

**Historical and Global Aspects of Geographical Names:
The Case of the *East Sea***

**16th ISOSN
August 20, 2010
Crowne Plaza Den Haag-Promenade
The Netherlands**

**Co-organized by
The Society for East Sea
Northeast Asian History Foundation**

Keynote Speech

Jin-Hyun Kim

Advisor, The Society for East Sea

Chairman, World Peace Forum

Chairman, Committee for the Establishment of the National Museum of
Korean Contemporary History

16th ISOSN

August 20, 2010

Crowne Plaza Den Haag-Promenade

The Netherlands

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to speak here today on the issue of the naming dispute over the East Sea.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the efforts that the Society for East Sea has been making since Korea became a member of the United Nations in 1991.

Since its official founding in 1994, the Society for East Sea has attended various international conferences on geographical naming to appeal to the international society to set right the injustice of Japan one-sidedly renaming the East Sea as the 'Sea of Japan' during its colonial rule of Korea. The Society had also proposed that the two names, 'East Sea' and 'Sea of Japan,' be used simultaneously until a final agreement on the naming is concluded. The society appealed its case in four UNCSGN conferences, in 1995, 1998, 2002, and most recently in New York this August. It has also attended

eight UNGEGN conferences as well as the two IHO conferences to advocate the cause.

During this course of time, we had also visited the U.S. Board on Geographical Names twice to speak for the legitimacy of the name 'East Sea' and to explain how through various efforts from the Korean side and international cooperation, we were able to convince various mapmakers, textbooks and media to use the name 'East Sea' or 'East Sea/Sea of Japan' instead of 'Sea of Japan' alone. Also, through our visits, we could receive valuable advice from related expert groups such as the National Geographic in Washington. The ISOSN has been held 15 times until now with the most recent seminar held in Sydney, Australia. So far, some 245 scholars from 26 countries have attended the ISOSN and some 198 papers have been presented through the seminar. We are now under selecting and editing those papers for the publication.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Kim Jin Hyun. It has been Kim Jin Hyun since my birth in 1936. However, from the time I entered primary school in 1942 to August 15, 1945, when Korea gained independence from the Japanese colonial rule thanks to Alliances victory in the Pacific War(which you Hollander suffered in Netherlands), I had been called Kane Shiro Jin Ken. During that time, my proper Korean name had been taken completely away from me and I was forced to use a Japanese name. We were not only forbidden to use our own names but also forbidden to use the Korean language or alphabet at all. We were only allowed to speak and write the Japanese language. Every time I used the name Kim Jin Hyun or any Korean language in school, I was given penalty points. Students with accumulated penalty points were given bad grades and not allowed to advance to the

next grade.

Once upon a time, this world had known colonialism and imperialism. Once, Western European countries had taken over colonies in Africa and Asia. As you Netherlands taken Indonesia. Yet, no colonial ruler had tried to steal the names, language or alphabet from their colonial subjects as relentlessly as the Japanese did to the Koreans.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are many ways to express one's values. Values can be expressed in forms of verbs or adjectives. Or they could even been shown through images. Yet above all, the most inherent form of expressing values in any country or any culture is the noun. A name, which is a noun that expresses an identity, is sometimes worth giving up your life for. In fact, many Koreans had laid down their lives in refusal to change their names to Japanese names during the colonial rule. It is abominable to note that the Japanese colonial government in Korea had only allowed a handful of the highest rank Korean bureaucrats and aristocrats who sympathized with it to use their Korean names. The common people, however, could not go to school, do business or register in court using their Korean names.

I personally do not think that 'East Sea' is the best name in the geographical or technical sense to cover this particular body of water. However, I believe that, in the least, the name for this body of water should not go against the values and cultures of this region nor the future peace and friendship among the neighboring countries. The 'Sea of Japan' is a name that the Japanese used during the colonial period to replace the name 'East Sea' without any prior consultation with Koreans. Even now, there are extremists in the Japanese government who refuse to acknowledge the unchallengeable values of humanity such as freedom, diversity, human

rights and democracy. An indication of this is the resolution adopted on July 30th, 2007 by the U.S. House of Representatives (HR121) condemning Japan's sex slavery ('Comfort Women') during World War II (and the Japanese government's refusal still to accept responsibility for this heinous crime.)

I do not harbor hostile feelings against Japan. Korea and Japan are the only two non-Western countries that succeeded in modernizing after the 19th century. Korea is also unique because out of the 140 non-Western and Third World countries to gain independence after WWII, it is the only one that completely achieved the modern requirements of political democracy, diversity of faith and ideologies, economic growth, and social openness. Korea, Japan, Netherlands and all the civilized world should join efforts in their shared responsibility of promoting peace and prosperity for humanity by encouraging the universal values of freedom, democracy, free markets, welfare, openness, and diversity.

I strongly believe that the great majority of the Japanese people share these common values and are willing to cooperate in promoting universal values. However, it will not do to go the old way. As long as the Japanese leadership remain soaked in a closed ultra extreme nationalism, this is not possible. We cannot pursue a common value for our future generations when the Prime Minister continues to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, when the Foreign Minister requests the Emperor to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, when he claims that it is Japan's constitutional right to build a 'defensive' nuclear armament, when the ruling party claim that wartime sex slavery which was coerced by the police and military were voluntary acts by women looking to earn money. As long as these extremists make up Japan's mainstream political powers, we cannot. The tightly guarded extremist and nationalist

reasoning that began with the Meiji Restoration and stubbornly stuck through the MacArthur era is "nauseating" as the U.S House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos said in 2007. That is the reason I am closely watching the present prime minister Mr. Kan's word of "seeing history honestly"

The East Sea naming problem is more than territorial and sovereign matters to Korea. It has to do with universal and fundamental values of openness, democracy, human rights, diversity and peace. Korean, Japanese, Hollander and European should join efforts to protect these universal and fundamental values. Any action contrary to this should be criticized and rectified regardless of the country including ourselves. And this is the responsibility of scholars and experts who value history and future peace.

The Society for East Sea ardently wishes that the East Sea naming problem and all other naming problems will be solved through inter-governmental efforts along with the efforts of the UN and IHO. And we will actively participate in these efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I sincerely ask you to understand how much we Koreans are relinquishing when we propose that the names "East Sea" and "Sea of Japan" be used simultaneously. We are willing to relinquish because we care about the future and we believe we want our proposal to be internationally acceptable both technically and functionally. Our proposal is open for discussion to all the concerned parties and we are even willing to consider the possibility of a completely new name. Korea's national anthem starts with the line, "Until the waves of East Sea dry up and Mount Baekdu is worn away, God

watch our land forever." I believe that if the two governments agree on a new name for the sea and this name gains international recognition, Korea should even be serious to change the words of our national anthem. Nevertheless, the current name "Sea of Japan" is not justifiable by any international standard.

Governments and citizens alike stand to gain if Korea, Japan, Hollander and European join hands to extend common values and maintain the geopolitical peace and security of life resources in the Eurasian continent and the Pacific region. Finding a legitimate solution to the East Sea naming dispute is part of this progress. The East Sea naming problem is not about holding on to the past but about shaping the future.

Thank you for listening.