

Results of the Vladivostok-2002 International Seminar on the Naming of the Seas and the Current situation with the Geographical Names in Russia

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The 8th International Seminar on the Naming of Seas was held from the 24th of July to the 26th of July 2002 in the city of Vladivostok, Russia. It was organized by the Korean Society of East Sea, the Republic of Korea and the Pacific Institute of Geography, FEB RAS. Scientists and specialists from the leading universities, academic institutes, Geographical societies, and central newspapers of the Republic of Korea, D.P.R. of Korea, China, Russia, Japan, France, and Great Britain participated in this Seminar. Over 30 foreign participants and 25 specialists from Russia took part in the Seminar. It was the first time when such a seminar was held outside the Republic of Korea, and it was the first time when representatives of D.P.R. of Korea from Institute of Geography, AS D.P.R. of Korea and Hydrographical Department, D.P.R. of Korea took part in the Seminar. The media of Primorskii Krai, central press, and national television channels headlined this event.

In the work of the Seminar three points of discussion devoted to the naming of the current East Sea / Sea of Japan can be identified. The first group of reports was dedicated to the history of geographical investigations of the water areas of East Asia. The point how their names were reflected in different cartographical issues between 14th-19th centuries was also considered. Issues

of the current use of geographical naming for the sea area were considered in the second group of reports. The third group of reports was oriented to the development of the proposals to reach agreement on this controversial point and to find options for the geographical naming of the Sea.

Ancestry of the geographical name of the sea areas located between the territories of the present states such as Japan, Korea, and Russia became a key issue in the course of the Seminar. During the long period of time this sea area had different geographical names, i.e. East Sea, Korean Sea, the Pacific Sea, and the Sea of Japan. Professor Philippe Pelletier (University of Lyon, France) presented a report “The role of French geography in the naming of the sea between Korea, Japan and Siberia from 15th early 19th centuries”. His report was based on the analysis of different maps storing in the National Library of France. The analysis of the Russian geographical maps of the 17th –19th centuries and geographical naming of seas of East Asia was presented by N.N. Komedchikov (Institute of Geography RAS, Russia). Dr. Sang-tae LEE (National History Compilation Committee of the Republic Korea) and Professor Bo Kyung YANG (Department of Geography, Social Science College, Sungshin Women’s University, the Republic of Korea) represented the historical analysis of geographical studies and issues of the usage of the name of the sea in Korea in their reports “A study on the Understanding the East Sea (Donghae) in the Chosun Dynasty (14th C –20th C) and “The Name of the East Sea on the Korean Old Maps, 17th –19th Centuries”. The analysis of geographical naming of the sea incorporated in cartographical materials published in Great Britain was represented in the report delivered by Professor Que Weimin (Department of History, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, P.R. China) “The Name of the Sea between Korea and Japan in the 19th Century Map by English”. In these and other reports of this group it was revealed that on the most geographical maps produced in world between 15th and 19th centuries the name the Korean Sea or East Sea was used. But none of these reports gives an answer to the question in what time and mainly why one began to use a name “the Sea of Japan” in most cartographic materials.

The analysis of the current usage of the geographical naming for this sea area was given by Prof. Ki-Suk LEE (Department of Geography Education, Seoul National University, Republic of Korea) in his report “New Trends in Identification of the East Sea (Japan Sea)”. He in particular demonstrated a great number of different publications in which the double name – East Sea / Sea of Japan is used for the sea area. Mr. Adam Kerr (Great Britain) who headed for a long time the International Hydrographic Society spoke about the problems related to the geographical naming of seas and course of change. His report “Problems and Progress in Defining the Limits of Oceans and Seas” made a stir.

Discussion on the final decision of the Seminar about the possibility of changing the name “The Sea of Japan” was very sharp. A speech of a delegation of D.P.R. of Korea was very emotional. They proposed that it was necessary to return the name “East Sea” to the water area as soon as possible. But many participants of the Seminar consider that it makes sense to use both names – East Sea / Sea of Japan – to this water area. As a result a following resolution was adopted:

The International Seminar on the Naming of the Seas:

Noting: The desirability of having a single name for the sea AREA BETWEEN Japan and the Korean Peninsula and Russia in the interests of international harmony and economic cooperation in the North East Asian Region.

Further noting *The long historical usage of various names for the relevant area.*

Further noting: It is apparent that coastal states cannot reach Agreement on a single name based on historical usage, geographic orientation, or national emotion, and a single county name.

Proposes: that the matter should be referred to the IHO and the U.N. Group of Experts on Geographical Names and reference be made to the U.N. Resolution advocating, in the lack of Agreement of the use of single name, both names to be used simultaneously, which is in accordance with the general rule of international cartography.

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Lately certain new tendencies in the usage of the geographic name for this sea area manifest themselves in Russia. We mean first of all scientific studies in which both names – East Sea / Sea of Japan are often used simultaneously for this sea. For example, between 1999 and 2002 specialists from Russia, China, the Republic of Korea and Mongolia carried out the project on environment assessment of the Tumen River basin (TREDA Project). In the final papers and monographs (published in English) both names the East Sea / Sea of Japan were used.

It is apparent that it would be very difficult to reach Agreement on official changing of the name of the sea and that there would be challenges. Among them one can notice such as disinclination to sharpen relationships between Russia and Japan because there exist some unsolved territorial issues, economic difficulties connected with the necessity to republish official maps and atlases; cultural misunderstanding because four Russian generations were brought up on feats accomplished during Russian-Japanese war at the beginning of the last century in the Sea of Japan.

At the same time during the recent 10 years ecopolitical and humanitarian relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea are actively developing. More and more Russians are interested in Korean history, geography, and culture. Russians learn that in the Republic of Korea and D.P.R. of Korea such a name of the sea as East Sea is constantly used. In different Russian – Korean documents, agreements etc. both names the East Sea / Sea of Japan – are used.

The decision on the name of the Sea will likely take a long time. We consider that the only way to agree to a compromise is to use both names East sea / Sea of Japan. Such an approach will satisfy national interests of all interested countries, and first of all the Republic of Korea, D.P.R. of Korea and Japan.