

# Discussion

Isolde HAUSNER\*

In these three papers we heard very interesting details on the genesis of the names *East Sea/Sea of Korea* and *Sea of Japan* from various points of view, opening a new window of discussion on the interrelations between the historic backgrounds and the use of geographical names.

The first paper, thankfully read by CHOO Sungjae, concentrates on the two names '*East Sea* and *Sea of Korea*' in the scope of an analysis of historic documents, maps and their producers from the western part of the world and their intentions. The authentic Korean name 'Tonghae' has been translated as '*East Sea*' in favour of the foreign, especially European friends. But it proves also that the name has a long tradition in variations, and the two mainstreams are:

- translation of the local name Tonghae = *East Sea*, classified as endonym
- the new name '*Sea of Korea*' ('*Sea of Japan*'), classified as exonym

The big shift for the frequent use of '*Sea of Japan*'/'*Mer du Japon*' has its roots in 1797, when after the death of the French navy officer and explorer La Pérouse his world atlas '*Atlas du Voyage de la Pérouse*' was published. La Pérouse invented the names '*Mer du Japon*' and '*Mer du Corée*', and this was the beginning of the widespread use of '*Sea of Japan*' in atlases. The consequences in the future were, that the name '*Sea of Japan*', the exonym, became the internationally used name of this sea, whereas the name '*East Sea*', the endonymic denomination, nearly expired and in the following centuries was given less or no international relevance.

---

\* Professor, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

- I refer at this point to UNCSGN res. X/3, where the criteria for establishing and evaluating the nature of geographical names as cultural heritage are listed. All criteria specified in this resolution are valid also for the name Tonghae = '*East Sea*'.
- The international practise concerning local naming traditions shows, that also after a long period where local traditional names had no relevance because of various circumstances, the reinstalment of these local names is promoted (see Australia with its 'dual naming' policy, see the manifold minority naming policies all over Europe).

The second paper shows quite impressing the long lasting tradition of myths, legends and sacrifices in conjunction with the Sea east of Korea. And in these legends and old traditions the part of the sea, called *Tonghae* (= *East Sea*), performs its function as a full toponym in the onomastic sense. The rituals, myths and legends are vivid witnesses for the traditions referring to the *East Sea*, but are at the same time worthful for the spiritual life of the people living there. And we heard, that many of these rituals and sacrifices can be traced back to very ancient times and some of them are still exerted contemporary. One can say that these customs and traditions, and the sacredness of the *East Sea* in the shape of the dragon king in the *East Sea* are part of the Korean historical heritage.

We have similar experiences in the European folklore tradition, where pre-Christian pagan beliefs live on also after the Christianization by integrating them according to the Christian religion. The nature is conceived as an animated landscape, where dragons, demons and ghosts live in woods, seas and mountains.

This spiritual wealth is what makes the intangible cultural heritage of men which is also one of the priorities of UNESCO. This cultural background is absent in the name *Sea of Japan* - or are there also legends known from the Japanese side of this sea? But names are always also part of policies and cannot be as stable as we would wish it to be. The name *East Sea* moved even in the long course of its history from place to place, denominating various parts of this sea, using various variants, until in the first half of the 20th century the dual naming practice was stopped and cut to a single name to be used on the international stage. Now there is a time window of its absence of about 80 years (from the first edition of the IHO publication 'Limits of Oceans and Seas...') which could best be filled by a diplomatic act in following a double naming policy, if no agreement on a single name can be reached.

One could also scrutinize if the name *East Sea* and the culture behind it are threatened to expire and if these legends, myths and especially the sacrifices could be brought to the interest of UNESCO's world heritage safeguarding programme.

The third paper leads us to details of the political backgrounds of the appearance of the name *Sea of Japan*. It explains clear the connections with the western colonial powers like England, America, but also Russia and their struggle for predominance in this region. The author of this paper sees the name *Sea of Japan* in the frame of a political concept of Japan, that is to say, as an expansion-based name.

He verifies it among other things with a map in a geography text book for Korea, used during the Japanese occupation, in which the whole area of the Pacific was denominated as 'Great Japan'. The paper reveals in this geopolitical analysis that the dual naming practice in maps had its end during the Japanese occupation and - one can add - by register it as single name in the IHO publication from 1929.

The wish for a reinstatement of a double name practice is well backed from the historical background as well as from the geopolitics of the present time, too, where a more liberal and peaceful policy between neighbouring countries made ground. One can say, that the present single name practice relies not only on an unclear localization of former rendering in some historical maps, but also on an old geopolitical system.