Sea Name, Old Maps and Exonym/Endonym

-An onomastic approach

Jung Chul Soh

Abstract

The controversy between Japan and Korea over the names of the Sea of Japan/ East Sea originated from the inconsistencies of names in historical maps. In this presentation, I will address (1)the significance of the names of seas in historical maps and (2)an analysis of the linguistic nature of the names "Donghae", "Nihon Kai", "Sea of Japan" and "East Sea". I argue that the names of seas used in historical maps take on an onomasiologic approach where the concept is prior and the name reflects the signifiers of the concept, and then at a secondary onomastic level, the names turn into individualized proper names. This is the case with "Dong hae" in Korean. At the onomasiological level, it signifies the meaning of "the sea on the east side of the country." However, over 2000 years, "Donghae" has transformed into a proper noun at the onomastic level, and is used simply as a name that does not conjure up the original signification of its meaning in everyday use by speakers. Yet, for other names such as "Nihon Kai" and "Sea of Japan", this is not the case. I present evidence as to why these names are problematic and argue that these names need to be reviewed in terms of an endonymic/exonymic perspective. I conclude with a justification for why "East Sea" is a perfectly valid name for this sea given that the Korean government created this name for foreigners and reflects not an exonym, but an endonym.

Introduction

Last year in this seminar, two Japanese authors and one Korean author presented on early appeared old maps obviously to justify the names East Sea and Sea of Japan. However, examining the maps presented, we found some of the understandings were not sufficient and even misleading. Therefore, we decided to present our re-analysis results in this seminar.

The analysis

Countries sharing a same sea are often in controversy over the sea name. The controversy between Korea and Japan is one of the well known cases. The claim of legitimacy was instigated first by the frequency of the names 'Sea of Japan' and 'East Sea' on old maps. However, impossible to agree on the statistics, the two countries turned to compete for early appearance of their name in old maps.

In the competition, Korea counts names such as 'Oriental Ocean', 'Oriental Sea' and 'Sea of Korea' as legitimate Korean names, while Japan considers all 'Sea of Japan' marked on old maps as evidence of its actual name. There are two strange things to observe. First, both sides do not mention why these names on old maps are important and, second, what these names stand for on the onomastic level. It is to say we have to look at the significance of old maps in order to use the onomastic approach to the sea names.

Main sea names were originated from old maps. Old maps were produced by many European cartographers. However, their works were not pure inventions of cartographers themselves. They collected all kinds of information from various sources and when they obtained new information, they did not hesitate to change their geographical names.

Generally speaking, old maps were the images of distant world and reflected system of values according to the philosophy of the time they were produced. If we look at these maps carefully, we can find out some principles which have been the reasons in the naming of unknown seas: First, cartographers name the seas according to the location of the seas. As they have to sail down south in order to reach the Pacific Ocean, they named it 'Mer du Sud' or 'South Sea'. For Atlantic Ocean, they named 'Mer du Nord' or 'North Sea'. Along with this reasoning, the names 'Oriental Ocean' and 'Oriental Sea' were created.

The word 'Orient' which comes from the Latin word 'Oriri (to rise)' means the rising sun in the east. From this perspective, 'Oriental Sea' is a synonym of 'East Sea'. However, not all 'Oriental Ocean' or 'Oriental Sea' are synonyms of 'East Sea'. We have to get the answer from semiology. A sea name in semiology is a sign composed of a signifier (s·r), a signified (s·d) and a referent (re). A signifier is simply the phonetic or graphic representation of the name. A signified is the content or meaning of the sign and a referent is the thing indicated.

$$\begin{array}{c} s{\cdot}r \\ \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ s{\cdot}d \; \text{—} \; re \end{array}$$
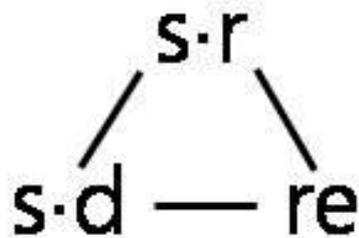
Explained in this way, 'Oriental Ocean' or 'Oriental Sea' is a synonym of 'East Sea' only when they indicate 'East Sea' with some proper contents and meaning. However, in the context of 16th century maps or earlier ones, 'Oriental Ocean' or 'Oriental Sea' meant the ocean or sea over India. Therefore, they were not synonyms of 'East Sea'.

The content and indication of 'Oriental Sea' was changed in 1700 by G. De L'Isle. G. De L'Isle had personal contacts with missionaries and those who served in Peking. G. De L'Isle reserved 'Oriental Sea' only to 'East Sea'. He observed that the denomination of 'Sea of Korea' had been dominant since 1660, so he put a comment in his map of 1705 that 'Oriental Sea' and 'Sea of Korea' indicate the same sea. De L'Isle preserved his denomination hereafter and was followed by a number of European cartographers. N. De Fer, a prolific cartographer and well-known merchant of maps was clearer about the name. On his map of East Asia in 1705, he put a comment on 'East Sea' that "The Sea is unknown to Europeans, but the Tartars are calling it 'Oriental Sea'". At that time, 'Oriental' designated 'East'.

Cartographers take into consideration of the country nearby also. Good examples are 'Indian Ocean', 'Gulf of Mexico', 'British Channel ('La Manche' in French) and 'Sea of Korea' and so forth. Indian Ocean is shared by several countries. However, India is such a large country that it represents the region without any objection. As for 'Gulf of Mexico', the southern part of American country has been Mexican territory to make it quite legitimate to have such a name. 'Sea of Korea', the major name for the sea between Japan and Korea in the 18th century, seems to have originated from the shape of Korea which is straight down from north to south. There is another possibility; as we observe from the examples of writing, what lies on the right side is influenced by what lies on the left for Europeans. Meanwhile, Japan is composed of islands laying from north-east to south-west. Since 'Sea of Korea' is on the right side of Korea, it is natural and reasonable to have such name. 'Sea of Japan' needs to be analyzed through onomasiology and onomastics.

As a general rule, when a noun is combined with an adjective and becomes a proper noun, a noun moves from the onomasiologic level to onomastic level. During this change, the adjective becomes one linguistic unit with the noun and the adjective loses its modifying function on onomastic basis. For example, suppose we say 'rising star'. On onomasiologic level, it is any star which is rising. However, if it goes through onomastic level to represent someone, it becomes a proper noun to indicate a person whose nickname is 'Rising Star'.

A complement of a noun functions as an adjective. But when the complement is formed with a pronoun, the analysis is not the same. For example, in 'Sea of Korea', there are two autonomous elements 'Sea' and 'Korea'. 'Korea is already a proper noun; therefore it is to say that Korea is already on anonomastic level. When the whole unit becomes a proper noun on an onomastic level, there is no change for the proper noun as a complement and it keeps its original meaning So semantically, 'Sea of Japan' means 'Sea of Japan of Japan', it is to say 'Sea of Japan' owned by Japan, which is unacceptable for South Korea, North Korea, China and Russia. These analyses affect the study of exonym/endonym. Endonym is defined as 'the name of a geographical feature in official or well established language in that area' and exonym as 'the name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is widely spoken.'

As P. Jordan says, "the new UNGEGN definitions of endonym and exonym do not provide any definitive answer. They have been formulated in a way that makes them open for various interpretations on purpose." (P. Jordan, the 16th International Seminar on Sea Names, 2010, The Society for East Sea) On the sea name between Korea and Japan, endonym/exonym are concerned with the terms 'East Sea', 'Tonghae (東海)', 'Sea of Japan' and '日本海'. P. Jordan views, "The Korean and Japanese names, respectively, have endonym status in the waters under the jurisdiction of their countries. Outside, also in international waters, they assume the status of exonym. (P. Jordan, The 16[th]International Seminar on Sea Names, 2010, The Society for East Sea')

As an overall view, I agree with Woodman who says that one name in one language cannot simultaneously be an endonym and an exonym. And on other third toponymic term seems to be not necessary to designate sea names. But when he claims that Korean name Donghae (Tonghae) is an endonym and, vice versa, the Japanese name 'Nihon Kai' has an endonym status, I would like to make another analysis.

As it is well known, Matteo Ricci was the first to name the sea between Korea and Japan as '日本海'in 1602. The map was made in China in Chinese. Since '日本海'was written in Chinese, it cannot be an endonym but an exonym in Japan. Chinese character was adopted in Japan and an old map in Japan at the end of 1700 named the same sea as '日本海'. But as it was already an exonym, therefore it could not be an endonym though it is written in Japanese 'Nihon Kai'. As for 'Sea of Japan', Japanese scholars acknowledged that it is

foreign countries who used first the name 'Sea of Japan'. This seems to legitimate the general use of its name. Therefore, without any objection, 'Sea of Japan' is an exonym.

The significance of 'Donghae' ('Tonghae') and 'East Sea' must be analyzed. As 'Donghae' was used for over 2000 years to denominate the sea in question, there is no doubt that it is an endonym. For 'East Sea', a number of specialists in geographical name say that it is the translation of 'Donghae' in English, it is an exonym. Communication theory of Saussure and Greimas suggest another analysis. All linguistic messages are produced by addresser for addressee. When an addressee becomes an addresser, the addressee sends a response to the addresser. A communication is realized when the message reaches its destination. A message is addressed from the addresser to the addressee. And another message can be addressed from addressee to addresser.
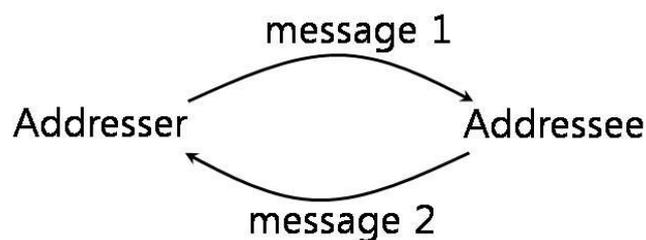
So are all sea names, including 'Donghae' and 'East Sea'. As 'Donghae' was created as a name in Korean by Korean addressers for Korean addressees. Another way, it is from inside to inside, the name 'East Sea' was created by Korean government for foreigners even though English is not Korean language. Briefly speaking, the message is from inside to outside. The language itself is not an important factor here. We can summarize different names of the sea:

1) 동해: From inside to inside

2) East Sea: From inside to outside

3) 日本海: From outside to inside

4) Sea of Japan: From outside to outside

5) Nihon Kai: From outside to inside

The analysis shows that 1) and 2) are endonym while 3), 4) and 5) are exonym.

Conclusion

Whether the name is in local, aboriginal or in foreign language is not a decisive factor to judge exonym/endonym. The most important thing is to determine whether the name was originally created inside or outside. It is what we should observe in the analysis of the names Donghae, East Sea, Nihon Kai and Sea of Japan, etc.

Jong-Chul SOH
Professor Emeritus of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
Inwhan KIM
Professor Emeritus of Ewha Womans University