

Revaluation of old maps and linguistic aspects in the naming of East Sea / Sea of Japan

Jung-Chul SUH

Professor emeritus of
Han Kuk University of Foreign Studies

I. Introduction

Some people may cast doubts on the value of old European maps on Korea. Obviously the shape of the land is not accurate and the names are not coinciding to those actually have been used either. Often old maps were made just by following or copying those made previously and sometimes we can find that there are some patterns which are repeated in the evolution of maps. These are the reasons why we cannot rely on them generally and why we doubt about the value of these old maps.

Nonetheless, in recognizing frequent inaccuracy in many aspects, if we are patient enough to look at them carefully and study more scrupulously according to their chronological evolution, we cannot fail to find out that they were not made carelessly. The cartographers must have studied current geographical informations of their times and that finally leads us to understand the significance of what they have tried to mark on the maps and to reevaluate the old maps.

II. General Considerations

Beginning our discussion, I would like to point out that old maps conceal valuable informations in historical dimension and in geo-political dimension, too. It is also worth while analyzing them on linguistic level. In this perspective, I would try to show the importance of old maps and also to examine some of linguistic aspects in the naming of East Sea / Sea of Japan.

To begin with, I would like to say it is not wise to examine only one or some of old maps. We have to keep in mind that if we want to see a tree we should look

around the forest before judging the tree, because nothing stays the same forever and everything is under continuous change. But no change happens by accidents. Every phenomenon has a motivation for it and that's what we have to understand.

i) Historical dimension

Let's consider the problems related to the historical dimension. There are 2 levels in the historical dimension. The first level refers to the circumstances in producing the maps. For example, the cartographers could have been influenced in the process of producing, by the previous maps, some information they got and the motivation of making the maps, etc. On the other hand we can take into account the historical situations of the countries involved. One of the examples could be the absence of Korea in some maps until the end of 16th century. At that time people had no information on Korea. Because of its reclusiveness, Korea had forbidden any kind of relationship with foreign countries. That's why the old maps named East Sea / Sea of Japan as Sea of China or vaguely Oriental Sea / Oriental Ocean. They began to recognize the existence of Korea thanks to the work "Atlas de la Extrema Asia" by Martino Martini (1655).

Historical dimension makes it clear how the name Korea has been evolved. It appears on the maps made by the Portuguese as Coreia, while the Spanish used Corea and the French used Corée. Later the name becomes Korea by the American Missionaries. These changes cannot be explained without old maps and phonologic knowledge on the related languages.

ii) Geo-political dimension

Old maps contain some problems to be discussed in geo-political dimension. We are well aware of the fact that geo-political problems and the problems treated in the historical dimension may be overlapped each other. But, personally I perceive them as distinct things one another. Problems related to the historic dimension need mostly chronological and explanatory elucidation. While geo-political considerations are not relevant if the problems are not discussed by relating them to the geo-political situations of the past, present or future of the countries.

One example is provided by A. van Langren / Linschoten in their famous "Itineraio" (1596). Korea appears as round islands. The map should be lacking of any exact information on Korea, which is quite understandable. But the most strange thing is the description written under the island of Korea. It is written as "Ila dos Ladrones", the island of the thieves or pirates, which cannot be the truth because the history shows no Korean pirates pillaged other countries. At that time, Japanese pirates pillaged coastal area of Korea and southern coast of China. So the map makers confused the Korean with the Japanese. It is possible that the island in question should be Tsushima or Japan.

Most of all, what we should not forget is that old maps do not confine

us only in the past. These raise not only present problems but also the problems we may face in the future. I would like to explain the old maps do not give illuminations only for the past. They maybe are suggesting somethings to do immediately and in the future. The naming of East Sea / Sea of Japan could be one example. In this case, old maps show clearly what we should do now. They show that up to 19th century, almost all the maps named East Sea / Sea of Japan as "Mer Oriental", "East Sea", "Corean Sea", etc. They were not named by any fortuity, and we have to understand what led them to draw the maps and to give such names. As we investigate the maps, it is obvious that the old maps hardly named the sea in our consideration as Sea of Japan. It is from the geographical form of the sea. Japan has the shape that is lying obliquely from north-east to south-west while Korea is almost straight from north to south. In this case, those who are used to write from left to right, put what is more important on the right side, as the verb comes after the subject, naturally they name the sea as Sea of Korea or East Sea. Therefore, we may say that restoring the old name and correct the wrong one is the right thing for us to do.

Does it mean that old maps do not leave us any more assignment for the future? We don't think so. Because we probably would have a problem of dispute for the boundaries with China. Actually, as Korea is divided into 2 parts and it is North Korea that shares the boundaries with China. Primarily, it is North Korea's problem, we understand North Korea has already set this problem in 1964 with China. Furthermore, South Korea does not like to have any kind of trouble with China for now. But, when the countries get reunited and have one government, Korean government should solve this problem. In this way, old maps, especially "Map of whole Korea" made by D'Anville (1737), would be most important source that should guide us. But before referring to the map, it would be helpful to trace some facts and talks with China in this respect.

First of all, I would like to dissuade people who think that the territory occupied by the ancient Koguryo dynasty should be the part of Korea just because the kingdom was founded by the Korean race. Of course, we refute wrong pretension of Chinese government alleging the history of Koguryo is the history of the people lived in the sphere of Chinese power. We should have some real proof in order to raise any argument. What really happened between Korea and China?

In 1712, the emperor of China sent a representative to settle the issue. But we can hardly say that the Chinese officials and Korean officials had discussions, because the Chinese representative decided alone and fixed the boundaries by himself. Once on the top of Mountain Baik-dou, he said that the north part of the area, where the streams of the Yalu originate, was Chinese territory and the south part was Korean territory. According to the decision, they built up a wooden landmark saying that the west part of this mark should be called as Yalu and the east part as Tumen. That was concluded as the border line of two countries.¹⁾

We recognize there are some ambiguity in tracing exactly the border

line. But the essential part is the fact that the Chinese representative looked for the places where the streams of Yalu and Tumen are originating. In a word, the main stream of Yalu and Tumen was not the main point of the question. So the border line decided by two representatives should pass through the southern part of Man-chu-ria.

In this point of view, the map drawn by D'Anville is a precious document. We should be reminded that the Chinese emperor at that time, the emperor Kanghi, was a native of the region and could not have failed to mark the exact border line. He himself visited where European missionaries were drawing the map. He encouraged them and gave instructions about the boundaries. When the missionaries who had drawn Man-chu-ria finished their work, he called them to the imperial court and gave them Korean ginseng as awards. And when they finished all the maps, those maps were called "Maps of Ching (China) given by the Emperor". Missionaries sent the copper plate used for printing the maps to father Du Halde in France preparing his famous "Description géographique, historique de l'empire de la Chine" (1735). For the maps, he asked D'Anville, the most reliable cartographer of that time. Referring to his rich collection of maps counting to 10,000, he asked someone to make all the Chinese letters into French and the cartographer drew all the maps of China, Tibet, Man-chu-ria including the first map of Korea. Almost all the maps in Europe made after 1737 were thoroughly influenced by these maps. So it goes without asserting the importance of the maps he drew. For us, most of all, it shows clearly the border line of the two countries indicated by the emperor himself.

If we pay close attention, we are able to find out the fact that the Chinese emperor had a firm principle in marking the border line. We have to learn from the maps that the border line is traced by all the places, mountains or valleys, originating all the brooks entering to the main stream of Yalu and Tumen. This principle is confirming previous convention of two countries establishing a "No man's land" in Man-chu-ria, north of Yalu, so that no Koreans cross the border line in order to cultivate the land or to pick up some wild ginseng roots. It is quite possible that the Chinese emperor took into account of "No man's land" in fixing the border line.

Anyway, the map of D'Anville, "No man's land" and the border line fixed by the emperor are far from being contradictory. They all are based on the same principle and show the conformity among them.

Unfortunately, in 1880 when there was another talk between two countries for the border line, the Chinese representative denied the existence of the map of emperor Kanghi and devalued all maps, saying those were unreliable objects. But at that time, he did not mention about the border line, marked by the main stream of Yalu and Tumen. It is only in 1909, when Japan as they were starting to occupy Korea, held a conference with China on the issue of the

1) c.f. J.C. Soh, "Western old maps and Korea", Dae-won-sa, Seoul, Korea, 1991, p.p. 90-92.

border line. The Chinese acknowledged, excluding Korea for only their interests, the main stream of the Yalu and Tumen as the border line. In thanking the Japanese concession, China allowed Japan to have the right to construct the railway in Man-chu-ria. After the Korean war, North Korea and China convened a talk for the border line, and two parts seemed to consent on that the half line of the length of Yalu and Tumen constitute the border line.

When both North and South Korea reunite and form one government, neither the talk between China and Japan nor the agreement between North Korea and China are valid, because Japan is not the country concerned and North Korea alone cannot represent the whole Korea. It means nullification of the treaties or conventions of all previous talks. We have to return to the time of emperor Kanghi and try to fix the border line. In this perspective, D'Anville's map of 1737 is maybe the only proof which can testify historic truth.

As we could see, old maps cannot be confined in the past. They teach us what we should do in the future and show us it is our unavoidable duty to act what is suggested in the old maps.

Now except these 2 dimensions of problems, is there any more dimension to think about? Surely yes. I would like to point out that old maps have 2 parts. The shapes and the names on it. Naturally all the geographic names are written in languages. It is why there should be a linguistic dimension to be analyzed and discussed on linguistic level. In doing so, we have to judge whether the name is adequate and pertinent or it is absurd and wrong.

III. Linguistic dimension in naming

I would like to analyze the names of the East Sea / Sea of Japan in two ways. Firstly, according to some methodological frameworks already established, and secondly, according to the framework applied in geography and after, try to analyze more freely. For the first way, we are going to examine a) according to the approach appearing in Plato and then b) according to the concept of endonym / exonym.

a) Naturalism / conventionalism

It is well-known that Socrates has discussed first the problem of correct naming with his disciples and Plato transcribed it in his work.²⁾ He distinguishes the naturalism and the conventionalism in naming. The naturalism transfers with fidelity into language what the natural objects are representing. For example the Greeks called uncivilized people "barbarian" because they always seem to say "bre~bre". It describes the sound the barbarians seem to be producing. While the conventionalism state that there is an agreement even implicitly between the

2) Plato, "Cratyle", in Platon, O.C.I., NRF, Paris, 1984, p.p. 614~630.

speakers of a society. For example, we call the place where we live a "home", because the word is used and accepted by most of the people. In many cases, in fact, the two positions should be mixed, because the naturalism needs the conventionalism and the conventionalism should begin with any kind of the naturalism. The important point is that any existing name should be based on at least one of two theories.

Old maps show naming of some geographical places. Often we can notice the geographical names are known so by others because they are marked on the maps.

b) Endonym / Exonym

Let's consider the name according to another set of concepts more frequently used among geographers, endonym / exonym.³⁾ In fact, these constitute the criteria to judge the value of names. According to professor Lee Ki Suk, endonym signifies the name created and used by local people while exonym is given by the people outside. When it is an exonym, the name cannot claim the right on international scene.

Many people know through the history that the Japanese are traditionally used to call Pacific side sea as Sea of Japan. Personally I am willing to recognize that the name is in semantical point of view well founded. Because in the point of view of Japan, the sun rises on the Pacific ocean and I don't see any illicitness in calling so. Japanese changed their position at some point of time around the middle of 19th century. It is because the maps made in Europe after the publication of French sailer La Perouse's "Atlas de Voyago" (1802), adopted after the name "Sea of Japan". Then, Japan stopped former naming and gave up the traditional denomination applied to the Pacific side sea. In this case, no doubt that the name "Sea of Japan" is an exonym which cannot claim the right internationally.

i) Sea of Japan

a) First, let us come to the name Sea of Japan. It is not apparent in English, but in Chinese letters which are used in the Japanese language, Japan, "Nippon" or "Nihon" signify "the root of the sun" or simply "sun rise" phenomenon and the Japanese flag depicts the sun, too. But the trouble is the sea named Sea of Japan is the sea where the sun sets, not rises as it ought to do according to etymological meaning. So from the point of naturalism, the name is totally wrong and inverse. Then does the name Sea of Japan fits to conventionalism? Again, not. Because the sea is surrounded by 4 different countries: Japan, Korea, China and Russia. Especially Korea, more exactly 2 governments of both North and South Korea are strongly opposed to the name of Sea of Japan for different reasons. Korea has a population of 75 million people. As a consequence, there is no consent at all in the naming as Sea of Japan. Finally the name Sea of Japan is not adequate to either of the categories established in Plato's work.

3) These concepts are suggested by the professor Lee Ki-suk of SNU.

As it is a wrong name, we don't have to hesitate to change the name or to use simultaneously another name. But the Japanese people make a strong opposition to any change of existing wrong name. They emphasize that East Sea / Sea of Japan could be formed because the island of Japan separates the Pacific ocean in two. They are also saying a survey done by Japan showing the 97% of people of the world use the name Sea of Japan and 3% of people prefer the name East Sea. They say that East Sea is named according to the direction of one country, Korea and the adjective "Oriental" of Oriental Sea used by some cartographers is different from east of East Sea and consequently, cannot be related to East Sea. For me, I don't have any pretension to speak on behalf of Korean people. But my common sense says that, without any specialized knowledge in geology, the sea would rather be called as "Sea of China" or "Yellow Sea", assuming Korea doesn't exist and the name "East Sea" should not be used, because China is much bigger and well-known than Japan. The Japanese claim that only 3% of people use the name "East Sea", but they don't say that more than 70 million Koreans who live in Korean peninsular and 4 million Koreans who live abroad all use the name "East Sea" for the sea concerned. Actually, the name "East Sea" has been used at least for 1500 years. And some important media in the world begin to use simultaneous naming of both names.

ii) East Sea

One of the remaining problem is to be discussed by checking the claim that "East is a direction only applicable to Korea" and "'Oriental' is in fact different from east".

Han-guk, the country of a race once lived in the Korean peninsular is the actual name of the country. The previous name of the country Cho-sun consists of "Cho", the morning, and "Sun", the irradiant, describing the natural brilliancy of the country under the beautiful rising sun.

East Sea, "Dong Hae" in Korean, is formed by "Dong", the East, and "Hae", the Sea. East(東) is the figure of the sun(日) on the tree(木). It means the rising sun through a tree in the morning. As a matter of fact, for Korea the sun rises from the East Sea and linguistically and logically, East Sea is quite adequate as the name for the sea to Koreans. For another information, East Sea is perceived by Koreans as the holy sea. It's name appears as the very first word of the national anthem of South Korea. And King Mun-Mu of Sila dynasty who achieved the unification of the country asked to be buried in East Sea in order to protect the kingdom from the Japanese pirates.

Now we have to examine if the east in the name East Sea is a direction only applicable to Korea. This problem in fact is tied with the assertion that the adjective "Oriental" in the "Mer Orientale", "Oriental Sea" or "Ocean Oriental" does not concern Korea. These two problems can be resumed as "what East and Orient stand for?" Basically, we should accept that in our world, everything is western world oriented and western reality is in the center of our mind. So does

the concept of direction. I don't believe that the direction is indicated in old maps of early stages. It is only in some French maps of 16th century, the direction is clearly marked. "Occident" in French, is west. It comes from Latin word "occidens", present participle of the verb "occidere", which means "to fall". With a figurative sense, the word means "decline", "to be on an ebb" or "termination", etc. But originally it means "sun declines" or "sun sets". Occident is introduced in 12th century. But later, as the influence of English becomes strong in French, it turns out to be "ouest" or "west". Adjective "Occidental" and "Western" make a set of pair words. The north is "septentrion", originated from Latin in which the word means "work of seven oxen". The word has been used since 12th century. But under the fire of the English, "nord" became generalized. The adjective "septentrional" could be related to "cold winter". Méridien, the direction of the south also comes from a Latin word "meridianus", which has the same meaning. The adjective "mériidional" which means joyful, open minded and sociable, is used frequently even today, but it is formed much later than the noun. From the middle of 16th century, the word "mériidien" gives way to "sud", the south, formed under the English influences. Now, let's come to the main point, "Orient". As the other words for direction, it comes from a Latin word "oriens", and introduced to French in the late 11th century. "Oriens" is a present participle of the verb "oriri", which means "to rise" or "to come out" in English. Mostly it indicates the celestial bodies, especially the sun, rise on the horizon. Practically, for Europeans, "Orient" is related to the Asian countries where the sun rises first. But the word does not seem to make clear distinction. Approximately they say "Proche-Orient", "Moyen-Orient" and "Extrême-Orient" which mean "Near east", "Middle east" and "Far east" in English, respectively. There is no word to designate south-west area of Asia like India, Malaysia and Indonesia. In this case, they should say "Sud-Ouest Asiatique", which means "South-Western Asia" in English. The noun "orient" refers to "méditerranean world" somewhat vaguely, the middle east countries in general. The adjective "oriental" which is more frequently used than the noun, means exotic taste. The words "orient" and "east" both are used today.

We could learn all the words for directions in French come from Latin in different periods. They have a different range of figurative meanings and their continuation of existence in their relation to words coming from English is quite variable. But the certain thing is that "Mer Orientale" and "Océan Oriental", "Oriental Sea" and "Oriental Ocean" in English, respectively, show the area from where the sun rises or comes, rather than the simple direction of east. For Europeans and for the map makers, the sun rises on Pacific Ocean, is passing through East Sea / Sea of Japan, travels all the Siberia to reach the eastern Europe and finally to the western Europe. In this sense, the "Orient" has more to do with the phenomenon of sun rise than the direction. At any rate, two things are synonymous.

These explanations show that even if Korea does not exist, East Sea / Sea of Japan would be named "Mer Orientale" or "Océan Oriental". This

possibility is proven in the early maps where Korea does not appear yet. What is interesting is that the word "east" in Chinese from which many Korean and Japanese words and expressions come and oriens in Latin, share a similar meaning.

As a small conclusion, the naming of "Mer Orientale" or "Océan Oriental" is not motivated in connection with the direction at the point of view from Korea. The map mad by Nicholas de Fer in 1705⁴⁾ explains on this sea saying "This sea is not known by Europeans. The Tartarians(Man-chu-rians) in general call it 'Mer Orientale(East Sea)'" It is not usual that any cartographer add this kind of explanation as a topography. But he thought he should give some informations to the Europeans. It is possible that he himself got this information from someone who had been to Man-chu-ria or China.

iii) Adequacy in the naming

Armed with different knowledge we could get, we have to judge the adequacy of names actually in use. Firstly, let's see the name East Sea. Though it is the translation of local name "Dong Hae", by it's etymology, it shows no linguistic or logical contradiction with the natural object, the sea itself. It is in harmony with the adjective "oriental". Secondly, what happens to the name Sea of Japan? By it's etymology Sea of Japan suppose a sea where the sun rise. But with the name Sea of Japan, it happens the opposite. The phenomenon of sun sets. So it is reversed and the name Sea of Japan is fundamentally a contradiction. As the sun rises on the Pacific ocean and sets on East Sea / Sea of Japan, the name Sea of Japan is totally wrong one. Maybe, it should be in the considerations that the Japanese themselves called the Pacific side sea as Sea of Japan in reality. The Japanese switched to the name Sea of Japan to call the sea that we are considering. Occupying Korea by force since the beginning of the century, they put the final hand on the name in 1927 when they made the official request of the name Sea of Japan to I.H.O.

Honestly, if Japan looks for another name for the sea, I would like to suggest "Sun-set Sea" because it is based on the reality and fits better. What astonishes us is that some Japanese people are putting their national pride on the name of Sea of Japan. Restoring the name that is correct and make more sense has nothing to do with the national pride. Historical and a simple linguistic analysis should guide us.

iv) Episode of 'Dok-Do' called by Japanese 'Takeshima'

My primary purpose is to try some consideration on old maps in connection with the naming of East Sea / Sea of Japan. But it reminds me an episode, Dok-Do. For those who are not familiar with this small island, I would like to simply mention that it is etymologically a "solitary island" located in the middle of East Sea / Sea of Japan and called "Takeshima" by the Japanese. In

4) Seoul Museum of History, "Corea in the imagination of the Europeans", Catalogue of Maps, 2004, p.p.142~143.

fact, two isles form the island. Japanese people tend to think it belongs to them because it is in the sea that is called Sea of Japan. They add, they used to catch fishes around this island from a very long time ago. For Koreans, although it is uninhabited land, the island is historically Korean territory and especially it forms an inseparable set of pair with its sister island Ulleng-do, which is inhabited. I would like to make only a small analysis in conjunction with what I tried on the naming of the sea.

Coming back to D'Anville's "Map of whole Korea", he made some mistakes in naming the two islands which are called "Fang-ling-tao", "Tchan-chan-tao".⁵⁾ As I have already mentioned in my previous work, Ulleng-do became "Fang-ling-tao" and "Wu-san-do", the old name of Dok-do became "Tchan-chan-tao". I must admit that throughout the history of Korea, there have been some confusions in the naming of two islands mentioned. But one thing is for sure. At any time in the history, Koreans haven't taken the two islands separately. They have always existed together as a set of pair.

Since 1945, according to the international treaty signed at San Francisco after the Second World War, Korea has been occupying the island, Dok-do, with some guards dispatched. But Japanese contend its possession saying that it is their land. One of the Province, Shimane-hyun, proclaimed an ordinance to establish the day of Takeshima.

The confusion in the naming occurred also in Japan. First in 19th century, they called Ulleng-do as Takeshima and Dok-do as Matsu-shima. Anyway, This phenomenon explains that Japanese people also perceived two islands as a pair. But we have different name for a pair. We Koreans and the Chinese call the pair as Yin and Yang, while the Japanese calls them as Matsu and Take. Just like we think and divide everything in terms of Yin and Yang, the Japanese use the terms Matsu and Take. For example, in the primary school, two classes are called as Matsu(a pine) group and Take(a bamboo) group. In this way, Matsu and Take always go together and inseparable at any rate. They are tied together also in the minds of the Japanese.

There has been some problem raised. Japan has never claimed the right for the possession over Ulleng-do, Matsu-shima as they call. The answer is clear. If Ulleng-do(in Japanese, Matsu-shima) is the Korean territory, who should claim the possession over the other sister island Dok-do(in Japanese, Take-shima)? It should be Korea not Japan who can claim the right to possess the island. This kind of linguistic and cultural reasoning helps us to see the right answer that should not be screened by political issues to mislead the people by merely irritating their pride.

5) Soh, Jong-Chul, "Old western maps and Korea", Dae-won-sa, 1991, p.47.

IV. Conclusion

Problems related to the historic dimension can be proved through the historical facts, statistical data, or documents, while the geo-political problems should be linked to the past, present and future issues, although they require same data. Linguistic problems, in principle, don't need any external data. It is enough to be able to analyze what lies beneath the name.

In practice these three dimensions can be more efficient when they are mixed and help one another. But for the consistency the logic seems clear when they are separated. But relying on any theory, any framework or not, naming as Sea of Japan for the sea in the consideration is wrong and inadequate. It is wise to accept that everything, including names, is relative and subject to change. One should always listen to what others are thinking and saying, acknowledging when there is an error in his/her own side, embracing courageously the right answer.

With careful observations, Japan should neither stick to the self-righteousness, nor make the groundless claim over the thing which other peoples have possessed through the test of time, Dok-do. It is the only way to restore the friendship and preserve good neighborhood. It would be the most reasonable thing to try to find out a right name altogether to make the most of the sea and of the island.

Thank you.