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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN JAPAN
(PART ONE)*

Paper submitted by the Government of Japan

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Standardization of Geographical Names in Japan

1. Organization for controlling geographical names

In Japan there is an organization called the Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names as mentioned in the Report of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Volume 1 (E/CONF.53/3). This, however, is merely an organization which was set up by two agencies, the Geographical Survey Institute of the Ministry of Construction and the Hydrography Department of the Maritime Safety Agency, Ministry of Transport, with the object of standardizing the geographical names used on land maps and marine charts. It is not an overall official organ established for the purpose of registering and controlling Japanese geographical names. Such being the case, other government offices, etc. are not bound by the decisions of the above mentioned organization.

2. Geographical names that require standardization

Concerning the names of such local public bodies as cities, towns and villages, the Local Autonomy Law prescribes the procedure for fixing them. Under the Law, the name of such a local public body is fixed by its by-law, and the approval of the prefectural governor concerned must be obtained on it. When the approval has been given, the Minister of Home Affairs issues a notification to that effect. Also, under the Law, the name of a street or section within a city, town or village is fixed by a resolution passed by the general assembly of the city, town or village concerned, and the prefectural governor concerned issues a notification of it.

Thus, the name of a city, town or village and the name of a street or section within a city, town or village are subject to legal regulation, so each of them is invariably called by one name. In such circumstances, there is no problem of their standardization.

With regard to geographical names other than those mentioned above (i.e. names of natural features, etc.), there are cases in which a place is called by two or more names, as the names of these places are

not governed by any legal regulations such as those mentioned above. Therefore, standardization of these names should be considered.

3. Present status of standardization of geographical names

Particularly, the names of some natural features in coastal districts used by maritime circles differ from those used by other people. For this reason, land maps and marine charts sometimes show different names for the same place. It was for the purpose of standardizing these names that in 1960 a joint committee on the standardization of geographical names was established, as stated earlier. Since then, the committee has been proceeding with the work of standardization by checking data, referring to the cities, towns and villages concerned, etc.

Up to the present, about five thousand names of natural features have been standardized and compiled into "Standardized Geographical Names (Names of Natural Features)" (in Japanese), which was published in July 1971. The committee intends to continue making consultations and strive for standardization of such geographical names for all Japan including inland areas.