

New Trends in Identification of the East Sea(Japan Sea)

Ki-Suk Lee

**(Professor, Department of Geography Education, Seoul National University,
the Republic of Korea)**

This paper intends to summarize recent progress of our campaign for standardization of East Sea since 1992. Major contents divides into four parts: 1. Brief introduction of International Conferences on Standardization; 2. Progress and Efforts to Restore the Proper Name; 3. Current Trends in Identifying the East Sea; and 4, A Sea without a Name.

1. International Conferences on Standardization

Two international agencies deal directly with standardization issues concerning the names of seas: the U.N Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the United Nations Group of Experts of Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The UNGEGN meets every two years, and the UNCSGN convenes on a five-year cycle. New York hosted its latest assembly in January of 2000.

The primary goal of these agencies is to ensure that the world is using the standardized names of geographical features appropriately and correctly. These organizations believe that accurate use of standardized geographic names is a crucial factor in improving communication between nations as well as socio-economic conditions among individual nations in disputes and the world in general. Since 1991 when it became a member of the United Nations, Korea has dispatched representatives to these international organizations and positively participated in their activities.

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) is also required to take action to effect the change of the name of the sea.

2. Efforts to Restore the Proper Name

From the mid-1960s, as Koreans began to move into the international arena, they became

concerned about the fact that the East Sea had been erroneously identified as the Sea of Japan on foreign maps. Korean students and media correspondents abroad brought the matter to national attention. As some old maps were discovered, public interest in the East Sea controversy further increased. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the effort to rectify the name of the Sea of Japan did not gain wide public participation.

In the 1990s, the Korean government, along with civic organizations, began to launch a more concerted campaign to restore the proper name of the East Sea. In 1992, the government brought the matter to the attention of the 6th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographic Names (UNCSGN), requesting that the incorrect name "Sea of Japan" be replaced with East Sea.

In 1997, the efforts resulted in Resolution III/20 at the Conference. The resolution called for consultations among concerned parties to resolve the dispute. Despite this UNCSGN resolution, Japan refused to address the issue and has failed to engage in any serious talks with Korea to date.

Even though Japan has refused to cooperate, the Korean government nevertheless kept raising the matter at international forums, voicing its position again at the 7th UNCSGN conference in January of 1998, held in New York City. The Korean government argued that the use of "Sea of Japan" for East Sea was never justified and that the situation must be resolved as soon as possible. It also sought to build new awareness about the East Sea question among the members of the conference and eventually established it as a legitimate issue in dispute. Subsequently, the Korean government's "Proposal for the Names of Geographical Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty" gained new momentum as a working committee of the UNCSGN began to draft a resolution for debate at the main assembly of the conference.

However, the Japanese persistently opposed these efforts and refused to take part in a debate over the East Sea dispute at the UNCSGN main conference. Japan alone opposed the discussion, arguing that the working committee failed to apply all related basic principles during the drafting process.

Despite the Japanese opposition, the main conference went ahead and adopted a Chairman's Summing-Up statement supporting the position of the Korean government. Toward the end of the conference, this statement was accompanied by a decision, directing that both the names East Sea and Sea of Japan should be used simultaneously until the dispute is resolved, and that all issues concerning names of features beyond a single sovereign nation's borders be dealt with at subsequent UNCSGN conferences. For Korea, the adoption of these decisions at the conference meant that the dispute over the East Sea had taken on new significance worthy of full international attention and that there would be passage of more resolutions to this effect at future UNCSGN conferences.

In January 2000, the Korean government presented three working papers to the 20th assembly of the UNGEGN in New York City.

One of the papers, the WP-24 (Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation), prepared jointly by Korea and South Africa, called for an assessment of implementation efforts over all resolutions that the UNGEGN assemblies have passed in the past. The paper was later adopted, providing an important opportunity to review the status of the resolutions.

The Korean government, then, presented another proposal to the United Nations, the WP-96 (Implementation of Resolution III/20 on Geographical Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty), officially questioning the legal validity of Sea of Japan. The United Nations is currently reviewing the Korean proposition.

In 1994, the Korean government continued its work with the IHO, requesting the organization that the erroneous use of Sea of Japan be rectified. Since then, the government has renewed the request each year, urging IHO member nations to start using East Sea, and not Sea of Japan or Japan Sea. In 1997, the Korean government took the issue to the 15th IHO meeting held in Monaco. In a booklet the government distributed there, entitled "The Limits of Oceans and Seas," Korea reiterated that the use of the term Sea of Japan was wrong and argued for the restoration of the name, East Sea. The organization plans to make public its final decision in 2002. The member nations will then state their official positions on the dispute in accordance with the decision.

With regard to the names of geographical features, the IHO has in place a 1974 resolution (described as A 4.2.6), which requires that the name of a given geographical feature should specify all the names being used by the parties concerned until the dispute is settled and an agreement on a single name is reached.

Section A 4.2.6 of the 1974 Resolution reads as follows:

"It is recommended that where two or more countries share a given geographical feature (such as a bay, a strait, channel or archipelago) under different names, they should endeavor to reach agreement on a single name for the feature concerned. If they have different official languages and cannot agree on a common name form, it is recommended that the name forms of each of the languages in question should be accepted for charts and publications unless technical reasons prevent this practice on small scale charts; e.g., English Channel/La Manche."

The guideline above carries the same language as Resolution II/25, the Names of Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty, adopted at the 2nd conference of the UNCISG held in London in 1972. Five years later, at the 3rd UNCISG conference hosted by Athens in 1977, the United Nations adopted a revised resolution, labeled III/20. Under this revision, the Korean government issued a statement of request that East Sea/Japan Sea be accepted as the standard name of the sea. To this day, Japan rejects this proposition.

3. Current Trends in Identifying East Sea

The efforts of the Korean government and civic organizations have begun to yield encouraging results in the campaign to restore the name East Sea to official international use. Organizations and map-makers are beginning to use the name East Sea, some using parenthesis to include one or the other name, others adopting a new method of concurrent use of both names, East Sea and Japan Sea (or Sea of Japan).

Rand McNally, one of the largest map-makers in the United States, used Sea of Japan (East Sea) in its 1997 world atlas (Rand McNally and Company, 28-31). The Most Comprehensive World Atlas Ever Created posted at (www.encarta.com/Microsoft/2000) also included East Sea in its description of the sea, naming it Sea of Japan (East Sea). The Humanitarian

Response Planning Map, a 1988 publication by the United Nations Environment Programme Global Resources, also named the geographic feature the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

Along the same lines, the map posted at www.reliefweb.int/map.nsf/wLatestMaps in 1998 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) went so far as to use the Korean word "Tonghae" for East Sea and named it as the Sea of Japan (Tonghae).

It should be noted that using parenthesis around East Sea is not exactly in compliance with the concurrent use requirement. But, it is a sign of progress, which takes the issue a step in the right direction.

There are more encouraging examples. The Cartographic Satellite Atlas of the World, which the Canadian Warwick Publishing Inc. published in 1997, complied with the standardized practice and used the generic terms, Tong-Hae/Nippon-Kai (Japan Sea).

Encyclopedia Britannica in its 1998 CD-ROM named the sea as "East Sea (Sea Of Japan)" in Korea-related sections, while using "Sea of Japan (East Sea)" in the sections on Japan. This method appears to have been adopted in due consideration of the sovereign control of waters contiguous to the concerned countries. Both the New York Times and the Merriam-Webster Atlas 2001 are currently following the same format.

Also seen is an increasing tendency among map-makers around the world to accept the legitimacy of East Sea, and the number of maps favoring the use of East Sea over Japan Sea is growing.

The map, Democratic People's Republic of Korea Crop Use Intensity, published by the U.S. Agency for International Development in 1997, was the first example of this noticeable change, using East Sea only with no reference to Sea of Japan.

In 1999, another case appeared when The Bulletin 49(2) (Orographic Map of Korea, p.135), published by the International Geographical Union, identified the geographic feature as EAST SEA (Sea of Japan), giving East Sea priority. A year later (2000), "Geography: Realms,

Regions and Concepts" by H.J. de Blij and Peter O. Muller (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) replaced all its old names of the sea with East Sea (Sea of Japan) throughout the book. A 1998 seminar of the U.S. National Council for Geographic Education, held in Indianapolis, Indiana, apparently convinced the authors of the book of the validity of using East Sea. An earlier version of the book (1997) offered no reference to East Sea, only identifying the geographic feature as Sea of Japan.

The website, (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~felsing/kstuff/korean_Peninsula.GIF), of the University of Oregon followed suit, using only East Sea on its Korea maps. The university substituted Sea of Japan with East Sea when taking over the maps from their original publisher, the Central Intelligence Agency, to post them on the website. The maps bear Code Number, 802191 (R00141) 7-93.

Meanwhile, the National Geographic Society (NGS) relied on a quite different method of identifying the sea, adopting East Sea (Sea of Japan) for the use of its Korea maps while inscribing Sea of Japan (East Sea) elsewhere on its atlas. The new practice came as a result of years of persuasion by the Korean government. Until 1996, the NGS had cited regulations of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, rejecting Korea's request for the restoration of East Sea. That policy was modified in January of 2000, when the first Korean-language edition of National Geographic magazine was published in Korea. The society announced at the time that it would simultaneously use East Sea and Sea of Japan on all the maps in the magazine. The announcement was carried out a year later, in 2001.

A similarly encouraging sign of change is taking place in Japan itself, where many tourism maps on Korea and other materials published there began to identify the sea as East Sea. Some of them are using the names East Sea and Japan Sea simultaneously, and others are putting East Sea in parenthesis next to Japan Sea.

There were more cases in 1998 and 2002 that followed the rule of concurrent use of both names. The Internet maps at (www.atlappedia.com/online/maps/political/Korea), produced by the Latimer Clarke Corp. Pty. Ltd in 1998, marked the sea in question as EAST SEA/SEA OF JAPAN. And, a 1998 German atlas identified the geographic feature as Japanisches Meer (Japan Sea) and Ostmeer (East Sea) in compliance with the concurrent use principle. And

most of maps in the report of TRANSBOUNDARY DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS(RAS/98/G31 - UNDP/Global Environment Facility - Tumen River Strategic Action Program, 2002) used both names. In this year Canadian ITMB(International Travel Maps & Books, 2002) map publisher follows the rule of IHO resolution. The publisher uses both 'East Sea(Sea of Japan)' and 'East Sea' only in some pages.

4. A Sea without a Name

The use of East Sea has begun to win greater international recognition and more organizations have come to accept the usage. International news media and map-makers have gradually agreed that the description of Sea of Japan is not justified. In the process, however, a new practice is emerging: not identifying the sea at all, out of political consideration or due to a lack of space.

For example, since January 2001, CNN abandoned its use of Sea of Japan, airing maps of Korea and Japan with no particular name in reference to the sea. The move, apparently meant to strike a balance between Korea and Japan, is nevertheless significant because it suggests that the company finally has recognized the invalidity of using Sea of Japan.

A similar example has appeared in Japan. The Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA) in Niigata, Japan, is an institute that pays keen attention to issues concerning the geographic feature in question. It has recently dropped its old policy of using Sea of Japan and stopped identifying the sea in its publications.

For whatever the reasons, not identifying the sea at all is not acceptable. The Catalogue of Admiralty Charts and Publication, put out in 2001 by the British Hydrographic Office, identified all the seas in the region except for the East Sea. Given the importance of well-documented sea maps for navigational safety, this new trend of not identifying the sea should be reconsidered.

One more practice worthy of note involves the maps recently published by UN organizations. The Beijing office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been working on a project known as the Tumen River Economic Development Project since 1991. It has published three maps in 2000. These maps, all published in China and distributed a

year later, bear no identification of the sea, even though they identified all other seas in the region. The maps were entitled Tumen River Economic Development Area and Northeast Asia, Economic Centers of Northeast Asia, and Economic Map of the Tumen River Economic Development Area. The North Korean map (Map No.4163), published in 2001 by the U.N. Department of Public Information Cartographic Section, followed suit, carrying no name for the sea area.

In most recent case, ironically FIFA did not produce the official map for World Cup 2002 even it's event hold in both Korea and Japan. The related web pages also carried a very brief sketched map without sea names. At the same time, one of map company, Sohagkwan(小學館), distributed guide map for World Cup 2002 without any sea names.

In addition to this new trend, the International Hydrographic Organization has once sought to designate geographic features being disputed as undefined areas. However, its matter is now pending situation for further consultation between concerning countries.

To be sure, these new phenomena have come about as a result of the recent growing recognition that the use of Japan Sea would no longer go unchallenged. But, it should be clear to all concerned that navigational safety must never be compromised on account of a dispute over the name of a sea area.

5. Conclusion

It was upon the publication of the Limits of Oceans and Seas in 1929, eight years after the formation of the International Hydrographic Organization, that Korea's East Sea was formally replaced with Japan Sea. The restoration of the name East Sea is, in fact, part of Korean efforts to put an end to the painful legacy of its colonization by Japan.

In Europe, Iceland has had a similar experience. Upon independence in 1944 after centuries of Danish suzerainty, the newly independent country began asking the international community to adopt a new name for what is still called the Denmark Strait. The strait was given its name when Iceland was still under Danish subjugation.

It seems that the time has come for Japan to join in the debate about the East Sea and to play an active role in the solution of the East Sea problem. Furthermore, it should show a positive

attitude toward establishing the simultaneous use of East Sea and Japan Sea as a fully accepted international practice. UN and IHO resolutions have already called for such a cooperative settlement of the issue. And, when need arises in the future, the parties concerned could convene a new round of discussions to decide on an entirely new name for the geographical feature in question.

For over a decade, the Korean government has exerted consistent efforts to restore the proper name to the East Sea. It worked closely with various international organizations, such as the UN and the International Hydrographic Organization, requesting that the unjustifiable use of "Japan Sea" be duly rectified. It has hosted international seminars, encouraging scholars and institutions to conduct research on the East Sea. Academic and civic circles in Korea have also joined in the effort, working in tandem with the government authorities.

In conclusion, Korea's concerted endeavors have finally brought about a significant change of perception in the international community with many maps adopting the simultaneous use of East Sea and Japan Sea. Further efforts should be made by international organizations along with Korea and Japan to agree on a single name for the body of water lying between the two countries.