

## Study on the geographical name "Japan Sea"

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### Preface

Teikyo University research group on geographical names conducted a research (2006-2009) on the evolution of sea names in the East Asian region. The objective of the study was to revisit the existing theories, and to gather map images on the abovementioned topic. We have done intensive research in archives and libraries, mainly in Holland, England, Portugal, and Russia. We made an attempt to identify all the historical maps that cover the East Asian region in the collection of each library, and examined the morphology and the names of seas on each map. The results from this research activity were published in the form of a book (Tanabe et al, 2010). Any views expressed in this paper are the authors' own, and do not represent the views of any organisation.

### Introduction

How did the names of seas evolved in the East Asian region? In ancient and medieval times, in East Asia, seas were only given names by coastal features, such as bays and straits. Beyond that, it was just "the sea", or the "big sea". Based on Sinocentric viewpoint, names emerged such as "East Sea" "South Sea" "West Sea" and "North Sea". They do not indicate a specific area, they are just distinction of seas according to the direction. Chinese "Tung Hai", Korean "Tonghae", Japanese "Tokai" all mean "East Sea", but they indicated a different stretch of water. "South Sea" in China pointed to South China Sea, from Korea it was the Korean Strait, and from Japan it was the Pacific Ocean off the south coast of western Japan. These names are still used domestically in these countries today.

With the age of Exploration and the European advancement to the world, the custom of limiting the seas and giving them each a name has started in East Asia. We have observed the process of the naming of large seas in East Asian region and its acceptance, through investigating European old maps. In this paper, we will focus on seas surrounding Japan, and describe in chronological order.

### Names of Seas when the shape of Japan was unknown

The first map in the history with the name "Sea of Japan", which we encountered in our investigation, is one of the East Asia maps created by Diogo Homem, dated 1568 (original map in the collection of Dresden royal library). Japan is shown as an Archipelago dangling from the coast of the Asian Continent. Although the shapes are heavily distorted, it appears that "*Mare de Japā*" is given to the Pacific Ocean side of Japan, and there is no name for the side which is now known as "Sea of Japan". There is also mention of "*Leucoru Mare*". Ryukyu is the current Okinawa and it was known to the Europeans as a maritime nation, even before Japan.

In the map *Indiae Orientalis, Insularum que Adiacentium Typus* (East India and adjacent islands), in the atlas "*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*" by A. Ortelius (ca 1570), the Japanese islands lie in between China and North America. The Korean peninsula does not exist. The sea between China and Japan is named *Mare Cin* (China Sea), and the Pacific is named *Oceanus Orientalijs* (Oriental Ocean). As a variation of this pattern of naming, there are some maps that use the name "*Mer de Mangi*" in place of *Mare Cin*. In some other maps, Japan was a set of islands floating amidst the Pacific Ocean (which had many different names).

Mateo Ricci's World map of 1602 resembles the actual morphology of landforms remarkably well for a map of this time. Although many errors can be seen regarding place names within the Japanese islands, the bend of Honshu island is recognised, Ezo is depicted as an island, and Korea is correctly projected as a peninsula (while many maps depicted Korea wrongly as an Island). The resulting marginal sea between the continent and the Japanese islands was named "日本海" (Japan Sea). A copy of this map was delivered to the Vatican, but as the place names were all written in Kanji (Chinese characters), it made little influence in the western world.

Manuel Godinho de Eredia created a set of maps of this area around 1615, the shape in his maps resembles that of Ricci. In his map of Asia, the name "*Mar Iapan*" was given to the sea along the Japanese coast of the Pacific Ocean. Consequently, the sea between the Japanese Islands, Korean Peninsula, and the Asian Continent was named "*Mar Coria*". This is the first appearance of "Korea Sea" in our investigation. However, in his map of Japan, what was "*Mar Coria*" on his Asia map is named "*Mar de Syapon*". This is the first appearance of "Japan Sea" in western language in the marginal sea.

It appears that the concept of giving only one name to one closed area of sea was not firmly established in 16-17C Europe, as seen on R. Dudley's map of Japan, Ezo, and Korea (*Carta Particolare della Grande Isola de Giappone e di Iezo con il Regno di Corai et altre Isole in torno*, 1661), which placed three different names in the marginal sea between Japan and the continent, and "Japan Sea" occurs on four different seas. Names were given liberally with respect to local namings and nearby land names.

Although expeditioners such as Maarten Gerritz de Vries explored this area (1643), at that time, none of them went in to the Japan Sea, and the morphology of the sea remained unclear to the western world until the end of 18C, especially the topology of its northern part. During this period, "Korea Sea" was often used, but names such as "Japan Sea", "China Sea", and "Oriental Ocean" occurred frequently as well. Japan Sea remained with its shape unclear, and with no fixed name for 200 years.

#### Examples of maps in this period

\* Nicoleii Witsen's map of Asia (1687): For the northern islands of Japan, the discovery of de Vries is reflected, as can be seen from the combined island of Ezo, Sakhalin and Kunashir (Vries was unable to find la Perouse Strait which separates Hokkaido from Sakhalin), and the presence of Iturup and Urup (which were named then by Vries as Staten Island, and Compagnies Landt respectively. These two islands are separated by de Vries Strait). However, the side of Japan Sea is unknown and Witsen let it just fade out. As regards to the name of seas, the Pacific side is named "*Mare Meridion. Iaponiae*" (south sea of Japan), further off-shore it is named "*Oceanus Chinensis*" (Chinese Ocean). Between the continent and Japan, it is "*Mare Septent. Iaponiae*" (north sea of Japan). This appears to have respected the local naming in Japan where the Pacific is "south sea", and sea of Japan is "north sea".

\* V.M. Coronelli's map of Japanese Islands and the Korean Peninsula (1692): Ezo is described as "*Tartaria de Yupi*". Yupi is the phonetic of Chinese 魚皮 (fish skin). The Jesuits named the tribes along the Ussuri River and the lower Amur River as such, as river fishes are Yupi's main diet and they made clothing out of fish skin. Along the coast of the Korean peninsula, it is inscribed "*Mare della China*". In Coronelli's map of China, "*Mare della China*" spans the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Japan Sea. For him, Japan Sea was not a closed independent sea, but rather a fringe of Pacific Ocean along the coast of China. Along the south coast of Japan we can find the inscription "*Mare del Giappone*". The fact that the inscription "*Oceano Orientale*" is sandwiching the Japanese Islands indicates that he considered all these seas as part of what is now Pacific Ocean.

\* J.B. Homann's map of Asia (ca 1720): Due to the Nerchinsk Treaty (1689), Russia was denied expansion to the Amur River region. Therefore since 1697, they started from Anadyr in the North to explore southwards along the west coast of Kamtchatka. Probably this map reflects the findings by the Russians. The shape of Kamtchatka is relatively accurate, but its longitude and direction are skewed. Hence the map is not compatible with de Vries' findings. Compagnie Land (Urup) and Staten Island (Iturup) is located east of the rest of the Kurils, separated by Canal de Pieck (Kunashir strait). Ezo is combined with Kamtchatka ("*Kamtzadzlia sinis ledso*"), although there are many unidentified small islands between Matsumae and the Peninsula. Sakhalin, including the Bay of Aniva and Cape Terpenya has disappeared. As a result, there is nothing to separate the Sea of Okhotsk from Japan Sea. This stretch of sea is named "*Mare Iaponicum Occidentale*" (the West Sea of Japan) in the south part, and the north part has a Latin based name "*Mare Meridionale*" (South Sea) as well as the Russian based "*Lamskoe vel Penschinskoe More*". Along the southeast coast of Japan on the Pacific Ocean, it is inscribed "*Mare Iaponicum*".

*Oriente*" (East Sea of Japan), East China Sea and South China Sea together are "*Oceanus Chinensis*". "*Mar di India*" extends into South China Sea, and "*Oceanus Orientalis*" also spans from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

Scheuchzer's map of Japan (1727), Tirion's map of Asia (1733), and China (1740), have similar shapes as this Homann's map. The marginal sea in question is named "*Golf van Kamtschatka*" on the first map, "*Zee van Kamtschatka*" on the second, and in the last map, there are three names; "*Mer Septentrionale du Japon*" to the very south, "*Mer de Coree*" just north of this, and "*Mer de Kamtschatka*" further north.

### **The identification of the morphology of Japan, and the standardisation of its name**

La Perouse made an expedition to north Japan Sea in 1787. With this expedition, the topology of Japan Sea was completed with its five straits, Tartary, la Perouse, Tsugaru, Kanmon, and Korea. For the map in his book describing the expedition, the editor chose to use "*Mer du Japon*". In 1805, Adam Johann von Krusenstern explored the northern part of Japan Sea. In his voyage logbook which was published in 1809-13, he stated "*People have also called this sea the Korean: however, the Korean coast consists a minor part of the coast of the sea in question. Hence it would probably be more correct to call this the Japan*" (Kruzenstern 1812, vol.3 p.255, translation by the authors)

Following the results of these two expeditions, "Japan Sea" became accepted widely in the western world. Influential cartographers such as Arrowsmith and Tallis used "Sea of Japan" in their maps. As a result, "Sea of Japan" was more or less fixed by the 1820s, and after 1840s almost all maps produced in the western countries indicate it as "Japan Sea" in respective languages.

As seen here, names of large seas were given by the Europeans, in the process of early globalisation. "Sea of Japan" was fixed in the western world in the first half of 19C. However, Japan was under the isolationist ("*Sakoku*") policy, and the name was introduced with a great delay. Almost until the end of the Shogunate rule, the government in Japan used "日本海" (Japan Sea) for Pacific Ocean, and "朝鮮海 (Korea Sea) for the marginal sea. This can be seen on Takahashi's map (1810). Japan Sea became "日本海" for the first time on Yamaji's map in 1855. It shows how slow Japan was, in absorbing western ideas. This change has nothing to do with the rise of Japanese Imperialism, which happened much later than that.

Among the public, 日本海 was not accepted until the 1890s, and even in 20C the name 北海 (*Hokkai*), meaning "north sea" was used to indicate Japan Sea. Also the example of East China Sea (still domestically called 東海 - *Dong Hai* meaning "east sea") also shows that the strength of the influence of these directional sea names based on the East Asian traditional self-centric viewpoint. It took almost 100 years for the Japanese society to abandon "*Hokkai*".

Nevertheless, "North Sea" for Japan is not "North Sea" for Korea, and "East Sea" for China is not "East Sea" for Japan. Regarding the global standardisation of place names, there are often conflicts between globalisation and local customs. In the case of high seas, while it is totally acceptable to use the traditional self-centred name in local languages, it cannot be translated directly into another language as a globalised standard name, as it would cause confusion and inconvenience. Hence it seems appropriate in this case, to accept the globalised name given by the Europeans.

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