

# A proposal for mutual understanding among Japanese and Korean students upon the sea naming question between them.

YAMADA Harumichi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tokyo Keizai University, 1-7-34 Minamicho, Kokubunji, Tokyo 185-8502 Japan, yamada@tku.ac.jp

## ABSTRACT

In order to overcome the current debate over the Sea of Japan/East Sea naming in a long run, efforts should be made by both the Japanese and the Korean nations for mutual understanding. For the first stepping stone, I would like to propose introduction of “Tonhe kai” (トソヘ海) into the map which focuses upon the Korean peninsula in Japanese school atlases, and simultaneous introduction of “Nihonkai hae” (니혼카이 해) into the equivalent map of the Japanese archipelago in Korean ones.

Keywords: atlas, sea naming, East Sea/Sea of Japan debate

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every nation has its own right to name places of the world, including seas, in their own language for the domestic uses. Other nations, not necessarily neighbors, may have their own opinions, and surely have rights to make some claims upon those naming. Thus, the Koreans have right to call the body of water in question as “Donghae” (동해: 東海) domestically, as much as the Japanese have the same right to call it as “Nihonkai” (日本海) domestically. Apparently, mutual non-interventionism should rule in this context.

The central question here is the way the sea should be called officially in the context of international matters, especially in English, the *de facto lingua franca* of our time, and Korea has been challenging *status quo* to call it “Sea of Japan” for almost three decades. Both Korea and Japan have right to appeal to international settings for exchange of opinions including United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, UNCISG. Ultimately, it is the international community who decides how it should be called. Neither Japanese, nor Korean government has right to make the final decision. So are the Japanese or Korean people, either. It is some agreements among the members of international community that would settle the debate over the sea naming. Thus, unfortunately, it actually is the matter of power politics and diplomacy rather than academic exchange of creative thoughts.

My proposal here is not aiming at the solution for the on-going Sea of Japan/East Sea debate directly. As being neighbors geographically, Japan and Korea have strong ties socially and historically. The Republic of Korea, in particular, shares economic prosperity and national security with Japan and USA. While having many disagreements in varied aspects of culture and history, both nations should make efforts to enhance mutual understanding, especially among younger generations.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

(This presentation is a policy-oriented proposal rather than an ascientific analysis. Thus, this section is not applicable.)

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As far as I understand, current school atlases in Japan make no reference to the name “Tokai” (東海) on their maps of the Sea of Japan (other than a name of a Korean city). Quite the same can be said with “Ilbonhae” (日本海) on maps of Korean school atlases. My proposal is to introduce those “other side views” into these atlases, with a little twist in vocabulary.

The very first step may be introduction of “Tonhe kai” (トソヘ海) in the map which focuses upon the Korean peninsula in Japanese atlases, and simultaneous introduction of “Nihonkai hae” (니혼카이 해) to the map of the Japanese archipelago in Korean ones. Students would learn about geography of their neighboring country through these maps, and should understand that neighbors call the sea in different ways. Those names introduced first may not be “Tokai” or “Ilbonhae”, for those expressions are translation into their own languages.

Additional “other side views” names are not necessarily treated with the same weight as native names. They might be put in parentheses, or shown in smaller letters. It may also be considerable to put additional names closer to “the other side”, rather than putting it in the center of the sea with the native name, in order to indicate that it is the name viewed from that side.

This proposal is in accordance with the IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6. (1974), and the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographic Names (UNCSSGN) Resolution III/20 “Names of Features beyond a Single Sovereignty” (1977). These recommendations states “... it should be a general rule of international cartography that the name used by each of the countries concerned will be accepted” (UNCSSGN), and “If they have different official languages and cannot agree on a common name form, it is recommended that the name forms of each of the languages in question should be accepted for charts and publications unless technical reasons prevent this practice on small scale charts” (IHO).

School atlases are not ruled by these recommendations, of course. As a method to overcome international debate, however, they should be respected and referred to.

Some supplementary discussions may be required around this proposal:

1) “Tonhe kai”, or “Donhe kai”

In most cases, Korean consonant “ㄷ” is pronounced closer to “t” in English at the head of a word, and to “d” in other places. This consonant is transcribed as “t” in the previously popular and still influential McCune-Reischauer Romanization system. Meanwhile, the Revised Romanization of Korean (국어의 로마자 표기법) of 2000 currently effective (in ROK) requires to transcribe it as “d” at the head of a word, and as “t” in other places. The Korean name of the Sea in question is Romanized as “Tonghae” in McCune-Reischauer system, and “Donghae” in Revised Romanization.

While Japanese orthography does not make distinctions between Korean vowels “ㅏ” and “ㅑ” (both are treated as vowel “e”), and consonants “ㄴ” and “ㅇ” (both are treated as consonant “n”), possible ways of putting “동해” into Japanese are “トシヘ” (Tonhe) and “ドシヘ” (Donhe). As web searches over Korean place names would prove, current system is not widely accepted outside ROK, and McCune-Reischauer is still widely used internationally. As the authority of Revised Romanization stays within ROK, “トシヘ” (Tonhe) seems to be a better choice between these alternatives.

2) “Tonhe kai”, or “Ton kai” / “Nihonkai hae”, or “Nihon hae”

As “해” in Korean means “sea”, and “海” (kai) in Japanese also means the same, “トシヘ海” (Tonhe kai) repeats “sea” twice semantically. While most of the Japanese, who do not understand Korean language, would not notice this repetition, some others may prefer to avoid such duplication within a single place name. Then, one possible alternative may be “トシ海” (Ton kai). Quite the same can be said with “니혼카이 해” (Nihonkai hae), where “니혼 해” (Nihon hae) might be an alternative.

Different from English and many other languages, however, such repetition in place names are widely allowed both in Japanese and Korean languages. For example, the Rio Grande in North America is more often referred to as the Rio Grande rather than the Rio Grande River, and the English version of Wikipedia has an article under the title of “Rio Grande”. The Korean version of Wikipedia has equivalent entry of “리오그란데 강” (Rio Grande gang), and the

Japanese “リオ・グランデ川” (Rio Grande gawa), regardless of the fact that “Rio” in Spanish means “river”. Similarly, the Sahara in English Wikipedia is “사하라 사막” (Sahara sabak) in Korean, and “사하라沙漠” (Sahara sabaku) in Japanese versions.

These examples show that avoiding semantic repetition in place names is not necessary, or low in priority, in Japanese and Korean languages.

### 3) “Nihon kai” , or “Nippon kai”

These are two distinct ways in pronunciation of “日本” , Japanese word for “Japan” , namely “Nihon” and “Nippon” . In most contexts, these pronunciations are used interchangeably, but in some cases, especially proper nouns, pronunciation may be fixed to either one, or choice of pronunciation causes difference in nuance of the term.

In case of “日本海” (Sea of Japan), however, all Japanese dictionaries and encyclopedia I consulted unanimously agreed “Nihon kai” for pronunciation of the term. In fact, pronouncing “日本海” as “Nippon kai” is not a very bad mistake. It might be acceptable in most situations, and some restaurants, etc. bear the name “日本海” spell themselves “Nippon kai” in English. Still, the advantage of “Nihon kai” is apparent.

## 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Both Japan and ROK have their own textbook screening systems, and school atlases are ruled under them. My proposal would be materialized, when the governments of Japan and ROK agree, and clearly declare such policy through textbook screening. Of course, I know only too well that things cannot be that easy.

Since 1980s, there have been many history textbook issues between Japan and Korea, especially in the field of history, and many of them have been overcome through the exchanges of ideas not only among politicians and bureaucrats, but also journalists, activists, and academics of both nations.

If my proposal has a chance to be realized, it would be as a result of sincere and elaborate discussion between varied specialists from Japan and Korea, probably for a long time. As the development of Japan - ROK Joint History Research Project (한일역사공동연구위원회) shows, such discussion is not an easy way. We are required to continue persevering efforts on this matter from both sides.

Students should learn the fact that neighbors call the sea in a different name in a different language, first. Then, they may have a chance to learn the background and meanings of the Sea of Japan/East Sea debate. Mutual understanding in a long term starts from the point where we learn our difference properly.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This presentation is an extended version of my previous comment at the 22nd International Seminar on Sea Names, 2016.

## REFERENCES