

## **Semantic Change in one of the Meanings of the Terms "Donghae (East Sea)" and "Sea of Japan"<sup>1)</sup>**

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### **1. Semantic Change and Geographical Names**

Every word has a variety of meanings which can be added, removed, or altered over time.

Every single one of those three types of changes is a semantic change. Also geographic names can change its meaning. In this case we can theoretically differ between two types:

1. The geographic unity to which the geographic name refers to is changing.
2. The geographic name itself goes through a semantic change in the course of time.

Both of these kinds of semantic changes with geographic names can proceed, admittedly, also parallel and dependent of each other.

In connection with the discussion around the international naming of the sea between Korea and Japan, above all, the names "East Sea", a literal translation of "Donghae", or "Sea of Japan" became used from both sides. Both names were attacked in each case by advocates of other names. Thus writes the pro-Japan homepage "The Sea of Japan and Koreans"<sup>2)</sup>: "There was no practice to name a body of water in large scale in East Asia. So every sea was called nebulously a name after its direction ...It is dubious that they were considered geographic names. They were common nouns rather than geographic names".

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2) URL: <http://www.geocities.co.jp/WallStreet/4076/index.en.html>(24.7.2009)

On the other hand, from the Korean side the name "Sea of Japan" is brought into connection with the Japanese colonialism. However, the grounds given by the Korean side for it are not always understood by neutral observers. Mark Monmonier(2006), geography professor at the Syracuse University, for example, absolutely expresses understanding for the fact that the Koreans try to eradicate remaining traces of Japanese colonial occupation: "If I were Korean, I'd be resentful too"(Monmonier, 2006, 90). However, Monmonier received a letter of a Japanese consul with a pamphlet with historical maps from a time far before the colonialism of Japan which shows the seabetween Korea and Japan as "Sea of Japan". Monmonier was impressed: "These and other precedents support the consul's argument that the name [Sea of Japan] is unrelated to Japan's militarist or colonial past"(Monmonier, 2006, 91).

Reasons for misunderstandings often originated from the fact that the terms "Donghae" and "Sea of Japan" had different meanings in the course of time. Without considering the semantic changes an understanding of the problems of the naming of the sea between Korea and Japan is not possible.

## **2. Semantic Change in one of the Meanings of the Terms "Donghae" in Korea**

The term "Donghae" is already used since a long time in Korea. However, it has many different meanings<sup>3)</sup>. Nevertheless, in the following examples only the meanings should be pulled up with which the word "Donghae" is either identical with the sea between Korea and Japan or at least a sea area which incorporates the sea between Korea and Japan.

The term "Donghae" can be found in numerous Korean sources. Starting from the Gwanggaeto stele (414) many examples can be found among other things in the most important Korean historical works like in the Samguksagi (1145), in the Samgukyusa (1284), in Goryo-sa (1452) etc.

The oldest preserved Korean document which names the term "Donghae", is considered to be the inscription on a stele which King Jangsu of Goguryeo orderd to put up to the memory for the achievements of his father, King Gwanggaeto the Great, in the year 414. In the eighth verse of the third segment of this inscription it is mentioned that three inhabitants of the region by the East Sea were selected to guard the grave of King Gwanggaeto (Lee, Sang-Tae, 2008, 178).

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3) Jeong Seong-hwa/Yi Don-su/Kim Sang-min (2007, 130).

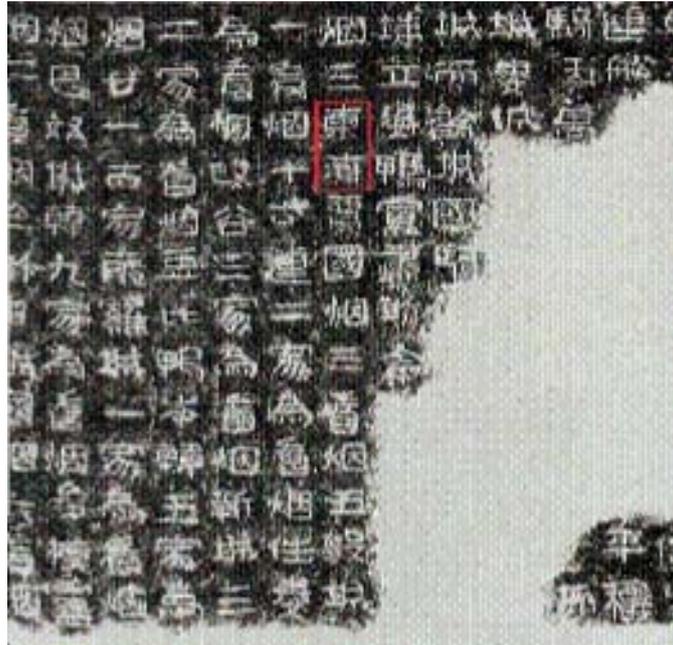


Fig.: Part of the inscription of the Gwanggaeto stele (414)

However, how is the sea called between Korea and Japan on historical Korean maps? There are only few Korean historical maps which are delivered. Also names of seas on historical Korean maps can be found very seldom. Often we find names like "Sea" or "Great Sea (Daehae 大海)" for surrounding sea areas of Korea.

One supposes, that after the maps with Chinese inscription which had been made by Westerners have reached Korea through China, Korean people started to produce maps where the sea between Korea and Japan has its own sea name (Yi Chan, 1992, 264).

In 1602 the Jesuit Matteo Ricci had made a map of the world Kunyu Wanguo Quantu in Beijing. Giulio Aleni (1592-1649), also a Jesuitical missionary in China, has made a map, the Wanguo Quantu 萬國全圖, on its basis. The map of Matteo Ricci calls the sea between Korea and Japan "The Sea of Japan", the map of Aleni shows no name for this sea.

Both maps became models for maps made in Korea. The map "Hoeip-gonyeomin'gukjeondo" 繪入坤輿萬國全圖 which was made in 1708 from Kim Jin-yeo 金振汝 is based on the Kunyu Wanguo Quantu of Ricci. This map names the sea between Korea and Japan "The Sea of Japan 日本海", the East Chinese sea as the "Great Chinese Sea 大明海" (named after the Ming 明 dynasty) and the Pacific as an "Eastern Ocean 東洋" like the map of Ricci named it too.

On the basis of the map of Aleni the Cheonha-dojido 天下都地圖 which is

stored in the Kyujanggak of the SNU was made in Korea in the 1770th. On this map the sea between Korea and Japan and the Yellow Sea are named "Small East Sea 小東海" and "Small West Sea 小西海". The name "Small East Sea" points out the smallness of the sea and is probably following the style of the naming of "Small Eastern Ocean 小東洋" and "Great Eastern Ocean 大東洋" on this map.

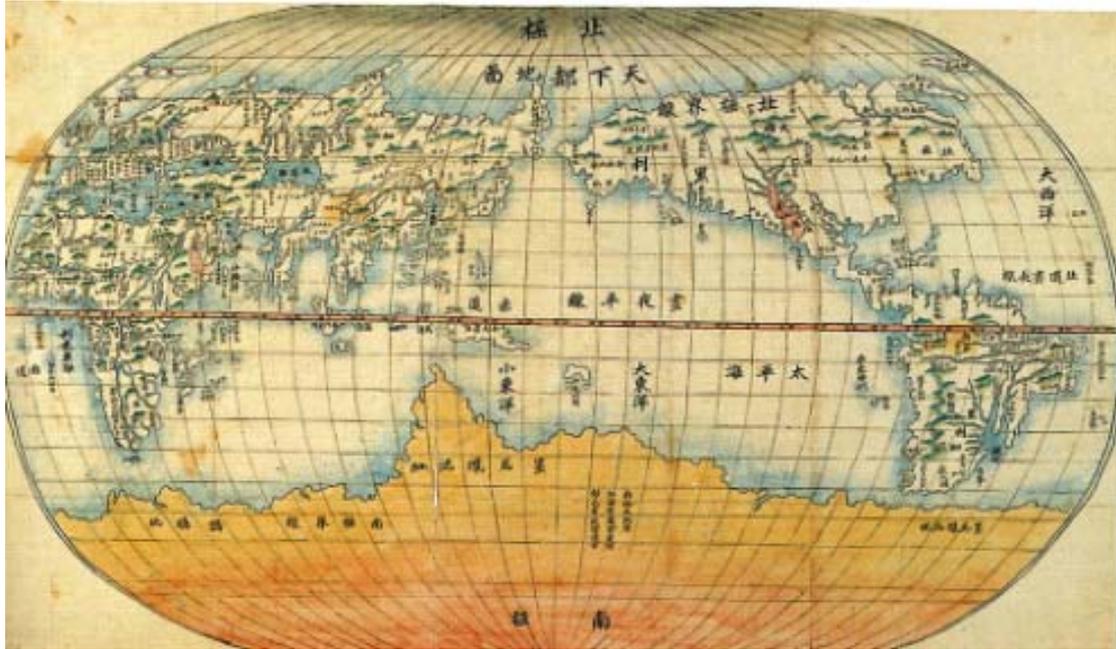


Fig.: Cheonha-do (the 1770s)

From the 18th century Korean maps are maintained which name the surrounding seas "East Sea (Donghae 東海)", "West Sea (Seohae 西海)" or "South Sea (Bukhae 南海)".



Fig.: Joseon Ilbon Yukuguk Th (end of 18<sup>th</sup> Cent.)

An example is the map Aguk Chongdo 我國總圖 (Full map of our country) which was produced between 1787 and 1799. A map which shows Korea, Japan and Ryuku (Joseon·Ilbon·Yukuguk-do 朝鮮·日本·琉球國圖) is added. Also this map includes the names "East Sea", "West Sea" and "South Sea" in Chinese ideographs. Moreover, in the north of the sea to the west of Korea the sea name "Balhae 渤海" is found. Japan is shown in the south of Korea.

Also maps of smaller administrative unities like districts and towns mostly followed the example of the provincial maps where the sea is named "Great Sea 大海". Nevertheless, there is a number of maps from the time around the middle of the 18th century which show the name "Donghae 東海" (see Yang Bo-kyung 2008).

Yi Chan (1992, 267) draws the attention to a specific feature. If we

speak of the "East Sea" today, we think of a kind of mediterranean seabetween Korea, Russia and Japan. Nevertheless, the term "Donghae" did not always have this meaning in Korea. It meant merely that it concerns the sea which lies to the east. A remark is informative in the Haedong Jegukgi 海東諸國記 (Chronicle of the countries of Eastern Asia) of the Korean official 申叔舟 Sin Sukju (1417-1475) from 1471. Sin describes Japan as a country which lies in the "East Sea (Donghae)" (東海之中). However, after the current interpretation of the term "Donghae", as the sea which lies between Korea and Japan, one would have to say that Japan lay to the east of the Donghae. It becomes clear that "Donghae" had not the meaning like the today's Donghae, but a wider one in the early Joseon time. Awareness about the Donghae, as we know it today, was probably introduced through the import and distribution of maps of the world which followed western models. At the example of the map Joseon·Ilbon·Yukuguk-do we had already seen that on this map the Donghae is not shown as a sort of central sea between Japan and Korea, but Japan as an island group situated to the south of Korea. Therefore, according to investigations of Yi Chan (1992, 267) the oldest Korean map which shows the Donghae as a a kind of mediterranean sea and provides with a name which contains "Donghae" is the map Cheonha-do from the 1770s. This map was made on the basis of a map by Aleni and calls the sea "So Donghae (Small East Sea)".

From 1894 educational reforms were carried out in Korea and fields like mathematics, geography, history and gymnastics were taken up in the educational canon of newly originating schools in a modern sense. Though these reforms were carried out by Koreans Japan was taken as an example. In connection with these reforms new textbooks originated, also for geography, which were published by the state, but also through private publishers. The knowledge from the west which had been imported by the Korean neighbors was taught together with contents which should strengthen the national self-confidence of the Koreans.

In view of the seas surrounding Korea it has to be stated that the Yellow Sea was called always "Yellow Sea" (Hwanghae 黃海), the sea between Korea and Japan, nevertheless, had different names. On maps the names "Daehanhae 大韓海" ("Korean sea" literally: "Great Han Sea", named after the empire of Great-Han), "Joseonhae 朝鮮海" ("Korean sea") and "Sea of Japan" are found (Lee Ki-suk 1998, 543). Hyeon Chae 玄采 (1856-1925) has written several geography textbooks in this time and has used all these names for the sea

between Korea and Japan. On a map in the school textbook *Sinchan-chodeung-sohak* 新纂初等小學 (1909) he calls the sea between Korea and Japan on the Korean side "Daehanhae" (Korean sea) and on the Japanese side as "Ilbonhae" (Sea of Japan). However, in the text, Hyeon Chae also uses the name "Donghae" instead of "Ilbonhae" or "Daehanhae". The sea to the west of Korea is called "Hwanghae" (Yellow Sea) but here the Yellow Sea encloses also the sea area lying to the south of Korea.

If one looks at the names of the surrounding seas of Korea in modern maps of the Republic Korea, one can observe that after the end of the Japanese rule the practice to call the Yellow Sea as "Hwanghae" (Yellow Sea) and the sea between Korea and Japan as "Donghae" (East Sea) asserted itself very quickly.

The term "Donghae" has a long tradition in Korea, however, it was not always used with the same meaning. We can notice three steps of a semantic change which are not strictly separable of each other regarding to the time, but nevertheless can overlap.

These three steps are chosen in a way that the term "Donghae", after crossing to another step, will differentiate itself in another way from other surrounding seas. Concretely: Because since a long time the sea to the east of Korea is called "Donghae", I have chosen as a criterion for the demarcation of the three steps the names of the sea areas which lie to the west and to the south of Korea.

**1. Step:** "Donghae" as the Eastern Sea in view of the sino-centric theory of the Four Seas which surround the "continent of the middle" (China). The peninsula Korea was part of this continent. Here "Donghae" stands in contrast to three other seas which surround the central continent. (Therefore in the strict sense, the sea area to the west and to the south of the Korean peninsula is also a part of "Donghae").

In China, Korea and Japan, seas in ancient times did not have proper names. One just used the terms "Sea (海)" or "Great Sea (大海)". Great influence on the naming of the seas had the theory of "Four seas". It displays China as the empire in the middle of the world which is surrounded by four seas. This theory displays the seas after their directions as an East Sea (東海), South Sea (南海), West Sea (西海) and North Sea (北海). This Chinese world view is found in hand drawings till the 17th century. Real and idealistic views interlock here. China

lies in the centre of an almost square continent. An example is the map Sihai Huayi Zongtu (四海華夷總圖 'General map of China and the barbarians of the four seas') from 1532.

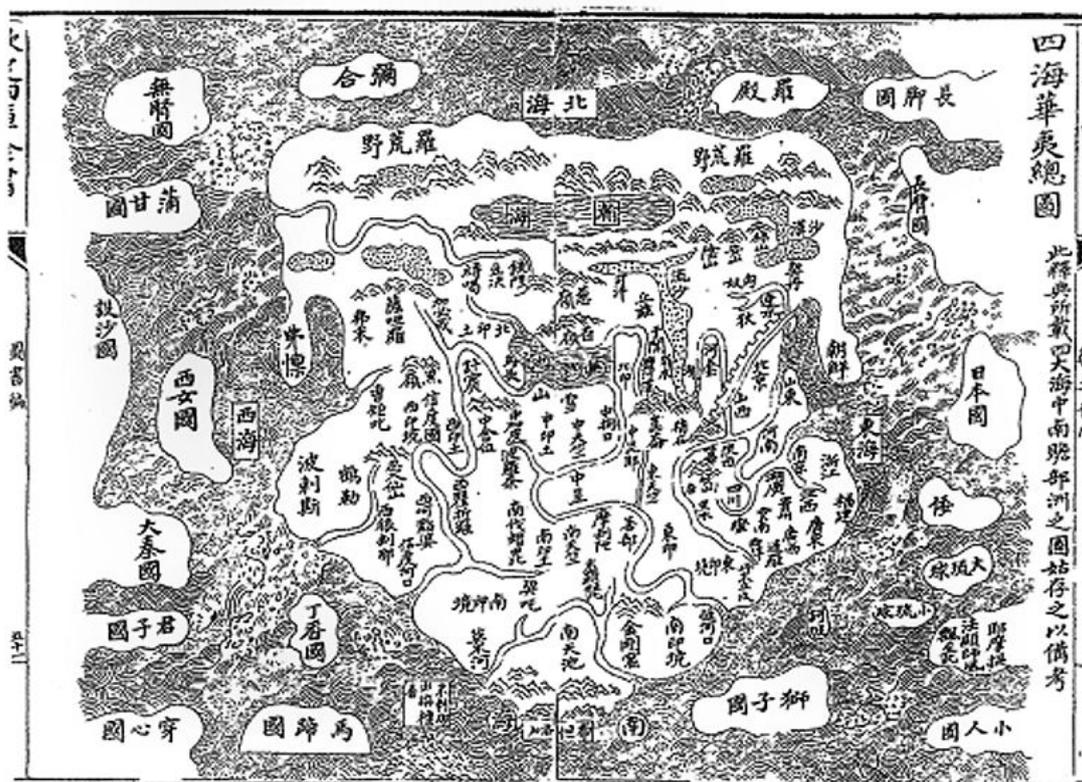
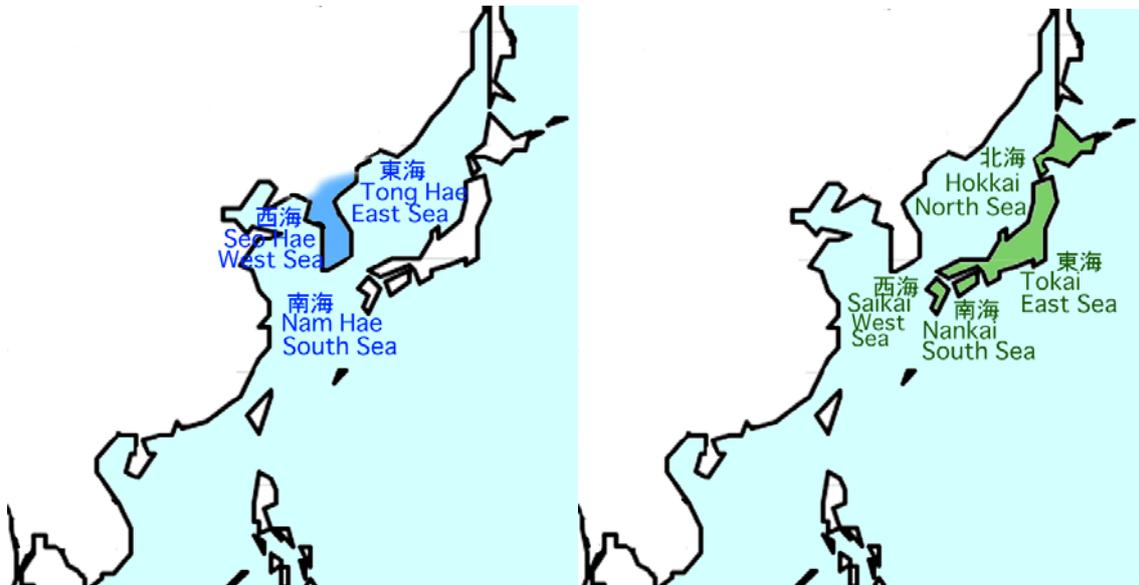


Fig.: Sihai Huayi Zongtu (1532)

In the east of the central continent one can find the peninsula Korea (朝鮮). Japan (日本) is shown as an island within the "East Sea". The term of "Four Seas" became therefore a synonym for the (civilized) world. Thus the remark of Confucius' disciple Zi Xia "within the four seas all people are brothers" is cited with pleasure in many official ceremonies and laudations all over the world.

There is evidence that in the beginning Koreans understood "Donghae" in the same way as the Chinese. Therefore this means that all surrounding seas of Korea are part of "Donghae". On the Gwanggaeto stele (414) the name "Donghae" is mentioned. At another place on this stele it is reported about King Yeongnak the Great (永樂大王), that the fame of his warlike heroic deeds were known up to the borders of the "Four Seas" (威武柳被四海). This means that probably in this case "Donghae" must be seen as part of the theory of "Four Seas" and therefore it means nothing else than the waters in the east of the central continent.

**2. Step:** "Donghae" as the sea to the east of the Korean peninsula as a contrast to the other two seas which surround Korea: The "Seohae" (West Sea) to the west of the Korean peninsula and the "Namhae" (South Sea) to the south of the Korean peninsula.



From: Watanabe/Yaji/Takizawa (2008)

In step 1 all the seas displayed in the above map of Watanabe/Yaji/Takizawa (2008) were part of the "Donghae". Now it is only the eastern part of the sea next to Korea (mentioned here as Tong Hae). However, the "Donghae" in this case has no proper borders. Step 2 is actually an adaptation of Step 1, but it is a smaller scale limited to Korea. This way of designating seas has also been adopted by Japan. The Aguk Chongdo from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is an example for the use of the term "Donghae" in sense of step 2.

**3. Step:** "Donghae" as a proper name for the central sea between Korea and Japan in contrast to other names for seas worldwide.

If one was still able to argue with the steps 1 and 2, that the name "Donghae" is no "proper" sea name, this does not apply for the third step anymore. Here the name "Donghae" emancipates itself and differentiates itself from the "Hwanghae" (Yellow Sea) to the west of the Korean peninsula as well as from the "Dong-jungguk-hae" (東中國海 Eastern China Sea). "Donghae" is used in Korea instead of the worldwide used term "Sea of Japan" and nowadays means in

fact the sea No. 52 in the 3rd Edition of "Limits of Seas and Oceans" of the IHO which also encloses the "South Sea" of Korea from step 2 at least mainly.

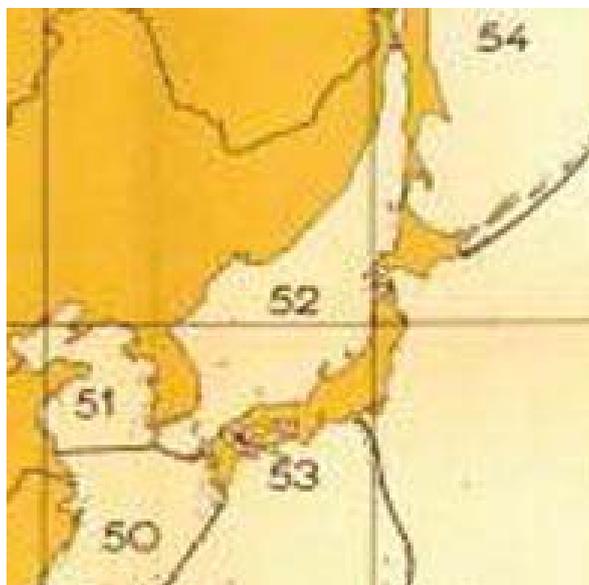


Fig.: "Limits of Oceans and Seas", 3rd Edition (1953)  
(part)

As a former example for the use of the term of "Donghae" in step 3 one can cite the use of this name for the sea between Korea and Japan in the textbook *Sichan-chodeun-sohak* (1909) from Hyeon Chae. Even if in this example the term of "Donghae" is defined different as in the IHO book, the "Donghae" in the east faces the "Hwanghae" in the west.

In summary one can say that the term "Donghae" has a long tradition in Korea, its meaning, admittedly, as it is the case with many terms, has changed in the course of time. This semantic change includes also, but not only changes of the geographic unity which is called "Donghae". If "Donghae" was still a part of a sino-centric world view in the first step, it developed in the second step to a term which designates one of the seas surrounding the respective country like *Koera* of Japan. Then in the third step the term "Donghae" becomes a modern sea name which, while one took over the name "Yellow Sea" for the "West Sea" in Korea, the name of the sea area to the east of Korea was deliberately maintained as "East Sea", although Japanese and other maps preferred the name "Sea of Japan".

### 3. The Semantic Change of the name "Sea of Japan" through Japanese colonialism

Toponyms which are insulting are subject to substitute. Monmonier (in 2006, 12) mentions among others following examples:

old: Chinaman Spring - new: Chinese Spring

old: Polack lake - new: Corner lake

In 1963 all entries on maps that includes the word "Nigger" were substituted by "Negro" through the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, in 1974 "Jap" became in a similar manner "Japanese". At that time "Negro" was still seen as polite wording, later on it became negative too. While one sees the problematic of using toponyms like Chinaman Spring, Polack Lake, Niggerhead Point or Squaw Tit Peak at first sight, someone is only able to recognize a countries problem with a certain name if he knows the historical and geographical circumstances.

As an example from the German-speaking we can talk about the abbreviation "Tschechei" for Czech Republic. The official German name is "Tschechische Republik (Czech Republic)". There are two unofficial abbreviations "Tschechien" and "Tschechei" in German. However, there were protests against the term "Tschechei" in the Czech Republic, although it is also used by many Czechs if they speak German. The name "Tschechei" is associated with the Nazi time (1933-1945). However, fact is that in general the term "Tschechei" has nothing to do with Nazis. The name appears latest since 1918, so clearly before the Nazis take-over of power. However, if one still assumes a connection with the Nazi time, then because the Nazis have used the term "Rest- Tschechei" in their propaganda. The aim of the Nazi dictatorship was the suppression of Czechoslovakia (1938/39). The formerly neutral term "Tschechei" got therefore a negative meaning. Now in addition to its old neutral meaning the name "Tschechei" had also got a second negative meaning: Many German-speaking people did not stop to use the name "Tschechei" in its neutral meaning. However the Czech Republic has protested against the use of the name "Tschechei", and this has led to the fact that many have followed the wish of the neighboring state, so that the name "Tschechei" has disappeared from the German-speaking newspapers and is not used anymore. Instead most people use the term "Tschechien" and who does not like it or has the feeling that he was forced to use this name says just "Tschechische Republik".

What does however mean "Sea of Japan"? When Europeans gave the name to this sea the name "Sea of Japan" had the neutral meaning of a sea which lies beside Japan.

Kim Shin (2004, 151) cites in a paper on the naming of the "East Sea" by the IHO in 1928 that in the first edition of "Limits of Oceans and Seas" among 26 seas the "Sea of Japan" was the only one that was named after one single state. "According to the 'Limits of Oceans and Seas' it what indicated that in giving the name to a sea lying between two states, they follow the principle of giving the name of a specific country. Instead it is preferred to use a name related to a continent, or to use a third name. Alternatively, both names may be recorded together" (Kim, Shin in 2004, 153).

Kim speaks here of a "sea lying between two states", however, the problem is that the Japanese and everybody those who have not recognized Korea as an independent state have seen this agenda completely different. The "Sea of Japan" was not seen as a sea between two states, but as a sea between two parts of Japan, as a sea which lies between the Japanese islands and the Japanese province Chosen (Korea).

As a result of the Japanese colonialism and expansionism the name "Sea of Japan" underwent a semantic change. After 1910 the "Sea of Japan" not only had the meaning "sea which borders Japan". Now the name "Sea of Japan" also meant "sea between two parts of Japan, the inland sea of Japan". In this second meaning the use of the name "Sea of Japan" means in fact that the peninsula to the west of the "Sea of Japan", namely Korea, is part of Japan. By the fact that Japan has transformed the Korean East Sea into an inland sea of Japan the name "Sea of Japan" became a symbol for Japanese imperialism and is therefore intolerable for Koreans.

Therefore if Korea begins to approach against the sole use of the name "Sea of Japan", the reason should not be resentful feelings for Japan. It should not be a matter of wanting to show up Japan on account of its past. Not the fact that the name "Japan" is part of a sea name is the problem. Korea and Japan have stepped up more and more to each other the last years. Japanese youngsters see Korean TV series, Korean youngsters hear J-pop.

However, as a result of progressing globalization and worldwide sensitivity on inappropriate and discriminating names the wish of the Korean people to prevent the sole use of the name "Sea of Japan" becomes bigger and bigger. Just as the use of the word "Tschechi" reminds Czechs of the use of

this word by the Nazis, the same happens to Koreans with the use of the word "Sea of Japan" as it reminds them involuntarily of the "Japanese Inland Sea", wittingly or unwittingly. If one considers the semantic change of the name "Sea of Japan", don't we have to understand, why Koreans associate this name directly with colonialism?

#### **4. Increased sensitivity on Terms – a global trend**

Not only have the meanings of the geographic terms changed in course of the time, also the sensitivity of the people towards them. The name "Donghae" has a long tradition in Korea and is a part of a cultural heritage which shows specific Korean features, but also crosses national borders.

Therefore, the conflict between Korea and Japan concerning an adequate naming of the sea between both nations is so difficult to solve, because one can not expect on the one hand that the Koreans further accept the term "Sea of Japan" as the only valid one, nevertheless, on the other hand, it is unrealistic to expect that Japan will support a change of the existing name actively. Finally, in case of the sea between Korea and Japan, the ones who are responsible for the naming of the seas worldwide are required to find a suitable compromise which takes into consideration the feelings of both nations.

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