

A letter from third-year students of South Korea's Hampyeong middle school history club

Geography teachers at junior high schools in Shimane Prefecture received a letter from three South Korean middle school students who belong to the school's history club. The letter states as follows: "Recently, we were told a disappointing story." According to the story, "In the new curriculum guidelines, the Japanese Government describes Dokdo as an integral part of Japan." "The Japanese Government makes a false claim." "Students in Japan are taught an incorrect 'fact' at elementary and junior high schools."

The letter then goes on to say, "Dokdo was the first land occupied and annexed by the Japanese imperialists during the Russo-Japanese war as part of their war implementation policies." It also states, "The Japanese Government high-handedly claims that Dokdo was Japan's territory as early as in the pre-modern era, but this is not factually correct." They then seek to justify their view by saying, "The fact that Dokdo was a part of South Korea's territory is proved by the large number of documents and maps dating from that period, some of which were even published by the Japanese Government. This fact is easily discoverable if you carefully examine these historic materials."

The letter then goes on to state: "We kindly request Japanese teachers to teach a correct account of history to Japanese students who know little about the historical facts related to Dokdo," and "Please make efforts to become more closely aligned with the real history instead of accepting only the distorted claims of the Japanese Government."

The letter concludes by saying, "we hope that students, the future generation of South Korea and Japan, will be able to learn correct history, based on which they will be able to come to terms with the unfortunate past between the two countries and build a brighter future of mutual cooperation."

The letter mirrors the arguments used by the South Korean Government in the Takeshima dispute. Throughout the letter, the students give a very one-sided account of the territorial dispute, using words such as "a false claim," "an incorrect 'fact'," "the far-fetched argument," and "the distorted argument." I would like to strongly encourage them to reconsider the claims of both the Japanese and South Korean Governments as well as the basis of these claims by comparing and examining them in a cool-headed manner for themselves.

In Shimane Prefecture, we have already prepared our unique educational materials and relevant documents such as historical records, and these are used by students at all the

elementary and junior high schools in the prefecture to learn about the Takeshima issue. In the process, we give students the opportunity to learn about the claims being made by both the Japanese and South Korean Governments as well as the basis of these claims, while taking the students' stage of development into consideration. In addition, the Shimane Prefectural Board of Education prepared a booklet called *Handbook for Territorial Education* and have distributed it to teachers, hoping it will help to nurture children capable of resolving territorial disputes peacefully and developing genuinely friendly relationships with the countries involved.

The letter from Korean middle school students was addressed to teachers working at junior high schools in Shimane Prefecture. Japanese students should also try to understand the "Takeshima issue" without falling into a self-righteousness attitude. I sincerely hope that young people, who are expected to shape the future of Japan and South Korea, will have the chance to increase their interaction with each other and "build a brighter future of mutual cooperation."

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