

**Current status of the naming issue**  
***East Sea/Sea of Japan***

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**Eighteen Years of the *East Sea* Campaign in the International Society**

It was in the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in New York, 1992, that the Korean government officially raised the naming issue of the sea between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago for the first time in an international forum. In the first conference on geographical names after the two Koreas, South and North, joined the group of the United Nations in 1991, the Korean delegates made an official statement that there was a sea called *East Sea* in the world which had been deeply involved in the life of Koreans.

Since this important momentum, the Korean delegates, both from the government and the academic sides, have made arduous efforts to disseminate the sea name *East Sea* to the world. This campaign was destined not only to the UN meetings, but also to the forum of hydrographers, International Hydrographic Organization, which has been in charge of publishing the book of world sea names and limits, national authorities of geographical names in each country, and map-makers of the world.

This eighteen-year campaign of promoting the name *East Sea* can be evaluated to have witnessed outstanding accomplishments. Most importantly, international organizations in charge of place names, or more specifically, sea names, now perceive the seriousness of this naming issue and search for a visible change. UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), when first faced with this issue, took the position that it would be out of the scope of its discussions because it would be about the sea mostly composed of international waters. But

now it "encourages the countries concerned to continue their efforts to find a solution acceptable to all of them, taking into account relevant resolutions<sup>1)</sup>."

IHO also realizes that the sea currently listed as *Japan Sea* still remains unresolved. In 2002, it circulated a draft of the fourth edition of S-23, *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, with the sea area left blank pages with no title, no description, and no map. In the 17th Conference of IHO, 2007, a proposal was made "to publish S-23 in two volumes, the first of which would cover all the agreed issues while referring to the second volume, which would not be published, for the matters which remained unresolved." IHO is now operating a working group to publish a revised version of S-23. The name of the sea area between Korea and Japan belongs to the main issues to be resolved in this working group.

Along with these transitions of international organizations, major map-makers of the world, which exert their influences over the international society, have also changed their policies. In the past, they stuck to the policy of using single name *Sea of Japan*, but now adopt *East Sea* simultaneously. According to a series of surveys, the rate of using the name *East Sea* together with *Sea of Japan* has increased sharply, from 2.8% (2000), 10.5% (2005), 23.8% (2007) to 28.1% (2009)<sup>2)</sup>.

## **Tracks of Debates**

We can trace some tracks of arguments and counter-arguments from the Japanese and Korean sides. They can be categorized into the following three tracks.

The first debates are focusing on historical facts, which can be called as historical legitimacy debates. The Japanese side argues that *Sea of Japan* has such a long history to appear in 1602 in an old map by Mateo Ricci. In the 17th to 18th centuries, the sea was called with various names, but in the late 18th to early 19th centuries, the name *Sea of Japan* began to be established by European explorers.

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1) Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) Session Report(2007), paragraph 191.

2) The surveys of 2000 and 2005 were conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, while those of 2007 and 2009 were carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Korean government.

In response to this argument, the Korean party emphasizes that various names were used in foreign old maps, but none of them was established. A series of surveys of old maps, produced by foreign map-makers since the 16th century, commonly show that such names as *Sea of Korea*, *East Sea*, *Eastern Sea* and *Oriental Sea* were more frequently used until the early 19th century, while the frequency of using *Sea of Japan* increased since the 1850s. The increase of using *Sea of Japan*, however, does not mean that it became an established name. Various names were still used and a considerable number of maps did not have determined names. The name *East Sea* has been used for more than 2000 years and it has appeared in Korean old maps since 1531. Moreover, even Japan officially used the name *Sea of Joseon* (or *Chosun*), where *Joseon* is the name of dynasty in Korea which existed from the late 14th to the early 20th century.

The Korean side argues that the increase of using *Sea of Japan* in the late 1850s results from the Japanese expansionism and colonial rule. But Japan provides supporting materials which show that the name *Sea of Japan* was already prevalent in the early 19th century, and insists that Japan was unable to exercise any influence to establish the name *Sea of Japan* because of the isolationist policy at that time.

The second debates are made in respect to the international organizations' use of the name concerned. Japan insists that *Sea of Japan* has been recognized as the official name by international organizations and governments of major countries. The argument is extended that "the United Nations recognized *Sea of Japan* as the standard geographical term, and UN policy states that the standard geographical term be used in official UN publications<sup>3)</sup>," Japan also points out the fact that governments of major countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and China, officially use the name *Sea of Japan*.

Korea, in response, emphasizes that *Sea of Japan* is not an authorized name, and that international organizations including UN and IHO recognize the problem of its single use and recommend that Korea and Japan reach an agreement on a common name. Citing the UN Secretariat's letter, Korea also emphasizes that it is just UN's internal practice to use the most frequently used name, and this practice does not support for a specific name. In addition, many major

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3) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2009, *The One and Only Name Familiar to the International Community Sea of Japan*, p.4.

map-makers of the world have begun to use East Sea simultaneously with *Sea of Japan*.

Thirdly, arguments are exchanged surrounding the IHO Technical Resolution A4.2.6 and UNCSGN Resolution III/20. Adopted in 1974 and 1977, respectively, these resolutions recommend that countries sharing a given geographical feature under different names should endeavor to reach agreement on a single name, and that when failing to agree, the name used by each of the countries should be accepted. The Korean side insists that these resolutions be applied to the sea between Korea and Japan, for which both names should be used when failing to agree on a common name.

Japan, in response, argues that these resolutions presume that the geographical feature concerned is under the sovereignty of two or more countries, such as in cases of bay or strait, and do not apply in this case because the sea area in question is a part of the high seas. Korea further argues that regardless of its legal status, the sea area is 'a given geographical feature' as defined in the IHO and UN Resolutions. Falling within the definition of 'semi-enclosed sea' as stated by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it is argued, it is a 'geographical feature' shared by 'two or more countries,' rather than an ocean such as the Atlantic or the Pacific.

Besides these three debates, Japan has argued that the most frequently used method of naming sea areas separated from an ocean is to use the name of a major archipelagic arc or a peninsula that separates the sea area in question from the ocean, and that the name *Sea of Japan* conforms to this principle. It seems likely, however, Japan does not stick to this argument any more<sup>4</sup>). There are diverse cases of naming seas, using a direction from a continent or a country, naming after an adjacent geographical feature, after an explorer or a discoverer, and expressing characteristics of the sea (Choo, 2007).

### **Possible Resolutions under the IHO's S-23, *Limits of Oceans and Seas***

Currently, a working group is being operated to produce a revised version of S-23, *Limits of Oceans and Seas*. With two face-to-face meetings, June 2009 and

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4) In the most recent publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in 2009, this argument disappeared.

July 2010, and several e-mail correspondences, discussions and proposals have been made for the name of the sea area between Korea and Japan.

Two conspicuous proposals should be noted. The first one, made by France, is to list all the local names, say, endonyms, together with English and French exonyms. As the names contained in the S-23 list are simply provided for information, it is proposed, this list can be supplemented with local names in local script (possibly romanized) in a table with multiple entries. For the case of the sea between Korea and Japan, no name but a single reference, e.g. "See section 52," is listed in the S-23 sheets covering this area, and in section 52 a table with entries of all the names, e.g. Table 1, is provided.

**Table 1. A table of multiple entries, as proposal by France**

Endonym KR/KP		Endonym RU		Endonym JP		Exonym <sup>2</sup> en	Exonym <sup>1</sup> fr	Exonym es
동해	Donghae	Япо́нское мо́ре	Япо́нское мо́ре	日本海	--	East Sea	Mer de l'Est	tbd
						Sea of Japan <sup>3</sup>	Mer du Japon	tbd

The other proposal, made by Australia with the same spirit of providing information to support navigational safety, is that when consensus cannot be reached on the name of a sea or ocean area, then the alternative positions are to be also included in S-23. Two methods are suggested; a) the fact that there is a reservation by other member States be included on the main page referring to the sea or ocean area, and details of the reservation, such as alternative names, be clearly detailed in an Annex, and b) the fact that there is a reservation by other member States be included on the first page referring to the sea or ocean area, and a second page with alternative names for the same sea or ocean area be inserted immediately following the first.

I evaluate these two proposals are worth being given specific notes. Although the methods adopted are different, one using a table with multiple entries and the other occupying multiple pages, the idea is the same; to accept multiple names used by countries concerned. It signifies much in that these proposals basically admit the inappropriateness of using one single name for controversial naming cases, and that multiple names are to be acknowledged.

One crucial thing would be to maintain the same treatment of the names. Each

name should be considered with the same status, not one being major while the other being subordinate. In this perspective, the second method of the Australian proposal would be preferred. A more balanced way could be to insert two (or more) maps with respective names on the same page.

### **Three More Possibilities**

Besides the practical solutions under the IHO framework which focus on how to publish the book of S-23, three more possible resolutions for the naming issue *East Sea/Sea of Japan* have been proposed and discussed.

#### **1) Agreeing on a New Name**

This method is endorsed by the IHO Technical Resolution A4.2.6 and UNCSCN Resolution III/20, saying that countries sharing a given geographical feature under different names should endeavor to reach agreement on fixing a single name. For the sea between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, a few new names have been suggested, such as *Blue Sea*, *Sea of Peace*, *Far East Sea*, and *Sea of Whales*.

It seems not to be easy, however, to adopt a third name, because it would ignore the historical tradition of current names and, therefore, it would be hard to draw consensus from each party concerned. There are some cases of using new names, such as *The Gulf* for *Persian Gulf/Arabian Gulf* and *Der Kanal* for *English Channel/La Manche*. But these are all created by map-makers and journalists with specific motivations, not standardized internationally.

#### **2) Using Dual Names or Dual Endonyms**

Adopting dual names for one feature is also acknowledged by the IHO and UN Resolutions mentioned above. In conformity to this resolution, the single name *English Channel* has become to be accompanied by *La Manche* in the draft of IHO's S-23, *Dover Strait* by *Pas de Calais* and *Bay of Biscay* by *Golfe de Gascogne*.

In respect to dual naming, Japan argues that the resolutions do not apply to the case of the sea between Korea and Japan, and that using two names would cause confusion to the navigators of the sea area. Korea, on the contrary, points

out that in the situation where about 300,000 Korean ships sailing the sea area each year use the name *East Sea* to describe it, the sole use of the name *Sea of Japan* would cause confusion.

A specific method of dual naming will be using dual endonyms, *Donghae* and *Nihonkai* (or *Nipponkai*) rather than *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*. Initiated by the French experts at the IHO Working Group on the Revision of S-23, this method seems to have two advantages. One is that these names are faithful to the principle of using endonyms which are the names in the language occurring in this area, Korean and Japanese. The other advantage is that these names could hide the literal meanings of each name which might cause unacceptable feelings when using *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*. I evaluate that it could be a good starting point to discuss the ways of resolving controversies surrounding this sea name.

### **3) Separating Sea Areas and Naming Each of Them**

Another possible way of resolving controversies would be to separate waters into a few segments and give separate names to each segment (Choo, 2009; Choo, 2010). In case of the sea between Korea and Japan, if we could divide it into three segments according to each nation's territorial waters, we could give separate names; *East Sea* to the Korean territorial waters, *Sea of Japan* to the Japanese territorial waters, and either *East Sea* or *Sea of Japan*, a new name, or both names to the international waters. If the boundary of exclusive economic zone (EEZ) can be accepted as a jurisdictional boundary, then more simply *East Sea* for the Korean EEZ and *Sea of Japan* for the Japanese EEZ may be used.

This way of solution could reduce an unnecessary unhappy response from one of the neighboring countries. Some newspaper articles name the Korean territorial water as 'Sea of Japan,' which could make Korean readers inconvenient. But this way of separating waters and giving separate names cannot be accommodated in small-scale maps. Moreover, there is a consistent view that maritime features should be perceived and named as a whole, not be separated (Woodman, 2009, Jordan, 2009), even though different views exist on the status of the name, endonym, exonym or any third terminology (Choo, 2009). This view objects to adopting territorial boundary or sovereignty limit in naming geographical features.

## Looking Ahead

Maritime names are more prone to controversies between countries. This would be because maritime features are in their own nature very complicated; being composed of territorial waters and international waters, sometimes being transboundary or beyond a single sovereignty, causing different views on whether they could be separated or not. Maritime names using country names could aggravate this situation.

But the controversies surrounding maritime names should be resolved in any way. In order to achieve this goal, it is expected that every party concerned participates in the multilateral or bilateral talks with open mind to listen carefully to every argument and counter-argument. In some time after a series of debates, it is also expected, a decisive action should be taken. I hope a visible resolution could be reached through the activities of the IHO Working Group on the Revision of S-23.

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