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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

National Standardization of Geographical  
Names in Japan

Paper submitted by Japan

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# NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN JAPAN

(Item No.5 of the provisional Agenda)

## 1. Collection and Treatment of Names

There are supposed to be more than 10 million geographical names in Japan which are commonly used in daily life. The collection, registration and standardization of these names is a valuable project which will preserve our cultural heritage as well as promote economic and social activities.

There are no governmental agencies which centralizes the collection, treatment and standardization of geographical names in Japan, but several agencies and organizations, however, have been dealing with this problem in connection with their own administrative work.

The agencies engaged in map preparation, namely, the Geographical Survey Institute and the Hydrographic Department have been collecting and treating geographical names of land and ocean areas respectively. Both agencies have been adopting the names to be used on their maps and charts by referring to the local public bodies concerned, on the basis of the principle that the name used in common among the people of the concerned local areas should be adopted.

Names of territorial administrative units and settlements are stipulated by laws and regulations, and new names and corresponding areas should be announced in the governmental newsletter. Therefore, these are treated as

the standardized names. The spelling or pronunciation of the names of natural features and other conventional place names, however, are not always fixed, even among the people of the concerned local areas, and changes with the time. Sometimes there are two or more names for one natural feature.

In order to cope with this situation and to standardize the names used by the two agencies, the Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names has been held.

## 2. The Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names

The Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names was established in 1960 in order to unite the geographical names used on maps and charts prepared by the Geographical Survey Institute and the Hydrographic Department. The Joint Committee has convened periodically. The Primary and Secondary Education Bureau, Ministry of Education and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) have taken part as observers with the objective of using the names adopted by the committee, in education and broadcasting.

### (1) Treatment of the Geographical Names

a) The names which are in common usage by both the agencies are adopted as the standard names, and if the two usages are different, the standard one is decided after a resurvey conferring with local public bodies and other agencies.

b) The names of international seas and oceans beyond the territorial limits admitted by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) are adopted on principle.

c) When there is another name used by the public, concerning a river, cape and etc., beside the name designated by laws, either name is allowed to be adopted as the standard one with the other adopted as a sub-name.

d) The characters of "Hiragana (or Hirakana)" should be used for the pronunciation of names.

e) The characters to be used to write the names should be "Kanji"(Chinese character), "Hiragana" and "Katakana" and a long vowel symbol(-) is admitted in writing with "Katakana".

(Example)

Spelling of name

Pronunciation

日 本 山

ひ の み ね さ ん

( Hinomine San )

## (2) Progress of Standardization

The standardization of geographical names by the Joint Committee has been carried out in stages, according to map scales and has completed 6,000 names of natural features used on 1:500,000 scale maps as of 1978.

Since then, standardization of the names to be described on medium scale maps of 1:25,000 to 1:50,000 has been conducted and about 25,000 names out of a total of 80,000 have been determined so far.