



## U.S. textbooks are pulled into international clash

By Richard Simon  
*Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 23, 2014

WASHINGTON — It's not the usual question considered in U.S. state capitols: What to call the body of water between Japan and the Korean peninsula?

Virginia's governor is poised to sign legislation that would answer that question. It would require new public school textbooks in the state to note that the Sea of Japan is also referred to as the East Sea in the region. New Jersey and New York are considering similar legislation.

The issue is about more than geography.

It has pitted the economic clout of Japan, whose ambassador hinted that the legislation could cost Virginia foreign business, against the increasing political influence of the growing Korean American population, who regard the use of "Sea of Japan" as a painful reminder of the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula.

"I can understand why people might ask why we, at a state level, are meddling with something that is international," said Mark L. Keam, a Korean American member of the Virginia House of Delegates.

But for Korean Americans, Japan's 35-year colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, which ended in 1945, is a "period that they cannot forget that affects them even to this day," he said. During the legislative debate, he told colleagues that memories of the Japanese occupation still cause emotions to boil up in his mother, who is in her late 70s.

"When Virginia's kids are learning history and geography about that part of the world, they should be taught properly that there are two sides of the story," he said in an interview.

The Japanese government hired lobbyists to try to defeat the bill, and its ambassador, Kenichiro Sasae, warned newly elected Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe in a letter that the "positive cooperation and the strong economic ties between Japan and Virginia may be damaged" if the bill becomes law.

The Virginia legislation, nonetheless, passed by wide margins with bipartisan support.

Still, there were some dissenters. State Sen. John Miller, a Democrat who cast a “no” vote, said: “This issue is way beyond the scope of the General Assembly of Virginia, and I have grave concerns where this going to lead.... In a year or two, somebody is going to say every time we refer to the Civil War, it’s also known as the War of Northern Aggression. Where does it end?”

The actions have been closely watched on the other side of the world, where the sea’s name has been debated for decades. It’s one of a number of issues that have strained relations between Seoul and Tokyo, along with a territorial dispute over islets between the two countries and lingering Korean wounds — and demands for compensation — over Japan’s use of Korean “comfort women” who were forced to work in a network of brothels established by the Japanese military.

After a bill similar to Virginia’s measure was introduced in New Jersey, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga called it “extremely regrettable” and pledged a “response through diplomatic channels.”

On the other hand, South Korean officials have welcomed the Virginia legislation.

Peter Kim, a Korean immigrant living in Virginia, launched the effort to pass the legislation after seeing his son’s fifth-grade textbook. Kim had been taught to call the body of water the East Sea. “I was shocked that my son recognized it as the Sea of Japan,” he said.

Kim said he had been invited to Los Angeles to speak to Korean Americans about taking up the cause there. In California, some textbooks use both names; others use “Sea of Japan,” said a spokeswoman for the state Department of Education. A Los Angeles Unified School District spokesman said its textbooks use “Sea of Japan.”

Of all states, California has the largest number of people of Korean descent — an estimated 540,000, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank. New York and New Jersey are next. Virginia has 89,000 people of Korean descent, up from 53,000 in 2000 and 34,000 in 1990, according to the institute.

The issue has put McAuliffe in a tough spot. “He has Japanese businesses and diplomats after him over promising the Korean American community this change,” said Geoffrey Skelley at the University of Virginia Center for Politics. “At the end of the day, he can’t have it both ways. He’ll either have to sign it into law and anger the Japanese or veto it and anger the much larger Virginia Korean American community.”

A spokesman for the governor said he would sign the bill.

The Korean and Japanese governments have posted extensive arguments online, reproducing old maps, citing historical documents and providing extensive lists showing how modern mapmakers and publications describe the sea.

Korean officials contend that “East Sea” was in use for hundreds of years and that “Sea of Japan” superseded it only because Korea was once under Japanese rule.

Japanese officials contend “Sea of Japan” has been used on maps dating to 1602 and dismiss “East Sea” as “nothing but a local name” used only in South Korea.

The National Geographic Society, citing the dispute, decided in 1999 to add “East Sea” below “Sea of Japan” on its maps — in parentheses.

At the U.S. State Department, which seems to want to steer clear of the controversy, officials say: “We encourage Japan and Korea to work together to reach a mutually agreeable way forward with the International Hydrographic Organization on this issue.”

<https://voicesofny.org/2015/05/korean-parents-push-to-remove-novel-add-east-sea/>

### **Korean Parents Push to Remove Novel, Add East Sea**

May 28, 2015

By Lee Kyung-ha, *The Korea Times* | Translated by Yehyun Kim from Korean



Co-president of the Korean American Parents Association of Greater New York, Yoon-hee Choi (middle), and other members, held a press briefing at J.H.S. 189 Daniel Carter Beard in Flushing on May 26 about the inclusion of the East Sea in New York textbooks, and the removal of a novel from a Connecticut school that they say portrays Koreans inaccurately.

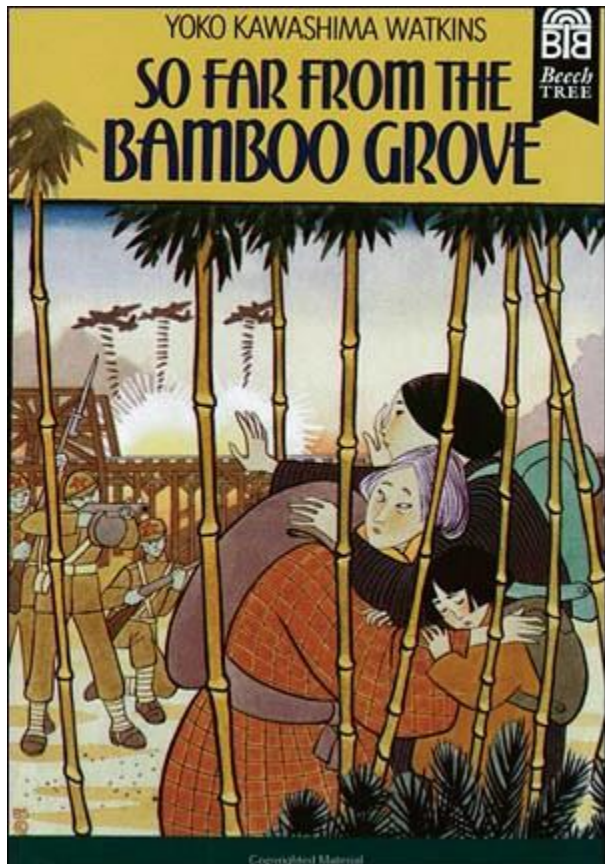
The co-president of the Korean American Parents Association of Greater New York, Yoonhee Choi (middle), and other members, held a press briefing at J.H.S. 189 Daniel Carter Beard in Flushing on May 26 about the “East Sea” legislation, and the removal of a novel from a Connecticut school that they say portrays Koreans inaccurately.

The Korean American Parents Association of Greater New York is trying to stop a school in Connecticut from using the novel, “So Far from the Bamboo Grove,” in the curriculum, and

petition to include the “East Sea” in New York state textbooks [alongside references to the “Sea of Japan,” the disputed body of water between Japan and mainland Asia].

Yoonhee Choi, the co-president of the Korean American Parents Association of Greater New York, said at a press briefing held at a middle school in Flushing on May 26, “[We] sent a complaint letter to the elementary school and school district in Connecticut that is using ‘So Far from the Bamboo Grove’ ... [We] will fight till the end until the text is banned [in schools] all across the U.S.”

The association said, “After reading the article titled ‘It’s urgent to ban the use of ‘So Far from the Bamboo Grove’ for teaching,” in the The Korea Times on May 22, [we] decided to embark on a project to stop it. On May 26 we sent a complaint letter to the principal of Beecher Road School and the head of the [Woodbridge] school district, strongly requesting that they stop using the story as teaching material.



“So Far from the Bamboo Grove” is a novel by Japanese-American author Yoko Kawashima Watkins, based on her personal experience as a daughter whose father was sentenced to six years in prison for his roles in the Japanese colonization of Korea, and World War II.

[Editor’s Note: The novel describes the semi-autobiographical account of the author’s experience as a child leaving present day North Korea – where her father was a high-ranking Japanese official — and traveling to Japan with her family during the fallout of World War II.]

But many parts of the story allegedly differ from historical fact. For example, there is a section where Koreans are described as abusing and raping innocent Japanese, which, it’s argued, is negatively affecting young Americans’ perception of Korea to a significant degree.

The association had worked with Korean parents of J.H.S. 67 [Louis Pasteur Middle

School in Queens] to successfully remove the book in 2007, after it had been used as 6th grade reading material for 10 years.

The association is also planning to conduct an extensive signature campaign to encourage the State Assembly to vote on a bill requiring that references to the Sea of Japan also include the East Sea, before the current legislative session ends in June. [The bill was passed by the State Senate in 2014 and has yet to be voted on by the Assembly.]

As part of the campaign, the association sent a letter to Edward C. Braunstein (D–26th District) and Tony Avella (D–11th District) that explains the necessity of including the East Sea.

<http://www.nysed.gov/memo/curriculum-instruction/updated-guidance-sea-japaneast-sea>

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Instructional Support  
89 Washington Avenue - Room 875 EBA  
Albany, New York 12234

To: Superintendents of Public Schools  
District Superintendents of BOCES  
Principals of Charter and Other Public Schools  
From: Dr. Kimberly Young Wilkins  
Subject: **Updated Guidance for Sea of Japan/East Sea**  
Date: August 6, 2019

New York State has a long history of providing guidance to school districts for developing conceptual and critical thinking in Social Studies. In addition, students should be able to apply these ideas to every day experiences. Although the State Board of Regents sets the learning standards (what a student should know and be able to do), curriculum decisions, including which textbooks to use in the classroom, local lessons, and the pace of the instruction, are locally decided by the school districts. With the ongoing implementation of the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards and related Framework, school districts across the State must reflect on the use of terminology that has historical significance to different countries, groups, or individuals.

One such example is the use of the term Sea of Japan, which, when referenced within lessons or curriculum materials, has also been called the East Sea. The New York State Social Studies Framework does not specifically refer to the Sea of Japan or the East Sea; however, while teaching about this geographical location, school districts should be sensitive and responsive to the historical significance of both names. The NYSED recommends teachers refer to the body of water on the eastern boundary of Asia between Korea and Japan as both the East Sea and the Sea of Japan.

For more than 2,000 years, not just Koreans, but people throughout the world, viewed the body of water on the eastern boundary of Asia between Korea and Japan as the East Sea. In order to resolve the controversy, in 2019, the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) reportedly urged Japan to negotiate with the Republic of Korea. The IHO was founded in 1921 to standardize the names of seas and oceans and support safe navigation of ships. The name the East Sea was on world maps, including old Japanese maps, until the publication of S-23 “the Limits of Oceans and Seas” by IHO in 1929. During the time when the IHO was creating a list of the names of oceans and seas, Japan had occupied and imperialized Korea starting in 1910 and



ending in 1945. Accordingly, Korea was unable to participate in the decision-making process. As a result, only the name Sea of Japan was used in the publication, which fueled the spread of the name on world maps and in textbooks. This practice remained in the second (1937) and third edition (1953) of the publication of S-23 “the Limits of Oceans and Seas” because Korea was either under Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945 or engaged in a war from 1950-1953, the time of the publications.

There are many examples where school districts, BOCES, etc. should be cognizant of terminology that has historical significance and meaning to different communities. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the NYSED Office of Curriculum and Instruction at 518-474-5922.

[http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news\\_view.htm?lang=e&Seq\\_Code=147382](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=147382)

## S. Korean Civic Group Promotes New York State's Guidance on East Sea

KBS (Korean Broadcasting Service)  
2019-08-13



A South Korean civic group has started a campaign to promote the U.S. state of New York's guidance for public schools to refer to the body of water between the Korea Peninsula and Japan as both the "East Sea" and "Sea of Japan."

The Voluntary Agency Network of Korea(VANK), a civic group that promotes Korea and its history online for an international audience,

said on Tuesday that it would use the decision by the New York State Education Department as leverage to promote the use of both names for the waters.

VANK head Park Ki-tae revealed that they plan to send New York State's guidance to major government organizations, publishers, broadcasters and newspapers around the world that have been calling the sea only as the Sea of Japan.

The group, which has 150-thousand members, also aims to spread the word about the East Sea

name through various online social networks until the International Hydrographic Organization(IHO) meets next April, when the name of the water will be determined.

The State of New York announced the new guidance last Tuesday, pointing out that for more than two thousand years, not just Koreans, but people throughout the world, viewed the body of water on the eastern boundary of Asia between Korea and Japan as the East Sea. A similar decision was made by the U.S. state of Virginia in 2014, requiring local school textbooks to use the name "East Sea" alongside the "Sea of Japan."

<https://japantoday.com/category/politics/new-york-schools-urged-to-refer-to-sea-of-japan-as-east-sea-too>

## **New York schools urged to refer to Sea of Japan as 'East Sea' too**

Aug. 31 06:00 am JST  
NEW YORK

The education department of the state of New York has recently advised public schools to refer to the Sea of Japan also as the "East Sea," the name pushed by South Korea.

The guidance, which is not legally binding, was sent out earlier in the month after Korean American residents lobbied the state's legislators.

"For more than 2,000 years, not just Koreans, but people throughout the world, viewed the body of water on the eastern boundary of Asia between Korea and Japan as the East Sea," it said.

The Consulate General of Japan in New York has expressed disapproval to the department, saying that the Sea of Japan is the only name that has been internationally recognized. The Japanese government says the name became established in Europe around the end of the 18th century.

In May, New York State Assemblyman Edward C Braunstein and Senator Toby Ann Stavisky announced a revised policy on the issue.

According to Braunstein's official website, "the two legislators shared the concerns of the Korean community regarding the matter of the East Sea and the importance of being historically accurate in our textbooks and classrooms."

The state of Virginia approved legislation in 2014 requiring school textbooks to include the "East Sea" name. A similar law has been proposed in New York, but is yet to clear the legislature.

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