

Geographical naming: Reflections on peace, cooperation and social justice

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Peace has been elusive throughout much of history. There have seldom been periods during the 20th and 21st centuries when conflict has been put to rest and peace prevails. In this paper, two elements of cooperation among countries are used to examine peace. First are the successes in attaining peace when transboundary watercourses and international lakes are concerned. The universal need for water is paramount in survival. Both its presence and absence seem to bring about negotiations that commonly, but not always, result in peaceful agreement regarding the availability and use of water resources. The second is the attachment of names to geographic features. Language and cultural attachment with place both are woven into the name given to a geographic location. The role of both water and place names, the issues that arise, and the resolution of those issues bring about some strong messages for cooperation and peace. The peaceful resolution of geographical naming issues, such as the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*, provides the countries affected opportunities to gain prestige within the region of Northeast Asia and further afield within the international community. In this paper, both water issues and geographical naming are reflected upon in order to draw similarities that may be helpful in resolving geographical naming issues that are complex in their history, toponym usage, culture, and power relationships between countries.

Peace is an ideal that is generally regulated by the distribution of power within society in which the residents are fairly and equally represented. Such a society has checks and balances that provide measures to stem the acts of any individual in violation of a mutually agreed peace. Immanuel Kant argued that only a representative government formulated as a republic can achieve the rule of law that brings the conditions necessary for peace (Kant, 2003). A republic based on representation of the people and that offers the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches provides the clearest form of essential checks and balances. Kant's reference to a republic referred to the political system that employs freedom and equality as basic rights of the citizenry (Kleingeld, 2006) and the reliance on a common legislative process. The fundamental idea of peace is a regulative ideal toward which we must continually strive. It is built by deliberation, compromise, moral judgement and transparency. It cannot be decreed. Kant's philosophy reflected on an ideal future that he believed was both practical and

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feasible. He envisioned the transformation from conflict of all types to a state of peacefulness regulated by laws and positive relationships between countries.

It takes an optimist to discuss peace in a present day world that is affected by discord, conflict, tense international relationships between countries, and acts of violence that affect children vulnerable populations who are among the most helpless and harmless in any society. The 20th century examples of the road to peaceful relationships among countries in Europe are especially noted since 1945, with greater intensity since 1989 as the reunification of Germany and the independence of the former Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe occurred. In this paper I will discuss two other examples that provide evidence of the peaceful resolution of issues that have often been the cause for regional conflicts throughout history. Both have to do with transboundary issues. One has its focus on water and the second on transboundary geographical names that are expressions of territorial control or national ownership.

Water and people are bound together in many intricate ways, but people are totally dependent on water. Even in the driest places on Earth, if there are people, then there must be water. Water is a principal sustenance of life on Earth. People nearly always attach a name to water or to the source of water. For example, on the island of New Guinea there are approximately 1000 distinct languages. There are approximately 1000 words for water used by those languages. Incidentally, it is similar to the number of words used to denote the small insect referred to as a louse in English (Underwood, 2015). In comparison to New Guinea and the term for water, Europe has the terms for louse applied within approximately 280 distinct languages.

The rivers Nile, Rhine, Vistula, Moskow, Kalamazoo, Amazon, and lakes Michigan, Baikal, and Victoria, and all of the other geographical names representing watercourses, lakes, seas and oceans, comprise a lengthy list. Each name is culturally based to a language or languages, to perceptions of the water source, to belief systems that often include a reverence for water since it is an essential resource, as well as other considerations that make water a priority for domestic consumption, travel, irrigation, and recreation. We nearly always refer to the planet on which we live as Earth, but slightly more than 70% of it is water and ice, making it a water planet. People view water and classify it into two large categories, potable and non-potable. Potable water, that which is safe for drinking has the effect of bringing people together since everyone on Earth relies on a source of water that is safe to consume. Potable water is the universal drink and has many characteristics, including natural water, distilled water, aqua sin gas or aqua con gas, beer, Gatorade, tea, coffee, and on and on. Water is delivered by many different conveyances from buckets, wells, stand pipes, tanker trucks, bottles, faucets, and cisterns. It is viewed as extremely precious to some and plentiful enough to be wasted by others, but it is absolutely essential for all.

Non-potable water is comprised of many sub-categories that are used for a range of purposes. In its closest condition to potable states, non-potable water may be used for irrigation, for bathing, for industrial purposes, and for transporting effluents, just to name a few. At the severe end of the non-potable water classification spectrum is badly polluted water contaminated with industrial wastes, sewage, natural leeching of minerals or toxic Earth materials such as arsenic. Those non-potable waters are dangerous to humans because of the detrimental health effects or toxicity that can lead

to illness and death. While only humans and water have been discussed, there are a multitude of other biological organisms that, just as humans, balance their wellbeing, or very existence on the available of potable to non-potable water. Dangerous organisms do thrive in extreme states of non-potable water, such as viral pathogens and bacteria.

Salt water has a very compelling intermediate role between the potable and non-potable classifications of water. It is not safe for human to consume, but other biological organisms thrive on salt water with its many forms and varying degrees of salinity. The consumption of ocean salt water, which is on average 3.5% volume of sodium chloride by weight, results in severe dehydration of the human organism if consumed. Human blood has .9 % sodium chloride by weight. Slightly saline water, such as that included in sports drinks, contain sodium chloride in amounts that enable the human body to rehydrate when doing strenuous physical activity. The need for potable water, or safe water, is universal to all human kind, but only approximately .33 of one percent of Earth's water is potable and accessible. Access to potable water has resulted in strong moral and normative behaviors for humans enabling consumption of the resource and its use for many hygienic and livelihood necessities. International norms and conventions are applied to the use of water and to the abuse of water. Water also receives attention when it is in excess of the environment's ability to absorb it. Surplus of water during a short interval occurred in in 2017 in Bangladesh, China, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Italy, the United States, and the Caribbean Islands as a result of weather conditions. The realities and consequences of water shortages in some locations and water surpluses in other locations occur regularly. Each extreme results in natural disasters, migration or relocation of populations, and establishing the balance between people, their water needs, and the provision of potable water.

Normative behaviors are especially important with international claims and uses of water, and especially the world's potable water. Responses based on strong humanistic, moral principles are necessary when making decision about water and water related issues. Water may be a nectar for war, but it is also a strong stimulate for peace. Water enables survival and endurance among the people who share it. Just as friends joining together for a cup of tea that is nearly 100 percent water, the peaceful resolution of global issues involving water has been a necessity throughout history and continues to be a means for establishing peace among countries in the 21st century.

There are rational connections between transboundary water agreements, geographical naming, collaboration regarding water and peaceful conditions that assure adequate water. While the quality, distribution, and use of the water in transboundary agreements are often the principal concerns, there have been important underlying norms established through those agreements. The norms include diplomacy, fairness, admission of past abuses regarding rights to water, as well as discussion and negotiations that address the contemporary issues surrounding water and its availability. Foremost among the diplomatic challenges has been the avoidance of war – or more humanely stated – to arrive at a peaceful resolution of a water issues.

At the beginning of the United Nations Water for Life Decade (2005 – 2015) the recent conflict history as well as peaceful collaborations over transboundary sources of water were documented. During the period from 1955 to 2005, there had been water related actions across national borders involving violence a total of 37 times. While those

conflicts and actions were numerous, at the same time there were 150 treaties that were concluded after peaceful diplomatic discussions, social conversations, and the moral commitment to resolve a sensitive transboundary water issue and avoid conflict (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2004). The countries involved in each of those agreements benefitted from the maintenance of peaceful relationships. In many instances, the inconsistencies of past water usage or access were corrected and social justice was achieved in either one or both countries. Countries and societies were able to put past disagreements or indiscretions regarding water behind them and work towards mutually shared water. Countries demonstrated a commitment to the egress of safe water and receiving countries became partners to expect safe water when the transboundary surface of a lake or the flow of a stream crossed from one to another country, or was the common boundary among countries. Water became a means to not only an improved quality of life, but to a more secure, peaceful existence with the avoidance of conflict over water. Realistically, the physical presence of a water issue as well as the name of a water body should presumably, under internationally acceptable moral standards, be treated similarly. Delegations should review the information, discuss the issue and the options, and arrive at an acceptable solution for all countries involved. The process has been successfully exercised with transboundary water issues, navigation issues, and should be applied to geographical naming issues.

Wars over water in Mesopotamia are recorded as engravings on very early tablets and stones. However, there is also evidence that agreements involving the peaceful sharing of water and watercourses may date to 2500 BCE between the Sumerian cities of Lagash and Umma. The two city-states, both dependent on river water, were located where the control of water was at Umma, while the dependency on that very same water for economic prosperity was at Lagash. Periods of conflict over available water and who would receive it were common occurrences. Peace was achieved when a water sharing agreement was negotiated. Territorial demarcation between the two city-states resulted. The negotiated agreement brought about peace between the two competing places. The agreement did demonstrate the power of water based diplomacy.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO) documented that since 805 CE there have been in excess of 3600 international agreements related to water resources. Most of the agreements address access to water for irrigation, river and lake navigation and boundary demarcation. During the past 100 years, the focus of transboundary agreements for rivers and lakes has changed largely from navigation to water use in conjunction with land use, economic potential, environmental stewardship of water and the means to conserve catchment regions critical to the natural storage of water (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). Europe is the global geographic region that has led in the development of transboundary agreements for rivers and international lakes (Tanzi et al., 2015).

In Europe, transboundary water agreements were focused on the rights to use the rivers and international lakes, either as transportation or for domestic, agricultural, and industrial usage. During periods of conflict, those rights were disrupted, or removed. Border demarcations along and through rivers and lakes were altered during periods of conflict and became difficult to restore when conflict ended or as new boundaries were determined. Often the peace following a war proved difficult to maintain as new

territorial relationships unfolded. Managing the peace meant more than simply no more war. New issues emerged and the negotiations and treaty-making for transboundary watercourses and international lakes. During the past century issues have somewhat shifted away from navigation towards the uses, development, protections and conservation of water resources.

Less studied, but a significant aspect of transboundary watercourses and international lakes are the geographical names that identify features from locational, cultural, and historical perspectives. For example, the research by Maciej Zych on the transboundary toponyms for geographic features shared by Poland and Czechia reveals the complexity of the fabric representing geographical naming in Europe. The research revealed that there are 360 named geographic features that are transborder with the same names within the two countries. Several of those features actually overlap the geographical territory of each of the countries. The transboundary features were comprised of the following categories:

1. Hydronyms (123 total) (comprised of names of rivers and other streams),
2. Oronyms (224 total) comprised of: (139 names of summits, 22 names of mountain passes, 35 names of mountain ranges and ridges, 15 names of highlands, plateaus and uplands, 7 names of mountain basins, valleys and depressions, 3 names of lowlands, and 3 names of rocks),
3. Forests: 9 names of forests,
4. Mountain meadow: 1 name of a mountain meadow (alp), and
5. Tracks: (3) named tracks (Zych, 2016, p. 1).

The research reported that geographic features have the same names in both languages in 212 of the 360 cases cited, or 59% agreement. Of the remaining 148 cases, the transboundary geographic features are identified in one language. The research stated that within the single language group there were 67 geographical features (18%) having single Czech names, and 81 (23%) having single Polish geographical names. When both Czech and Polish names are used for geographic features, there is consistency for 113 of the geographic features. The Polish toponyms are different from Czech geographic names in 99 cases (Zych, 2016). The names along the geographical border between Poland and Czechia provides an example of the cultural recognition and blending of geographic names across national boundaries. The names are also examples of frequent and concurrently used geographical names on both sides of the national boundaries.

Geographers and cartographers have traditionally been responsible for assigning toponyms to these transboundary features. The occurrence of the geographic names along the border between Czechia and Poland and represented on maps have interesting variations. For example, a region with a single geographic name in one country may spatially correspond with several differently named, adjacent regions in the other country. Illustrations of different geographic names for the same feature are most often apparent with rivers. A river's name in one country may have a different name in a neighboring country. In one country a watercourse may be regarded as a uniform river, whereas in a neighboring country the watercourse may be classified as a tributary to a larger river and assigned a different name. The Polish and Czech names of the geographical features located on the common boundary were compared relative to the names that were used in

the neighboring country (Zych, 2016). The use of the same geographical name for some features and different names is clear evidence that geographical naming is enhanced when it reflects the cultural characteristics of the countries concerned, and dual naming is widely accepted as an informed solution to a naming issue.

Other examples of dual naming are observed outside of Europe. A strong case for dual naming may be observed in the river names in South Asia. For example, the Ghaghara River flows from Tibet to join the Ganges in India. Near its headwaters the river is called the K'ung-ch'iao Ho in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). In Nepal the river goes by three names - Nepali Kauriala or Manchu or the Karnali. Further south in India the river has the names Gogra, Ghaghara or Ghagra. It serves as a tributary to the largest river in the region and geographically its name becomes the Ganges. It is an example of one river that has multiple names along its watercourse. Multiple names reflected by cultural regions and transboundary flows provide a setting that is reflective of the history, economy, and social ties provided by the river. It seems that bodies of water are candidates for dual or multiple names in recognition of their geographical location and history.

Returning to Europe, the concurrent naming of geographical features is common to the border region of Poland and Czechia. The roots of the toponyms used in either country are deeply embedded in a cultural and linguistic system that provides legitimacy despite the differences that appear on the maps of the region. Differences in the names of geographical features may be resolved through discussion and diplomacy if and when an issue arises regarding a toponym. The transboundary examples from Czechia and Poland do reflect a respect for the effects of cultural traditions in toponymy. They also recognize that two names may be equally effective in naming geographical features peacefully with complementary recognition of the toponym within social, political, geographic, and cultural contexts.

In recent decades, both the issues of transboundary waterways and geographical naming have been addressed. European countries are governed largely as republics, using the Kantian philosophical basis for a republic. Europe is enjoying 72 years of peace – 1945 to 2017. During that period the role of citizen and the citizen legislator has increased in prominence. In some countries the role of citizen has made very substantial advances since 1989, as the countries of Eastern Europe began their 20th century rapid transition to representative government. Kant hypothesized that republics governed by citizens with a fair method of representation would foster peace through the willingness to negotiate, compromise, and arrive at agreements that were fair, or as fair as possible for different perspectives held about an issue.

Europe provides a model in using the power of deliberations, discussions, representation, moral commitment, and choice regarding transboundary waters and the issues that accompany them. Collaboration in reaching agreements regarding transboundary waters and the uses, abuses, and monitoring has required negotiations and compromise. Wars have not recently been employed to resolve disputes over the usage of transboundary watercourses. The collaborative efforts to resolve issues surrounding transboundary waters have become a component of the continuing peace in the region.

I have reviewed two examples of peaceful agreement regarding water courses and geographical naming in Europe, both which were in transboundary contexts. These examples seem to present general models for resolving international geographical naming

issues. The practical significance of the resolutions regarding the geographical names is important since it does not follow the policy for single features -single toponyms. Republics, following democratic principles of governance that engage citizens should be capable of meeting together to discuss, deliberate, and resolve thorny issues about geographical features and the toponyms assigned to them. This has occurred to a substantial degree of success in Europe. While the geographical context is different, there are lessons here that apply to the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* geographical naming issue.

What needs to transpire in order for the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* discussion to go forward? First, the involvement of a broader range of society, both in the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as in other countries will be necessary to expand the discussion of the naming issue. The stakeholders who have an interest in the discussion must engage in an open dialog regarding a negotiated solution. This may involve policy makers, academics, military interests, government official, and business communities. It may involve general citizens in special interest groups or organizations that have keen interests in the name of the sea. Representative groups, both from Korea and Japan, need to take the initiative to initiate a wide discussion on the need for a resolution to the issue. For example, there are many examples of maps, atlases, and written papers in traditional and electronic format that use both names concurrently – *East Sea/Sea of Japan*. The dual naming of the water body between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago is widely recognized and accepted outside of Japan. That broader range of global society is expressing their preference. The external recognition of dual naming should be a point of discussion between cultural and geopolitical experts from Japan and South Korea.

The lines of argument for the concurrent use of the name *East Sea/Sea of Japan* has largely been made at the international level with the International Hydrographic Organization and the United Nation Conferences on the Standardization of Geographic Names. Informal discussions have occurred as well as with respective national geographic naming agencies, such as the United States Board of Geographic Names. As international bodies, they are largely interested in adhering to the prescribed policy of one feature one name. The ability of the two countries to discuss and recommend a concurrent naming policy needs to be high on the agenda. It needs to include serious discussions of the benefits of dual naming to the peace and harmony in Northeast Asia. Serious deliberations will begin to reveal that there are benefits to both countries in resolving the geographical naming issue. It is a win-win decision process for each country.

The most successful arguments for concurrent naming, in a practical sense, have been made by scholars, non-federal governmental officials, decision makers and the management officials of private and publicly held publishing companies. Scholars review the evidence regarding the use of the *East Sea* geographical name, its occurrence on historical maps and other documents, and the history of Northeast Asia under the colonial control of Japan from 1910 to 1945. This was the period when the names for the world's oceans and seas were officially designated by the International Hydrologic Organization (IHO) (International Hydrographic Organization, 1974). The Korean name for the waterbody between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago was not put forward for consideration since Korea was governed by the colonial Japanese government. Most scholars and many policy makers view the colonial policies pursued by any

colonizing country as infringements upon the human rights and dignity of colonized people. The initial and residual social injustices had considerable negative impacts on South Korea. It was a social injustice to forbid the *East Sea* geographical name from due consideration during the 1929 IHO conference when the *Sea of Japan* became the only accepted name. That decision harkens for social justice in the 21st century by agreeing *East Sea* is a concurrent geographical name for the water body in conjunction with the name, *Sea of Japan*, but never received a full hearing at the IHO conference. While historical information must be recognized for its relevance to the geographical naming issue, attention must also be given to the contemporary preferences for dual naming of the body of water. The body of water is represented by both names on a substantial number of the published and electronic maps, atlases, and charts used and studied by people outside of Japan and South Korea. Users of geographic information seem are readily amenable to having dual naming. That is the observed response from the public outside of the region. It is not known if the public of both Japan and South Korea will accept dual naming on the maps they provide for their public use. The Society for the *East Sea* in South Korea has made the overture for dual naming by printing and electronically distributing maps with both names – *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*.

Dual naming in the United States seems to be an issue only at the federal governmental level. For example, the decision by the Commonwealth of Virginia to require concurrently the name *East Sea/Sea of Japan* in school textbook and ancillary instructional materials passed in 2014. While it was spearheaded by Korean American voters in Virginia, there was considerable support and agreement with dual naming by teachers, scholars, and education officials. The Korean American supporting the dual naming legislation were citizens exercising rights in Kant's philosophy as it can be applied to peaceful change. They worked through the political processes to convince their state officials of the benefits resulting from dual naming in the educational context of Virginia schools. They did not request to delete *Sea of Japan* from maps, but used their cultural heritage and citizen diplomacy to convince state officials that *East Sea* was a scholarly and culturally significant toponym to be added to educational materials for the benefit of future generations of students.

Publishing companies producing textbooks, maps, encyclopedias, and atlases have also responded to concurrently use the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*. The responses by publishers are perhaps due to the diverse marketplace for the published materials. However, it is also an indicator of collectively setting an increasingly acceptable standard for geographical naming. In the United States, a majority of the geography books and atlases at the secondary school and university use *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* concurrently. Both legislative and market pressures have led publishers of educational materials to recognize the Korean claim to the *East Sea* geographical name. Again, *Sea of Japan* is not deleted. *East Sea* is added as a concurrent (dual) name.

There are formal governmental positions on all naming issues that impede the resolution of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* concurrent naming proposal. On the one hand, there is the official position stating one feature, one geographical name that is maintained by most governmental and inter-governmental agencies. There is little room for negotiations within that policy. On the other hand, there are also the opportunities in a civil society for citizens to become engaged in the discussion and eventual resolution of the issue.

Those citizen participants often represent an agenda for change. The societal participation is usually inclined to foster a harmonious agreement that is peaceful and consistent with long standing humanistic beliefs. No one would expect conflict over a geographic name in the second decade of the 21st century. The fear of conflict is not a major factor in the issue. Rather, the fear of not reaching an agreement is the paramount concern. A rational agreement for concurrent naming that is fair and delivers social justice is within the reach of both South Korea and Japan. How will the current stalemate be broken? It will require non-state, civil society participants to become active in amicably reaching an agreement regarding the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* concurrent naming issue. Those societal participants are oftentimes considered, or relegated to position of peripheral actors in what is viewed as a governmental decision. That should not be the case in either South Korea or Japan, with both countries being republics committed to 21st century visions of justice, human rights, and moral responsibility.

Peripheral groups have already taken action by agreeing with the proposal to recognize the concurrent name the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* as a fair and equitable solution. They are not waiting for official governmental approval or endorsement at the national level. They include publishers, educational groups, scholars, local government, and general citizens. Similar groups must be present in both Japan and South Korea. Their voices must be heard. They must discuss the concurrent naming issues at length and with sincerity. Only then will pathways to a resolution become possible and the civil society power of discussion can then be applied to resolving the naming issue. This process has already begun, but greater inclusion of peripheral participants in addressing the issue are necessary. Interest groups, public presentations, and scholarly discussions must be directed to the benefits of resolving the concurrent naming issue, not extending it by refusing to participate in discussions or to have dialogue with the citizens of the other country.

Are there benefits in resolving the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* concurrent naming issue? Yes, it is a win-win situation for both countries. Following are several basic benefits.

How will Japan benefit from a resolution to the concurrent naming issue?

- Japan will be viewed in the eyes of the world as having taken the necessary step in establishing harmony in Northeast Asia.
- Japan will have moved to renew strong regional international relations with South Korea, the only other country in Northeast Asia that shares its values as a democratic republic.
- Japan will have resolved a long term issue that will advance its ethical recovery from its history of colonization in Asia.

How will South Korea benefit from a resolution of the concurrent naming issue?

- South Korea will realize its long held cultural attachment to the *East Sea* geographical name, but recognizing the common usage of *Sea of Japan* on maps and documents.
- South Korea will be viewed in the eyes of the world as having taken the necessary diplomatic steps in establishing harmony in Northeast Asia
- South Korea will move closer to the realization that social justice is being met.

I have presented arguments and examples to show that transboundary watercourses, international lakes, and transboundary geographical naming have a number of similarities. Each necessitates international negotiations in order to reach a fair agreement; each necessitates the inclusion of stakeholders who work on the periphery of the issue to be engaged; and each necessitates a firm commitment to cooperation and social justice. Water and Peace: Is there a lesson that can be learned from the Water-Peace connections and applied to Geographical Naming and Peace? Yes, there is. The United Nations reports that despite the wide range of locations and the diverse, often complex nature, of disputes over the claims to water in lakes and rivers, those many disputes have been approached and resolved peacefully in a civil manner (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). Those agreements have been experiences in Europe and other parts of the world.

Geographical naming, using the example of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* concurrent naming issue, is in need of broader civil discussions among the peripheral groups involved regarding the benefits of an agreement. It will require a commitment to resolve the concurrent naming issue by policy makers and the rational response to the citizenry. The periphery, made up of publishers, educational groups, scholars, and general citizens may be able to peacefully and honorably conclude with a resolution that will satisfy and raise the international prestige of both countries. That resolution may be either an agreement for concurrent naming of the water body or a new marine name that will be the mutual agreeable way forward for each country – Japan and South Korea. The possibilities are not fully known until citizens from both countries enter into discussions together that are accompanied by the commitment to reach a positive outcome for both.

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