

East Sea in the literatures of late Qing Dynasty

Cheng Long

(Professor, Beijing Language and Culture University, China)

The sea area to the east of Korean Peninsula, which is located in the west of Japan archipelago and the southwest of Sakhalin Island (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 documents and literatures about the sea area were left. The documents and literatures of ancient China indicate that the naming of this sea area started from Tang Dynasty, 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 citizens 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 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.

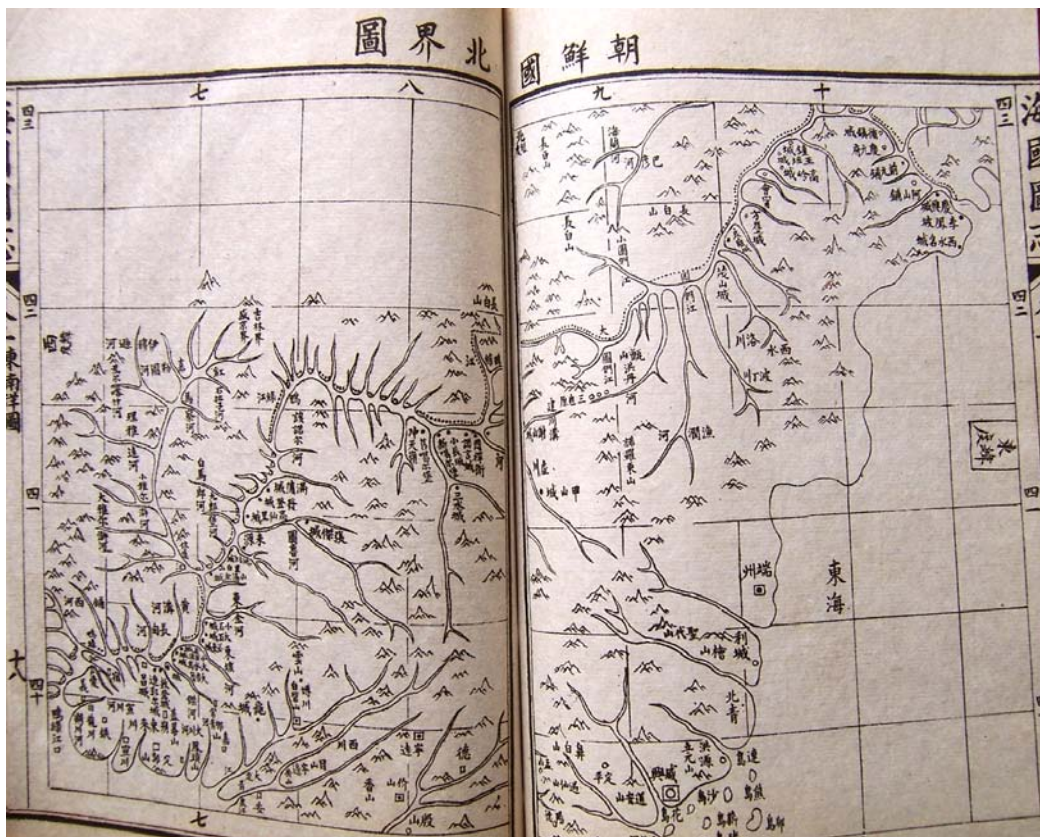
In 17th century, when the Manchurian grew up in the northeast to build Qing Government, the name East Sea was popular again and it reappeared in the books of that time frequently. In 1644, when Qing Government moved its capital city from Mukden (called today Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning Province) 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 people 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 beaten and forced to open its door. In a bid to narrow the gap with Europeans, Chinese people, especially educated, recognized that they should learn more about world history and

geography to know what happened in the past 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 British army in Opium War. He knew that the defeat of the war was, to some extent, attributed to the Qing Government's ignorance to the world. 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 in 1852.

In the book *Hai Guo Tu zhi* (Maps of the Countries Overseas 《海国图志》), “East Sea” was marked beside the east coast of Korean Peninsula. (See Map 1) This indicates that the “East Sea” in Chinese historical records means the same sea area as what the Western colonizers called “Sea of Japan”.



Map 1 *Map of the Northern Boundary of Korea, 《朝鲜国北境图》*

(Map 1). (See volume three, *Map of North Korean boundary, Chao Xian Guo Bei Jing Tu, Map of the Northern Boundary of Korea, 《朝鲜国北境图》*)

And in Qing Dynasty, there are the distinct understanding about the range of “East Sea” in the documents, which 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 Heilongjing River(黑龙江). Another book 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 Island (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”.

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, the vast lands along the shore of “EAST SEA” were ceded to Russia. Cao Tingjie(曹廷杰)wrote in his *Stories in exploration of Bo Li*(*Bo Li Tan Lu Ji*,伯利探路记):”Russians gained the shore of East Sea,.....and it is 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 colonizers, “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”.