

# *Keynote Speech*

at the 18th International Seminar on Sea Names

By Dr. Chang, Dong-hee,  
Ambassador for Geographic Naming,  
Northeast Asian History Foundation

*March 8, 2012*

Good morning,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Honorable participants,

To begin with, I would like to welcome all of you to the 18th International Seminar on Sea Names co-hosted by the Society for East Sea, the Northeast Asian History Foundation, and Vrije Universiteit Brussels. Since its inception in 1995, this International Seminar has traveled through major cities of the world such as Vancouver(2011), The Hague(2010), Sydney(2009), Tunis(2008), Vienna(2007), Seoul(2006), and it has finally landed on this beautiful city called "the capital of Europe." It is with great pleasure for me to attend this Seminar, as Brussels brings back my old memories of working at the Korean Embassy in Boitsfort ten years ago. It is all the more meaningful to hold the Seminar in this capital of Europe because it will

give us a great opportunity to listen to the diverse views from European perspective as well. Initiated as a forum for discussion on the naming issue of the sea body between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago, the Seminar has broadened its scope to cover a variety of issues related to the naming of geographical features and has established itself as an important and authoritative forum in the field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have seen that the international law governing the Sea has undergone different phases of development according to the interests of the state with maritime hegemony. Some historical periods are characterized by an aggressive and expansionary sovereignty while others are marked by the restraint of national sovereignty in the sea.

For example, Hugo Grotius's great work *Mare Liberum*, published in 1609, was written to support the Dutch East India Company's claims to trade in the Far East against Spanish and Portuguese monopoly. In the case of Britain, it sought to minimize the benefits enjoyed by the powerful Dutch merchants in times of weakness by espousing *Mare*

*Clausum.* However, as it grew in maritime power in the nineteenth century, it pursued and consolidated a policy of the freedom of the seas. Today, it is the Law of the Sea Convention adopted in 1982 which provides for the framework of the regime governing the Sea.

Northeast Asia is a region where we witness a sharp collision of interests surrounding the sea. With the entering into force of the Law of the Sea Convention in 1994, each state is entitled to have 200 miles of EEZ(Exclusive Economic Zone). However, as no sea area around the Korean Peninsula extends to as wide as 400 miles, an overlapping of sovereign jurisdiction is inevitable. In spite of many rounds of negotiations, Korea, Japan, and China have yet to agree on the delimitation of the EEZ.

Apart from the legal issue of the delimitation of the EEZ, Korea and Japan have another serious pending issue which is non-legal; that is, how to name the sea body which lies between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago. The Korean people have been calling the sea body in question 'East Sea' during the past two thousand years. However,

we lost the name 'East Sea' together with our sovereignty under the Japanese colonial occupation in the early 20th century. As you are well aware, the IHO (International Hydrographic Organization) published its 1st edition of the "Limits of Oceans and Seas (S-23)" in 1929, the 2nd edition in 1937, and the 3rd edition in 1953. The IHO decided, without Korean representation, to name the sea body in question as 'Japan Sea' in its S-23. Korea was unable to be represented in the International Hydrographic Conferences at the time because of the Japanese colonial occupation from 1910 to 1945 and because of the Korean War which lasted from 1950 to 1953.

Awakened from the past ignorance and indifference, the Korean government decided to raise the issue of recovering the lost name in the United Nations in 1992. Since then, we have been making efforts to have our voice heard in the international community. However, as we do not deny the reality that 'Sea of Japan' has been widely used during the last century, we are not requesting to replace 'Sea of Japan' with 'East Sea' but to use both names simultaneously. Indeed, the concurrent use pending an agreement on a common name is in line with the long-established

practice in the cartographic community as well as with the IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6 and UNCSCN Resolution III/20. They endorse the principle of simultaneous use of different names for a shared geographic feature when the countries concerned do not agree on a common name.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

‘East Sea’ is not merely a geographic name but a name which has been lying in the heart of Koreans as their spiritual home for the past two thousand years. What is meant for Koreans by the name ‘East Sea’ is well manifested in the Korean national anthem which begins with the following verse: "until the wave of East Sea dries out and Mount Baekdu is worn out, Heaven will protect our land forever... " That's why Koreans are so sensitive to the issue of naming the sea area in question. Furthermore, the name ‘Sea of Japan’ reminds Koreans of the past sufferings when they were deprived of their own names by the Japanese authority in the first half of the 20th century. Koreans were forced to abandon their Korean names to adopt and use Japanese names.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Distinguished scholars and experts,

The international community, including Korea, has been awaiting an updated edition of the S-23 to be published by the IHO, which is already long overdue. The naming dispute between Korea and Japan over the sea area has been one of the most important factors at least during the last decade to delay the publication of new editions. I know that there are voices against politicization of the issue. However, if IHO had applied its own technical resolution to the issue without hesitation and without regards to other aspects, there would have been no room for outside intervention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 18th International Hydrographic Conference is to be held in the coming April in Monaco. I hope it will be a venue to muster the support for our just cause. We are not insisting on the sole use of 'East Sea' for the Japanese territorial sea or EEZ. In the same way, we cannot accept its territorial sea or EEZ being referred to as 'Sea of Japan.' Korea simply seeks Japan's respect and acknowledgement

of the name which has been used for two thousand years and is still being used by 75 million South and North Korean people. I am pleased to note that the international community is increasingly aware of the intrinsic nature of the issue. In this respect, I extend my sincere thanks to the Society for East Sea for its contributions, among other things, to enhancing the understanding of the historical origins and background of the 2,000 year-old name 'East Sea' in the international community. I am sure that its continued efforts and cooperation would contribute to bringing forward the date for the name 'East Sea' to be widely accepted in the international community

In closing, I would like to thank President Park Nohyoung, professor Choo Sungjae and all the members of the Society for East Sea, for their hard works and dedication to the successful preparation and organization of the Seminar. My thanks also go to the EU-Korea Institute and the Department of international and European Law at Vrije Universiteit Brussel for their unstinting support and cooperation. Finally, I cannot help appreciating the contribution made by the scholars and experts from around the world. Without their active participation and

dedication, this seminar would not have been possible. I hope that this seminar will be a productive and meaningful one with thought-provoking presentations and lively discussions among renowned scholars and experts. I hope you will also enjoy and breathe the fresh air of Brussels during your stay.

Thank you.