

Panel Discussion

SUH Dae-won*

1

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the International Seminar on Sea Names organized by East Sea Society.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Society, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to the co-organizers and sponsors for their generous support and assistance in making this seminar possible each year. Thanks to you, this seminar has been hugely successful. I am, of course, also grateful to the new sponsors who have joined us for the first time for their valuable support.

This seminar is designed to cover a wide range of areas relating to the issue of naming geographical features. As such, I learn something new each year and this year has not been an exception.

2

As I already mentioned, I was a member of the Korean delegation to the United Nations when the issue was first raised by the Korean government back in 1992 and witnessed the unfolding of the issue from the very beginning. It has been over 20 years that I have been keeping a close eye on this and I would like to take a brief moment to share with you some of my thoughts as we come to a close.

3

First, perhaps the biggest achievement of this seminar, in my opinion, is how there has been a remarkable shift from making criticisms and passing judgments to engaging

* Visiting Professor, Chung-Ang University, Korea

in quality research and discussions with a view to finding practical solutions. It is truly astonishing to see how the character of this forum has changed over the years. In the nascent days, there were plenty of scathing criticisms, groundless accusations and poor judgments being made from all sides. It is wonderful to see how the forum has turned into a space for an open and free exchange of views between participants.

4

Second, for the past 20 years, the Society tried to defend the legitimacy of the name East Sea by making a logical and coherent argument in its support. My opinion is that we are better off resorting to the most objective facts and data when making our case and that we should try to build a simple and clear set of arguments.

My suggestion in this regard is to highlight the fact that East Sea is the name that Korean people have used for over one thousand years. The first two words of Korea's National Anthem are, in fact, East Sea. When Korean people sing the National Anthem, that means the word East Sea is being said many million times across the Korean Peninsula. East Sea carries that much significance to the Korean people.

But when IHO standardized the geographical names of the world for the first time in history during the period between 1923 and 1929, Korea was under the colonial occupation of the Japanese Empire and hence had no representation at IHO. Therefore, the name Japan Sea, as proposed by the Japanese government, met no resistance when it was adopted and indicated in a map that was published in IHO's Special Public No. 23.

The adoption of the name Japan Sea is part of historical injustice that calls for rectification. One way of correcting this injustice would be to allow a simultaneous usage of the names East Sea and Japan Sea.

5

Third, staying on the issue of justice, it has been a prime topic of discussion for a good part of this seminar. We are certainly very encouraged by what has happened in the U.S.'s State of Virginia and how geography is taught in American schools.

However, the U.S. Board of Geographical Names and the U.S. State Department—in other words, the U.S. Government, which is the most important actor—is still adamant on this issue. They support the position that Japan Sea is an internationally recognized

name and see no purpose in making any changes. I feel that, given the U.S.'s interest in rectifying historical injustices and setting examples, it is rather surprising that the U.S. does not see any problem with this.

6

Last but not least, it is great to know that there has been a growing number of dual usage of names in major atlases and geography textbooks and that a considerable number of flagship maps of major map makers and textbooks have adopted.

7

In view of such development, I would like to propose that we renew our request to the United Nations Secretariat to use both names in all of its maps, recalling previous efforts that had been made by the government of the Republic of Korea in this regard since the issue was raised for the first time in 1992. Then, the job of the Society for East Sea is to make full efforts to actively engage the Korean government in pushing forward with the proposal and help the United Nations Secretariat to reflect necessary changes in all of its maps and publications made under the auspices of the United Nations.

8

That said, I am confident that this seminar will continue to serve as an important vehicle for us to critically examine what we have accomplished so far and to see what lies ahead of us as we continue to work on this issue.