

Current Situation and Prospect at Naming of East Sea/Sea of Japan in regards of Northeast Asian Cooperation Activities in Japan

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In Japan it is fixed that the sea between Korean Peninsula and Japan is called as “Nihon Kai” in Japanese and “Sea of Japan” or “Japan Sea” in English. But there have been various changes in an English name, including the elimination of the name itself, while they propel international cooperation.

1. The cooperation works of Northeast Asia Region and the issue of Naming of East Sea/Sea of Japan

1.1 The emerging of the cooperation works of East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region in Northeast Asia Region

Since the late 1980s so-called “Concept of Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone” has appeared around local autonomous entities, economic organizations and colleges in western coastal area of Japan. That is to designate the Northeast Asia region surrounding East Sea/Japan Sea as “Japan Sea Rim Region” and to make great strides in this region with developing diversified exchanges through international cooperation.

Especially the Tuman (Tumen) River Area Development Plan that China suggested first in the beginning of 1990s and South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, and Mongolia with UNDP as the central figure participated was considered as a main model

of East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region and it requested Japan an active participation. The local authorities on the western coastal area of Japan have shown great interest in the development of the Tuman (Tumen) River area, with Niigata, Akita and Tottori prefectures actively taking the lead in interaction with the area.

The forms of the cooperation works of East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region seen in Japan could be classified as the following.

1) Systematization of the cooperation works among local autonomous entities

The representative form of international cooperation among local autonomous entities in East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region is the “Association of North East Asia Regional Governments” (NEAR) that launched in 1996 to propel exchanges of 34 local autonomous entities in Japan, China, South Korea, Mongolia and Russia with Tottori Prefecture and Toyama Prefecture as the central figures. Internally in Japan, in 1964 “Japan Sea Coastal Region Promotion Federation” composed of 12 Prefectures in Honshu launched, and in 1993 The “Association of West Japan Region for Japan Sea Rim Exchange” started.

2) Establishment of international research institutes in the local level

Since the early 1990s the activities to proceed research and exchange works on East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region in the level of local autonomous entities have activated. To establish ERINA in Niigata city in 1993 was epochal as international economic institute in the local level. In 1995 the “Academy Forum for Northeast Asia” in Kyoto city and the “Tottori Research Center” in Tottori city were established.

3) Holding international symposium

The “Niigata International Forum on Japan Sea Rim” that Niigata Prefecture began to hold in 1990 is the typical form. Since 1996 it had been renamed as the “Northeast Asia Economic Conference in Niigata” and has been held every year sponsored by ERINA. Besides in almost every region of Western coastal area of Japan international conferences on economic exchanges and cooperation are held frequently.

4) The response of political parties

After ex-Japan Socialist Party held the “Japan Sea Rim Forum” in Niigata city in 1990, Democratic Party of Japan succeeded to it and organized the “Japan Sea Rim Parliamentary Forum”. This forum was renamed as “Northeast Asia Region Friendship

Parliamentary Forum” in June, 2003 and has been working on analyzing and studying the issues of Northeast Asia.

As previously stated, in Japan local autonomous entities are very active while central government remains negative in this issue and western coastal area of Japan are especially active. The background that the development of these areas dropped behind the others and the hope that the cooperation works in Northeast Asia region would contribute to these areas’ development causes it.

1.2 The issue of naming East Sea/ Japan Sea in Japan

The cooperation works of Northeast Asia region in Japan faced the issue of naming East Sea/Japan Sea. When so-called “Concept of Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone” idea first appeared in Japan in the late 1980s, there was no problem with naming East Sea/Japan Sea. The name, “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” was a kind of identity in Western coastal area of Japan. It was the term to represent the wish of “Development National Development Axis of Japan Sea Coast” equal to “National Axis of Pacific Ocean Coast” and the desire of non-mainstreamers that are based on the local level not central (Tokyo) mainstream.

Therefore in most cases when they organize various councils, research institutes, organizations or hold international conferences, they usually use the name “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” in Japanese. However when they designate it in English, there were different trends; One was to adhere to the term “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” when they want to emphasize the name of the sea itself, and the other was to use various English names when they want to express the region around the sea.

The following table is the list of organizations that uses the term “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” or “Kan Nihon Kai (Japan Sea Rim)” in Japanese among all Northeast Asia region cooperation organizations, using various English names.

Table 1. The List of Organizations using the term “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” in Japanese

Classification	Name	Headquarter	Establishment
Councils	Japan Sea Coastal Region Promotion Federation	Toyama	1964
	Association of West Japan Region for Japan Sea Rim Exchange	Tottori	1993

	Japan Sea Rim Trade Base Akita	Akita	1999
	Around Japan sea Economic exchange Conference	Kanazawa	1992
Research center, organizations	Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA)	Niigata	1993
	Northwest Pacific Region Economic Center	Toyama	1993
	The Academy Forum for Northeast Asia	Kyoto	1995
	Institute for Northeast Asia Study	Tokyo	1996
	Northwest Pacific Region Environmental Cooperation Center	Toyama	1997
	Japan Sea Intercultural Center	Toyama	2004
	NIHONKAI International Exchange Center	Kanazawa	
Academic society	Association for the Japan Sea Rim Studies		1994
International conference	The Regional Exchange and Cooperation Summit of the Japan Sea Rim		1994
	The International Exchange Conference of Neighboring Countries Around the Sea of Japan	Matsue	1986

(sources) referred to sundry records

From the above list, we can see there are various forms to designate Japanese name “Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)” in English even in Japan. It reflects the atmosphere that Japanese local autonomous entities try to consider the positions of South Korea or North Korea when they proceed international cooperation.

2. Experiences on the issue of naming East Sea/ Japan Sea in ERINA

ERINA was established at Niigata city of western coastal area of Japan in 1993 as international economic institute for researching the Northeast Asia Region. for The name of the center registered was “Kan Nihon Kai Keizai Kenkyusyo” in Japanese and ERINA in English. It was a kind of compromise considering both internal atmosphere and international relations.

From 1996 ERINA changed the name of the international conference from “Niigata International Forum on Japan Sea Rim” into “Northeast Asia Economic Conference” and still it’s ongoing. The attitudes that ERINA had as a principle to the issue of naming East Sea/Japan Sea were the following.

< Principle of naming East Sea/Japan Sea adopted by ERINA >

(1) International conference

- ERINA designates East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region as Northeast Asia Region

generally. It is the same in the case of written translations. But when the meaning is limited to the region only including eastern coastal area of Korea, Primorsky Territory of Russia, and western coastal area of Japan around the Sea, ERINA use both Korean and Japanese designation simultaneously as “East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region”.

(2) The works of ERINA

- ERINA usually makes and uses the maps of Northeast Asia where the name of East Sea/Japan Sea is erased like the map below. When needed, ERINA co-writes both East Sea/Japan Sea.



@ERINA

3. Prospect at Naming of East Sea/Sea of Japan

From December 2004 to March 2005, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan conducted a study with regard to the naming of East Sea/Sea of Japan on the maps possessed by the United States Library of Congress that were published between the 14th and 19th century.

The study work shows that among the 1,435 maps for which a name is recorded for the East Sea/Sea of Japan, 77% bear the name "Sea of Japan." this study shows also that of

the maps published in the 19th century, 82.4%, or 1,059 maps, bear the name as "Sea of Japan."

Total : 1730

Maps recording a name for the Sea : 1435

Sea of Japan : 1,110

Sea of Korea : 188

Sea of China : 22

Oriental Sea : 20

East Sea : 2

Japan▪ Korea : 14

Japan▪ China : 1

Japan▪ Orient : 7

Orient▪ East Sea : 4

Others : 20

Impossible to read : 47

This kind of study work would breed more harsh and discontented conflicts between Korea and Japan.

In Japan, especially in western coastal area of Japan, the name "Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)" is not the mere name of the sea but is used as a kind of identity of lagged provinces and the motive of local development. But in the case of propelling international cooperation in the local level, they give some consideration to Korean peninsula so they changed the commonly used term "Kan Nihon Kai (Japan Sea Rim)" into "Northeast Asia Region" or co-named "East Sea/Japan Sea Rim Region". Or they use the map on which name of the sea was eliminated. ERINA has the most convertible attitudes to this issue. However, the central government of Japan doesn't allow even co-naming.

From this situation, there is almost no possibility that the movement to change "Nihon Kai (Japan Sea)" into another name would arise in Japan independently. Maybe Japanese maximum concession would be to co-name "East Sea/Japan Sea" in international conferences.