the media, this dispute is known as the Takeshima Problem (竹島問題 or *Takeshima Mondai*). The islets are so small that one really wonders what is at stake here. The Japanese argue that seafood especially salmon, squid and shark, as well as kelp and abalone, the main staple of the Japanese nation, is abundant here and, according to South Korea's provincial government, there is also a rich natural gas field.[2] But, more than natural resources, Takeshima represents the pride of national sovereignty for both Japan and South Korea.

## Tokyo's version of history

2.1 Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) released an official statement on its version of Takeshima's history: Takeshima is a group of islands that used to be called "Matsushima (松島)" until around the start of the Meiji era (明治 1868-1912). From the Japanese perspective, it is clear from many written references, maps and others that Japan has long recognized "Takeshima" or "Matsushima."[3]

2.2 The Japanese government also cites historical documents in their favour, including the Revised Complete Map of Japanese Lands and Roads (改正日本輿地路程全図 or *Kaisei Nippon Yochi Rotei Zenzu* dated 1779) by Sekisui Nagakubo (長久保赤水 1717−1801), which is considered the most prominent published cartographic projection of Japan by the Japanese. According to the Japanese government's interpretations, the locations of Utsuryo Island and Takeshima are accurately recorded at their current

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2 "Isle row with Seoul a longtime affair", *Japan Times*, 17 July 2008.

3 "Outline of the Issue of Takeshima", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website*, undated.

positions between the Korean Peninsula and the Oki Islands (隠岐諸島, Oki-shotō, or 隠岐群島 Oki-guntō).

2.3 The Japanese government's stance is that it "firmly believes that Japan has established the sovereignty of Takeshima by the beginning of the Edo Period (江戸 1603-1867) in the mid-17th century at the very latest" since "the trade families of Ohya and Murakawa of Yonago (米子) in the Tottori (鳥取) clan in the region of Houki-no-kuni (ほうきのくに) traveled, with the permission of the Shogunate, to Utsuryo Island alternately family by family once every year to engage in fishing, felling of the bamboo groves and other activities, and sent the abalone that they caught to the Shogunate as a tribute".[4] Takeshima was a convenient stopover to Utsuryo Island and was historically a fishing spot as well.

## Tokyo's claims

3.1 Tokyo accused South Korea of occupying the islets illegally since they are Japan's inherent territory in light of historical fact and international law. The Foreign Ministry (*Gaimusho* or 外務省) claims Japan began to use the islets in the 17th century as a stopover en route to nearby islands and as fishing grounds, establishing sovereignty by the mid-17th century and reaffirming sovereignty with the incorporation of the islets into Shimane Prefecture (島根県) in 1905.

3.2 Japan argues that it has claimed sovereignty and stopped travellers to Takeshima since 1692 when members of the Murakawa and Ohya traveled to the island respectively and decided to stop the many Koreans they encountered from fishing around the island. To stop such activities, in January 1696, Japan's Shogunate issued a ban on the passage of ships to Utsuryo Island (the so-called "Takeshima Ikken (竹島一件 or The Affair of Takeshima)").

[4] "Outline of the Issue of Takeshima", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website*, undated.

3.3 Other than historical records, most importantly, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, during the drafting process of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, signed in 1951 and stipulating Japan's recognition of Korean independence, the U.S. rejected the Korean request that Tokyo give up the islets.[5]

3.4 According to Japan, in the drafting process of the San Francisco Peace Treaty that entered into force in April 1952, the Republic of Korea (ROK) requested the United States to add Takeshima as one of the regions for which Japan would renounce all right, title, and claim. However, the United States did not accede to the request as Takeshima had never been treated as part of Korea, nor had the island appeared ever before to have been claimed by Korea.[6]

3.5 In fact, to dispute Korean claims, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that, in July 1952, the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee that was established for the purpose of implementing the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, designated Takeshima as one of the maritime exercise and training areas for U.S. Forces stationed in Japan, based on Japan-U.S. Administrative Agreement of that time. That the Joint Committee's mandate was stipulated as a means for consultation in determining "facilities and areas in Japan" clearly shows that Takeshima was treated as a facility or area "within Japan,"[7] In this way, according to Japanese accounts, this effectively means that Takeshima was in fact a Japanese bombing range!

## The Ministry of Education (Monbusho)'s initiative

4.1 In mid-July 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho or 文部省) announced the implementation of a new supplementary education guideline on social studies textbooks for use at junior high schools from the 2012 school year by teachers and publishers of textbooks.

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5 "Isle row with Seoul a longtime affair", *Japan Times*, 17 July 2008.

6 "Outline of the Issue of Takeshima", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website*, undated.

7 *Ibid*

4.2 "Especially regarding Takeshima, Shimane Prefecture passed an ordinance" in 2005 calling for an early establishment of Japanese sovereignty over the islets, an unnamed Ministry of Education official explained in *Japan Times*.[8] "In the Diet, (members) have recently been asking more questions" about the islets, such as why they are not included in the education guideline, the same official said, "and the revised Fundamental Law of Education says that (students) should love our nation and homeland."[9]

4.3 Japan's education ministry says it has no plans to delete its description of the islets: "We have judged that we need to teach (students about Takeshima) in junior high schools, and wrote" about the islets, the official said. "The content will not be altered after being told to do so by foreign countries."[10]

4.4 In defence of the new education guidelines, *Japan Times'* editorial noted that Tokyo had given due consideration to South Korea's sentiment as the Ministry of Education guidelines and manual do not directly say that Japan has sovereignty over Takeshima. Instead, it says that students should be taught that Japan and South Korea have different opinions over the islets and that it is necessary to deepen their understanding about Japan's territories.[11]

4.5 Meanwhile, the fallout continues at the local levels. The South Korean city of Jeonju has canceled indefinitely their annual exchange program for junior high school students, prompting Toshitaka Nakagawa head of Tottori's education board, to make the formal statement: "It is regrettable that a political and diplomatic matter like Takeshima disrupts a friendly event between the two countries' middle school students"[12]. Such a cancellation is far less serious than naval conflicts.

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8 *Ibid*

9 *Ibid.*

10 "Isle row with Seoul a longtime affair", *Japan Times*, 17 July 2008.

11 "Editorial- Don't let islets issue damage ties", *Japan Times*, 17 July 2008.

12 "Exchange canceled", *Japan Times*, 17 July 2008.

## Avoidance of naval conflict

5.1 Japan says it is trying to avoid naval conflict and practice "self-restraint". In the view of Japan's MOFA, the Japanese government has already tried diplomatic solutions. In September 1954, Japan submitted a proposal to resolve the issue in a peaceful manner by bringing it before the International Court of Justice but the Japanese government claimed that, in October 1954, the Republic of Korea (ROK) rejected this proposal.[13] A second rejection from Korea came in March 1962.

5.2 The Japanese government also urges its public not to enter Takeshima via the ROK mainland as this "might give the wrong impression that Japanese nationals admit that they are subject to the jurisdiction of the ROK in Takeshima and that they recognize the ROK's sovereignty over Takeshima"; and Japan's MOFA pleads for "the understanding and cooperation of the people of Japan on this point". [14] In 2005, a civilian Asahi Shimbun (朝日新聞) plane's approach to the disputed Takeshima island prompted Seoul to scramble jet fighters.

5.3 The nearest point to an all-out clash came on 20 April 2006 when Japan almost conducted an ocean survey in the disputed waters of Takeshima, prompting the mobilization of South Korean gunboats. This potential clash was only averted at the last moment by unplanned natural factors of stormy waters around Takeshima. The same weather conditions also forced the Koreans to scale down high-sea seizure drills.[15]

5.4 The ocean survey was finally jointly conducted on 7 October 2006 by a Japanese Coast Guard research vessel and a South Korean ship, both with several Japanese and Korean researchers on board. The crisis was defused by

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13 "Outline of the Issue of Takeshima", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website*, undated.

14 *Ibid*

15 "Weather helps delay clash between Japan and S. Korea over islets", *International Herald Tribune*, 20 April 2006

then new Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before he visited Seoul on the following Monday on 9 Oct 2008. The current crisis will test the skills of new Japanese PM Taro Aso of Japan and President Lee Myung Bak of South Korea.

5.5 Aso in becoming the new PM has vowed to improve relations with Japan's East Asian neigbhours. The Korean media reported Aso's election nervously, stating that the conservative Japanese politician had once uttered his view that Koreans voluntarily adopted Japanese names during Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. Against this backdrop of Korean trepidation of Aso, the island will probably remain an irritant in the two-way relations between the two countries for a long time, particularly with the surge of Korean nationalism.

5.6 Since 7 October 2003, with the Joint Declaration on the Promotion of Tripartite Cooperation among the People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in Bali Indonesia, the three countries have been trying to mitigate their rivalries – thanks to the auspices and the good offices of the institution of ASEAN Plus 3. Besides ASEAN mediation, the three Northeast Asian states also enjoy close economic relationship, especially in trade and foreign direct investment. Consequently, there is wide latitude to ensure that there will be no big escalation of conflict over Dokdo (or Tokto) (독도/獨島)/Takeshima (竹島), only constant irritation.

## APPENDIX A JAPAN'S OFFICIAL MAP OF THE ISLANDS ISSUED BY JAPAN'S MOFA


Source: The MOFA, "Recognition of Takeshima" in the MOFA website [downloaded on 17 July 2008], available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/takeshima/recognition.html

## APPENDIX B TAKESHIMA

Source: "Liancourt Rocks / Takeshima / Dokdo / Tokto", Globalsecurity, available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/images/liancourt-image2.jpg