

# SEA OF JAPAN



The name “Sea of Japan” is geographically and historically established and is currently used all over the world, except for a few countries claiming that the name should be changed to the “East Sea”.

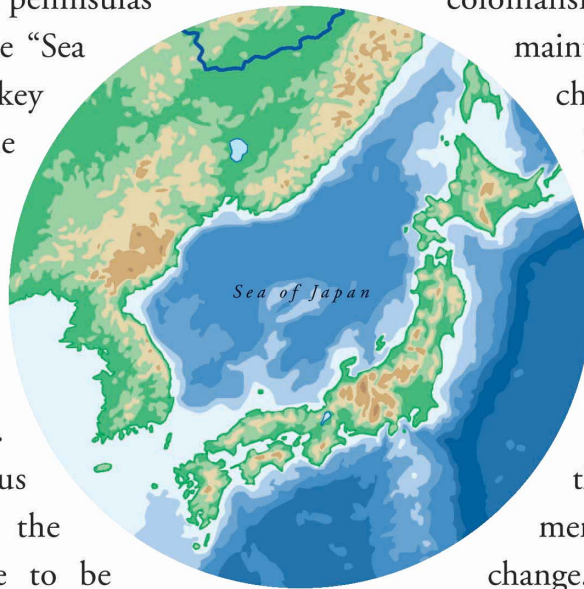
However, their argument is unfounded and will only cause confusion in the international geographical order.

This pamphlet provides objective and factual information to help the international community to understand this issue.

# Preface

**T**he Sea of Japan (or the Japan Sea) is a sea area located along the northeastern part of the Asian continent. It is separated from the North Pacific Ocean by the Japanese Archipelago and Sakhalin.

Historically, the name “Sea of Japan” was first established in Europe from the late 18th century to the early 19th century, and has been used for more than 200 years. When seas are separated from oceans, they have been frequently named after major archipelagos or peninsulas that separate them. The name “Sea of Japan” focuses on one key geographical feature — the Japanese Archipelago that separates this sea area from the Northern Pacific Ocean. In fact, without the presence of the Japanese Archipelago, this sea area would not exist. Because of this obvious geographical characteristic, the name “Sea of Japan” came to be widely accepted throughout the world. At present, more than 97% of the maps used around the world, except for those in the Republic of Korea(ROK) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea(DPRK), use only the name “Sea of Japan”. This name has been internationally established.



Despite this global recognition, ROK and DPRK suddenly proposed that the name “Sea of Japan” should be changed at the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992. They continue to raise this issue at related international conferences of the United Nations and at meetings of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). They argue that the name “Sea of Japan” became widely used from the beginning of the 20th century, as a result of Japan’s expansionism and colonialism. For this reason, they maintain that the name should be changed to the “East Sea,” as ROK and DPRK domestically use, or at least, that both the “East Sea” and the “Sea of Japan” should be used together. However, the assertion made by ROK and DPRK is unfounded, and there is neither reasoning nor merit behind the call for such a change.

This pamphlet presents the results of a Japanese government study on how the name “Sea of Japan” is described in the maps available throughout the world, and presents the historical and geopolitical origins of the name. We sincerely hope that this pamphlet provides people around the world with accurate, objective and factual information on the name “Sea of Japan”.

SEA OF  
JAPAN

The name “Sea of Japan” came into gradual use and acceptance in Europe from the 18th century.



More than 97% of maps used throughout the world display only the name “Sea of Japan”.

# How the Sea of Japan is Described in Maps Published Around the World

The Japanese Government conducted a field study on this matter from August to October 2000 (Note 1) in 60 countries in the world, other than ROK, DPRK and Japan (Note 2). We investigated how the Sea of Japan (the sea area enclosed by northeastern Asia, the Japanese Archipelago and Sakhalin) was described in the maps, using mostly maps that were available for purchase by anyone in those countries. We investigated 392 maps, and the results are shown in Table 1 and Fig. 1 below.

As a result of this study, the following facts became clear.

- More than 97% of the maps we studied used solely the name “Sea of Japan” either in English or its equivalent in the local language.
- All of the 392 maps used the name “Sea of Japan” either in English or its equivalent in the local language.
- There was no map that used only the name “East Sea” by itself either in English or its equivalent in the local language.
- Very few maps used both names, the “Sea of Japan” and the “East Sea,” either in English or its equivalents in the local language. Even in the maps, with both names the main description was the “Sea of Japan”, and the “East Sea” was used in parenthesis or in the form of an additional description.

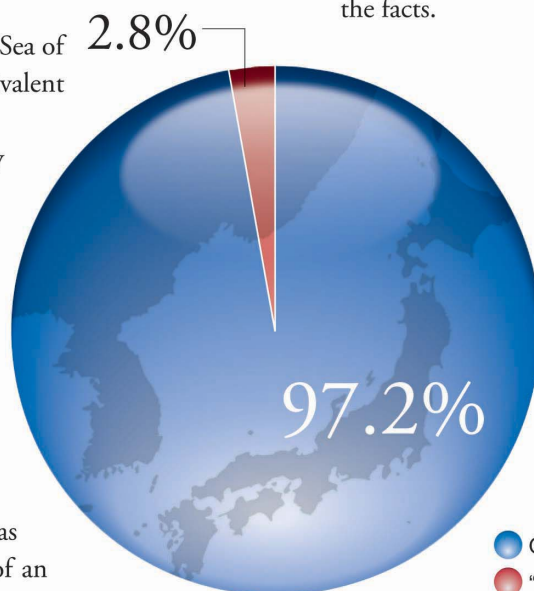


Fig.1  
**Descriptions of the Sea of Japan in the Maps of 60 Countries**

- Only “Sea of Japan”
- “Sea of Japan” with other name(s)

Table 1

Total number of the countries and maps studied	60 countries 392 maps
Maps that describe the sea area as the “Sea of Japan” or the “Japan Sea” in English, or as the “Sea of Japan” in the local language.	381 maps (97.2%)
Map that describes it as the “Sea of Japan” first, followed by the “East Sea” in the local language.	1 map (0.3%)
Maps that describe it as the “Sea of Japan” in English or in the local language, followed by the “East Sea” in English or in the local language in parenthesis.	4 maps (1.0%)
Maps that describe it as the “Sea of Japan” in English or in the local language, and add in parenthesis “Nippon-kai” (Japanese), “Tong-hae” (Korean), or “Japonskoje More” (Russian), etc.	6 maps (1.5%)
Map that describes it only as the “East Sea” either in English or in the local language.	0 maps (0.0%)

(Note 1) A supplementary study was conducted for 10 of these countries in July 2002.

(Note 2) Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Pakistan, Brunei, Malaysia, United States, Canada, Argentina, Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba, Guatemala, Colombia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Ireland, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Hungary, Finland, France, Bulgaria, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Romania, United Kingdom, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Israel, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Bahrain, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco.

- A pamphlet entitled “East Sea in World Maps” (Apr. 2002, published by Society for East Sea in ROK) reported on maps that used only the “East Sea,” and on other maps that make the “East Sea” the primary name with the “Sea of Japan” in parenthesis. We did not find such maps in our field study, which mainly investigated maps available for purchase.

Evidently, the “Sea of Japan” is now internationally established as the standard name in the maps used around the world. ROK asserts that the name “East Sea” is beginning to be used on the same level as the “Sea of Japan,” but our survey makes it clear that this assertion is entirely contrary to the facts.

# How the Name “Sea of Japan” Became Established

The Korean study bases its advocacy for adopting the “East Sea” on the use of the names the “Sea of Korea” and the “Oriental Sea” in many maps produced in Europe up to the 18th century. The study then concludes that the “Sea of Japan” is not a historically established name, and that the “East Sea,” which is taken to be synonymous with the “Oriental Sea,” is the “correct name.” However, the Korean study does not refer to the fact that the name “Sea of Japan” appears with overwhelming frequency in the maps produced in Europe during the first half of the 19th century. The study contends that the establishment of the name “Sea of Japan” is merely an outcome of Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century. Moreover, the Korean study all but equates the term “Oriental Sea,” which signifies a sea located in the Orient as seen from Europe, with the name “East Sea” which signifies the sea located eastward as seen from Korea. This seems to be an inaccurate interpretation.

A very detailed examination of the name “Sea of Japan” was conducted in a paper titled “Changing the Name of the Japan Sea,” co-authored by Takehide Hishiyama and Masatoshi Nagaoka, published by the Geographical Survey Institute of Japan in 1994. This paper studied more than 200 maps drawn mainly in Europe from the 16th to 20th centuries, and studied in depth how the name “Sea of Japan” became established. There have been other notable papers that further clarify this issue, such as: “The Formation and Development of the Naming of Nihon-kai (the Japan Sea): an Approach from the Map History”(1993), “A Study on Formation of Geographical Knowledge of the Sea of Japan and Its Surrounding Areas and on the Name of the Sea of Japan” (1997) by Hiroo Aoyama, “The Term ‘Japan Sea’: Its Reasonable Naming and the Era of Its Frequent Usage and Firm Establishment in Maps”(2001) by Hideo Kawai, and “Process of the Denomination, Acceptance, and Fixation of the Sea Name ‘Japan Sea or Sea of Japan (Nihonkai)’ in the World and in Japan”(2002) by Masataka Yaji.

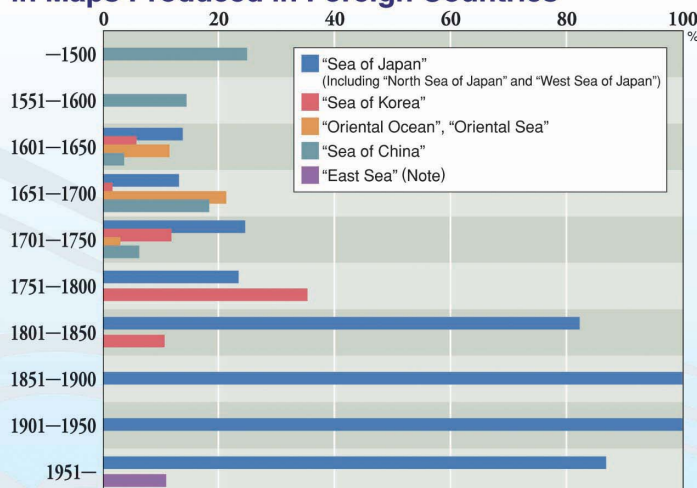
These five papers recognize and agree on the following four points. (See Fig. 2 and Table 2.)

- The first time the name “Sea of Japan” was used was in the map “Kunyu Wanguo Quantu” drawn up by an Italian missionary priest Matteo Ricci at the beginning of the 17th century.
- From the 17th to 18th centuries, partly because the shapes of northeastern part of the Asian continent and the Japanese Archipelago were not fully understood, various names were used for this sea area, including “Sea of China”, “Oriental Sea” or “Oriental Ocean,” “Sea of Korea,” and “Sea of Japan.”

- From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, a number of explorers investigated the area, including the French explorer Jean La Pérouse, English explorer William R. Broughton, Russian explorer Adam J. von Krusenstern. They explored the areas surrounding the Sea of Japan, clarifying the shape of the Sea of Japan and the topographical features of the coastal areas. After this period, maps drawn in Europe began using the name “Sea of Japan” or the “Japan Sea” and the name became established and internationally accepted.
- During that time, Japan’s Tokugawa Shogunate government pursued a policy of isolationism, and contact with foreigners was banned. The government ended its policy of isolationism as late as 1854, thus Japan played no direct role in promoting the use and acceptance of the name “Sea of Japan” in European maps from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. Also, according to the studies by Aoyama, Hishiyama, Nagaoka and Yaji, Japan had no custom of naming a broad sea area from ancient times, and in fact began using the name “Sea of Japan” for the most part following on usage by the Europeans.

In this light, use of the name “Sea of Japan” became established in Europe from the late 18th century through the early 19th century, and has continued to be used for 200 years since then. Therefore, the Korean assertion that Japan sought to establish the name “Sea of Japan” in the beginning of the 20th century with a view to reinforcing its colonialist and militarist policies is simply not correct.

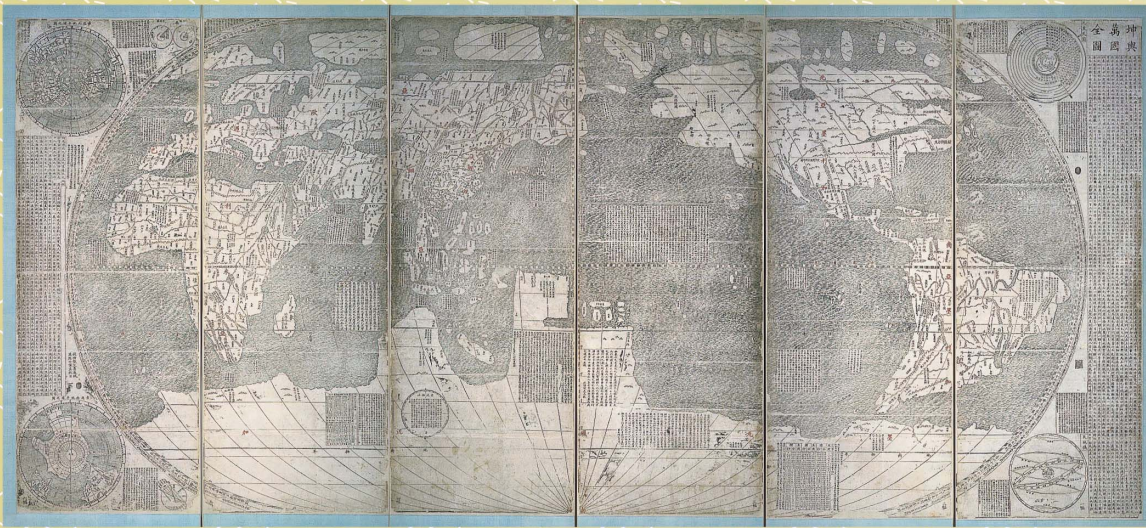
Fig. 2  
**Changes in the Description of the Sea of Japan in Maps Produced in Foreign Countries**



When multiple names were used for this sea area, each name was tallied with a count of 0.5.

Source: Based on Hishiyama and Nagaoka, 1994. See Table 2.  
(Note): The maps shown in purple bar were produced in ROK

# History of the SEA OF JAPAN



Map 1



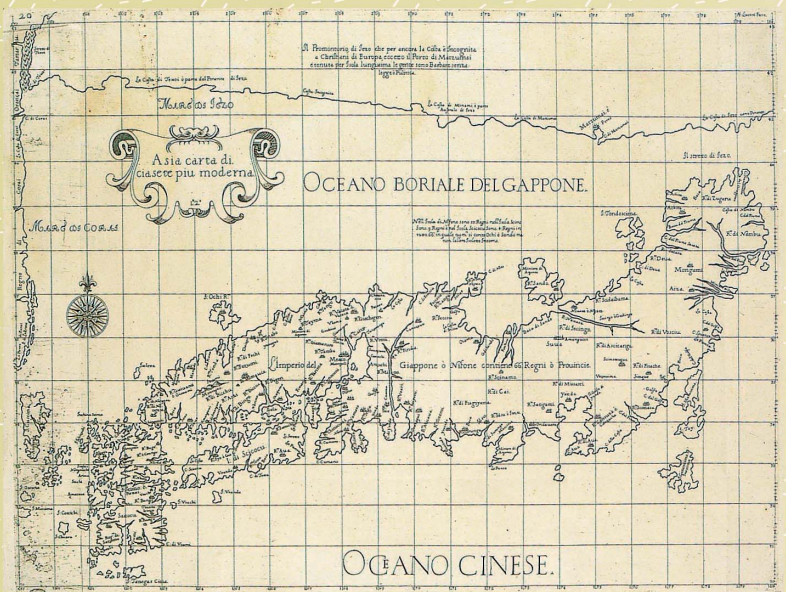
## 1602 日本海 (SEA OF JAPAN)

“Kunyu Wanguo Quantu” drawn by Matteo Ricci, Beijing.

This is the oldest known map that describes the sea as the “Sea of Japan.”  
The name is written in Chinese characters.

## 1646 OCEANO BORIALE DEL GAPPONE

“ASIA CARTA DI CIASETE PIU MODERNA” drawn by R. Dudley, Florence. The western side of the sea is described as “Mare di Corai” (Sea of Korea) and the central portion of the sea area is described as “Oceano Boriale del Gappone” (North Sea of Japan).



Map 2

# 1704 MER DU JAPON

“L’Asie,” drawn by Privilege du Roy and J.B. Nolin, Paris.

The central part of the sea is described as “Mer du Japon” (Sea of Japan). The area extending from what are today the “East China Sea” to the “South China Sea” is called “Mer de La Chine” (Sea of China), while the Pacific Ocean is described as “Océan Oriental.”



Map 3

# 1720 MER ORIENTALE OU DU JAPON

“Mappe-Monde,” drawn by Hubert Jaillot, published by P. Mortier, Amsterdam. French-language edition. The present sea area of the “Sea of Japan” is described as “Mer Orientale ou Du Japon,” while the Pacific Ocean is described as “Océan Oriental.”

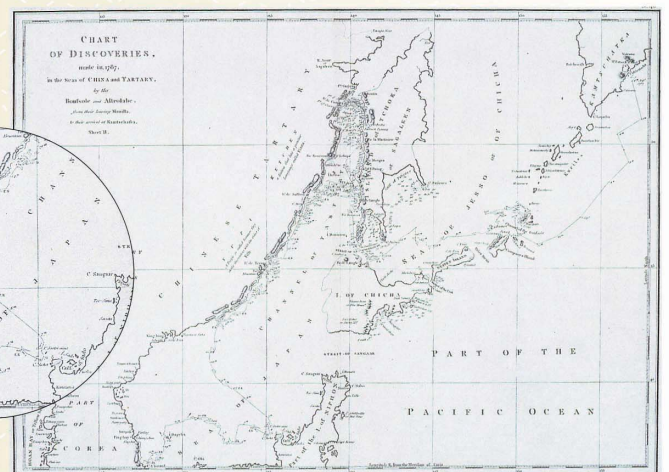
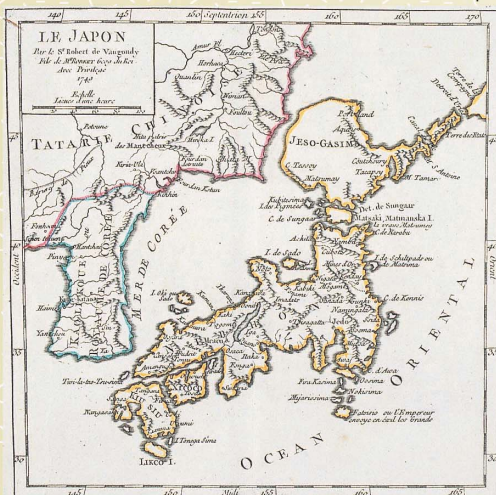


Map 4

# 1749 MER DE CORÉE

“Le Japon,” drawn by Gilles Robert de Vaugondy, Paris. The sea area along the Korean Peninsula is described as the “Mer de Corée” (Sea of Korea), while the Pacific Ocean is described as “Océan Oriental.”

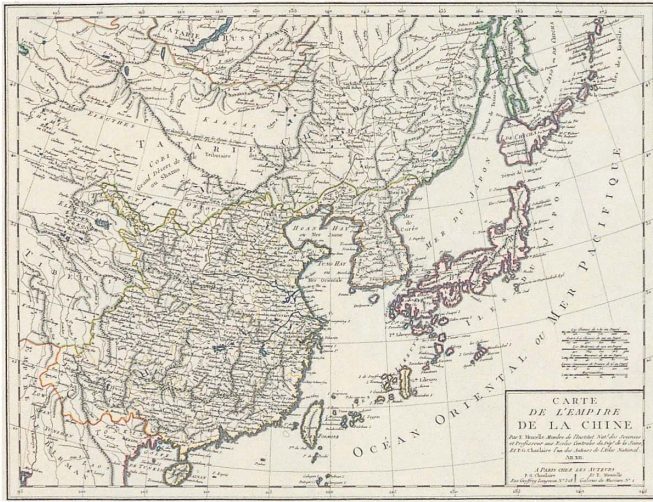
Map 5



Map 6

# 1798 SEA OF JAPAN

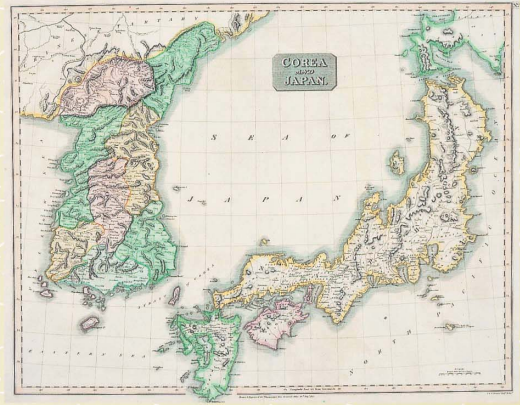
“La Pérouse: Chart of discoveries made in 1787 in the Seas of China and Tartary,” London. English edition of the map attached to “Voyage de la Pérouse autour du monde.” The northern part of the Sea of Japan is described in detail, and its central area is described as “Sea of Japan.”



## 1803 MER DU JAPON

Map 7

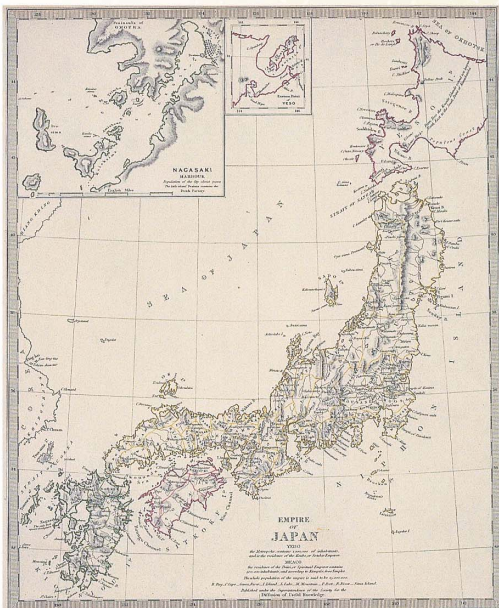
“Carte de l'Empire de la Chine,” drawn by Edme Mentelle, and Pierre-Grégoire Chanlaire, Paris. The Sea of Japan is described as the “Mer du Japon” (Sea of Japan). The Pacific Ocean is described as “Océan Oriental ou Mer Pacifique.”



Map 8

## 1815 SEA OF JAPAN

“Corea and Japan,” published by J. Thompson, Edinburgh. Page from the “New General Atlas.” The Sea of Japan is described as “Sea of Japan.” The sea near the southern part of the Korean Peninsula is described as “Eastern Sea.”



Map 10

## 1835 SEA OF JAPAN

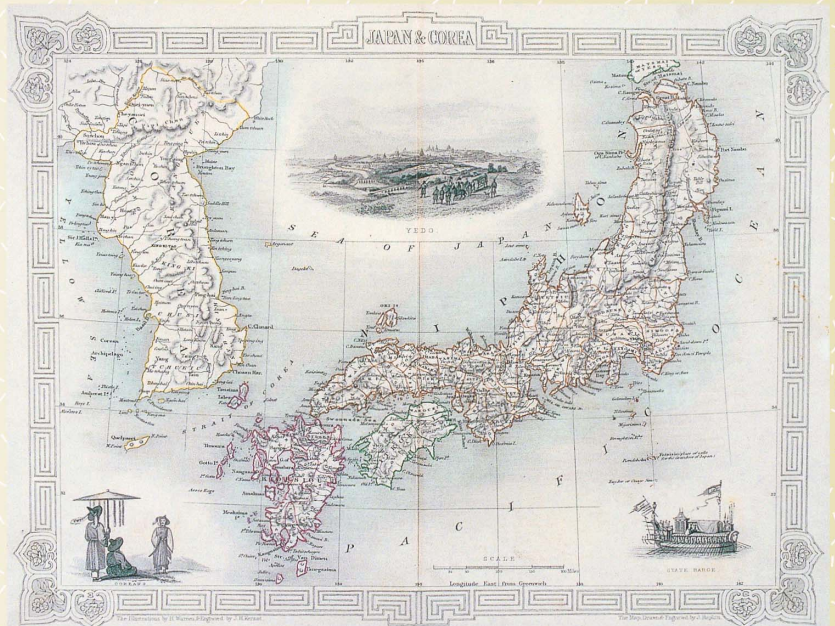
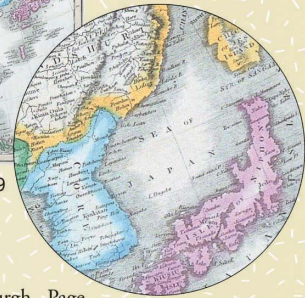
“Empire of Japan,” drawn by J. & C. Walker, published by Baldwin & Gadock, London. Makes use of materials from Adam G. Krusenstern.



Map 9

## 1817 SEA OF JAPAN

“Tartary,” drawn by J. Thompson, Edinburgh. Page from the “New General Atlas.” The Sea of Japan is described as “Sea of Japan.”



Map 11

## 1851 SEA OF JAPAN

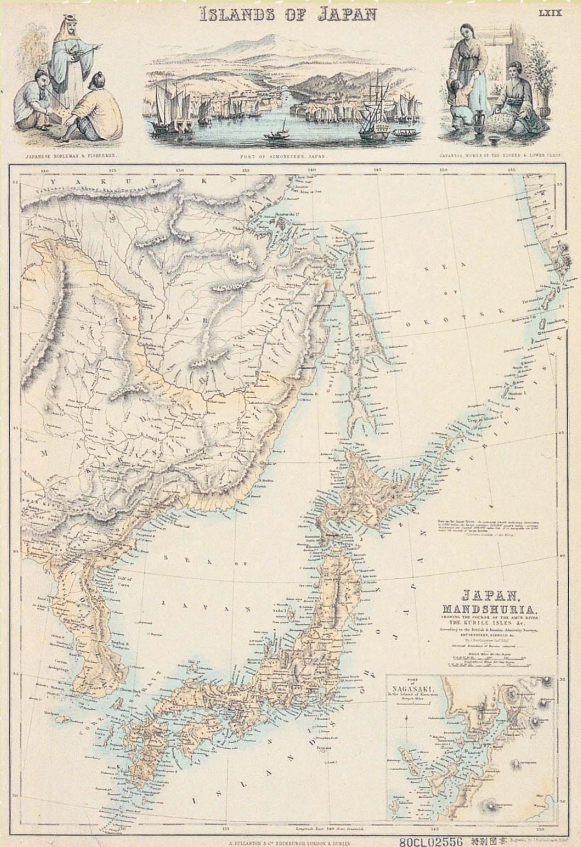
“Japan and Corea,” drawn by J. Rapkin, published by John Tallis, London.



# 1864 SEA OF JAPAN

“Japan, Mandshuria, The Kurile Isles, etc.,”  
drawn by John Bartholomew, Edinburgh.

Map 12



Map 13

# 1865 MER DU JAPON

“Carte générale de l'Empire Chinois et du Japon,” drawn by Adrien-Hubert Brué, Paris.  
The central part of the sea area is described as the “Mer du Japon”(Sea of Japan).

- Map 1  
In the Collection of the Miyagi Prefectural Library.
- Map 2  
“Maps of Japan Drawn by Westerners (Seiyojin no Egaita Nihon Chizu),” OAG (German East-Asiatic Society)
- Maps 3 and 4  
In the Collection of the Kobe City Museum.
- Maps 5 through 13  
In the Collection of the Osaka University Library.

Reproduction of these maps not permitted

Table 2

## Status of Sea of Japan Descriptions in Maps Produced in Foreign Countries

(Source: Based on Hishiyama and Nagaoka, 1994)

	16th Century		17th Century		18th Century		19th Century		20th Century		Total
	1501-1550	1551-1600	1601-1650	1651-1700	1701-1750	1751-1800	1801-1850	1851-1900	1901-1950	1951-	
Sea of China	1	3	1	4	2						11
Oriental Ocean, Oriental Sea			3	4							7
Sea of Korea			1		3	5	1				10
<b>Sea of Japan</b>			2	3	1	2	11	7	16	26	68
North Sea of Japan			1	1	5						7
West Sea of Japan					2						2
Sea of Korea / Sea of Japan			1			3	1				5
Oriental Sea or Sea of Japan				1							1
Sea of Korea / Oriental Ocean				1	2						3
Sea of China / Oriental Ocean				5							5
Other Name						1					1
East Sea										4*	4
No Reference	3	18	17	16	18	4	1				77
<b>Total</b>	4	21	26	35	33	15	14	7	16	30	201

\* Maps produced in ROK.

# Methods Used for Designating Geographical Names

It is likely that the name “Sea of Japan” came to be generally accepted because of one geographical factor : this sea area is separated from the Northern Pacific by the Japanese Archipelago.

As described above, western explorers explored this sea area from the late 18th century to the early 19th century and clarified the topographical features of the Sea of Japan. One of them, Adam J. Krusenstern, wrote in his diary of the voyage, “People also call this sea area the Sea of Korea, but because only a small part of this sea touches the Korean coast, it is better to name it the Sea of Japan.”

In fact, this sea area is surrounded by the Japanese Archipelago in the eastern and the southern parts, and by the Asian Continent in its northern and western parts. ROK and DPRK have coastal boundaries in the sea’s southwestern part, but their coasts face only about one fifth of the total length of the coast of the Sea of Japan.

Hideo Kawai, the aforementioned Japanese researcher, examined the geographical validity of the name “Japan Sea” in a paper presented to the Oceanographic Society of Japan in 2001. Kawai pointed out that the most frequently used method of naming sea areas separated from an ocean is to use the name of a major archipelagic arc or a peninsula that separates the sea area in question from the ocean. The examples he cited include the “Sea of Japan,” the “Andaman

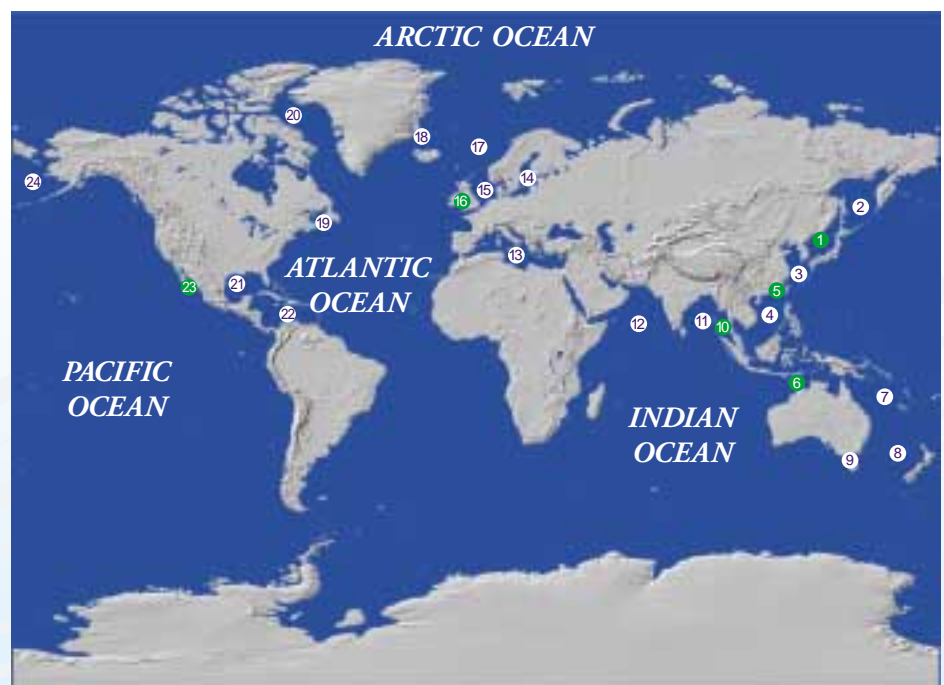
Sea” (separated from the Indian Ocean by the Andaman Islands), the “Gulf of California” (separated from the southeastern part of the Northern Pacific Ocean by the California Peninsula), the “Irish Sea” (separated from the northeastern part of the North Atlantic Ocean by Ireland) and so on. (See Fig. 3.)

According to Kawai, the “East Sea” name advocated by ROK is based upon another method of naming, a method that names a sea area based upon a direction from a specific country or region toward that sea area. Examples include the “North Sea” and the “East China Sea.” However, according to Kawai, a comparison of the naming methods used for the “East Sea” and for the “Sea of Japan” shows that while the “East Sea” is a subjective name as viewed from the geographical locations of ROK and DPRK, the “Sea of Japan” is a name that focuses on the geographical feature — the Japanese Archipelago — that is indispensable for the existence of this sea area. Herein lies the objective validity of the use of the name “Sea of Japan.”

One of the reasons why Koreans might oppose the name “Sea of Japan” could be that they think that this name implies “Japanese ownership” of this sea area. However, the name “Sea of Japan” is based upon the geographical features of this sea area and its established use in Europe from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. As such, the name itself does not imply any political intent.

Fig. 3  
**Names of Seas of the World**

- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| ① Sea of Japan    | ⑬ Mediterranean Sea    |
| ② Sea of Okhotsk  | ⑭ Baltic Sea           |
| ③ East China Sea  | ⑮ North Sea            |
| ④ South China Sea | ⑯ Irish Sea            |
| ⑤ Taiwan Strait   | ⑰ Norwegian Sea        |
| ⑥ Timor Sea       | ⑱ Greenland Sea        |
| ⑦ Coral Sea       | ⑲ Gulf of St. Lawrence |
| ⑧ Tasman Sea      | ⑳ Baffin Bay           |
| ⑨ Bass Strait     | ㉑ Gulf of Mexico       |
| ⑩ Andaman Sea     | ㉒ Caribbean Sea        |
| ⑪ Bay of Bengal   | ㉓ Gulf of California   |
| ⑫ Arabian Sea     | ㉔ Bering Sea           |



# Summary

The following three points summarize the studies on the name “Sea of Japan” presented in this pamphlet:

- A recent Japanese study of 392 maps in 60 countries revealed that only 11 maps (2.8%) did not describe the sea area using solely the name “Sea of Japan.” On those 11 maps, both the name “Sea of Japan” and the name “East Sea” were shown. There was no map that described the sea using solely the name “East Sea.”
- Historically, the name “Sea of Japan” became widely accepted and established in Europe from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. It did not come about, as asserted by ROK, as a result of Japan’s colonialistic and imperialistic intent in the first half of the 20th century.
- In view of the methodology for geographical naming, the name “Sea of Japan” was objectively determined by its geographical characteristics — the sea area is separated from the Pacific Ocean by the Japanese Archipelago. By contrast, the “East Sea” is a

subjective name proposed from a perspective centering on ROK and DPRK.

The adoption of the name “East Sea” was first proposed by ROK and DPRK at the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992. Today, only ROK and DPRK advocate the adoption of this name. Considering the fact that only one name, the “Sea of Japan,” is broadly accepted and internationally established and that there is virtually no historical or geographical basis for the use of the name “East Sea,” one may infer that the assertions of ROK and DPRK are backed by strong political intentions.

If a firmly established sea name were to be changed for the political intentions of only a few countries without a valid reason, such an action would not only bring about confusion in the world’s geographical order, but also would leave a bad precedent for generations to come. Japan strongly opposes such an attempt. We sincerely hope that the international community will understand and support Japan’s position.



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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

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