

The Naming of the Korea Strait on Old Maps

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Preface

In addition to naming the East Sea (Sea of Japan), which emerged as a subject of international dispute, the Korea Strait(大韓海峽), off the East Sea coast in the South, is also a matter of intense attention for Korea and Japan as they use different names for the Strait.

The Korea Strait, a narrow strait with an average width of about 200km is located between the Southeast coast of Korea and the Japanese islands, linking the Yellow Sea, the South and East Sea, and the East China Sea. The Tsushima Island(對馬島) lies in the center of the Strait and the island is divided into a West channel(東水道) and East channel(西水道). The Korea Strait, which lies between Korea and the Kyushu Island, is about 200km in length and width but the width of the narrowest point extends only about 50km. It is a relatively shallow with a maximum depth of 210m. From ancient times, it has been an important sea route between Korea and Japan.

Japan named the Strait 'Tsushima Strait' (對馬海峽), sometimes they called the Western part of the Tsushima 'Korea Strait' and Eastern part 'Tsushima Strait'.

This article examined the changes of the name of the Strait based on the old maps of Korea, Japan, and Western countries, which were produced between the 16th century and early 20th century. Maps used for analysis are Korean maps owned by libraries and museums and 74 Japanese maps from <Map of Eight Provinces of Korea> produced in 1747 to <Map of Korea> in 1941. A total of 153 Western maps were used for this analysis. They are maps of the Great Britain Library, and on the internet sites of the libraries of University of California and University of Texas.

As a result, it was found that it was in the early 20th century, especially after Japan's forced annexation of Korea, the name of Korea Strait was changed to 'Tsushima Strait' or two names were used 'Korea Strait' and 'Tsushima Strait'.

1. 'Korea Strait' on old maps of Korea

The name, 'Korea Strait', is not shown on the old maps produced in Korea until the late 19th century. It is believed to reflect the general practices of pre-modern society who had no pressing reasons to distinguish the name of a strait from a sea.

In the 20th century, the name, 'Choson Strait'(朝鮮海峽; Korea Strait), first appeared in <Dong-A Chonkuk-do> (東亞全國圖, Map of East Asia) and <Hankook-chido> (韓國地圖, Map of Korea), which was produced in 1905. The maps have both the West channel and the East channel. The present name, 'Korea Strait', first appeared in <Taehan -tido> (Map of Korea) and <Asia-tido> (Map of Asia), which was produced in 1907. In the Hyon Kong-nyom's <Taehanchekuk-chido> (大韓帝國地圖, Map of the Great Han Empire), made in 1908, both names, 'Korea Strait' and 'Tsushima Strait', first appeared. After the forced annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, maps including <Elementary School Students' Map of Korea> began to use the names of 'Choson Strait' and 'Tsushima Strait'. As colonial rule continues, increasing numbers of maps used 'Choson Strait' and 'Tsushima Strait' together suggesting the increasing power of Japan.

2. 'Korea Strait' on old maps of Japan

The analysis on a total of 74 maps from the <Map of Eight Provinces of Korea> (朝鮮國八道地圖), produced in 1747, to the <Map of Korea>(朝鮮全圖), 1992, revealed that no maps prior to the 1870s suggest the existence of the strait. The name 'Koryo Strait'(高麗海峽; Korea Strait) first appeared in the <Map of the East of Asia>(亞細亞東部輿地圖), produced in 1874, by the Army General Staff Office. As the map was not by an individual but a result of a nation-wide project carried out by a government body of Japan, it is meaningful in that it is a more trustworthy and authoritative map. Research of Japanese maps produced up to 1903 reveal that 16 maps wrote Choson Strait(朝鮮海峽; Korea Strait): 9 were Goryo Strait(高麗海峽; Korea Strait), 2 were Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait together, and one each for Goryo Sea(高麗海; Sea of Korea), Goryo Hyop(高麗峽; Korea Strait), Taehan Strait(大韓海峽; Korea Strait), West Channel, Korea

Channel, Tsushima Strait, Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait together. There were 10 maps without the strait name. In other words, most of the maps wrote 'Choson Strait' or 'Goryo Strait' namely Korea Strait.

The names, however have underwent changes since Japan usurped the foreign sovereignty of Korea by the Agreement (1904) and the Convention(1905), which made Korea its protectorate. A study on the maps of Japan made between 1904 and 1909 found that 7 maps refer to the strait as Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait using together, 5 referred to the strait as Choson Strait, and 1 referred to the strait as Tsushima Strait. There were 2 with no names. In other words, the majority of the maps wrote both Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait using together, reflecting the growing influence of Japan. The maps made between 1910 and 1945 show that the tendency became more distinctive; 6 maps wrote both Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait using together, 1 wrote Tsushima Strait, and not a single map showed Choson Strait or Korea Strait. It clearly proves that the co-existence of Choson Strait and Tsushima Strait on the map of Japan became dominant with the progress of colonization of Korea by Japan.

3. 'Korea Strait' in the maps made by the West

This article examined a total of 153 maps from the 16th century through 20th century. Many of the maps wrote the name of the sea but up until the early 18th century, no map was found to include the name of strait. It is in <Asia> made by R.W. Seale in 1740 the name 'Strait of Corea' first appeared, however until the late 18th century maps with the strait name are very rare.

Starting with 'Streights of Corea' in the R. Wilkinson's <China> made in 1797, Thomas Brown's <A New and Accurate Map of China> in 1794, the maps carrying the name of the Strait increased rapidly and since 1820 the Strait appears in most of the maps.

It is believed to be greatly influenced by <The voyage of La Perouse around the world, 1797>, a record of the explorations of the North Pacific region made between 1785 and 1788 by La Perouse (1741~ 1788).

Of the 40 examined maps produced in the West during the 19th century, 23 maps wrote the Korea Strait. Of the 23 maps, 19 maps (or 82.6%) wrote 'Strait (or Str.) of Corea, 1 map wrote 'Channel of Corea', 1 'Korea Strait', and 2 Detroit (or Det.).