

**Why not silence the Republic of Korea in dealing
with the naming issue of the Sea of Japan?
(Summary)**

SHIMOJO Masao

A bill recently introduced in the Senate of Virginia Committee on Education and Health required that public school textbooks “when referring to the Sea of Japan, shall note that it is also referred to as the East Sea.” The bill failed to pass the Committee—by just one vote. The historical basis for the bill is nonexistent, but it is curious that such a close vote should have even occurred—it should have been rejected outright. How did this bill even reach consideration in a chamber of an American legislative body?

The introduction of this bill is the culmination of an on-going effort by Korean Americans in tandem with the Korean Government, to re-write history to their liking. Professor Shimojo states that rather than base the Korean naming of the ‘Sea of Japan’ as ‘East Sea’ on solid historical fact, the naming is based purely on wishful thinking. Regardless, Koreans and their supporters have in the past and will continue to insist upon a parallel appellation, or perhaps the eventual expunging of ‘Sea of Japan’. Professor Shimojo suggests that since the facts concerning the ‘Sea of Japan’ appellation are squarely on Japan’s side that the Government of Japan do more to state so. Indeed, the lack of a vigorous Japanese response to the current Korean propaganda campaign to influence foreign governments and international organizations concerning this issue emboldens other rivals with territorial issues with Japan, including China and Russia.

In fact, the Korean government has bound the ‘East Sea’ appellation to the issue of ownership of over Takeshima, the so-called Liancourt Rocks, currently unlawfully occupied by Korea. Since Takeshima sits in the Sea of Japan, in order for the Korean Government to assert sovereignty over Takeshima, they have engaged in an international effort for the recognition of the ‘East Sea’ appellation. There are Koreans in high places in international organizations that have facilitated Korea’s effort, including Ban Ki-moon, who as UN Secretary General distributed a pamphlet that stated that Takeshima belonged to Korea and as Korean Foreign Minister declared that this issue was more important than Japan-Korea relations. Koreans in the US are stridently lobbying local and national legislators in this effort and it is likely that more ‘East Sea’ resolutions will be presented in the future. This campaign is not limited to Koreans—European and American academics have joined the bandwagon as well, despite the lack of historical evidence that proves that the body of water between Japan and the Korean Peninsula was ever called the ‘East Sea’. Where ‘East Sea’ has appeared in history, it is merely a directional reference and not to a specific body of water. Although more leadership on this issue from the Japanese Government is crucial, Professor Shimojo points out that the likelihood of this is slim given the current make up of the government.