

Dual naming in cartographic and Non-cartographic environments

Paul WOODMAN*

This paper briefly considers the dual naming of maritime features around the world, before focusing more particularly on the specific *Sea of Japan/East Sea* question. The dual naming of this Sea has hitherto been considered almost exclusively in terms of the cartographic environment – how such a policy might best be applied on maps and in atlases – and such topics are duly considered here too. However, dual naming in the equally significant non-cartographic environment has been given scant attention so far, and this paper seeks to address this issue as well, by discussing some of the textual and oral problems encountered in international conferences. The paper then considers some of the deeper issues relevant to a naming policy for the Sea, concluding with the author’s personal thoughts on the way forward.

BRIEF GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Existing examples of the dual naming of maritime features can be divided into three categories, in which either: (a) a feature has different names in a single language; (b) a feature has a single name which appears in different languages; or (c) a feature has different names in different languages. There are two very important points to make here. Firstly, we are not dealing with *naming* as such; none of the toponyms discussed in this paper is new. Instead, we are dealing with the cartographic and non-cartographic *application of already existing names*; determining which name(s) should be deployed in which context(s). Secondly, it is important to note that almost all the names in all three categories below are used harmoniously, without any dispute whatsoever (see also Woodman, 2015)

Features with different names in a single language

This category includes features ranging from small bays to sizeable inlets. England provides us with a small example, in which an indentation in the shoreline of the Bristol Channel is known by either of two names – *Barnstaple Bay* or *Bideford Bay* – both of which are in the English language. A much more significant example is to be found in

* Former Secretary, Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, United Kingdom.

Mexico, where the inlet separating the major portion of that country from the peninsula of Baja California is known in Spanish both as *Golfo de California* and as *Mar de Cortés*¹. It is unlikely that any features in this category are dual-named because of some political or other disharmony; they exist together without friction and it would be of little consequence if one of the two options were omitted.

Features with the same name in different languages

The Gulf of Bothnia provides an important example in this category: the Swedish name *Bottniska viken* and the Finnish name *Pohjanlahti* both have the identical meaning of ‘Base Bay/Sea’ or ‘Bottom Bay/Sea’. Many other smaller features in this category are becoming increasingly visible, as more and more languages around the world achieve official status and thereby gain cartographic recognition. One such example is found in northern Spain, in the Basque region where both Castilian Spanish and Basque are official languages. Here the bay in the city of San Sebastián is known as *Bahía de la Concha* in Spanish and *Kontxako Badia* in Basque. In both languages the meaning is the same: ‘Bay of Shells’. Again, it is unlikely that any features in this category are dual-named because of some political or other disharmony.

Features with different names in different languages

Obvious examples in this category include *English Channel* (English)/*La Manche* (French), and *Strait of Dover* (English) / *Pas de Calais* (French). Very few features in this category are dual-named because of political friction or other disharmony²; in each case, one name or the other is the obvious choice purely on linguistic grounds. However, also in this category (if subjected to dual naming) would be the twin names 동해 (*Donghae*; *East Sea*) and 日本海 (*Nihon-kai*; *Sea of Japan*), respectively the Korean-language and Japanese-language names for the Sea lying between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. Again, there is not necessarily any disharmony or contradiction between these names *per se*, but there is significant disagreement as to whether this Sea should be the subject of dual naming. We might now usefully examine the application of names for this Sea in greater detail, in both the cartographic and the non-cartographic environments.

THE CARTOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT

Although the dual naming of maritime features is feasible, and is not uncommon in practice, there are several cartographic issues to be considered in its regard: (a) the sequencing of the names; (b) the positioning of the names; and (c) questions of map or atlas scale.

¹ It is interesting to note in passing that the name for this feature in the local Kiliwa language is *Ja’ Tay Eñoom*, which means ‘East Sea’ (Wikipedia, 2017). One wonders how many other East Seas lie hidden within similarly minor languages around the world.

² Croatia’s occasionally expressed preference for the Croatian-language neologism *Savudrijska vala* (for *Piranski zaliv*; Bay of Piran) is a rare exception (see Woodman, 2015).

Sequencing

Dual naming in relation to this particular Sea is intended to provide equal status, yet it obviously requires one name to be placed before or above the other, in what might inevitably seem to be a primary position. How does one determine this priority whilst still maintaining equal status? And what mark of connection should be used? A solidus, a dash, brackets; all these options carry different implications and can be read in different and perhaps unintended ways.

Positioning

If each of the two names for the Sea is included separately, without any connecting symbol between them, then their positioning becomes an important issue. Where should each name be placed, without appearing to divide the Sea into two features? If the sequence of names is determined by the frequency of their use, then the name *Sea of Japan* will usually come first. Yet if the disposition of the names is in a single horizontal line, then this would in most major languages position that name on the western side of the Sea, closer to Korea than to Japan, with the name *East Sea* closer to the Japanese archipelago. Only in languages using writing systems based on Arabic script, written from right to left, might a geographically more appropriate positioning be achieved.

Map or atlas scale

Not all cartographic products have the space to carry two names for the Sea. In such instances, one name alone will have to be chosen; which name should that be? Out of fear of offending one party or the other, some cartographers now actually omit all names from the Sea altogether. This unfortunate reality was confirmed at the 2016 International Seminar on Sea Names by the French political cartographer Philippe Rekacewicz in his presentation relating to maps published in the French monthly newspaper *Le Monde diplomatique*. It was seen again in the presentation made by the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) to the 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN 11) in 2017, which also showed maps with no name for the Sea (UNGEGN 2017: see slides 3 & 4). The Bureau had decided the application of any name to be altogether too problematic in a United Nations context³. This absence of any name is clearly of no help whatsoever to the user, yet it is a direct – albeit unintended – consequence of a dual naming policy advocated by one party in the absence of any universal agreement.

THE NON-CARTOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT

The non-cartographic environment has been insufficiently studied with respect to dual naming. This section of the paper gives a short background to the issue, and then considers the merits and demerits of potential solutions.

³ For this omission, incidentally, the Bureau was privately rebuked by Japan.

Background

In the many meetings, workshops and seminars which have been devoted to the naming of this particular Sea over the years, attention has been concentrated almost exclusively on the cartographic aspects of dual naming, as outlined above. Yet in reality the cartographic occurrences of this (and any other) toponym are far less frequent than the textual or spoken occurrences. For every map of the Sea shown at a given international meeting, the name of that same Sea is probably written or uttered at least twenty times.

But the present situation in international meetings – Korea objects to sole use of the label *Sea of Japan*, and Japan objects to any introduction of the label *East Sea* – is clearly unacceptable both to the countries concerned and to the wider international community. It has meant that important work in international organisations such as UNEGN and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) has been at a standstill for several years. And a new nadir was reached at UNCSCN 11, when Japan objected to the use of the name *East Sea* in a conference working paper submitted by the Republic of Korea – not for the customary reason that it included some direct reference to the Sea, but merely because the Sea name appeared in the paper indirectly, in the title of an organisation (*The Society for East Sea*) and as part of an Internet URL (<http://eastsea1994.org>) cited in the text (ROK-UNEGN 2017).

Dual naming

Dual naming cannot be the answer to this problem in the non-cartographic environment. It is unreasonable to demand of any expert, delegate or participant in an international meeting that they use the dual-name expression *Sea of Japan / East Sea* or *East Sea / Sea of Japan* on each occasion that they need to refer to that feature. Imagine that a delegate – let us say a Mr Smith from Australia – is reporting on trade in the Pacific Ocean to an international conference on economic affairs. With an obligation to follow the requirements of dual naming, his report might turn out along the following lines:

I can report that trade volumes in the East Sea / Sea of Japan have increased substantially over the reporting period. This is in part because the Sea of Japan / East Sea has not been affected by the outbreak of avian influenza that has blighted other sectors of the Pacific Ocean. It is anticipated that trade volumes in the East Sea / Sea of Japan will continue to increase into the next reporting period. That concludes my report on the Sea of Japan / East Sea.

This is convoluted, tautological and inelegant – a travesty of decent language. And note too that Mr Smith has felt obliged to cover himself by including a totally redundant fourth sentence. He knows that governmental representatives of Japan and Korea will pore over his report to check that the number of ‘priorities’ favouring their own language is not fewer than the number favouring the counterpart language. So, faced with this atmosphere of fear, Mr Smith adds an unnecessary fourth sentence simply to balance the books. In short, dual naming does not solve the problem in textual and spoken contexts.

Contextual naming with a place-holder

It would be possible to avoid the problem associated with dual naming by using a place-holder name for the Sea; one single toponym to be used in those international arenas in which use of either *Sea of Japan* or *East Sea* is problematic and where use of both names together is linguistically cumbersome and unwieldy. If we assume the place-holder name to be ‘North-East Asian Sea’, then Mr Smith’s report would read as follows:

I can report that trade volumes in the North-East Asian Sea have increased substantially over the reporting period. This is in part because the North-East Asian Sea has not been affected by the outbreak of avian influenza that has blighted other sectors of the Pacific Ocean. It is anticipated that trade volumes in the North-East Asian Sea will continue to increase into the next reporting period.

This version of the report is neater and more succinct, with 25% fewer words, and it no longer requires the redundant fourth ‘balancing’ sentence demanded by dual naming. Unfortunately, though, rather than satisfy both parties, this approach is unlikely to please either, since neither Korea nor Japan would see its preferred name represented. So contextual naming is unlikely to be the solution, notwithstanding my earlier advocacy of such an approach (Woodman, 2012).

DEEPER ISSUES

Much of toponymy has a political dimension to some degree, of course, and dual naming is no exception. The trend towards an increased official recognition of minority languages around the world has led to a significant rise in the visible deployment of dual naming in countries such as Spain, as we have already seen. So if the deployment of dual names is becoming more widespread, why should the dual naming involved in adding *East Sea* to *Sea of Japan* be so problematic? The short answer is that this particular issue has raised the political dimension of dual naming to new and unprecedented levels. There are several pointers which demonstrate this. The Korean government expends inordinate sums of money on promoting the name *East Sea* internationally, and has even established a unique diplomatic post (‘Ambassador for Geographical Naming’) to oversee this *démarche*. Foreign governments, foreign cartographic publishing houses, and foreign media are all lobbied intensively in this endeavour, and the Korean expatriate community in the United States has been encouraged to lobby state politicians in that country to ensure the visible presence of the name *East Sea* in school textbooks. The main ‘Current Affairs’ page of the official website of the government of the Republic of Korea gives the *East Sea* naming issue considerable prominence (ROK-GOV 2017). Moreover, the government is quite happy to acknowledge its involvement openly, writing in a sub-page of that same website section that it ‘is campaigning for revisions to erroneous [*sic*] naming, targeting relevant international organizations, state governments, academic bodies, the press, map producers and publishers’. Clearly, there is a greater insertion of politics into this issue than is usually found in toponymy.

But this has led to a paradox. Many experts (particularly those from Europe) have pointed out over the years that outside Asia the name *Sea of Japan*, while on the one hand clearly possessive in form, is on the other hand semantically neutral in reality – simply an address label. Ironically, it is the name *East Sea* which, although structurally neutral in form, has become in reality semantically possessive, as a result of the political initiatives already cited. In the international community the name *Sea of Japan* is not identified with Japan in any ownership sense, whereas the name *East Sea* has become inextricably linked with Korean national ambition. The international community is understandably wary of this, and is particularly concerned about setting the precedent for a potential proliferation of national names, which is already becoming widely problematic in south-east Asia.

THOUGHTS ON THE WAY FORWARD

How can we end this ‘War of the Two Toponyms’? It is a conflict that has now endured for a quarter of a century, a far lengthier period of time than the total duration of all the real-life hostilities that the Sea has experienced in its history (Lee, 2017)⁴. How can we dispel the fear that grips cartographers and conference participants to the extent that they sometimes avoid naming the Sea at all? Maybe we might look to another part of the world for guidance. In his paper submitted to this present seminar, Professor Sang-Hyun Chi refers to work undertaken by the Australian toponymist Laura Kostanski. In interviewing residents in the Australian state of Victoria about the prospect of adding Aboriginal names as second names for local features, Kostanski writes as follows about the response from one particular interviewee (Chi, 2017):

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.

The key element in this Australian experience is clearly the licence to ‘pick and choose’ at will. The interviewee expects to be able to select the name of his choice from the toponymic options available to him, and it is apparent from the relaxed tone of the quoted passage that this expectation is completely reasonable and unremarkable in an Australian context. So can we transfer this idea from territorial Australia to our own maritime dilemma? Let us examine the choices we are offered at present as regards the Sea. To demand sole use of either *Sea of Japan* or *East Sea* obviously does not allow for any choice at all. Less obviously, though, the call for dual naming as presently understood does not allow for choice either, because it demands the use of both names together, as a single contrived unit. Note too that not only does the label *East Sea* need to be added to instances of *Sea of Japan*, but in the interests of reciprocal justice and fairness the label *Sea of Japan* needs to be added to instances of *East Sea* also. Thus at present there is no genuine choice, and the only way to introduce choice into the proceedings – and thereby perhaps bring much-needed harmony – is to allow the type of facility inherent in the Australian passage above; the licence to use either name (or both names) as the user sees fit.

⁴ According to Lee, the Sea has in its history witnessed three individual wars amounting to a total of 14 years.

So here is the big question. Might it be possible to re-frame and re-interpret our understanding of dual naming, so that it involves the genuine choice available in Australia? Is it really too much to ask that all parties to this toponymic conflict simply adopt a policy of ‘live and let live’, allowing the preferred choice of each cartographer or conference participant to pass unchallenged? The difference of opinion over the name of the Sea is now universally known and need not be tediously restated on every occasion, especially since neither of the two names involves by virtue of its use any dispute over territory or sovereignty. Such a policy of real choice would permit everyone – including Japan and Korea – to submit working papers and make oral presentations in international meetings, and to include maps in international publications, in a relaxed environment, using their own preferred choice of label for the Sea, safe in the knowledge that they would not be challenged. It is certain that the world in general would be thankful for the resulting relaxation of tension.

REFERENCES

- Chi, Sang-Hyun. (2017). Lingerin g issues on sea names: Why are we drifting about?. *Achieving Peace and Justice through Geographical Naming*, 23rd International Seminar on Sea Names, Berlin, October 2017.
- Lee, Young Choon (2017). Some perspectives on the history of the *East Sea*?. *Achieving Peace and Justice through Geographical Naming*, 23rd International Seminar on Sea Names, Berlin, October 2017.
- ROK-GOV (2017): Republic of Korea government: website homepage: <http://www.korea.net/Government/Current-Affairs/National-Affairs?affairId=83> (Accessed September 21, 2017).
- ROK-UNGEGN (2017). International Seminar on Sea Names, 2013-2016. 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, August 8-17 2017. Available on the ROK-UNGEGN website: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/E_Conf.105_131_CRP.131_7_ROK_WP_International%20seminar.pdf (Accessed September 21, 2017).
- UNGEGN (2017). UNGEGN, objectives, current structure and programme of work. 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, U.S.A., August 8-17 2017. Available on the UNGEGN website: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/UNGEGN%20present.pdf> (Accessed September 21, 2017).
- Wikipedia editors (2017). “Golfo de California”. Wikipedia. Accessed 2017-09-21.
- Woodman, Paul (2012): Contextual naming of the sea between Japan and Korea: Reconciling parallel realities. 18th International Seminar on Sea Names: Asian and European Perspectives; Brussels, Belgium, March 7-9 2012.
- Woodman, Paul (2015). Maritime naming practice for shared and divided features: Common perceptions and harmonious coexistence: in *Sea Names: Heritage, Perception and International Relations*; Proceedings of the 21st International Seminar on Sea Names, Helsinki, Finland, 23-26 August 2015; The Society for *East Sea*, Seoul, 2015
- Woodman, Paul (2015). Maritime naming practice for shared and divided features: Common perceptions and harmonious coexistence: in *Sea Names: Heritage, Perception and International Relations*; Proceedings of the 21st International Seminar on Sea Names, Helsinki, Finland, August 23-26 2015.