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Exonyms

On Exonym/Endonym dichotomy and Sea/Ocean names

Submitted by Japan**

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On Exonym/Endonym dichotomy and Sea/Ocean names

It should be recognized that attempts to date to examine issues concerning the names of maritime features such as seas and oceans in terms of the exonym/endonym dichotomy have not been conclusive. They might even have added to the confusion in certain cases.

In this relation, the intrinsic differences between land-features and seas/oceans should be fully appreciated. A land-feature is either entirely under a single territorial sovereignty, or completely divided into two or more parts that are respectively under different territorial sovereignties (with the exception of the Antarctica). The elements of ownership and of exclusiveness, which are inherent in any land-feature, and the distinction between “home” and “foreign” that comes with it, is the fundamental pre-requisite of the endonym/exonym dichotomy. On the contrary, seas and oceans are open to all countries, and are in principle under no territorial sovereignty, except for the narrow 12 mile-maritime-belt skirting their respective coastal areas. It should also be noted that the number of littoral states of seas and oceans, as well as languages spoken in the littoral areas, are usually numerous. The number of countries of origin of ships that frequent those sea-areas are also numerous. Besides, boundaries and limits of sea-areas are drawn in multiple different ways. In the absence of knowledge of land shapes, sea-names, including most endonyms in East Asia, did not necessarily entail a clear notion of boundaries and limits. For example, Japanese traditionally called parts of the Pacific Ocean Nankai (“South Sea”, off the coast of today’s Shikoku and Kii peninsula) and Tokai (“East Sea”, off the coast of today’s Tokai region), without recognizing the limit of the sea-body that is today called internationally “Pacific Ocean” extending to such places as Alaska, California, and Chile and Australia.

Against this backdrop, as maritime activities develop globally, and out of necessity, particular names based on particular demarcation of sea-areas gradually established themselves as international standards. This is the basis of the IHO’s work related to the limits and names of oceans and seas, which consists of identifying standardized sea-names for all sea-areas as defined by standardized demarcation of water-bodies, out of countless of local names in different languages, as well as different level of scales used to draw maps and charts.

It is obvious that the Endonym/Exonym dichotomy cannot explain why, in this process, such names as the East China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Tasman Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Solomon Sea, or the Pacific Ocean came to be identified as international standards. Any such attempt would be a source of confusion. For example, the Exonym/Endonym dichotomy does not explain the fact that the name “Baltic Sea” is uncontested as the internationally standardized name, while most of the littoral states call the same water-body the “Sea to the East” or the “Sea to the West” (Estonia) in their respective languages. The simple fact is that the “Baltic Sea” is the *international* name for the sea-area, while “Ostsee” (German language) and “Läänemeri” (Estonian language) and other names used in littoral states are *local* names. Such names as “Ostsee” and “Läänemeri” would remain one of the local names for the same sea area, even if one were to attempt to translate them into English/French as “Sea to the East/Mer de l’Est” or “Sea to the West/Mer de l’Ouest.”

It may thus be useful for the UNGEGN to fully appreciate the actual history and process of the international standardization of sea-names as explained above, which centers around the identification of internationally standardized names as opposed to local names, rather than around the exonym/endonym dichotomy.

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