

The Northeast Asian historical conflict and the naming of 'East Sea' : Why should we call the sea 'East Sea' ?

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I conducted a lecture course entitled "Historical Controversies Over Korea in East Asia" at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York in the fall semester 2008¹⁾.

During the fifteen-week class period, I spent the first ten weeks discussing historical and territorial disputes between Korea and Japan and between Korea and China in seven subjects. Another two weeks were dedicated to dealing with theoretical and practical activities to resolve these issues. The final two weeks were designated for students' presentations and discussions of their own topics.

I gave a lecture on the naming of the East Sea in the tenth week. Before the lecture I asked the students to read 'East Sea' and 'Sea of Japan' propaganda pamphlets produced by the Korean and Japanese governments as well as Kee Ho Song's *History Disputes in East Asia* (Tong Asia ūi yōksa punjaeng, Seoul, 2007), a book that comprehensively examines these propaganda pamphlets from the two governments.

Beginning by looking at how the waters of the East Sea have been named, I investigated and compared its naming procedures and how the Korean and Japanese governments have interpreted them.

Although there were individual differences among students, they all looked critically at the claims and logics expressed by the Japanese government and by the Korean government. What they pointed out among claims by Korea was that explaining the background for the spread of the particular nomenclature 'Sea of Japan' by turning to Japan's hegemonic expansion in the late nineteenth century is not supported by investigating premodern Western

1) I lectured at Cornell University as a visiting assistant professor. Therefore, the content of the lecture was determined by my personal judgment and responsibility and I would like to announce in advance that my lecture has nothing to do with the Northeast Asian History Foundation's position.

maps. They also suggested that this dilemma be examined whether or not the geographical boundary represented by the Korean term 'East Sea' in the past corresponds to the oceanic boundary of 'Sea of Japan'. They pointed out other problems and made further suggestions about the logic produced by Korea. However, they also recognized the shortcomings of solely using the name 'Sea of Japan,' and suggested as their own alternatives a co-naming system using both the 'East Sea' and the 'Sea of Japan, and using the third nomenclature. Some students also suggested to divide the sea geographically, naming the sea near Korea the 'East Sea' and calling the sea near Japan 'Sea of Japan.'

One student who was initially skeptical about efforts to name the sea the 'East Sea' later changed his perspective. Arguing that naming the sea the 'Sea of Japan' is not a persuasive solution even by the general methodology of sea nomenclature, he insisted that we should invest more research into the ways and cases in which oceans are named.

Through teaching this class, I also realized that using a name for the sea which contained the country name 'Japan' would give rise to controversies, given the fact that sea nomenclature is shared by multiple countries and that Japan had a history of invading other countries. In this respect, I think that the dilemma about solely using the name 'Sea of Japan' is revealing, and it made me more concerned to understand the contexts in which the name 'East Sea' has been used in Korea.

Based on these observations, I examined newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and found that the term 'East Sea' appeared in a Korean language newspaper, *Cheguk Newspaper* (*Cheguksinmun*, 帝國新聞), printed between August 1898 and August 1910. I also found that in the *Maeil Newspaper* (*Maeilsinbo*, 毎日新報), which actually served as a government newspaper of the Government General in Korea after Japan annexed Korea in 1910, they understood 'East Sea' and 'Sea of Japan' differently. The 'East Sea' referred to the sea to the east of the Korean peninsula or to the sea adjacent to the western area of the Japanese archipelago. In other cases, they used it as a replacement designation for what had otherwise been called the 'Sea of Japan.'

These examples of the use of 'East Sea' and 'Sea of Japan' in the *Maeil Newspaper* reflect the political situation at that time. Japan registered the name 'Sea of Japan' to the IHO (International Hydrographic Organization) and the term 'Sea of Japan' was solely used in *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, a book published by the IHO in 1929. Under these circumstances, 'East Sea' was, however, still

being used to refer to a body of water different from the internationally recognized 'Sea of Japan.' Some Koreans also employed the name 'East Sea' as the preferred name for the sea that contained the Japanese referent. I think that the Government General in Korea had to acknowledge this and it was reflected in the Maeil Newspaper.

There has been a persistent vitality in the name 'East Sea,' which survived the era of Japanese colonial rule and the international and domestic recognition given to the name 'Sea of Japan.' Its persistence is made possible by Koreans' love for this name. Therefore, it is necessary to make others understand the mentality of the Korean people, who have longed to restore their subjective rights to naming their own sea after their liberation from colonial rule and their reacquisition of sovereignty.