

A Study on transition in naming of sea area: Survey focused on Sea of Japan and East Sea

Jung-Chul Soh

Prof. Emeritus, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

In-Whan Kim

Prof. Emeritus, Ewha Womans University

Names represent cultural value of objects, transmitted from generation to generation. However, there are a couple of common misunderstandings about geographical names. Firstly, geographical names are considered to be perpetual hence we tend to assume that those never change. Secondly, we overlook origins of the geographical names and tend to see them as only proper nouns. However, names can change whenever there are rational reasons behind it, therefore it is suggested that we study origins of names and producers' intention when we account for suitability of the names.

In linguistics, Onomasiology is the study on naming objects and Onomastics is the study on proper nouns. However, it seems that there is no methodology to apply in these areas. I recommend that we investigate origins as well as transitions of names in Onomastics first.

If we take a look at geographical names such as China, Japan, Korea, America, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and so on, they came from the old maps and went through transitions. The Sea of Japan and the East Sea are not exceptions.

According to historical references, the name of East Sea has been used since B.C. 59 in Korea. In China, the name has been used since 10th century, and it was renamed as "Kyong-hae" during Ming Dynasty which was derived from ample whales' residence, and the name of East Sea was reappeared in the 17th century during the Ching Dynasty.

However, there was no specific name for the sea in Japan for a very long time and the name of "Sea of Japan" temporarily used in late 18th century, but soon the name of "Sea of Chosen", was officially given by the shogunate which governed the entire land of Japan. They preferred to call the Pacific "Great Sea of Japan" as it represents an immense sea than the "Sea of Chosun".

In the West, Matteo Ricci was the first to use the name "Sea of Japan" in his world map in 1602. Here we have to take a few things into account. Korea or Chosen was a closed country to foreigners unlike Japan. Therefore missionaries had to put more priorities on working in Japan. Furthermore, the name Sea of Japan was written closer to Japan, not in the middle, because too much space near Korea was already used for putting explanation on unknown country at that time, Chosen.

However, Matteo Ricci's naming had no impact on the maps even in Japan, not to mention in the West. For example, another missionary Aleni firmly used "East Sea" in 1623. Vinland was the first person in western world to produce a map which is related to the East Sea. Vinland marked the sea as "Mare Oceanum Orientale" or "Great East Sea" in his map in 1440.

There was a monk named Carpini, who published a memoir based on his personal experience in Mongolia around 1250. Vinland contributed maps to his book. The map has little to do directly with East Sea, however, we should focus on its usage in etymologic point of view. The term "East" or "Oriental" used in proper nouns are mostly given in relation to the direction of objects. Historically, the trend shows that geographical proper nouns are originated from common nouns.

Godinho de Eredia, the Portuguese mathematician and cartographers, who was familiar with Oriental culture produced "Entire Map of Asia" in 1615 where he used "Mar Coria" for the name of the sea. What interests us here is "Coria", the word is in the form of the feminine noun of Portuguese by adding an "a" to "Cory" or "Cori", which are the names Arabic people used to call Korea since they first started trading with the Korean. Anyway, the name, which can be translated as "Sea of Korea", is considered to be following the naming principle related to the shape of Korean land, along with other maps produced in 18th century.

It is after late 17th century that the sea has been marked as "Mer de Coree" or "Sea of Korea". Before that time, the entire ocean in the east, including the East Sea, had been called "Oceanus Orientale" or "Mare Orientale".

From the early to middle of 17th century, the name was widely used by Sanson family who contributed to active production of maps; the transition of the name began in the middle of 17th century.

The transition can be explained as follows. First, the term "Oriental" began to be used for the concept of "exotic touch from the east" or "unusually unique", rather than simple concept of direction. Second, there were efforts to look for a better name because "Oriental Ocean", which had been used to indicate the entire ocean beyond India, was thought to be inadequate for the relatively narrow sea between Korea and Japan.

Later on, Montanus used "Sea of Korea" in his book on Japan published in 1669. His book made an incredible success and was read by almost every countries in Europe. Tavernier wrote "Sea of Korea" in his publication in 1679, which soon became essential for readers who were interested in Japan.

Thomas, Belgian priest who used to be actively involved in "entire China map" while he was doing the missionary work in Beijing and studied the East Asian maps made in Russia, produced a map in 1690 and the name of "Sea of Korea" appeared in his map. Kaempfer also used "Sea of Korea" in his publications in 1700. These serial usages resulted in a new trend of "Sea of Korea" in 18th century.

Certainly "Sea of Korea" was not the sole name used in Europe. We can also find other names in those maps from Europe. For example, Blancus in 1617 and Blaeu in early 17th century used "Sea of Japan", Ginnaro used "North Sea of Japan". Valk, Jansonius, Bucclinius and Cornolelli have a preference for using "Sea of Japan." On the other hand, Dudley and Witsen divided the sea into 2 parts to mark both names of "Sea of Korea" and "Sea of Japan".

Other exceptional cases such as "Mer de Mangi" or "Oceanus Chinesis" can also be found. However, the term "oriental" started to assume a new meaning, instead of being disappeared. Despite of the fact that the term was considered vague, there are a few examples such as "Mer Orientale" by Aubre

de Garrel and "Mare Orientale Minus" which can be found in German maps.

Guillaume De L'Isle who was the most respected royal astronomer and the first royal geographer in the late 17th and the beginning of 18th century marked "Mer Orientale" for the East Sea, showing his great affection on the term "Orientale" by consistently using it since 1700. He annotated that "Mer Orientale" equals to "Sea of Korea" in 1705 in the wake of minding the dominance of the trend of "Sea of Koea."

The names used by Guillaume De L'Isle projected huge influence afterwards. For example, Chatelain in 1719, Senex in 1730 and Elwe in 1792 followed his model.

The most important map is the "Map of East Asia" by De Fer in 1705. He marked the sea not only as "East Sea" but also commented in the map 'This is unknown to Europeans. Tartars call it as East Sea'.

As a matter of fact, the sea between Korea and Japan was once explored by La Perouse as late as in 1780; it was the most unknown sea in the eyes of people in the West. Therefore, De Fer's commentation should be highly evaluated since he put the local names on his maps.

De Fer was a big retailer of maps in France, who also participated in producing the map and had ample knowledge on East Asia. However, he was too sensitive about any information given by various sources that resulted in constant changing names of the sea. The lack of consistency was also found in Sanson family's cases.

Another great figure in Europe in 18th century is D'Anville whose reputation was undisputable in his time. However, one thing regrets us is that he didn't put any name for the seas near Korea. Presumably, it was his principle not to put any name for which he was not completely confident.

The interesting aspect was that many cartographers who were under his strong influence put the name of "Sea of Korea" to the sea between Korea and Japan although their respected D'Anville didn't specify any name for the sea. Here, we are encountering an inevitable question. Why was the name of "Sea of

Korea" predominated among other cartographers?

One of the reasonable and fundamental answers would be as follows: No matter how it is unknown to Europeans, Korean peninsula has the shape that stretches from north to south straight. On the contrary, Japanese archipelago is spread from south-west to north-east with the skew. Based on the literal intuition of human civilization, choosing the name "Sea of Korea" must have been considered as the most appropriate one. Besides, it was undisputedly reasonable and the only option in the eyes of European people who write letters from left to right and put the subject on the left to influence the verb on the right.

One noticeable thing found in the maps from United Kingdom is that they used "Gulf" instead of "Sea" because they thought the East Sea was not big enough to be called as a sea. For example, Dunn used "Corean Gulf" in 1772 and Roberts put "Gulf of Corea". "Gulf of Korea" was used in 1794 by Keith, Laurie, Russelin 1799, Faden in 1808.

While the use of "Sea of Korea" prevailed in the 18th century, there was another transition in the name around 19th century. It was first observed in "The Voyage of La Perouse around the World" produced by La Perouse. Upon his adventures to Japanese seashore, he marked the East Sea as "Sea of Japan".

In his voyage, what he observed from Korean area were only hostile people living in barren land. On the contrary, the people from Japan while he observed were relatively active and friendly. Presumably this might have affected his impression because he would prefer to put more weight on reporting the possibility of new trade with prosperous and friendly people.

Siebold, a medical doctor from Netherlands who stayed in Japan for a long time and a map collector produced "Entire Map of Japan" around 1840 and marked the sea as "Sea of Japan". Since he was considered to be an expert on Japan at that time, the map started to spread strong influence among the European maps.

During his stay in Japan, a big supporter of collecting data and giving guidance was Takahashi Kageyasu, who was one of the great figures among the Japanese cartographers. However, while Takahashi firmly believed and

consistently used "Sea of Chosen" or "Sea of Korea", Siebold modified the part and used "Sea of Japan" when he published.

Kruzenstern used "Sea of Japan" in his memoir after completing his circumnavigation of the world from 1803 to 1806, his naming of the sea as "Sea of Japan" contributed to its wide dissemination. His ultimate mission was to establish diplomatic and trade relationships between Russia and Japan. After staying in Japan, he returned to Russia with the positive impressions to spread the knowledge on the unknown country to his people, therefore "Sea of Japan" was not a surprising result.

As the result, 3 people above initiated the transition to "Sea of Japan", while "Sea of Korea" was still prevailing in Europe. The statistic data shows that both names of "Sea of Korea" and "Sea of Japan" appear with the similar frequency. From my experience, the ratio is 3 to 2 in Japanese favour. However, "Sea of Korea" was still found in the other 20 cases of Japanese maps in the 19th century and the shogunate used "Sea of Korea" as an official name.

The united use of "Sea of Japan" in Japan was initiated by Japan's historical victory over Russian-Japanese War. This was even accelerated by Japanese occupation over Korean land and Japanese government finalized by laying the only usage of "Sea of Japan" on the discussion in I.H.O., while desperate efforts of Korean people were all blocked.

As we have seen, geographical names marked on old maps have a great influence on names. Since old maps do not always give a sole name of the same region, it can be also used in favour of one another. The issue between Korea and Japan regarding the naming of the same sea cannot be an exception;

Therefore claiming for an exclusive dominance seems to be rather ridiculous. However there is one thing to be pointed out. "East Sea" is the translation of the endonym "Dong-Hae" which has been used by the people whose life was directly related to the sea. On the other hand "Sea of Japan" is an exonym which was given by western cartographers for their convenience since 19th century.

Currently, U.N. encourages to put priority on endonym over exonym. If there is a claim supported by international consensus, U.N. recommends that

the double names with conflicts should be considered as a step to find a third appropriate name. Therefore, if there is any request of double names, the request should not be ignored because of the political nonsense or hollow exposure of self-pride. Hence, Korean people recommend using both "Sea of Japan" and " East Sea". This should be the biggest lesson from studying old maps, where we cannot find any names that last permanently.