

Our Opinion on the Geographical Name of the Sea of Japan (East Sea)

Shuren Yuan, Yanjun Huang
(Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China)

Since the 1990s, on some international conferences, especially the international academic conference of Northeast Asia, the question on the geographical name of the Sea of Japan has been put forward as some countries were interested in regional cooperation in the littoral of the sea and between the countries of Northeast Asia.

1. Raising of the question

1.1 Since the end of World War II, as the independence in politics and the development of national economy of colony and semi-colony, some new independent countries have gone on the stage of world politics one after another. The old historical pattern has been changed. These countries showed strong desire for participating international work and worrying about the future and fate of world.

1.2 With the spreading of new revolution of science and technology, people have paid more attention to the development of marine resources. They marched towards sea and obtained more food, oil and gas in order to relax the tension between the economic development and limited land resources.

1.3 Being promoted by the globalization and regionalization of economic life, regional international cooperation based on the theories of geoeconomy and geopolitics has been developing vigorously, and the regional cooperation of Northeast Asia on the middle and lower reaches of Tumen River and littoral of the sea of Japan organized by UNDP and UNIDO is especially outstanding. The attention that people have paid to this sea has reached such extent that never has.

1.4 After the World War II, the systems of the countries administering the sea have been changed greatly. The United Nations Conventions on the law of the sea

adopted in 1982 established the laws and systems of the extent of the territorial inland sea, archipelago waters, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and the bottom of international sea, etc. Then, all countries ratified or are going to ratify the conventions which put the management and development of the territorial inland sea and marine resources to a new historical stage.

2. Evolution of the geographical name of the Sea of Japan in Chinese ancient books.

Since ancient times, China has been the coastal country of the sea of Japan. The littoral area and wide sea area has been the important space for Chinese to live, multiply and friendly contacts. With the raising of the level of productive forces and the change of political and economic situation, the geographical name of this territorial sea has made a series of changes. There are main stages as follow:

2.1 Before the Tang Dynasty (before 10th century A.D.).

As the limited understanding that the people had, there was no appointed name about this sea. The people called it 'Sea' or 'Large Sea'

2.2 Liao and Song Dynasty (10th~12th century A.D.).

Based on geography position, the Sea of Japan was called 'East Sea' which has been continued to use and spreaded.

2.3 Yuan and Ming Dynasty (13th~17th century A.D.).

People called 'Whale Sea', maybe according to the features of marine animals.

2.4 Qing Dynasty (17th~19th century A.D.).

As the understanding becoming clearer and the abroad contacts developing, people continued to call the northern part of the Sea of Japan 'East Sea' and southern part 'South Sea'.

2.5 During the period of the end of Qing Dynasty and Republic of China (from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century).

With the capitalism's invading, the culture infiltration of some western development countries, and advancing of mapping technology, the geographical name of the Sea of Japan began to be drawn into Chinese historical books and maps.

In a word, the geographical name of the Sea of Japan in Chinese historical books

has gone through several stages (Look at the table).

3. Complication of arguing the geographical name of Japan.

3.1 The name being changed, other name or two names of one sea seems to have precedent in the world, such as English Channel, the French man calls it La Manche; Strait of Dover, the French man calls it Pas de Calais, etc.

3.2 Whether can the change of the sea set off a chain of reaction as the domino effect? If we change sea names named by one country, a series of sea will be renamed in the world, such as Gulf of Siam, Bay of Bengal, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Mexico, and the name of Indian Ocean, etc.

3.3 Whether can make the overlapping name of seas? such as East Sea of China (East Sea).

4. Our opinion on the name of the Sea.

4.1 Insist on the principle of equality, consultation and identity. Whether can we take the name basing on geography position or features of marine animals that most people can accept, but not have political sensitivity or incline to one country?

4.2 Accepted through common practice and based on international practice.

4.3 Respect academic authority, especially the encyclopaedia and maps that has international effect.

4.4 Follow the law that generally acknowledged and international adjudication.

4.5 Follow the law of simple easy and convenient name.

(Authors : Yuan Shuren, Center of NE Asia Research, Northeast Normal University, Vice routine director, professor, tutor of Candidate Ph. D.; Hung Yanjun, Center of NE Asia Research, Northeast Normal University, Candidate Ph. D.)