

Lingering issues on sea names: Why are we drifting about?

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Twenty-five years have already passed since the Republic of Korea raised the issue of sea names between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago in 1992. In the meantime, this issue has been a diplomatic problem between Korea and Japan, and at the same time, it was a topic that raised the interest and importance of the place name in Korea. This issue has also become a representative example of international debate on sea names and has become an important example of how history, memory, culture, sovereignty, technical and legal elements, and civil society are intertwined in the discussion of international standardization of geographical names. Of course, various ideas were submitted to solve this problem, and many discussions and debates have been done. The solution to this problem, however, still has a long way to go. Above all, this debate seems to be a status quo in itself. This paper delivers some thoughts on why the naming problem of the sea is not moving forward.

BRIEF OVERVIEW ON THE SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS FOR THE ISSUE

In the meantime, several ideas have been proposed to solve this sensitive problem. The first solution is to establish an alternative name, or to establish a name for international use, which is a consultation on a third name other than the *East Sea* and the *Sea of Japan* (Pokoly, 2013; Woodman, 2012). Although there is a difference in whether national or international uses of place names are to be matched, it is generally a meaningful idea since this approach assumes the sincere consultation and shows the future-oriented steps of the two countries. Of course, there is also a disadvantage of giving up the historical meaning of the *East Sea* and the *Sea of Japan*, and it is necessary to take a shrewd and vigilant measure enough to draw the consensus of the majority of the people. However, this approach had never been officially on the table between two countries¹.

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¹ In fact, On 18 November 2006, during the APEC summit in Hanoi, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun informally proposed to the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe that the sea be called instead the "Sea of Peace" or "Sea of Friendship", which Abe rejected. In January 2007 Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki opposed the idea, saying that there was no need to change the name of the *Sea of Japan*.

The second solution is the division of waters. This proposal separates the sea between the Korean peninsula and Japanese archipelago into two, the western part is called the *East Sea* and the eastern part is called the *Sea of Japan*. Considering the fact that the geographical extent of the nomination of the *East Sea*, which has been used by Koreans for thousands of years, has not been referred to the shore of Shimane Prefecture of Japan it is reasonable. However, the technical and political aspects of the proposal have been problematic. The technical part of this is the question of whether the sea can be divided into two. However it may not an impossible task. In the 4th edition final draft of IHO S-23, there are many examples of dividing existing waters by establishing a line connecting the islands and land. Rather a major flaw in this solution is the territorial issue of Dokdo, an island in the middle of the sea, which falls into the dilemma of addressing territorial issues to solve the naming issue. To separate the sea it cannot help drawing lines along Dokdo, Ulleungdo or Oki Island, which will be very unlikely accepted by two countries.

Lastly, it is the method of dual naming or concurrent usage which is the official position of the Korean government ². This solution was established based on the resolutions of the IHO and UNCISG that both nations should use the names used by each of the countries if they do not agree on a common name. Of course, technical problems such as the interpretation of resolutions, complexity and confusion of maps, order of names, and the use of parentheses have been suggested, but this approach is considered to be relatively feasible. This is because there are existing cases of dual naming, and because many atlases already adopted this dual naming practice. Also, map pub-

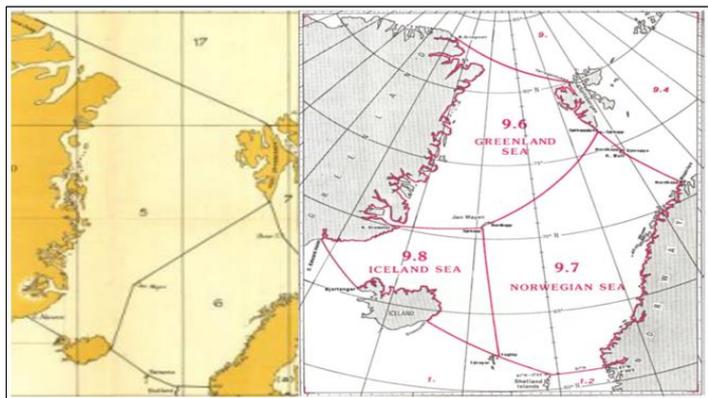


Figure 1. Division of sea (Iceland Sea):

(Source: S-23 3rd edition (left), Final Draft, 4th edition (right))

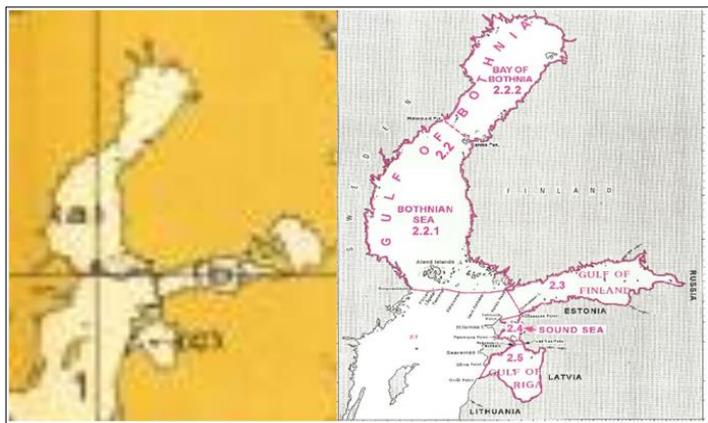


Figure 2. Division of sea (Bothnian Sea):

(Source: S-23 3rd edition (left), Final Draft, 4th edition (right))

² A detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach can be found in Choo(2014)

lishers and internet map providers have accumulated know-ledge on how to flexibly deal with this problem according to the context in which they are used. In other words, once the grand scheme of dual naming has been adopted, various methods of applying them are already being made by various users.

WHY ARE WE DRIFTING ABOUT?

Good name and bad name or better name?

Among the various solutions mentioned above, there are many factors that interfere with the principle of dual naming. The first point I would like to address is the evaluation of the geographical names. Those claiming the single use of *East Sea* or the *Sea of Japan* generally argue that one place is better than the other. For example, some claim that the *East Sea* is more universal because it implies that the sea is on the east side of Eurasia continent, and that it is not appropriate because the Sea of Japan includes a meaning of ownership. People on the other side argue that the *East Sea* is based on direction, which reflects only the view of the Korean people and sea name with cardinal direction can be confusing. However, as Kadmon (1997) addressed, geographical names are born in the process of people's cognition of an area. In essence, place names reflect the perceptions and thoughts of the people who are aware of the area. People's perception and worldview are not subjects of being evaluation. The widespread use of both the *East Sea* and the Sea of Japan has been a long historical process. Of course, the name "Donghae (*East Sea*)" has been used for thousands of years, and the name "Nihonkai (Sea of Japan)" is a pretty much modern output coined and spread by Western Powers. However, in my opinion, it is not easy to say that the *East Sea* is superior to the Sea of Japan just simply because it has a longer history of use. Just as the debate over how old the place name is not so important, derogation to the sea names with cardinal direction prevents productive discussion on the solution of this naming issue. Ormeling (2000) identified there are several schemes to name a body of water. Sea names for cardinal direction is one of eight ways of naming, such as nations, persons, places, attributes, rivers flowing into them, adjacent areas, and countries.

Also, the criteria used for the evaluation of these place names is not immutable. The norms and principles used for the evaluation vary with culture. For example, in Korean naming practice, a name that includes a name of administrative unit generally represents a territorial jurisdiction or ownership. Foreigners and travel companies often refer to Incheon International Airport, which is the gateway to the Republic of Korea, to Seoul - Incheon International Airport, but the official name in Korea is Incheon International Airport since it sits on the area of Incheon. Also, when the administrative district is changed, it is common to change all the geographical names related to the administrative district, such as public facilities and expressway tolls. The evaluation on geographical names can be changed too. After many states were liberated after World War II, some geographical names were restored to the one used in pre-colonial times. Also, as the awareness on the rights of indigenous people are increased, it is often the case that the place names made by outsiders return to the places named by the indigenous people. These examples demonstrate that the assessment of place names cannot be in the area of easy and clear technical world. In this sense, geographical names are essentially proper nouns. The beginning may vary, but the meaning of the place name is holistic as

geographical exploration (Gammeltoft, 2015), establishment of nationalism (Tichelaar, 2015), national modernization strategy (Shim J, 2016) and imperialism (Hausner, 2016; Dudden, 2014; Yi S-G, 2013) were deeply related to the names of the oceans. However, the world is changing too. The end of imperialism and the movement of post-colonialism have changed the geographical names including sea names. Chi (2016) argued that this post-colonial name change is a review process of Western civilization and the geographical knowledge created by colonizers. It is hard to know how many place names will be new issues in this era of post-colonization. However, the process in which the existing names is reevaluated and changed can be part of standardization of place name. The postmortem naming practice requires an epistemological shift that this post-colonial naming is a trend to cope with rather than the "enemy" of nominal standardization.

Creating unseen fear: the anti-discourse of dual naming

As Tanabe et al. (2010) admitted, there is a political aspect of place names. Once we acknowledge that naming practice is far from political neutrality, we should consider place naming as a political process in two respects. One is the practice of political bodies and the other is the construction and diffusion of discourse. Among these, the former is relatively clear, but the latter is very subtle. But the power of discourse lies in "plausible logic and metaphor". Through the discourse, people respond as if they know something they do not really know or have not experienced. Discourse creates a social environment in which certain expressions or claims are accepted, and for this reason discourse has become the most important word in modern political geography and geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, 1996). I would like to point out two discourses among issues related to the *East Sea / Sea of Japan*. The first is a "chain reaction" discourse. This discourse is based on the fear that if the *East Sea / Japan Sea* dual naming is decided by international organizations, this would stimulate other potential issues sequentially. This discourse is creating a kind of 'fear' that a dual naming in one area will make the world map very complicated and messy. This is the foundation for the criticism that one of the small sea names in East Asia may trigger a nationalist renaming project in other regions. But this discourses always live on the fear of the public rather than on solid facts.

It should be analyzed with caveats how much influence the *East Sea / Japan Sea* dual naming will have on the names of seas around the world. Disagreements and conflicts in the naming of seas in a region are based on a specific historical - geographical context. Therefore, a similar environment must be assumed for a decision in one area to be transferred to another area. We need to ask ourselves the following questions. How many countries are promoting English Channel and La Manche as a model for dual naming? Has the conflict between the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Gulf of the Middle East sparked other conflicts in that region? Or is it possible that dual naming movement in East Asia would shake the foundations of European international sea naming legacies?

Another discourse is about confusion and navigation security. This is a discourse that the dual naming will cause confusion and threaten navigation safety. In this regard, ethnographic review of dual naming policy in many countries needs to be reviewed. This is to rethink the naming policy from the perspective of the user rather than the provider or the expert. Kostanski provides interviews with local residents on the evaluation of the dual

naming policy of the Australian National Park area in a recently published edited book.

“She was originally opposed to the proposal, but she recognized that we do have to respect the Aboriginal history and that’s why I have said I’d like both names really... Jason posited that he didn’t have a problem really with dual names, so long as he can always refer to the place as the Grampians or Mount William or Pinnacle or whatever. This is an important point, in that dual names allows for people to ‘pick and choose’ which toponym they would prefer to use, because they know that either option will be recognized. (Kostanski, 2016)

Of course, there is a negative evaluation of dual naming, but in general, local residents show positive opinion to this policy. In this case, there is a premise that local residents are well acquainted with the information about the geographical features represented with dual names. On the other hand, in the case of the *East Sea / Sea of Japan*, named users should memorize one more new information that *East Sea* and *Sea of Japan* refer to the identical feature. However, in reality, it is very unlikely that the general public will mention the sea in their daily lives. And because of personal preference, whichever of the two names they choose should be respected.

This issue may refer to navigation safety because it is about sea names. However, there is no specific reason why sea names are important in sea navigation. When an aircraft pilot flies from Beijing to New York, it is hard to imagine what kind of risk the pilot has when he / she passes through this dual named area. In fact, sea names are not used in navigation logs related to sailing and flying. With the development of technology, the name of the sea is not an important factor in the navigation of the ship or aircraft compared to the longitude, latitude, altitude and direction and intensity of the wind. Nevertheless, this discourse has been created and prevalent because of the lack of user - centered approach or ethnographic research in place naming studies. The direction of future research needs to be complemented by a user-oriented viewpoint from a provider-oriented one.

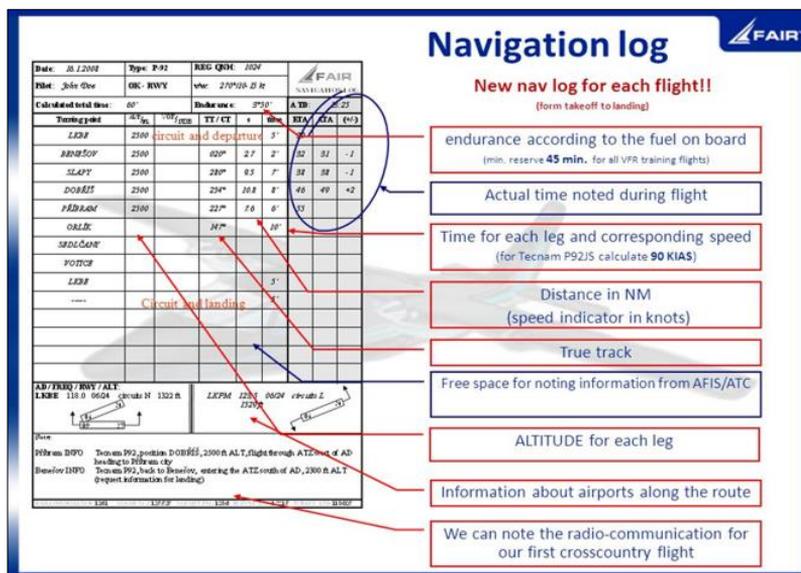


Figure 4. Flight Navigation Log Sample

CONCLUSION

As the debate over the sea names between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago continues, various proposals for the solutions have been discussed in this seminar. However, negotiations between the two countries are still failing, and the continuity of this debate seems to be a status quo. This paper examines some of the solutions discussed in this seminar, in particular the criticism of dual naming and the short evaluation on the criticism. Through this paper, I would like to emphasize several points. First, cultural and historical values of place names should be approached as holistic perspectives, and place names are difficult to be subject to technical evaluation. Second, the standardization of geographical names has been influenced by the ideologies of the times, and the present era is the period of post-colonialism. It is very natural to include post-colonialism mandates in the process of the sea naming. Third, a careful review is necessary for the concrete ingredients constituting the anti-discourse on the dual naming practice.

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