

"East Sea" in Chinese Historical Documents of Late Qing Dynasty

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The sea area to the east of Korean Peninsula, located in the west of Japan archipelago and the southwest of Sakhalin (Ku Ye Island), is called "EAST SEA" or "SEA OF JAPAN". The northwestern coast of "East Sea" used to be the territory of China. Moreover, the relations between China and Korean Peninsula were so close that many ancient Chinese documents and literatures recorded the sea area were left. The documents and literatures of ancient China indicate that the nomination of this sea area started from Tang Dynasty (618-916), nearly one thousand and five hundred years ago.

The name "East Sea", being used for nearly 2000 years, can be traced back to *The History of the Three Kingdom* in Korea. While in China, the name has a history of more than 1000 years. The name was given by the residents along the western coast of the sea area.

We can tell from the document whose name is Kai Guo Long Xing Ji (*Stories of Building up the Country 开国龙兴记*) talking about the history of the beginning of Qing Dynasty that before Qing Government was founded, people of Nuzhen, the residents living along the coast, had called the sea area "EAST SEA" for a long time. After Jin Dynasty, Manchurian, the descendant of Muzhen, accepted the name "East Sea" from their ancestors. Just because the relation between the northeast and the central part was not close enough to make the name popular, we seldom see the records about "East Sea" in the documents of that time. In 17th century, when the Manchurian grew up in the northeast to build Qing Government, the name East Sea was popular again and it reappeared in the books of that time frequently. In 1644, when Qing Government moved its capital city from Mukden (called today Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning Province) to Peking, the name "EAST SEA" then spread widely among China. Many documents recorded "EAST SEA" as the name of the sea area. For example, a documents about Mukden, the old capital city of Qing Government, *Shen Jing Tong Zhi* (*盛京通志*) said in its twelfth volume, "The east boundary of the General Jilin is to EAST SEA". (General Jinlin was the administrator of Northeast China in late Qing Dynasty).

However, in mid of 18th century, China closed its door to the world. Chinese were prohibited to ship along sea coast and trade with foreigners. This situation continued for nearly two hundreds years. Therefore Chinese people held an indifferent attitude to the sea and knew little about it, and they scarcely knew the "EAST SEA" and the sea area along the Chinese coast. During the Opium War initiated in 1840, China was forced to open its door. In a bid to narrow the gap with Europeans, Chinese people recognized that they should learn more about world history and geography to know what happened in the part two hundred years and where the invaders were from. In late Qing Dynasty, many books appeared in regard with the world geography and world history. Among them was the celebrated *Hai Guo Tu Zhi* (海国图志, Maps and Introductions to the Countries Overseas) by Wei Yuan (魏源), a famous historian and ideologist from central China Hunan Province.

Wei Yuan was an official in Southeast China and he attended the battles against Britain army. He knew that the defeat of the war was, to some extent, attributed to the ignorance of Qing Government. So he collected the information about the countries overseas and launched the volumes in 1843 to wake up both the government and ordinary people. The book was rewritten two times and added to 100 volumes from its original 50 at 1852.

The book gave a short introduction to almost every country in the world at that time with a map of it. It showed the Korean Peninsula, from the north to the south in three maps. In the map of North Korean Peninsula, we can find "东海" (EAST SEA) in the sea area east to the peninsula. (See volume three, *Map of North Korean Peninsula, Chao Xian Guo Bei Jing Tu, Map of the Northern Boundary of Korea, 《朝鲜国北界图》*) The book was really famous in late Qing Dynasty and very popular for its hundreds of maps. The name EAST SEA was also known by some Chinese with the book. The map of North Korea Boundary, collected in the book, was one of the few Chinese maps with "东海" (EAST SEA) on it.



figure 1 Map of North Korean Peninsula

And in Qing Dynasty, there is the distinct understanding about the range of "East Sea" in the documents. The sea area includes the whole Tatar Channel in the north, and the whole sea area to the north of Korean Peninsula in the south. According to *Shuo Fang Bei Cheng* (*Defense of North Boundary*, 《朔方备乘》卷一) volume one, "Huntong River (混同江), the confluence of Songhua River (松花江) and Hei River (黑水), runs through Ning Gu Ta (宁古塔) and San Xing (三姓) and flows into East Sea". Huntong River is the lower reach of Heilong River (黑龙江). Another document named *Dong Bei Bian Fang Ji Yao* (*Frontier Defense of Northeast*, 《东北边防辑要》) said that some of the islands near Sakhalin (Ku Ye Island) are at the estuary of Huntong River, such as East Sea Island" (See volume one, *Ku Ye Dao Yan Ge Xing Sheng Kao Studies on History and Geography of Sakhalin* 库页岛沿革形胜考). These records demonstrate that the sea area into which the Huntong River flows is called "East Sea". In the book *Hai Guo Tu zhi*. This indicates that the "East Sea" in Chinese historical records means the same sea area as what the Western colonists called "Sea of Japan".

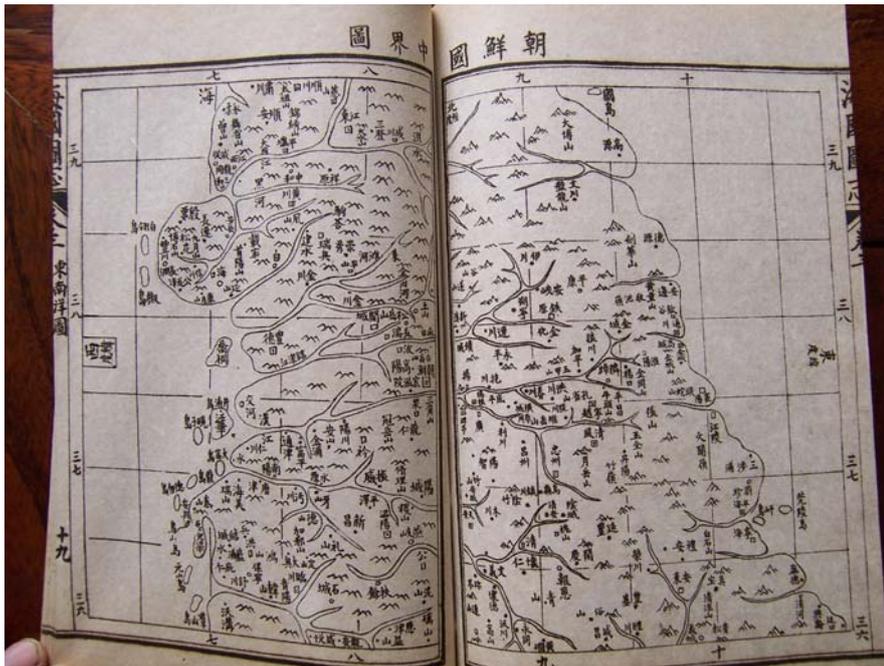


figure 2 Map of Middle Korean Peninsula

All these proofs show that the non-Han Government of Qing Dynasty from Northeast China replaced the different names with "EAST SEA" again after Liao Dynasty by people of Qidan.

After 80s of 19th century, the name "Sea of Japan" appeared in Chinese literatures. The name "East Sea" and "Sea of Japan" coexisted during the last twenty years of 19th century. In modern time, a lot of lands along the shore of "EAST SEA" were ceded to Russia. Cao Tingjie(曹廷杰)wrote in his *Stories in exploration of Boli*(Bo Li Tan Lu Ji, 伯利探路记):"Russians gained the shore of East Sea,.....and it will the only path for the ships to go into Huntong River from Sea of Japan". In this book we can see the concurrence of the two names. Even though the name Sea of Japan was accepted by many colonists, "EAST SEA" was still the name for the most Chinese till the late of 19th century. After the victory in the war with China in 1895, Japan occupied the Korean peninsula and parts of Northeast China. The name "Sea of Japan" became more popular instead of "EAST SEA".

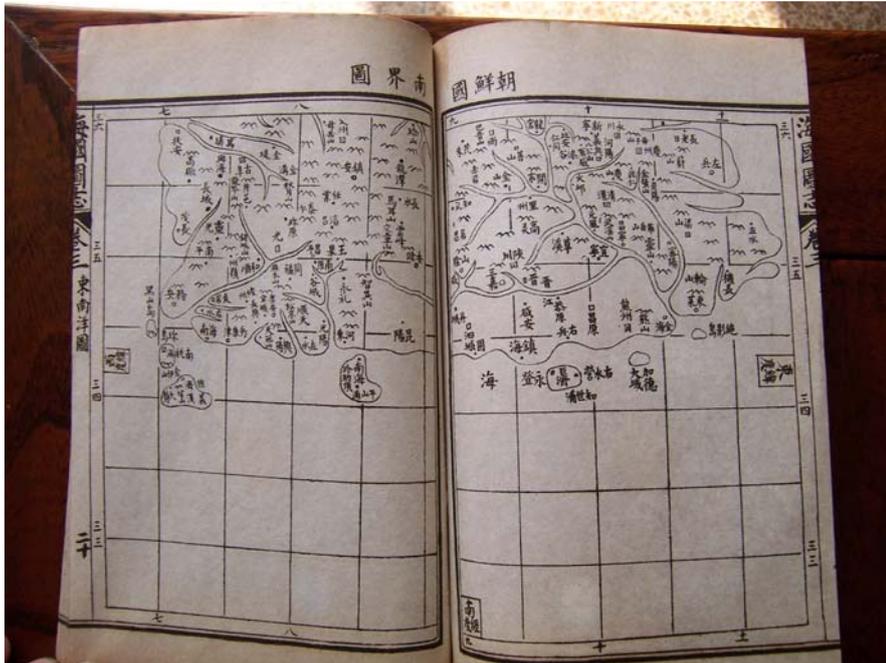


figure 3 Map of South Korean Peninsula

On determining the name of the sea area to the east of Korean Peninsula, we should follow the principle that the sea name comes from its owner and seriously consider the historical inheritance.

Reference:

1. Tang Hui Yao(唐会要)
2. History of Liao (辽史)
3. Hisroty of Jin(金史)
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5. Ji Dong Hai Zhu Wen(《祭东海祝文》)printed in the book DA Jin Ji Li (《大金集礼》)
6. Shen Jing Tong Zhi(盛京通志)
7. Shuo Fang Bei Cheng(《朔方备乘》卷一)
8. Dong Bei Bian Fang Ji Yao(《东北边防辑要》)
9. Hai Guo Tu zhi (《海国图志》)
10. Yuan Yi Tong Zhi(Geographical Records of Yuan Dynasty元一统志)
11. Ming Tai Zu Shi Lu(Records during Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang,明太祖实录)
12. Cao Tingjie(曹廷杰)wrote in his Stories in exploration of Boli(Bo Li Tan Lu Ji,伯利探路记)