

A categorization of different names for seas in East Asia

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In this paper, various names for the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea were categorized in three different ways: according to the official status of the names, according to the designated objects of the names and according to the status Endonym/Exonym. This categorization should help making clear the differences between the two naming disputes around the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea and observing the influence of the discussions about the naming of the South China Sea to the discussion about the naming of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

INTRODUCTION

As the multiple naming among the four larger seas named in the East Asia map below (*East Sea/Sea of Japan*, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea) shows, discussions are ongoing about the naming of *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

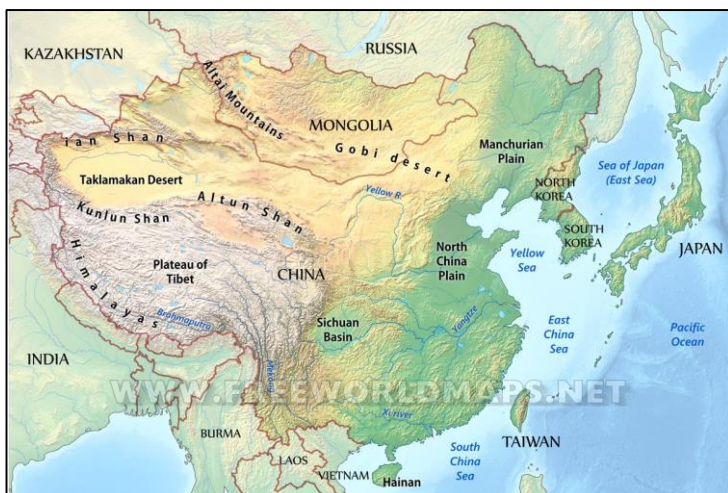


Figure1. East Asia (Source: www.freeworldmaps.net)

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Since 1992 Korea bought up the subject of the international naming of the *East Sea* with the United Nations (UN) and with the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO).

In recent times, however, discussions about the name of the South China Sea were initiated by several sides. Vietnam started to refuse using the name “South China Sea” in national documents and maps since the late 1980s (Murphy 2005, 215). However, following an escalation of the Spratly Islands dispute, in 2011 various Philippine government agencies started using the name “West Philippine Sea” instead of “South China Sea”. Additionally, in 2017 in an act of defiance against Beijing's territorial ambitions in the region, Indonesia started to refer to the northern areas of its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea as the “North Natuna Sea.” Furthermore, private initiatives that suggest the name “South Asia Sea” as an alternative to “South China Sea” came into being during this decade.

During the discussions about the renaming of the “South China Sea” or parts of it this issue and the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming issue sometimes are mentioned in the same breath¹. The purpose of this paper is to categorize different names for the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea, which have been come up during the recent discussions about the naming of the two seas. I will limit my observations on names in English respectively names which address English-speaking readers. But this categorization is not an end in itself. It should help making clear the differences between the two naming disputes mentioned above and observing the influence of the discussions about the naming of the South China Sea to the discussion about the naming of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

CATEGORIZATION ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL STATUS OF THE NAMES

Different names of the East Sea/Sea of Japan

Before 1992 most maps in English language used the name *Sea of Japan* for the sea between Korea and Japan. In the three editions of the guideline “Limits of Oceans and Seas” by the IHO (International Hydrographic Organization) from 1928, 1937 and 1953 the official name of the sea is “Japan Sea”.

In 1992 the responsible South Korean ministries discussed three alternatives of the English name for the sea between Korea and Japan: Tong-hae, *East Sea* and Sea of Korea (Shin Seung-hye 2008). They finally decided on *East Sea* and confronted Japan and the international community with this name. Shin Gil-sou (2010), who has served as ambassador-at-large for Geographic Naming at the Northeast Asian History Foundation, explained the Korean government’s position as follows: “Korea neither insists on the single use of *East Sea* nor ignores the name *Sea of Japan* ... The Korean government therefore calls upon the international community to use both names, *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* until an agreement is reached on a name acceptable to both parties through bilateral consultations”.

North Korea supported the South Korean claims at IHO in principle, but did not show a clear decision in regard to an alternative name for “Japan Sea”. In 2001 Vice Admiral Choe Jun Gil, Director of Hydrographic Department, DPR Korea, claimed in a letter to

¹ For example: Lynn (2017); Doctor (2017); Frost (2017).

the President of Directing Committee IHO Bureau, Admiral Giuseppe Angrisano, that the sea “should be called not ‘Japan Sea’ but thoroughly *East Sea* or ‘Oriental Sea’ like being called historically for a long time”. The representative of the North Korean delegation, North Korea's deputy UN ambassador Pak Tok Hun however demanded at the conference in 2007 that the names *Sea of Korea/Sea of Japan* or the names *East Sea of Korea/Sea of Japan* should be in common use (MOFA 2007). In a letter to the IHO in 2010, Kim Chang Sik, the director of the Hydrographic Office of the DPRK, expressed the view that the sea in question should in principle be called *East Sea* or *Sea of Korea*, but with reference to Technical Resolution A.4.2.6. of IHO under the present conditions he considers the combination of one of these two names with the one proposed by Japan (*Sea of Japan*) a fair and realistic way of regulating the problem.

Since Korea seeks an agreement on a name acceptable to both parties through bilateral consultations, there have been some proposals and ideas how such a name could look like even though the Japanese government has no open mind for such kind of suggestions.

The South Korean geographer Im Deok-sun proposed names like “Blue Sea” and “Koni Sea”, “Jako Sea”, “Koniru Sea” or “Jakoru Sea” (the latter are combinations of the first two letters of the country names Korea, Japan/Nihon and Russia) (Im 1992).

In November 2006 South Korea's President Roh proposed in a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Vietnam to use the name “Sea of Peace,” “Sea of Friendship” or “Sea of Reconciliation” for the sea between Korea and Japan (Digital Chosun 2007a).

But other alternatives would also be conceivable in principle like for example “Northeast Asia Sea”. Other obvious suggestions would be the combination of two names. In addition to the currently common combination of *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan*, this could be combinations of *Tonghae* and *Nihonkai* or *Sea of Korea* and *Sea of Japan*.

Anyway, Japan did show no interest even to discuss these suggestions or make their own ones.

On the basis of the above, we can now make a first categorization of the names for the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

Category 1: the controversial name

Category 2: the challengers

Category 3: proposals for a compromise name for agreement with the other side

**Table 1. Categorization according to the official status of the names
(*East Sea/Sea of Japan*)**

Controversial Name		Sea of Japan; Japan Sea
Challengers	ROK	<i>East Sea</i> ; (1992 in discussion: Sea of Korea; Tong-hae)
	DPRK	<i>East Sea</i> ; Oriental Sea; Sea of Korea; East Sea of Korea
Proposals by private individuals for agreement with Japan		Blue Sea; Koni Sea; Jako Sea; Koniru Sea; Jakoru Sea; Sea of Peace; Sea of Friendship; Sea of Reconciliation; Northeast Asia Sea; combinations of two names

Comments on Category 1 **Sea of Japan versus “Japan Sea”**

In the IHO guidelines from 1928, 1937 and 1953 we find the term “Japan Sea”. Nowadays English maps usually use the term *Sea of Japan*, this variant is also the current standard in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So why does IHO use the term *Japan Sea* instead of *Sea of Japan*? Watanabe (2011, 169-170) explains: “In the UK, *Sea of Japan* remained to be the majority throughout the 19th century, while in the USA the number of ‘Japan Sea’ exceeded that of *Sea of Japan* from 1861. ... It is most probable that in the IHO meetings leading to the Limits of Oceans and Seas publication, the prevalent naming in the USA at that time was adopted, hence ‘Japan Sea’ rather than *Sea of Japan*. ... The central government of Japan seems to have initially adopted *Sea of Japan*, and the shift to ‘Japan Sea’ seems to have taken place in the first 20 years of the 20th century”.

Comments on Category 2 **East Sea versus Sea of Korea**

South Korea decided in 1992 to promote the name *East Sea* and there has been no change in this decision in between except that the “Korean government, therefore, calls upon the international community to use both names, *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* until an agreement is reached on a name acceptable to both parties through bilateral consultations” (Shin 2010). North Korea supports the South Korean efforts at IHO in principle but seems to have no stringent strategy regarding the name. So only *East Sea* comes into consideration as “challenger” for *Sea of Japan*.

But there are also critics from outside and inside who would prefer the name “Sea of Korea” instead of *East Sea*. The problem is - and this will come as no surprise - that Japan has no interest in an arrangement with Korea or an alternative to the exclusive use of the name *Sea of Japan*². The result is that the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* is named in world maps mostly in two different ways. So there are maps

- using only the name *Sea of Japan* and maps
- using both names: *Sea of Japan (East Sea)*, *East Sea/Sea of Japan* etc.

As Japan does not give way, the danger is that the proposal *East Sea* plus *Sea of Japan* mutates to a quasi-long-term solution. The double naming *East Sea/Sea of Japan* or *Sea of Japan (East Sea)* consists of two parts which do not match meanings. This is criticized in Korea where East Sea is seen as the weaker partner of both because foreigners without deeper knowledge do not see the Korean origin in it. So specially thinking about the soccer World Cup in 2002 when the world community has been used to the combination “KoreaJapan” in the “2002 FIFA World Cup official logo” the wish to change *East Sea* to *Sea of Korea* became popular with the ulterior motive to change the dual naming of the sea to *Sea of Korea/Japan*. At the 22nd International Seminar on Sea Names in 2016, Won-deog Lee argues: “In the short-term, Japan Sea/Korea Sea is achieved as a part of

² Monmonier (2006, 91) comments „Like passive-aggressive people with weak partners, Japan is winning by refusing to compromise“.

progress and in the long-term, pursuing Japan-Korea Sea (or Korea-Japan Sea) as the international name is believed to be more acceptable by Japan”. This may be optimistic, but an important question will be whether the international community would easier accept a name like *Sea of Korea/Japan* compared to *Sea of Japan (East Sea)*.

Comments on Category 3

Roh Moo-hyun versus Digital Chosun

As a comment in Digital Chosun (2007b) says during “the Korea-Japan summit in Vietnam last November, it has been revealed, President Roh Moo-hyun made an informal suggestion to rename the *East Sea* (which Japan calls the *Sea of Japan*) as the ‘Sea of Peace’, seeking to resolve a number of disputes with the island nation. A Cheong Wa Dae official said on Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not like the proposal”. The comment critic to “publicize the *East Sea*’ designation, a group of Korean scholars, journalists, and cultural experts formed a study group in 1994 and since then have been holding international seminars each year, while passing out to libraries and universities around the world English-language maps containing the *East Sea* reference. A group of self-appointed ‘cyber diplomats’, the Voluntary Agency Network of Korea, or VANK, is conducting a fierce Internet battle with Japan over the issue. Due to such efforts, maps in various countries are changing the *Sea of Japan* reference to include the name *East Sea*. But the president’s unexpected ‘Sea of Peace’ comment is pouring cold water on such efforts”.

Here the dividing of the sea names into the three categories above may help to avoid misunderstandings. One may critic the proposals itself. “Sea of Peace” sounds corny and funny. And one may also critic that apparently no prior discussion of this matter through official government channels, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has been made.

But suggesting a name for a compromise with Japan should not be confused with suggesting an alternative to the “challenger”. In other words, “Sea of Peace” was not meant to substitute *East Sea* in a way the proponents of “Sea of Korea” desired it. “Sea of Peace” was an offer to Japan and if Japan would have accepted the offer the new official name of the sea also in the IHO maps may be “Sea of Peace”. As we know, Japan did not accept Roh’s offer.

Different names for the South China Sea

In the first three editions of IHO’s “Limits of Oceans and Sea” the seas had been counted individually until sea No. 66³. In the 3rd edition (1953) the South China Sea (Sea Number 49) officially is called “South China Sea (Nan Hai)”. In the Draft of the 4th edition (1986) the oceans and seas of the world have been divided for administrative purposes into nine and in the “Final Draft” of the 4th edition (2002) into ten main zones. The “South China Sea” (6.1.) became part of main zone 6 (“South China and Eastern Archipelagic Seas”).

³ There were divisions for the bigger seas like the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

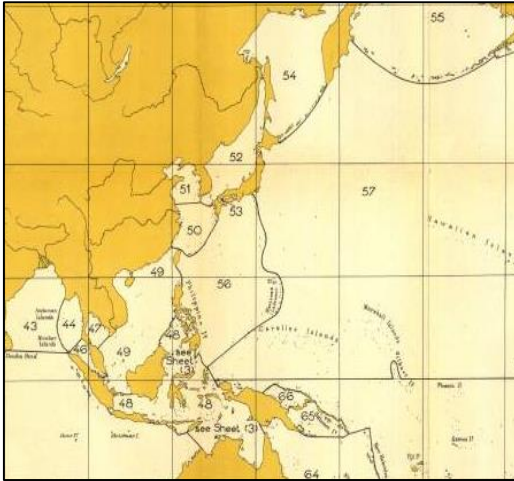


Figure 2. Oceans and Seas in East Asia
(Source: IHB, 1953)

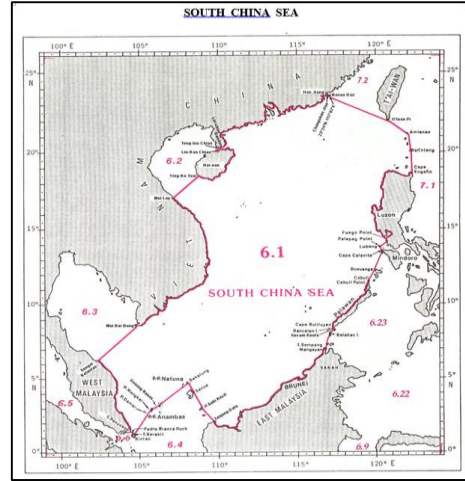


Figure 3. South China Sea
(Source: IHB, 2000)

If we compare the 3rd edition (1953) with the “Final Draft” of the 4th edition (2002), we can see, that there have been three major changes. By marking out “T’aiwan Strait” (7.2), “Gulf of Tonkin” (6.2.) “Natuna Sea” (6.4.) from “South China Sea” the latter would be reduced in three places. In its comments (January 2003) on the draft 4th edition of S-23 China rejected these suggestions. In China’s view “Natuna Sea” should be cancelled and the two other bodies of water should not be juxtaposed with “South China Sea”.

Following Murphy (2005), three sea names are under a high degree of dispute between bordering countries; the “Persian Gulf” (versus “Arabian Gulf”), “Japan Sea” (versus *East Sea*) and the “South China Sea” (versus “Bien Dong”). Two of these seas are located in East Asia. Apart from the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*, this is the South China Sea.

In the meantime, not only Vietnam, also the Philippines and Indonesia are engaged in the naming dispute. Background of these controversies is territorial disputes within the South China Sea, which involve both island and maritime claims among several sovereign states within the region. Apart from the Peoples Republic of China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, the involved states are Brunei, Republic of China (ROC) and Malaysia.

Vietnam’s name for the South China Sea: from “South China Sea” to “Bien Dong” to East Sea

In the 1970’s the government of South Vietnam still officially used the name “South China Sea”⁴. In the late 1980’s Vietnamese maps began to appear with “Bien Dong” as the name for the sea off the Vietnamese coast (Murphy 2005, 215). With the increased opening of Vietnam to other countries more and more media products of the country

⁴ Murphy (2005, 215) states as proof for it “An Annotated Atlas of the Republic of Vietnam (Nguyễn 1972)” which had originated in cooperation with employees of the embassy of Vietnam in Washington, D.C.

were produced in western languages. Thus the Voice of Vietnam, Vietnam + and the online newspaper of the Communist party of Vietnam have an English version of their internet pages ⁵. And those designate the South China Sea as *East Sea*. These English versions have originated only since 2005; at least the archives do not go back to times before that. Thus it is hard to recognize when the English concept *East Sea* was officially used by the Vietnamese side. With the help of the archive of Viet Nam News, it can be investigated that this page uses only the name *East Sea*. The Vietnamese name “Bien Dong” as well as the name “South China Sea” is mostly only shown in compositions with companies, organizations, agreements etc., which contain these names. Sometimes in media, the term East Sea (of Vietnam) with or without brackets can be found.

“West Philippine Sea”: first instead, later part of “South China Sea”

In 2011, following President Aquino’s lead, the Philippines renamed the “South China Sea” as the “West Philippine Sea”. The weather bureau of the Philippines “adopted the name ‘West Philippine Sea’ to refer to waters known as the South China Sea in its official advisories, amid renewed tensions between the Philippines and China over the disputed Spratly Islands” (Quismundo 2011). Science Undersecretary Graciano Yumul argues that the use of local names for international bodies of water would have long been a practice among countries and cites the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* as an example, since, as Yumul explains “the waters between Japan and Korea are known as the *East Sea* to Koreans and the Japan Sea to the Japanese” (Quismundo 2011). Asked if the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) “has officially informed its international counterparts, Yumul said: ‘Ultimately, when we give advisories, the international community will see the name change. ...’” (Quismundo 2011). However, one year later, in 2012, the Philippines changed their naming strategy. In Administrative Order No. 29 “‘West Philippine Sea’ was not to supplant ‘South China Sea’ but only to refer to parts of the sea already under the jurisdiction of the Philippines” (Stein 2016).

Indonesia’s “North Natuna Sea”

In an act of defiance against Beijing’s territorial ambitions in the region, in July 2017, Indonesia renamed the northern areas of its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea as the “North Natuna Sea”. Arif Havas Oegroseno, Deputy Coordinating Minister of Maritime Affairs and Resources of Indonesia, said that the Indonesian government has the authority to name every area in the country’s territory. He also said that the North Natuna Sea would be reported to the United Nations and the International Hydrographic Organization for official registration (Luu/Hunt/Feingold 2017). If we have a close look at the area of the claimed “North Natuna Sea” it is conspicuous that it is a kind of extension of the “Natuna Sea”.

⁵ See: <http://english.vovnews.vn/>; <http://www.vietnamplus.vn/>;
http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/index_E.html.



Figure 4. North Natuna Sea
(Source: IAS Abhiyan, 2017)

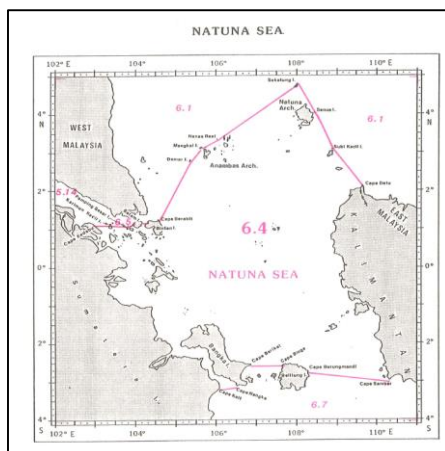


Figure 5. Natuna Sea
(Source: IHB, 1986)

As mentioned above, the “Natuna Sea” cannot be found in the IHO’s 3rd edition of “Limits of Oceans and Seas” (1953), but in the Draft 4th edition 1986. “The name is not widely used, and China has appealed to IHO to reincorporate the body of water into the bounds of the South China Sea” (MarEx 2017). The U.S. comments (in 2009) to China’s comments (January 2003) on the draft 4th edition of S-23 on this point are follows: “The body of water south of the Natuna and Anambas Islands and north of Bangka and Belitung Islands and the Java Sea has the characteristics of a distinct sea feature, and the name ‘Natuna Sea’ would not be an inappropriate name for this sea body. The U.S. has found no evidence of usage of the name ‘Natuna Sea’ other than by Indonesia or by Indonesian-influenced sources. Absent some sort of agreement with or evidence of use by its other littoral states (Malaysia and Singapore), we somewhat regretfully agree with the Chinese that this name should not be applied at this time”.

So it may be speculated that it is Indonesia’s strategy also to influence the IHO-dispute about the “Natuna Sea” by the claiming of “North Natuna Sea”.

Private initiatives: “Southeast Asia Sea”, “South Sea” and “Vietnam Sea”

The Nguyen Thai Hoc Foundation, based in Irvine, California, USA, a place with a high proportion of Vietnamese American (Kang 2015), launched a petition to change the name “South China Sea” to “Southeast Asia Sea”. On their homepage they argue et al:

- “The United Nations has officially recognized the region and named it ‘Southeast Asia’”.
- “The countries of Southeast Asia encompass almost the entire South China Sea with a total coastline measuring approximately 130,000 kilometers (81,250 miles) long; whereas the Southern China’s coastline measured about 2,800 kilometers (1,750 miles) in length” (Nguyen Thai Hoc Foundation).

Frost (2017) argues that calling “the South China Sea the ‘Southeast Asia Sea’ would meet with intense resistance from China, thereby perpetuating current divisions and escalating disputes. She proposes “South Sea”, the direct translation of the Chinese

endonym (Nanhai) as a name for the re-named South China Sea and hopes “it would be hard for Beijing to argue against it on historical or linguistic grounds”.

However, with very little followers, on September 2016 “The Vietnamese Sea Association” started a petition “Rename South China Sea to Vietnam Sea” (The Vietnam Sea Association).

On the basis of the above, we can now make a first categorization of the names for the South China Sea, which however looks different than the categorization of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

Category 1: the controversial name

Category 2: local names for the South China Sea

Category 3: proposals by private organizations or persons

Category 4: names for parts of the South China Sea

Table 2. Categorization according to the official status of the names (South China Sea)

Controversial name		South China Sea
Local names	Vietnam	Bien Dong, <i>East Sea</i>
	The Philippines	West Philippine Sea (from 2011 to 2012)
Private proposals		Southeast Asia Sea; South Sea; Vietnam Sea
Names for parts of the South China Sea	Indonesia	North Natuna Sea
	The Philippines	West Philippine Sea (since 2012)

COMMENTS

Here there is no category “challengers” because none of the countries surrounding the South China Sea expect the international public to use a naming other than the exclusive use of “South China Sea”. Names like “Bien Dong”, *East Sea* or “West Philippine Sea” are intended for use in national media. Among the proposals by private organizations or persons only “Southeast Asia Sea” could reach wider attention. Among the names for parts of the South China Sea “West Philippine Sea” seems to be intended for use in national media while Indonesia’s announced report regarding the “North Natuna Sea”-issue to the United Nations and the International Hydrographic Organization maybe in the hope that it has influence on the “Natuna Sea”-issue.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NAMING DISPUTES REGARDING THE *EAST SEA/SEA OF JAPAN* AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

“Challenger” versus “Local name”

In commentaries, the name conflicts around the *East Sea/Sea and Japan* and the South China Sea are frequently mentioned in the same breath. But, as already shown in the categorizations above, there are serious differences. While Korea has been intensively addressing the problem of the exclusive use of *Sea of Japan* on international maps for many years, no state is calling into question the sole use of “South China Sea”. Counter-

proposals have either local character or are limited to partial areas of the sea. In the case of private initiatives to rename the “South China Sea”, no government support can be recognized.

Reason and background of the naming dispute

Other big differences are reason and background for the naming conflict. In both cases of naming disputes around the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea, there are also territorial conflicts or claims within the respective sea area.

In the case of the recent dispute of the naming of the South China Sea, the background is territorial disputes within the South China Sea, which involve both island and maritime claims among several sovereign states within the region. Almost ever a different name is proposed for the South China Sea, this is directly related to the territorial conflicts. The efforts to rename marine areas within their own exclusive economic zone are also intended to clarify their own territorial claims. In case of the name dispute around the South China Sea, the territorial conflict is the main factor. The name discussion is a facet of the territorial conflict. Vietnam addresses the territorial conflicts to the international community, but not the naming conflict of the sea.

The situation in Korea, however, is different. The conflict around the international name of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* sometimes is discussed together with the conflict around the island group Dokdo. Korea raises the question of the naming of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* to international organizations, however, has no interest in an international debate about the sovereignty of Dokdo. Because this island group is administered anyhow by Korea, there is no reason for Korea to put this into a discussion. The Japanese are the other way round. They try to dispel doubts about Korea’s sovereignty over Dokdo and name it “*Takeshima*” as a part of Japan. Regarding the conflict around the international name of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*, one defends the status quo. So what was the starting point of wider discussions in Korea about the international name of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*? As Korea opened up to the world after the chaos caused by the Korean War and more and more Koreans were studying in the United States, Koreans more often came into contact with English maps, which called the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* as *Sea of Japan*. Articles that expressed criticism on that fact can already be proved for the 1970s (Lee Ki-suk 2008, 308) ⁶. When Koreans noted that the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* had different names on western maps in the past, this was the reason that interest grew in the issue of naming the *East Sea/Sea of Korea* in Korea (Lee, Ki-suk 2002, 156). Thus the question was discussed lively concerning how the name of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* on historical western maps has changed in the course of time. After Korea joined the UN in 1991 the naming issue of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* was raised to international organizations.

So, in both cases, the naming conflicts of seas are accompanied by territorial conflicts. But in the case of the South China Sea, the territorial conflicts are the main reason for the naming conflicts. In the case of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*, the naming conflict would also exist without the territorial conflict.

⁶ Soh Jung Chul (1978), Lee Ki-suk (1974).

CATEGORIZATION ACCORDING TO THE DESIGNATED OBJECTS OF THE NAMES

According to Ormeling (2000) most sea names worldwide can be categorized into one of the following categories:

1. Seas named for cardinal directions
2. Seas named for nations
3. Seas named for persons
4. Seas named for places
5. Seas named for attributes
6. Seas named for rivers flowing into them
7. Seas named for adjacent areas
8. Seas named for countries

In the present paper, these categories will be somewhat modified. The table below lists all names discussed above, which refer to the entire *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea.

Table 3. Categorization according to the designated objects of the names

Categories	<i>East Sea/Sea of Japan</i>	South China Sea
Country	<i>Sea of Japan</i> ; Japan Sea; Sea of Korea	Vietnam Sea
Cardinal directions	<i>East Sea</i> ; <i>Tong-hae</i> ; <i>Oriental Sea</i> ;	Bien Dong, East Sea, South Sea
Combination country & cardinal direction	East Sea of Korea	South China Sea; West Philippine Sea
Attributes	Blue Sea	
Combination of country names	Koni Sea; Jako Sea; Koniru Sea; Jakoru Sea	
Region across countries		Southeast Asia Sea
Combination region across countries & cardinal direction	Northeast Asia Sea	Southeast Asia Sea
Political desire	Sea of Peace; Sea of Friendship; Sea of Reconciliation	

Comment on Category “Country names”

“State with a recent history of political or economic hegemony in the region” versus “Less powerful neighbor”

In the cases of *Sea of Japan* and the “South China Sea”, the attaching of a name of a single state to an international common did lead to the naming conflict. Especially in case of names of a state with a recent history of political or economic hegemony in the region the degree of potential dispute between bordering countries is high because it usually connotes exclusive ownership or control by a single people, not a collective (Murphy 2005).

The possessive implications became visible through “a statement made at an international conference in 2015 by Chinese Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai, who stated bluntly, ‘the South China Sea, as the name indicates, is a sea area that belongs to China.’” (Doctor 2017). Doctor (2017) explains “The Chinese government’s position on the sea is inherited from its predecessor, the Republic of China (RoC). In the aftermath of World War II, the RoC released the Nine-Dash line, a map with nine dashes encompassing nearly all of the sea between the Chinese mainland and the countries of South-East Asia, all claimed for China. After the RoC collapsed and moved to Taiwan, its communist successor continued to maintain the claim (though the RoC in Taiwan has never officially dropped it either)”.

The reason why the name *Sea of Japan* is a problem is historical. When Europeans gave the sea the name *Sea of Japan*, it had the meaning of a sea, which lies beyond Japan. Korea has been Japan’s colony between 1910 and 1945. As a result of the Japanese colonialism and expansionism the name *Sea of Japan* has gone through a semantic change. The *Sea of Japan* meant after 1910 not only “Sea, which borders Japan”, the name *Sea of Japan* also meant “sea between two parts of Japan, Japan’s mainland and Japan’s colony Chosen (Korea)”. The colonial status of Korea made the sea between Korea and Japan quasi to an inland sea of Japan. The name the *Sea of Japan* became, therefore, a symbol for the Japanese imperialism and was intolerable for the Koreans.

However, not in all cases of sea names with a country name the degree of potential dispute between bordering countries is high, as the acceptance of the “Gulf of Mexico” and the “Irish Sea” by the United States and Britain shows. As Monmornier (2006, 94), a Professor of Geography at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, USA, explains, “neither the United States nor the United Kingdom carries a grudge against its less powerful neighbor, and however flattering to Mexico and Ireland, directional references to neighboring states are functionally useful to the Americans and the Brits, and thus deceptively ethnocentric”. So he goes on to argue that in “this sense, ‘Sea of Korea’ could serve both nations if the Koreans had been more assertive and the Japanese less intransigent” (Monmornier 2006, 94) and concludes that a “hyphenated toponym like Korea-Japan Sea might seem a logical compromise” (Monmornier 2006, 94-95).

Comment on “Cardinal directions” East Sea following “North Sea”?

The term “South Sea” for “South China Sea” is problematic because it could be confused to “South Seas” commonly refers to the South Pacific. And if you change “South China Sea” to “South Sea”, what’s about the “East China Sea” and the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*?

The term “Orient”, which derives from the Latin word “oriens” meaning “east” (lit. “rising”), has different meanings and has undergone various semantic transformation processes. Since North Korea has proposed the name “Oriental Sea” together with the name *East Sea*, I assume that both names were regarded as the direct translation of the Korean word for *East Sea*. So I did put the term in the category “Cardinal directions”.

The Korean term for *East Sea* has gone through a semantic change from “Sea in the East of China” to “Sea in the East of Korea” to “Sea no. 52 in the 3rd edition of IHO’s ‘Limits of Oceans and Seas’ (Sea to the East of the Eurasian continent)”. Choo (2008, 78) stresses the essential meaning of *East Sea* to Korean people. Now it’s the desire of many Koreans to establish the English name *East Sea* in worldwide use like the name already accepted “North Sea”.

Comment on “Attributes”

“Blue Sea” following “Yellow Sea”?

Seas are if there are not too many algae, in general, a blue color. The blue color is because of the fact that water molecules filter out certain wavelengths from the chromatic circle of the sunlight. Therefore there are already numerous companies, poems etc. that carry “blue sea” in their name or describe it, without meaning a certain sea by it. As most seas are blue, there is no particular reason to call just the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* “Blue Sea”. On the other hand, “Blue Sea” would be a fitting counterpart to the “Yellow Sea” west of Korea.

Comment on “Region name”

“Southeast Asia – Sea” versus “Southeast – Asia Sea”

“Southeast Asia Sea” is categorized as well as “region across countries” and as “combination region across countries & cardinal direction”. If the “Southeast Asia Sea” has been regarded as a “region across countries” “Southeast Asia”, as the Nguyen Thai Hoc Foundation does, this would mean, that China as a part of “East Asia” would be excluded. On the other hand, China is also a part of Asia, so if you regard “Asia” as “region across countries” and “southeast” as a “cardinal direction”, it would mean: the sea in the southeast of Asia, so China would not be excluded. But, of course, also this explanation will not lead China to a support of this name.

INFLUENCES OF THE SOUTH CHINA SEA NAMING DISPUTE ON THE EAST SEA/SEA OF JAPAN NAMING DISPUTE

A comprehensive approach: Southeast Asia Sea – East Asia Sea – Northeast Asia Sea

The name “South China Sea” is disputed, the name “East China Sea” isn’t. But both names have been shaped according to the same pattern. The comparison of the South China Sea naming dispute and the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* naming dispute showed that the most suggestions to new names had only one sea to be renamed in mind, but showed little responsibility for the names of the neighboring sea. However, if you rename the South China Sea, should you not also think about the naming of the East China Sea? In a comprehensive name change move the South China Sea could be renamed for example to “Southeast Asia Sea”, the East China Sea to “East Asia Sea” and the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* to “Northeast Asia Sea”. Even though these are merely theoretical thought-provoking games that cannot be realized in the short and medium term, it should be pointed out here that a proposal for a new sea name may have an influence on sea names in the neighborhood and beyond.

***“North Natuna Sea”- a potential obstacle to the discussions around IHO’
Publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas”***

The IHO adopted Publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas”, for the purpose of consistent nautical cartography and in the interest of the safety of navigation at sea. The 3rd edition of Publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas”, dated 1953, needs to be updated. Several attempts to prepare a 4th edition of the publication have been unsuccessful. So it may have looked as if it is the end of S-23 as in April 2012 the 18th International Hydrographic Conference decided not to take any further action on this matter. Nevertheless, the 1st Session of the IHO Assembly in April 2017, considering proposals submitted North and South Korea”... tasked the Secretary-General [of the IHO] to facilitate an informal consultation process regarding the future of S-23 among the interested Member States, including determining mutually agreed modalities of work and to report the result of the consultations to the Assembly at the next ordinary session (A-2) [in 2020]. This consultation is now starting” (IHO 2017).

A problem could arise if the new discussion about the borders of the South China Sea raised up by Indonesia could complicate the consultations around the 4th edition of S-23.

The South China Sea naming dispute as an example of problematic sea names that include country names

On the other hand, if someone needs information about the name of a water body, not very many of them will take a look at the publication S-23 of the IHO. Most people will switch on their smartphone. The naming of the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* very much depends on journalists. North Korean rockets brought the *East Sea/Japan Sea* particularly frequent in the international media. Among the printed media, school atlases will still play a role. Whoever wants to prevent the sole use of the name “Sea of Japan” must not only convince organizations like IHO but also many different persons. The recent escalation of the South China Sea naming dispute has repeatedly made it clear that the name of “a state with a recent history of political or economic hegemony in the region” (Murphy 2005) is highly problematic and can cause confusion. So one conclusion from the discussion about the “South China Sea”-naming is the evidence of “the need to find new English-language names for Asia’s major seas” as “a consequence of current tensions” (Frost 2017, 440).

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

EAST SEA AND ITS POTENTIAL AS AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED SEA NAME

Table 4. Categorization: Endonym/Exonym

Categories	<i>East Sea/Sea of Japan</i>	South China Sea
Endonym	Tong-hae	Bien Dong
Endonym (translated into English)	<i>East Sea</i> ; Oriental Sea; East Sea of Korea	East Sea, South Sea
Exonym (including historic exonyms)	<i>Sea of Japan</i> ; Japan Sea; Oriental Sea, Sea of Korea	South China Sea;
New names	Blue Sea; Koni Sea; Jako Sea; Koniru Sea; Jakoru Sea; Northeast Asia Sea; Sea of Peace; Sea of Friendship; Sea of Reconciliation	West Philippine Sea; Southeast Asia Sea; Vietnam Sea

COMMENTS:

“South China Sea” is a combination of the English translation of the endonym “Nan hai” and the country name “China”.

For a long time, Japan used the Japanese equivalent to “North Sea” to name the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*. Later Japanese maps show the Japanese equivalent to “Sea of Korea”. The Japanese endonym in use is a Japanese translation of the exonym *Sea of Japan/Japan Sea*.

“Oriental Sea”, which once has been proposed by North Korea, here is considered as a not really correct kind of translation of the Korean equivalent to *East Sea*.

In this paper, various names for the *East Sea/Sea of Japan* and the South China Sea were categorized in three different ways:

- Categorization according to the official status of the names
- Categorization according to the designated objects of the names
- Categorization: Endonym/Exonym

In the following summary, we only include the three names that are often found on international maps: “South China Sea”, *Sea of Japan* and *East Sea*.

Table 5. Categorization of “South China Sea”, *Sea of Japan*, *East Sea*

Categorization	Official status of the names	Designated objects of the names	Endonym/Exonym
South China Sea	Controversial Name, no official “Challenger”	Combination country & cardinal direction	Exonym
<i>Sea of Japan</i>	Controversial Name, official “Challenger”: “East Sea”	Country	Exonym
<i>East Sea</i>	“Challenger”	Cardinal direction	English translation of endonym

Even though “South China Sea” is a very controversial name, no surrounding country officially proposes an alternative name for the use in international media. But the discussion around the naming of the South China Sea has led to international criticism of the exclusive use of state names with imperialist past or current territorial claims for sea names in general. This could influence the naming debate around the *East Sea/Sea of Japan*.

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