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**Place Names to the Public:
Promoting Awareness of Geographical Names**

Submitted by Republic of Korea*

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Place Names to the Public: Promoting Awareness of Geographical Names[†]

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to introduce key efforts and achievements of the NGII in the Republic of Korea to enhance public awareness of geographical names. Since geographical name has become a key ingredient to collect and organize spatial information, NGII has carried out various projects to provide correct and useful information on geographical names. These projects have been devised for foreigners as well as domestic population. In addition, many initiatives have been implemented to increase awareness of geographical names and highlight their value. To accomplish these tasks, new and diverse attempts have been made, such as finding contents for media coverage, facilitating public participation to create digital contents on place names, and developing educational toolkits.

Place names and public awareness

As the resolution IX/7 adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSSGN) noted, it is an important task for governmental authorities to provide information on the origin and meaning of geographical names. Providing information on geographical names is one of the key activities to help people use correct geographical names and to recognize their value. Moreover, with the advent of information technology (IT) such as commercial map providers for mobile electronic devices, the importance of geographical names has been increased. Considering the fact that geographical names are made, used, discarded, and forgotten in the daily lives of people, it is imperative to enhance public awareness of geographical names. Since its establishment, the National Geographic Institute (NGII) of the Republic of Korea has tried to provide information on geographical names and enhance public awareness on geographical names. These endeavors include publishing informative materials, improving web-based accessibility, contents developments, and the hosting of various activities.

Accomplishment of NGII: Geographical Names to the Public

Publications on geographical names for the public

The NGII has implemented various programs to promote public awareness of geographical names. Those programs can be summarized and analyzed in three categories for other member states to reference. The first task is to provide people with correct and informative materials on the origins and meanings of geographical names. Given the many competing and often groundless theories of origins present today, it was deemed necessary for governmental institution to publish a series of

[†] This working paper pertains to the UNCSSGN resolutions IX/7 (Dissemination of information concerning the origin and meaning of geographical names) I/4 (National standardization), and V/6 (Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs).

books on the origins of geographical names. The publication of these books was a massive work in terms of the time and resources. In addition, the origin and meaning of geographical names needed a meticulous examination of historical texts. The NGII took on this ambitious task and published a series of books titled ‘The Origins of Place Names in the Republic of Korea (한국지명유래집)’ from 2008 to 2011. The series of books have covered cultural regions in order, such as central region including Seoul (2008), Chungcheong region (2009), Jeolla and Jeju region (2010), and Gyeongsang region (2011). For the interest of the readers, the books introduce official names, other popular names, stories behind the names, the change of names based on old maps. The NGII has distributed these books to governmental bodies, local authorities, academic societies, and major libraries. The books can be accessed through the gateway portal of the NGII (map.ngii.go.kr). Furthermore, the contents of the books are provided to major commercial Internet search engines. People can find the origins of place names through the Web, which greatly increased the accessibility to the information.

In a globalized world, providing the origins and meanings of place names should not be limited to the domestic audiences. In 2015, the NGII initiated a new project to publish a place-name book named ‘People, Places and Place Names in the Republic of Korea’ for non-Korean speakers. This project was designed to help non-Korean speakers to correctly read and easily understand Korean geographical names. Also, another purpose of this book was to introduce rich Korean cultural and historical heritages embedded in geographical names. As the existing books on etymologies of place names are often difficult to grasp and could not draw interest of the general, the new book had to be filled with fresh attempts. To fulfill this purpose, special attention has been paid. First, the style of writing and the choice of words have been given much attention. A conversational style with many interrogative sentences was used, which was devised to make readers feel that they are on the same page with the authors. Second, a considerable effort has been devoted to the understanding of the Korean language and how to correctly read Korean geographical names. Third, diverse sources of materials were used to explain geographical names, such as adage and cliché, pop songs, photos and pictures, folklore tales, and similar naming practice in other countries. This initiative of the NGII to narrow the gap between toponymy experts and the general public is waiting for evaluation and further development by the member countries.

Methods to raise public awareness of geographical names

When it comes to the task of raising public awareness of geographical names, it is very important to develop good methods to reach out the general public. To date, the NGII has devised and implemented new and insightful measures tailored to the expected audiences. Over the last several years, the NGII has released media coverage about place names that are related to the Asian (Chinese) zodiac of the year. Since 2010, place names that originated from tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, and monkey have been researched and released through major broadcasting systems and newspapers. The media coverage of those place names of the zodiac of the year has received much resonance and became an expected routine for the New Year. Information on the process of identifying place names related to a zodiac and the examples of media coverage would be available at the exhibition.

Several activities have been designed and implemented to raise the awareness on place names, and these activities have successfully elicited public participation. In 2015, the NGII hosted a competition of User Created Contents (UCC) and developing games for educational purposes to

encourage people to familiarize with the origins and meanings of place names. With regard to the UCC competition, individuals and teams were encouraged to participate in the competition with items about 1) how to help people correctly use place names; and 2) how to enhance public awareness on the value of place names. For the game-developing competition for toponymy education, many teams designed board games through which kids can play and study the origins and meanings of place names at the same time. Award-winning works were chosen by a group of experts from toponymy and education.

Further orientation toward disseminating information and enhancing awareness on geographical names

To date, the NGII has endeavored to perform its duty of disseminating the information on geographical names. In addition, the NGII has initiated creative programs to increase the awareness on place names. To accomplish these imperatives, a significant amount of time and resources have been devoted to many programs, such as publication on geographical names for the general public and non-Korean speakers, finding interesting stories behind place names to draw public attention, and programs to facilitate public participation in disseminating knowledge on place names. Building on the existing achievements, the NGII will expand its agenda items as well as maintaining currently successful programs.