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**Korea Committee on Geographical Names (KCGN):
Accomplishments and Challenges**

Submitted by the Republic of Korea**

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Korea Committee on Geographical Names (KCGN): Accomplishments and Challenges¹

SUMMARY

The paper reports on the accomplishments and challenges that the Korea Committee on Geographical Names achieved and faced during the period of 2012~2016, mainly focusing on its standardization of natural and artificial feature names. During the five year period, 420 natural and artificial feature names were standardized and publicly announced, including 395 new names and 25 changed names, totaling 152,292 standardized names up to the end of 2016. Most of the newly standardized names were given to those features which had been used by local residents or in maps but not publicly announced (e.g., small islands and peaks) and to newly constructed features (e.g., bridges, intersections, and parks). There were often cases in which controversial suggestions were made by adjacent local municipalities for overlapping features. Possible ways to reach an agreement between municipalities are still to be sought.

The status of the Korea Committee on Geographical Names

The Korea Committee on Geographical Names (KCGN) was founded in 2010 as an amalgamation of two separate committees dealing with names of land features and maritime feature. The KCGN reviews proposals for new names or name changes that are reported by the National Geographic Information Institute (NGII) for natural and artificial features and by the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency (KHOA) for maritime features, and executes the final decision of accepting or rejecting the given proposals. The KCGN consists of members from either the government or non-government sector, of which the chair is elected from the latter and two vice-chairs from the NGII and the KHOA. Government members come from several different professional backgrounds, including education, Korean language, history, defense, internal and foreign affairs, as well as land management and maritime affairs. The KCGN meets three to four times per year. The existence of the KCGN is legally based on the Act on the Establishment and Management of Spatial Information.

Standardization of geographical names, 2012~2016

During the period of 2012~2016, the KCGN approved the standardization and public announcement of 420 natural and artificial feature names reported by the NGII and 451 maritime feature names proposed by the KHOA. According to procedural rules, new names or name changes for natural and artificial features were proposed by committees of local municipalities, e.g., city, provincial or country committees and reported by the NGII, while those for maritime features were proposed by the KHOA itself.

¹ This working paper pertains to the UNCSGN resolutions I/4 (National standardization), II/32 (Dissemination of decisions by national authorities), IX/7 (Dissemination of information concerning the origin and meaning of geographical names) and V/6 (Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs).

Among the 420 natural and artificial feature names, 395 were new names and 25 were changed names. 26 names were approved at the subsequent meeting after being rejected or deferred during the previous meeting. With these names, the total number of standardized natural and artificial names reached up to 152,292.

Island names occupied the biggest portion among natural features (99 names). These were names for uninhabited small islands in the western and southern coast which had been used by local residents but not endowed with official status. Also included were names for peaks and mountains; those for officially unnamed features (17 names) and those replacing the currently registered ones which had been in use with inappropriate Chinese characters or exonyms created during the Japanese colonial period (9 names).

Recent years witnessed a growing number of new names for artificial features, including bridges (119 names), intersections (55 names), parks (45 names), underpasses (13 names), tunnels (13 names), and eco-bridges (11 names). These features were created as a result of the construction of new cities, highways, roads, and other infrastructure. Some name changes were also required due to duplicated names (11 names).

Table 1. Standardization of natural and artificial feature names in the Republic of Korea, 2012~2016*

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
natural features	island	10	0	0	49	40	99
	peak	3(1)	0	4(2)	0	8	15(3)
	mountain	2	1(1)	2(2)	3(2)	3(1)	11(6)
	others	3(1)	4(4)	1	0	0	8(5)
artificial features	bridge	3	0	6	29	81	119
	intersection	0	0	0	0	55	55
	park	0	1	0	26	18	45
	others**	3(2)	6(3)	3(2)	24(4)	32	68(11)
Total		24(4)	12(8)	16(6)	131(6)	237(1)	420(25)

* Numbers in the parenthesis represent name changes.

** Others include underpasses, tunnels, eco-bridges, etc.

Controversial proposals by adjacent local municipalities

Most of the proposals by committees of local municipalities are submitted with one name. However, there exist several cases in which two or more alternatives are submitted and the final decision is directed to the KCGN. In most cases these are names for features overlapping two or more local municipalities, e.g., bridges, tunnels, and very rarely, mountains. The KCGN recommends that all parties concerned reach an agreement on a common name based on the standardization guidelines. But controversies still persist. Here, three cases of naming bridges deserve attention.

A long bridge was constructed between Seocheon-gun (county) and Gunsan-si (city) in the middle of the western coast of Korea. Naming issues arose and the parties involved debated between “Seocheondaegyo Bridge” versus “Gunsandaegyo Bridge.” Through a naming contest, a third name was proposed: “Dongbaekdaegyo Bridge.” Both municipalities were satisfied with this name because they were famous for their indigenous dongbaek (Korean word for camellia). The two municipalities submitted a single

proposal of this agreed name and the KCGN responded with an approval.

Another long bridge was opened between Sinan-gun and Muan-gun in the southwestern coast. Sinan-gun desired the name “Sinandaegyo Bridge” while Muan-gun opted for “Unnamdaegyo Bridge” after its smaller administrative unit. The two proposals were brought into the provincial naming committee: yet an impasse disallowed for further advancement. An agreement was only reached when Muan-gun proposed a third name: “Kimdaejungdaegyo Bridge” after the former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mr. Kim Dae-jung. No hesitation was taken from the part of Sinan-gun because Mr. Kim was born in its territory. The KCGN welcomed the name but reservation was expressed by a few members as it had been just four years since he passed away.

The third case involved the naming of a bridge as well and its process proved to be quite difficult. A grand project of building eleven bridges connecting islands and lands with islands on the southern coast of Korea was near completed. Ten bridges belonged to Yeosu-si while the westernmost one, the longest, was connected to Goheung-gun. Yeosu-si proposed “Jeoggeumdaegyo Bridge” after the name of the island Jeoggeumdo located on the right-hand side of the bridge, while Goheung-gun proposed “Paryeongdaegyo Bridge” after the name of the highest mountain Paryeongsan in the western side of the bridge. The provincial committee submitted the name “Paryeongdaegyo Bridge” to the KCGN on the basis that it had been used for a few years since the beginning of the construction. But Yeosu-si maintained its stance. The KCGN returned the submission to the provincial committee, recommending more time for drawing a consensus. After six months, the proposal was submitted again, but an agreement had yet to be reached. The KCGN had no choice but to put it in a vote; “Paryeongdaegyo Bridge” was selected by the majority.

Principles of standardization and the reality

There are growing controversies on naming between local municipalities, particularly for overlapping features. Controversial cases may take place consistently in areas where new infrastructure is being developed. As seen in the cases above, however, there were good practices of reaching an agreement between parties concerned. It was rather easy when there were common elements in the area, e.g., products, great figures, even common culture, or way of life. But what if finding common things was infeasible?

What the KCGN depended on to accomplish appropriate judgment was the *Guidelines for the Standardization of Geographical Names in Korea*, published in 2012. Yet the problem lies in the matter of interpretation of the principles listed in the guidelines. Every local municipality makes use of the principles to their needs. Some principles could be conflictual to each other when applied in the reality. For example, one of the principles states that names currently used in the local area should be adopted with priority. Another principle affirms, however, that names with symbolic or historical meaning should be adopted with priority. As a result, when a name contains greater symbolic or historical meaning but has been marginalized by another name for a long time, one may be confused in adhering to these two principles.

Nevertheless, despite the predictable challenge, building consensus and reaching an agreement on a common name should be one of the major aims the KCGN should strive to attain in the future. Presenting accurate and unambiguous principles with accompanying examples may help to find solutions between the parties concerned.