

Written Statement by Japan on the naming of Sea of Japan

In response to the written statement distributed by the RoK Delegation,

Japan would like to present the pamphlet and related information on the appellation of the Sea of Japan, which show that the Sea of Japan is the standard appellation of the regional sea, and that all the UN publications shall exclusively use this specific appellation.

Naming of the Sea of Japan

The purpose of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) is to consider the technical problems of standardization of geographical names with a view to furthering it at both the national and international levels thereby preventing confusion in the use of names of geographical features. The delegation of Japan therefore believes that as a matter of principle it is not appropriate to discuss the issue of the naming of any particular geographical feature such as the Sea of Japan at this meeting.

The views of the Government of Japan on this matter were clearly expressed at the previous sessions of the UNGEGN and the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), including its last session in Berlin in 2002, and have been duly recorded.

It should be reiterated here that the name "Sea of Japan" is geographically and historically established and is used at present all over the world, except the ROK and the DPRK that claim the name should be replaced or at least co-named the "East Sea." The following are the major points Japan wishes to make in response to these unfounded and politically motivated assertions.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The name "Sea of Japan" is internationally established. It has long been supported and employed by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the United Nations system. The practice of the UN is illustrated in the attached map.

A Japanese survey covering 392 maps from 60 countries revealed that more than 97 percent display the single name "Sea of Japan" either in English or its equivalent in the local language.

HISTORICAL STUDY

From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, various names were used for this sea area, including "Sea of China," "Oriental Sea," "Sea of Korea," and "Sea of Japan," presumably because the shape of the northeast part of the Asian continent and the Japanese archipelago were not fully understood by Europeans.

From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, however, the name "Sea of Japan" gradually became accepted and internationally established. By that time, the international community had come to know, through the reports of a number of European explorers who investigated the area, its geographical contours and salient topographical features, the most important being that it was separated from the North Pacific Ocean by the Japanese archipelago.

It should be underlined that Japan, which at the time adhered to an isolationist foreign policy, played no direct role and exercised no influence in the promotion of the use of the name "Sea of Japan."

The results of the field studies recently conducted by the Government of Japan on the antique maps in the collections of the British Library, the University of Cambridge, and the Bibliotheque Nationale de France completely support the above assertion. The studies firmly concluded that the vast majority of the maps produced in the nineteenth century and in the possession of these three European institutes display the name "Sea of Japan." The Japanese delegation would like to invite anyone interested to visit our web site (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/maritime/japan>) and examine details of these findings.

PERSPECTIVE FROM NAMING METHODOLOGY

Oceans and seas are frequently named after a major archipelagic arc or a peninsula separating them from another major body of water. Besides the "Sea of Japan," the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of California, and the Irish Sea are good examples of this naming methodology being employed. It is worth mentioning that the Japanese archipelago has a coastline on the Sea of Japan five times longer than the Korean peninsula.

Some oceans and seas take the name of one of the countries they face, such as the Indian Ocean, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Norwegian Sea, the Solomon Sea, the Philippine Sea, and the Gulf of Thailand. The fact that a sea carries the names of a country does not connote ownership by the country of the sea in question.

A very few oceans and seas, such as the English Channel/La manche, are simultaneously named, but only when the two names have been long advocated internationally. Such dual designations are and should remain very exceptional. The "East Sea," first claimed internationally in 1992, is not really eligible for simultaneous designation. It should be recalled that the 'East Sea' is not identical to the Oriental Sea, which was the name that was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in antique European maps. The Oriental Sea was only a vague reference to a sea in the Orient, and this designation disappeared after the late eighteenth century as the shape of the northeast part of the Asian continent became more clearly understood by Europeans.

IHO-RELATED MATTERS

The name "Sea of Japan" was registered in the Special Publication No. 23 (S-23) of the IHO entitled "Limits of Oceans and Seas," issued in 1928, simply because the name "Sea of Japan" was well established internationally by that time. As noted in the 1929 proceedings of the First International Hydrographic Conference, Japan did not take an active role in the preparation of its first edition.

Since they began to participate in the IHO in 1957 and 1987, respectively, the ROK and DPRK had accepted the organization's use of the name "Sea of Japan." Furthermore, the ROK's Office of Hydrographic Affairs had accepted this name and published in 1993 a hydrographic map (No.102A) in which 'Japan Sea' was clearly mentioned. It was only in 1992 at the UNGEGN and in 1997 at the International Hydrographic Conference, that these countries for the first time challenged this designation, which the international community has long respected. Such an attempt to disrupt the world's geographical order for nationalistic and political reasons should be rejected.

CONCLUSION

At the last session of the UNCSGN in Berlin in 2002, the head of the ROK's delegation made a statement against the use of the name "Sea of Japan." He is quoted as saying, "It is undeniable that the name "Sea of Japan" gained wider currency than 'East Sea' from the early twentieth century because of Japan's expansionism and colonialism."

As against the ROK's allegations, let me summarize that the designation "Sea of Japan" is methodologically well-founded, universally accepted, and has been internationally established since the nineteenth century. Japan's alleged colonialism and expansionism has nothing to do with the matter.

The name "Sea of Japan" was not imposed by any party, country or organization, but was established naturally in the course of history and has been internationally recognized for two hundred years.

There is on the other hand virtually no historical or geographical basis for the use of the name "East Sea." Such assertions have political motivations and display nationalistic bias.

If an internationally established sea name were to be changed for political reasons for no valid reason, such an action would not only sow confusion in the world's geographical order but also set a terrible and dangerous precedent for generations to come. Japan strongly opposes such an attempt. We sincerely hope that the international community will understand and support its own disposition of the matter.