

Issue of the Name of the Sea of Japan

Overview of study of maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France

(March 2004)

From October 2003 to January 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan conducted a study of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France that were published until the 19th century concerning the naming on those maps of the maritime region known as the Sea of Japan. The results of the study showed that of 407 maps for which a name was recorded for the Sea of Japan area, 249 or 61.2% bore the name “Sea of Japan,” while only 60 or 14.7% bore the name “Sea of Korea.” In addition, of the maps that were studied on this occasion, of those published in the first half of the 19th century, 90.0% or 99 maps bore the name “Sea of Japan” and of the maps published in the latter half of the 19th century 100% or 105 maps bore the same name. This reconfirms Japan’s assertion that “the name ‘Sea of Japan’ became established and accepted in European maps from the beginning of the 19th century.”

1. Purpose of the study

(1) Japan has consistently asserted the legitimacy of the name “Sea of Japan” and its major grounds are the following three key points:

(a) At present, the name “Sea of Japan” is internationally established.

(b) Historically, the name “Sea of Japan” became established and accepted in European maps from the beginning of the 19th century.

(c) In view of the methodology for geographical naming, the name “Sea of Japan” is appropriate.

(2) Regarding the historical perspective mentioned above in (1)(b), two researchers at the Geographical Survey Institute studied over 200 antique maps published in Europe. As a result, they discovered that until about the late 18th century, various names were used to refer to this sea, such as

the “Sea of Japan,” “Sea of China,” “Oriental Sea,” and “Sea of Korea.” However, it has been confirmed that the name “Sea of Japan” came to be used with overwhelming frequency mostly in European maps from the beginning of the 19th century.¹ These facts were further verified by the study of maps possessed by the British Library and the University of Cambridge.² The reason for “Sea of Japan” first coming into usage from the beginning of the 19th century on maps published in Europe is thought to be due to the fact that from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century French, British, Russian and other explorers investigated the areas surrounding the Sea of Japan and discovered that topographically the Sea of Japan is separated from the Pacific Ocean by the Japanese Archipelago. This view is supported by many researchers.

Notes:

- 1) Refer to the pamphlet by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “Sea of Japan”
- 2) Refer to the homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “The study of maps possessed by the British Library and the University of Cambridge”

(3) In response the Republic of Korea (ROK) has asserted that “the name the ‘Sea of Japan’ came into dominant use as a result of Japan’s imperialism and colonialism during the first half of the 20th century”¹, and that “from the 17th to 19th century, westerners used various names for this sea area, including the “Sea of Korea,” “Sea of Josen,” “Eastern Sea,” “Oriental Sea,” “Sea of China,” and “Sea of Japan.” Even though various names referred to the sea area during this period, with references to Korea being most frequently found on maps.”² The ROK cites an independently implemented study of the old maps possessed at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France as the basis for these statements. According to the same study by the ROK, of 515 antique maps examined that were published between the 16th and 19th century, a name was recorded for the region of the Sea of Japan on 115 maps, of which 71, or 62% bore the name “Mer de Coree” (Sea of Korea) or “Mer Orientale” (East Sea), and 22, or 19% bore the name “Mer du Japon” (Sea of Japan).³ However, the following issues arise when considering the study results of the ROK.

(a) In the ROK study, “Mer du Orientale” is taken to be “East Sea,” however “Oriental” is the antonym of “Occidental” and therefore should not be used in parallel with “East” that simply represents a direction. Accordingly, “Mer du Orientale” should be classified as “Oriental Sea.”

(b) The ROK study claims that looking at all maps published from the 16th to 19th century, most maps contain reference to the “Sea of Korea” or the “East Sea” rather than the “Sea of Japan.” However, when considering the nomenclature of the Sea of Japan area, investigation should be undertaken into what names have been used for the area in the various historical periods, and also how the name of “Sea of Japan,” which is currently used widely internationally, came to be established.

(c) In the ROK study, data for each map examined is not made clear (the year of publication, the name of the map, the title of the sea name, book stack number, and country of publication, etc.), making it impossible to examine whether or not the ROK study was undertaken with any degree of accuracy.

(4) In order to examine the legitimacy of its assertion that “historically, the name ‘Sea of Japan’ became established and accepted in European maps from the beginning of the 19th century,” and to confirm the results of the ROK study, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a study of the names recorded for the area around the Sea of Japan on the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France.

Notes:

1) Lee Ki-suk, Kim Shin, Soh Jung-chul, “East Sea in World Maps”, The Society for East Sea. (Seoul: 2002) pp. 95-112.

2) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. The Korean Overseas Information Service of the Government Information Agency, “EAST SEA: The Name East Sea Used for Two Millennia.” (Republic of Korea: April 2003) pp. 4-11.

3) Chosunilbo, March 11, 2003, JoongAngIlbo, March 11, 2003.

2. Overview and results of the study

(1) Overview of the study

From October 2003 to January 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan conducted the following study of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France:

(a) This research was implemented through the Embassy of Japan in France. The embassy dispatched investigators to the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, who used records of collected items in the Bibliotheque to search for maps published between the 16th and 19th century that had a possibility of showing the areas surrounding the Sea of Japan area, and made a list of these maps. All maps confirmed to have been published in Japan and those that are not clearly maps (postcards, etc.) were exempt from the study.¹

(b) The investigators actually surveyed the maps on the above-mentioned list and confirmed whether or not the maps mentioned the Sea of Japan.

(c) The investigators compiled a statistical table by period of publication for the name of the Sea of Japan area.

(d) The investigators acquired photocopies of all the maps studied.

(2) Results of the study

The results of the study are as follows:

(a) Of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, 1,495 maps were found to comply with the conditions of (1)(a) above. Of this figure, 407 maps were found to bear a name for the area of the Sea of Japan.²

(b) Of these 407 maps, 249 maps bore the name “Sea of Japan” in the language in which the maps were published (Sea of Japan, Mer du Japan, etc.), 60 maps bore the name “Sea of Korea” (Sea of Korea, Gulf of Corea, Mer de Coree, etc.), 32 bore the name “Oriental Sea” (Oriental Sea, Mer Orientale, etc.), 3 bore the name “Sea of Japan – Sea of Korea”, 2 bore the name “Sea of Japan –

Oriental Sea” and 6 bore the name “Oriental Sea – Sea of Korea.” There were 56 other maps that did not fall into any of the above-mentioned categories. No maps were found that bore the name “East Sea.”³ (See attached list)

(c) Of the maps published in the first half of the 19th century, 90.0% or 99 maps bore the name “Sea of Japan” and of the maps published in the latter half of the 19th century 100% or 105 maps bore the same name.

(d) Of the 407 studied, their countries of publication are as follows: France (262), The Netherlands (41), Germany (34), United Kingdom (17), United States of America (9), Italy(8), Russia (8), China (3), Austria (2), Spain (2), and one each for Armenia, India, Catalonia, Canada and Portugal. Jointly published maps were as follows France/Netherlands (5), France/Germany (1), Germany/Netherlands (1). The country of publication of nine maps was unknown.

(e) If the results of the study are displayed by period of publication, they appear as shown on Table 1 and Graph 1.⁸ The differences between the results of the ROK study and the study undertaken by Japan of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France can be seen in Graph 2.

Notes:

- 1) The study of maps at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France was implemented by initially inputting keywords such as “Japan” “Asia” and “Korea” into the Internet Catalogue. Given that there are also maps that are not registered on the Internet catalogue, the study also conducted a book stack search for maps thought to include the Sea of Japan area.
- 2) There were 501 maps that met the conditions of 1.(1)(a) above, of which 94 were duplicates and therefore exempt from the study, leaving a total of 407 maps.
- 3) As mentioned in 1.(3)(a) above, the “Mer du Orientale” was classified as the “Oriental Sea.”

3. Conclusions

The conclusions of the study undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are as follows:

- (1) In European maps published until the 18th century, various names were used for the area of the Sea of Japan, including “Sea of Japan” “Sea of Korea” “Oriental Sea” and “Sea of China.”
- (2) The results of this research confirm that from the 19th century onwards, on maps published in

Europe the name used with overwhelming frequency is the “Sea of Japan,” thus attesting to Japan’s assertion that “the name ‘Sea of Japan’ became accepted and established in Europe from the 19th century, at a time when Japan, due to a policy of isolation, could not exert any international influence.”

(3) The study of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France undertaken by the ROK was insufficient in that it used only a selection of the maps possessed there. It is also clear from this study that the basis for the ROK assertions that “the name the ‘Sea of Japan’ came into dominant use as a result of Japan’s imperialism and colonialism during the first half of the 20th century,” and that “from the 17th to 19th century, westerners used various names for this sea area, with references to Korea being most frequently found on maps” are in fact groundless.

(4) In addition the ROK has issued a pamphlet showing the results of its studies of the maps possessed at institutions such as the British Library, the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, and the United States Library of Congress.¹ According to the ROK pamphlet the study has covered a total of 763 maps, of which 123 contained reference to Japan in naming the sea area. According to the study implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France alone there were a total of 407 maps published between the 16th and 19th century, of which 249 maps existed that recorded the “Sea of Japan” alone as the name of the sea. From these findings it is unavoidable to come to the conclusion that the studies undertaken by the ROK only covered a portion of the total maps possessed by the various institutions and as such are insufficient, providing no basis for the assertions made by the ROK.

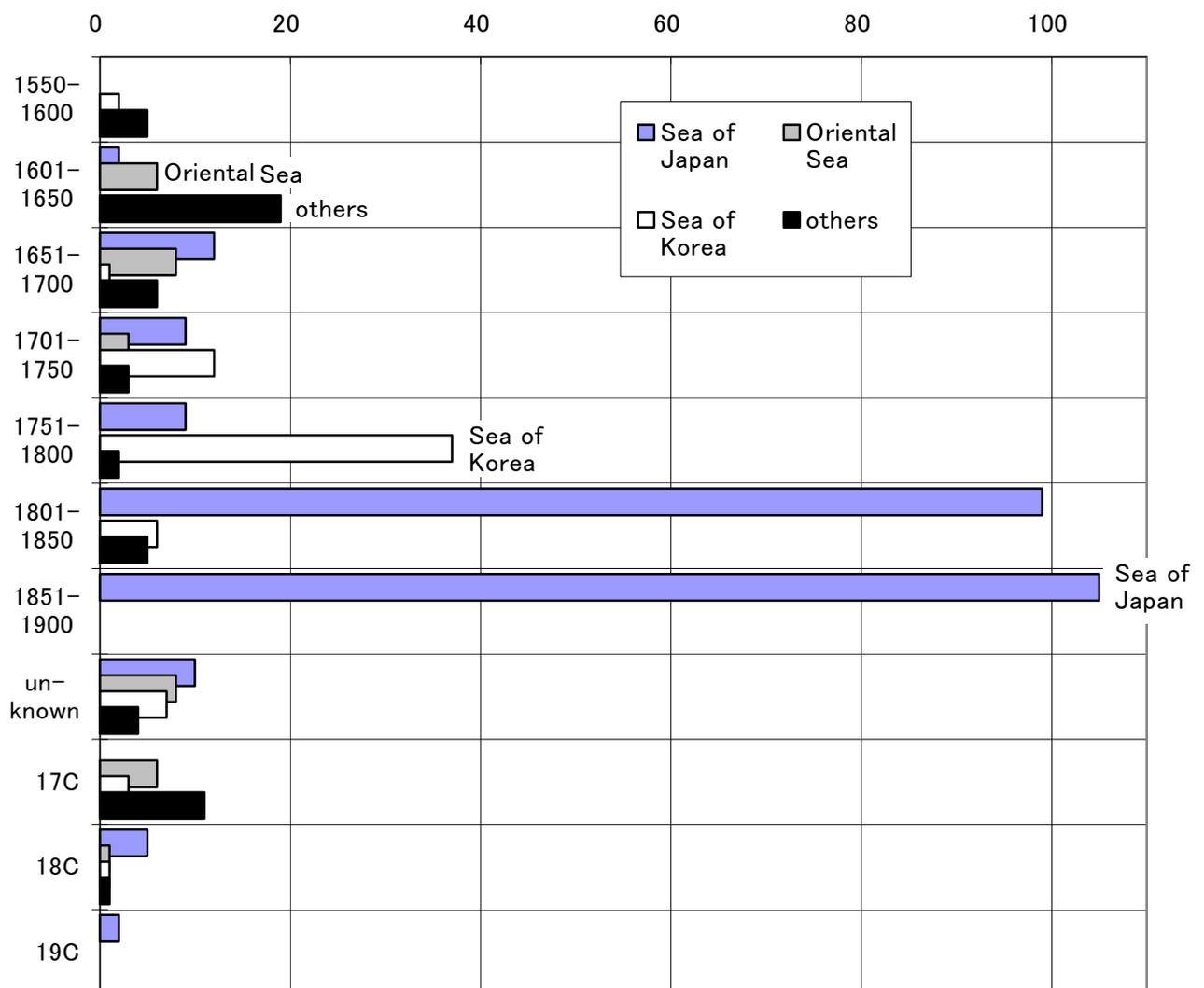
Note:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. The Korean Overseas Information Service of the Government Information Agency, “EAST SEA: The Name East Sea Used for Two Millennia.” (Republic of Korea: April 2003) p.5.

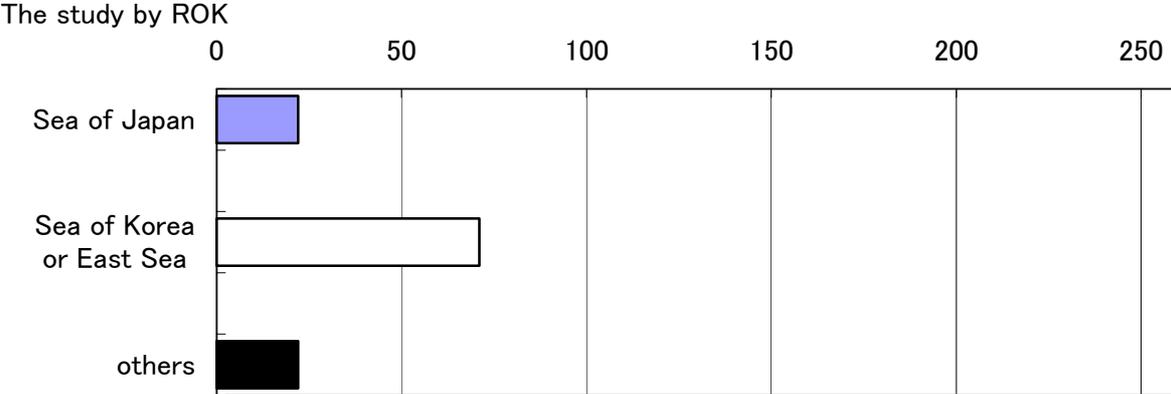
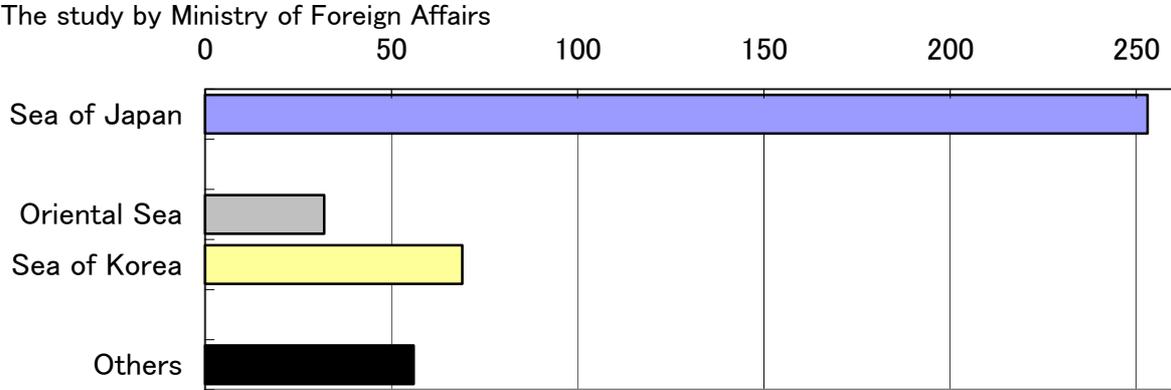
(Table 1) Result of Study of Maps Possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France¹

	1550-1600	1601-1650	1651-1700	1701-1750	1751-1800	1801-1850	1851-1900	un-known	17C	18C	19C	total	per-centage
Sea of Japan	0	2	12	9	10	99	105	10	0	5	2	254	62.0%
Oriental Sea	0	6	8	3	0	0	0	8	6	1	0	32	7.8%
Sea of Korea	2	0	1	12	36	6	0	7	3	1	0	68	16.6%
others	5	19	6	3	2	5	0	4	11	1	0	56	13.7%
total	7	27	27	27	48	110	105	29	20	8	2	410	

(Graph 1) Result of Study of Maps Possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France



(Graph 2) Result of Study of Maps Possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (Comparison of the studies undertaken by Japan and the ROK)



Note:
 Of the maps possessed by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, there were four maps the period of publication of which could not be precisely identified. For the sake of convenience these maps were classed as follows: a map published in the 1650s was classified as latter half 17th century, a map published between 1737 and 1772, together with another map published in the latter half of the 18th century were both classed as latter 18th century, and a map published in the 1880s was classified as latter half 19th century.

A map bearing the name “Sea of Japan – Oriental Sea” was included in the “Sea of Japan” classification, and maps bearing the name “Oriental Sea – Sea of Korea” were included in the “Sea of Korea” classification. Three maps bearing the name “Sea of Japan – Sea of Korea” were included in both classifications. As a result of this data management, the table and graph show a total of 410 maps.