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FEATURES BEYOND A SINGLE SOVEREIGNTY: FEATURES COMMON TO
TWO OR MORE NATIONS

The Naming of the Sea Area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese
Archipelago

(Submitted by the Republic of Korea)

The naming of the sea area between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago

Historically, the sea area between Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago had been called “East Sea” in European maps and writings about Asia because the sea lies to the east of the Eurasian landmass. The first group of Russian explorers who traveled along the eastern coast of the Eurasian Continent in the 16th century used the term “Eastern Sea.” In later years, other various names such as “Sea of Korea,” “Sea of Japan” and “Oriental Sea” were also used in old maps and publications of Europe.

A recent study on a large collection of old maps in the British National Library dating back to the pre-19th century shows that out of the 90 maps which gave a name to the sea between Korea and Japan, 72 referred to the sea as “East Sea” or “Sea of Korea.” This means that most of the European maps that were published until the 18th century recognized the sea as “East Sea” or “Sea of Korea.”

It is from the early 18th century to the mid-19th century that “Sea of Korea” and “Sea of Japan” gained wide acceptance and became the names most frequently used by cartographers. It is worth noting that as late as 1870, even many Japanese maps referred to this body of water as “Sea of *Choson*” which means “Sea of Korea,” *Choson* being the name of the Korean Kingdom which lasted from the 14th to early 20th century.

Korea became a protectorate of Japan in 1905, and was annexed by Japan in 1910. The ensuing absence of Korea’s diplomatic representation in international affairs during the first half of the 20th century until the end of World War II gave Japan a free hand to promote the name “Sea of Japan” with no opposition.

It is against this background that the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) decided to use “Sea of Japan” in 1929 to designate the body of water between Korea and Japan in the first edition of its publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas.” At the time, Korea could not contest the decision as it was under the Japanese colonial rule,

On 9 August 2002, the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) circulated the final draft for the fourth edition of S-23, requesting 69 IHO Member States to vote for or against publishing the draft. The draft, however, does not include pages 7-16 and 7-17 pertaining to the sea area between Korea and Japan, leaving it to be issued as an

addendum at a later stage.

The Republic of Korea had hoped that the MO would use “East Sea” and “Sea of Japan” together in the final draft, in compliance with its resolution A.4.2.6. The resolution, adopted in 1974, endorses the principle of using different names simultaneously for a shared geographical feature when the concerned countries do not agree on a common name. The IHB’s letter dated 23 October 2001 and circulated among South and North Korea, Japan and Russia also affirms this principle by stating that “Should there still be disagreement between the states in the region ..., it has no option but to proceed in accordance with IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6.” The IHB’s position on this issue received general support at the 16th International Hydrographic Conference held in Monaco in April 2002, while Japan was the only member state which voiced objection to the application of the resolution.

The principle of simultaneous recognition of different names for a shared geographical feature enshrined in the IHO resolution was later reaffirmed by the Third UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) held in Athens in 1977. Its resolution III/20 “Names of Features beyond a Single Sovereignty” recommends that when countries sharing a given geographical feature do not agree on a common name, it should be a general rule of cartography to recognize the names used by each of the countries concerned.

Notable examples of using two names simultaneously can be found in such cases of “English Channel/La Manche” and “Falkland Islands/Malvinas.”

Apart from the historical validity for using “East Sea,” the Republic of Korea deems it inappropriate to name the sea between Korea and Japan after a single country. Lying between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago and extending north toward Russia, the body of water in question is divided into either territorial waters or EEZ’s of the surrounding countries. Unless the surrounding countries consent, it is not justifiable to name the sea after a particular country. That is the reason why the Republic of Korea does not insist on using “Sea of Korea” despite the fact that it had once been widely used historically.

As IHO resolution A.4.2.6 also recommends those countries concerned to endeavor to reach agreement on fixing a single name, my government has made repeated requests to

Japan to hold bilateral consultations since 1994. The first bilateral consultation with Japan took place last December; however, it failed to produce meaningful results because Japan made it clear from the beginning that it had no intention at all to consider any other option than the sole use of “Sea of Japan.” This gives all the more reason for the IHO to comply with its resolution A.4.2.6.

Although the Republic of Korea is well aware of the IHB’s difficulty in drawing up the final draft as required by the IHO resolution in the face of the objection of one member state concerned, it is still disappointing that the IHO has failed to comply with the relevant resolution which was adopted with the overwhelming support of IHO member states, including Japan. However, the international community eagerly awaits an updated edition of S-23, which is long overdue. If the current final draft is disapproved by IHO member states, the publication of a revised edition of S-23 will be indefinitely postponed to the dismay of the international community.

It is from all these considerations that the Republic of Korea has decided to vote in favor of the final draft, requesting, at the same time, that an addendum be issued as soon as possible, listing both “East Sea” and “Sea of Japan” together in accordance with IHO resolution A.4.2.6

Over the past decade, a large number of independent studies and international seminars have been conducted on this issue with the participation of a broad range of renowned scholars and experts. The Republic of Korea welcomes this trend, which will contribute to looking into this issue in a more objective manner by the international community. The Republic of Korea is always ready to contribute to promoting in-depth studies and researches in this area.