

Achieve peace and justice through geographical names

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INTRODUCTION

It is my honour and pleasure to have an opportunity for the keynote speech entitled “Achieving Peace and Justice through Geographical Naming” at the 23rd International Seminar on Sea Names. The title of my speech is, as you noticed, same as the subtitle of today’s seminar. That is another honour for me.

Before starting my speech, I would like to introduce myself a little bit. I am Ambassador for Geographical Naming of the Republic of Korea. Actually, my title is very unique in the diplomatic service, and I have been asked many times what my job is. I am not a geographer nor toponymist, but a career diplomat. My job is to oversee the Korean Government's diplomatic démarche for the issue of geographical naming, particularly the *East Sea* issue. As experience is the best teacher, I have been able to get some knowledge about toponymy for the last 4 years of my service, although not reaching to the level of expert. Also, I, fortunately, have met with distinguished experts of toponymy and geography of many countries and worked together with them, some of whom are participating in this seminar today.

More than 25 years, a quarter of a century, have passed since the Korean Government formally raised the issue of *East Sea* at the international stage, and began to make various efforts for the concurrent use of *East Sea* with *Sea of Japan*. As a result of such efforts by the government, civil groups, academia and people of Korea, it is now easy to find *East Sea* on maps—including online maps-, atlases, school textbooks worldwide. Major news media in the world are thinking twice in selecting the name when they refer to the sea area of the right of the Korean Peninsula. However, notwithstanding the reality that the concurrent use of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* has remarkably increased, governments of many countries and international organizations including the UN still maintain their policies or practices of the single use of *Sea of Japan*. It is also true that member countries of international organizations are now feeling fatigue with continuous wrangle between Korea and Japan over the sea naming issue.

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Today, I will, first, look back on the history of the dispute over the sea naming issue between Korea and Japan. After that, I would like to share with you the Korean people's perception of the name *East Sea*, the official position of the Korean Government on this issue, and the current status of the concurrent use of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*. Then bearing these in mind, I will finally seek understanding for the purpose of Korea's *East Sea* campaign, that is to say "achieving peace and justice through geographical naming."

THE HISTORY OF DISPUTES OVER EAST SEA NAMING ISSUE BETWEEN KOREA AND JAPAN

Currently, the *East Sea* naming issue is on the list of contentious diplomatic agendas between Korea and Japan. At the same time, if my understanding is correct, it has been recognized as one of the notable examples of dispute over place names in the international community of toponymy.

It was in the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names(UNCSSG) in 1992 that the Republic of Korea formally raised the *East Sea* naming issue for the first time. Korea, both South and North, could not attend the UN conferences as a member country until 1992 because it joined the United Nations in 1991. In the Conference, the delegate of the ROK Government argued that the single naming as *Sea of Japan* for the sea body surrounded by four countries was inappropriate, and that this issue should be consulted among relevant countries. This argument was concluded as "it was suggested that the relevant parties consult each other."

The Republic of Korea, even before 1992, had argued with Japan about the *East Sea* issue. It happened in 1965 during the negotiation for the Fishery Agreement between the two countries. It is one of the five agreements to normalize the relationship between the two countries after Korea was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945. At the negotiation, the two countries failed to select one name for common use, and finally agreed to use the different name respectively, 동해(Dong-Hae) in the Korean version of the Agreement and '日本海(Nihon-Kai)' in the Japanese version. The authentic third language version, namely the English version, was not produced.

In addition to UNCSGN, Korea also raised the question at the 15th Conference of the International Hydrographic Organization(IHO) in 1997 about the single name of 'Japan Sea' in the "Limits of Oceans and Seas." It is a guideline book for sea names published by IHO and usually called as "S-23." The first edition of "S-23" was published in 1929, the second in 1937 and the third in 1953 respectively. The Korean delegate claimed at the Conference that the new edition of "S-23" in the future should employ *East Sea* together with 'Japan Sea.' But it is yet to be published because of the dispute between two Koreas, South and North, and Japan.

As the UNCSGN suggested in 1992, Korea has tried to resolve the sea naming issue through peaceful consultations among relevant parties. Such efforts, however, have rarely born fruits, and Korea is now focusing on campaigns toward other countries than Japan and publishers of map and school textbook, with the belief that the more *East Seas* on maps, the easier to resolve the issue. The position of Ambassador for Geographic Naming was also created to oversee diplomatic *démarche* in 2005.

PERCEPTION OF THE NAME OF EAST SEA BY KOREAN PEOPLE

The most frequent question that I have been asked during my *East Sea* campaign is “why Korean people are so keen on the name of *East Sea* which has nothing to do with territorial sovereignty.” The name 동해(Dong-Hae), *East Sea* in English, has been used by Korean people for more than 2,000 years as proved by many Korean old maps and documents. Thus, it has passed into the culture of Korea and life of Korean people, and closely related to the identity and pride of them. It is quite natural to say, in this connection, that their perception of *East Sea* is something special.

At the same time, many of Korean people regard the name *Sea of Japan* as a legacy of the Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Until the late 19th century, a number of old maps made by the Japanese cartographers employed the term ‘朝鮮海(Chosen-Kai)’, which means ‘Sea of Korea’, or ‘北海(Hokkai)’ referring to the sea body between Korea and Japan. They used the name ‘日本海(Nihon-Kai)’ or ‘大日本海(Dai Nihhon-Kai)’ to refer to the right side of the Japanese Archipelago, which is now the Pacific Ocean. In fact, it was in the early 20th century after Japan annexed the Korean Peninsula into their territory that all of Japanese maps named the sea between the two countries as ‘日本海.’

Another factor that led Korean people to perceive the sea naming issue as a legacy of the past history was probably provided by the Japanese Government itself. The web site of the Foreign Ministry of Japan is presenting the “Limits of Oceans and Seas(S-23)”, which I mentioned earlier, as an evidence of legitimacy for *Sea of Japan*. Korea could not attend the IHO Conference in 1929 when the first edition of “S-23” was published since it was the colony of Japan. Korea was still under the Japanese rule in 1937 when the second edition of “S-23” was published, and was at war in 1953, the year for the third edition of it. Korea, in this light, started to claim in the 1997 Conference of IHO that the product of the unfair past history should be revised by employing the name *East Sea*.

THE POSITION OF THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT ON THE EAST SEA NAMING ISSUE

Now, let me introduce the position of the Korean Government on the *East Sea* naming issue. First, the Korean Government claims to use the name *East Sea* together with *Sea of Japan*, namely dual names, not to replace *Sea of Japan* with *East Sea* until the two countries would agree to a name for common use. Domestically, there have been arguments that the name of the sea should be only *East Sea* by some scholars and people in Korea. Notwithstanding this domestic voice, the Government made the decision of dual naming in 1991 and still maintains it very firmly. This position is primarily based on the international practices and recommendations as expressed in the IHO technical resolution A.4.2 of 1972 and the resolution III/20 of UNCSGN of 1977. During the decision making process for dual naming, the Korean Government also considered the status of *Sea of Japan*, which has been widely used for a long time in the world. The Korean Government thinks that the two countries can have a fair deal regarding this issue if Japan would consider the Korea's position as much as Korea honoured the Japan's position and international recommendations. I believe that this is the way to realize ‘social justice.’

If there is not sufficient space on maps to employ dual names, no name would be preferred by the Korean Government. It is not sensible at all to argue that the map is too small to have enough space for two names of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*, since you will not be able to find many other names as well on the map of such a small size.

Secondly, Korea wants to resolve the *East Sea* naming issue through consultations among relevant countries as suggested by international community. The delegate of Korea, when they raised the question about this naming issue in the 1992 UNCSGN, made this position very clear. I, myself as head of the Korean delegate, also took the same stance in the 11th UNCSGN last August. The Korean delegate of the IHO Assembly last April suggested to resolve the issue of the revision of S-23 through informal consultation, and all member countries unanimously adopted the decision to do so. Before I came to Berlin, I visited Monaco and had a discussion with Mr. Mathias Jonas, new Secretary-General of IHO about how to form and run the informal consultation body. I anticipate that the informal consultation to discuss about the revision of S-23 would be launched sooner or later.

Korea understands that other member countries of UNCSGN, UNGEGN(United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) and IHO are now feeling fatigue about the repetition of fruitless arguments among two Koreas and Japan. Taking this atmosphere of the conferences into consideration, the Korean delegate recently has tried to refrain from excessive reactions regarding the ‘East Sea’ naming issue in the meetings and to seek for ways of peaceful resolution through consultations. If the issue could be resolved through consultation, then there will be no further criticism of the politicization of naming issues.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE DUAL USE OF *EAST SEA* AND *SEA OF JAPAN*

Then, what is the current status of the dual use of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* in the world? The Korean Government has conducted survey on the statistics of dual names of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* in the public and private sectors of the world every two or three years. In 2009, Korea once publicized the result of survey that showed 28 percent of the world maps employed two names. But since then, the results of the following surveys have not been announced again because of concerns about unnecessary disputes over the legitimacy of the statistics. However, it is clear that the percentage of dual use on maps and textbooks globally has increased remarkably at every survey. I am sure this trend will continue in the future.

The Government of Japan, not Korea, did publicize the result of their own survey recently. On August 4, 2017, “Sankei Shimbun”, the right wing daily newspaper of Japan carried an article, quoting the Japanese Government announcement, that the number of countries who support the single use of *Sea of Japan* has decreased. According to the article, the survey showed that 114 out of 195 countries, that is about 58 percent, supported the single *Sea of Japan*, 11 countries supported the dual use of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* and remaining 69 countries did not express their positions clearly to the inquiries.

The governments, not like map makers or textbook publishers pursuing commercial interests, have tendencies not to change their policies easily, particularly on the sensitive diplomatic issues. In this sense, the result of the Japanese Government's survey would be a very encouraging information for me, since only few countries recognized the name of *East Sea* when Korea started to launch its campaign for *East Sea* in the international community in 1992. I believe that the official positions of countries maintaining the single name of *Sea of Japan* will be gradually adjusted along with the expansion of dual names of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*.

CONCLUSION: ACHIEVING PEACE AND JUSTICE THROUGH GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Why should the *East Sea* naming issue, which is simply an issue of geographical name, not be resolved easily? This is the question that all Korean participants here might have in common. Four year experiences as Ambassador for Geographical Naming enabled me to reason some factors to interfere with the dual naming of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*.

If we look at the history of toponymy, it is easy to find that place names, domestically and internationally, have changed a lot. Therefore, we might think that it would be also easy to change place names even now. But on the contrary, in reality, it is very hard to do so once names are fixed. There must exist, I would argue, a 'regime' which restrains place names from being changed easily and frequently. I think so-called "conventional names" or "established names" in the glossary of toponymy would symbolize this regime. The goal of the United Nations Group of Experts of Geographical Names is, presumably, to materialize this invisible regime under the name of 'standardization.'

This invisible regime is being administered by a limited number of experts, who are quite influential not only in academic circle but also in their governments' policy making for geographical names. Some of them, not all of course, seem to be not comfortable in accepting any challenges to break the status quo of place names. They argue that the dual names like *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* are not in accord with the principle of "a single feature, a single name" in toponymy. From their viewpoints, Korea's campaign for dual naming would be regarded as simply another attempt to politicize the naming issues.

Korea's campaign for dual names of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* is not a challenge against the existing regime of the international toponymic world. It is simply a trial to question the unfair decision of the past and to change the name to be acceptable to Korean people. This is, in other word, an expression of desire for social justice. Korea has tried to solve the naming issue through consultations among relevant countries. This signifies the peaceful resolution of disputes. Korea, in short, is now trying to "achieve peace and justice through geographical naming." For realizing this goal, I would like to invite your suggestions, advises and mediation for the peaceful resolution of the issue.

The international seminar on sea names marks its 23rd anniversary this year. For the last 22 years, the seminar has contributed a lot, not only to deepening the horizon of academic researches on toponymy, particularly the specific issue of *East Sea* naming, but also serving as an amicable forum to associate each other for toponymists and geographers of the world. I hope that this year's seminar will also bear lots of fruits through your active participation and contributions.