

# In Light of Dokdo Day

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October 25th is 'Dokdo Day' in Korea. The origin of this day can be found in Imperial Order No. 41 announced by the Korean Empire on October 25th, 1900. As Dokdo was included in the scope of Uldo(=Ulluengdo)-county within this Imperial Order, October 25th is being commemorated as 'Dokdo Day'.

However, when reviewing 'Imperial Order No. 41,' one can see that the name of 'Dokdo' itself does not appear in the text. Only 'Ulleungdo, Jukdo (= a small island within a 2km distance from Ulleungdo) and Seokdo' is specified to belong within the scope of Uldo-county. Although 'Seokdo' appearing in this Imperial Order is referring to 'Dokdo', the fact is that Japan refuses to acknowledge this and the issue has also not been approved based on the international legal perspective as of yet. If the name of Dokdo or 'Usando,' which is the historical name of Dokdo, had been written in 'Imperial Order No. 41,' the current Dokdo issue would not exist. The reason for this is because Dokdo would have been specified as Korean territory in an official document of the Korean Empire in 1900, which is five years earlier than 1905, when Japan allegedly incorporated Dokdo into Oki Island of Shimane Prefecture.

Much evidence revealing that Usando is Dokdo can be discovered in government publications of Joseon. For example, 'Dongguk Munheonbigo (1770)' or 'Mangi Yoram (1808),' specifies that 'Usan and Ulleung are all territories of Usan-nation, and Usan is Matsushima as indicated by the Japanese', and shows that Usando is Matsushima (= Dokdo). The fact that Japan used to refer to Dokdo as Matsushima is a well-known historical fact. In 1876, Director Taichi Tanabe of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the understanding of the Korean side by stating that, "Matsushima(= Dokdo) was originally Usan that belongs to Ulleungdo of Joseon".

However, in 1882, an incident occurred, by which the historical name of Dokdo called as Usando disappeared. According to the 'Annals of King Gojong', King Gojong decided to dispatch Gyu-won Lee to inspect Ulleungdo, and when meeting Gyu-won Lee, beforehand, King Gojong stated that, 'Ulleungdo is formed of three islands, which is Ulleungdo itself, Songjukdo (= Jukdo), and Usando (= Dokdo).' This was the perception of King Gojong,

which became the basis of ‘Imperial Order No. 41’. However, Gyu-won Lee responded that Usando was a name referring to Ulleungdo in the old days, and King Gojong approved of that response, thus, removing Usando as the name of Dokdo.

Most of the people that moved to Ulleungdo were from Jeollado, however, they referred to Dokdo as “Dolseom” meaning a island of stone. The Joseon government marked the words Dolseom in Chinese letters, which became ‘Seokdo(石島)’. Dolseom became Dokseom through the Jeollado dialect that changes ‘Dol’ to ‘Dok’, which gave rise to the name of Dokdo. In 1904, a Japanese warship recorded the name of Dokdo for the first time, by writing in a voyage log that, ‘Koreans refer to this island as Dokdo.’

This was on September 25th, 1904, and at the time, Japan had forgotten the former Japanese name of Dokdo, which was Matsushima. Instead, the Japanese called Dokdo as ‘Ryanco-do,’ shortening the name called by westerners. Thus, there was no official name for Dokdo in Japan. In other words, Japan forgot the old name of Dokdo until 1905 and did not possess Dokdo, however, Korea had established the name of Dokdo before 1905 and was effectively controlling Dokdo at the time.

As such, the name of Dokdo was a term indicating Korea’s territorial sovereignty over Dokdo itself. Usando, as mentioned by King Gojong in 1882, became Dolseom, which in turn became Seokdo, being published in ‘Imperial Order No. 41,’ and the name ultimately settled as Dokdo. Wouldn’t looking back at the history of Dokdo on ‘Dokdo Day’ be a valuable reflection on current affairs?