

Making the Connection: the Geographic Naming of the Salish Sea and the Sea of Japan/East Sea in Advanced Placement Geography

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Abstract

Advanced Placement Human Geography is the only course of its kind in our local school district and the Okanagan region. I initiated the course offering because I could see the relevance of the course content to the present and future societal roles of Canadian students. Additionally, I enjoy human geography and could see that teaching an AP level course would challenge me and enhance my professional growth.

This paper will describe a teaching exercise that would ask students to compare the renaming of two different bodies of water: the Salish Sea and the Sea of Japan/East Sea. The British Columbia curricular area of study for secondary students in Canadian history is focused on Indigenous and European contact to the present. Given students' prior knowledge of Indigenous people, asking the students to research a topic such as the renaming of the Salish Sea would be a manageable task to them. Such an exercise could be very relevant and interesting to students; it would offer them a way to apply their training in geography to the pressing issues of the political world.

Keywords: human geography, Indigenous history, geographic renaming

The renaming of territory is, in most cases, a complex endeavour. There are often deep-rooted cultural, political, and historical issues that can slow and complicate the process. In the case of the renaming of the Salish Sea that borders Canada and the United States' West Coast, the reasoning was primarily cultural and historical. One of the main goals of renaming of the Salish Sea was to decolonize the map and to recognize the Indigenous Coast Salish people. By contrast, the renaming of the Sea of Japan to the Sea of Japan/East Sea has been fraught and difficult. Since the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992, attempts by the Republic of Korea to rename the Sea of Japan have been resisted or have fallen on deaf ears. It is important for Advanced Placement Geography students to study the cultural, political, and economic implications in both geographic regions and express the similarities and differences encountered in renaming of the two seas.

The name "Salish Sea" became official on July 15, 2010. The three water bodies that are included in the Salish Sea are the Strait of Georgia in British Columbia, Puget Sound in Washington State, and the Juan de Fuca Strait along the Canada/United States border. Although all three bodies of water are now considered to be part of the Salish Sea, the three original names still exist. Each of these waterways was named during the 1780s and 1790s after European explorers (Rose-Redwood, 2011). The Georgia Strait was named after King George III; the Strait of Juan de Fuca was named after a Greek explorer who sailed under the Spanish flag; and the Puget Sound was named after a crewmember of Captain Vancouver's expedition (Rose-Redwood, 2011). The proposal for the name "Salish Sea" was conceived by Bert Webber, a biology professor at Western Washington University in 1988 (Tucker and Rose-Redwood, 2011). Webber argued that the bodies of water share similar habitats and oceanic species such as Pacific salmon, orcas and other endangered species, such as the marbled murrelets. If the three bodies of water shared one name, the study and conservation of the marine ecosystem would be easier (Groc, 2015). Furthermore, Webber thought the name Salish Sea would rightly recognize the Coast Salish people, who continue to live and work there.

There were many supporters of the proposed renaming of the Salish Sea, and although the name was not previously used by the Indigenous people and was made up by a non-Indigenous person, there was considerable support by Coast Salish leaders (Rose-Redwood, 2011). One reason the Coast Salish people were in favour of the name change was because they agreed that the resources in the area should be protected (Tucker, 2013). It was during the 2008 First Nations Summit that the Coast Salish people endorsed the name and brought it forward to the British Columbia provincial government (Tucker, 2013). By the end of 2008, the Washington State Board of Geographic Names and the British Columbia Geographic Names office had received a package of information that included maps, newspaper articles, and magazine articles that promoted the change in name (Tucker, 2013). By 2009, the application was accepted for final consideration. At this time various naming boards from both Canada and the United States conducted a survey to parties they deemed pertinent, including "scientists, educators, city councils and Indian tribal councils, amongst others" (Tucker, 2013, p. 108) where the majority of respondents were in favour of the name change. The Geographic Names Board of Canada accepted the name, as did the Washington State Board on Geographical Names (Tucker, 2013). By 2010, with the approval of the Coast Salish people, the name was officially changed.

The renaming of the Salish Sea is an example of the decolonization of an area from Eurocentric naming in order to recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. According to Tucker (2013), the British Columbia government hoped that the name change could herald in an opportunity to forge a "new relationship" with the Coast Salish people—one that would help counteract the treatment Indigenous people had endured from Canada and the United States'

colonial governments. The renaming process did not involve any treaty negotiations (Tucker, 2013). To date, the name "Salish Sea" has been accepted and used by people in the region. For example, there have been exhibits that promote Coast Salish art and the use of the toponym for business names (Tucker, 2013). There has been a shift in public recognition of the region's need for environmental protection and respect for Indigenous people living in the surrounding territory.

Not all examples of geographic renaming are as peaceful as the renaming of the Salish Sea. The body of water between the Korean peninsula and Japan has been widely recognized as the Sea of Japan since 1928, the year of the conference on maritime naming of the International Hydrographical Organization. Korea, as a colony of Japan, was not represented at the conference and only the Japanese position regarding the name of the Sea of Japan was supported. After the conference, the name was adopted by most national naming boards and became used widely in atlases and maps (Casino and Shin, 2010). Unaddressed during the conference was the 2,000-year historical period when the sea between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago was known as the "East Sea" (Chol, 2014). Presently, most people in the Republic of Korea would like to see the body of water dually named, such as "Sea of Japan/East Sea." Due to the oftentimes contentious political history between Japan and the Republic of Korea, the renaming of the sea has been internationally controversial.

The controversy over the geographical name of the Sea of Japan has been ongoing since it was introduced to the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of the Geographical Names in 1992. The first point the people in the Republic of Korea argue is that, geographically, most seas in the area are named after the mainland side. They believe that the Sea of Japan should not be named for the ocean side, but rather the adjacent Korean peninsula (Casino and Shin, 2010). Furthermore, the name "East Sea" was used by mapmakers as early as the sixteenth century (Chol, 2014). From a political perspective, Koreans feel that the name "Sea of Japan" is a constant reminder of the "criminal result of expansion policy by Japanese militarists" during the Second World War (Chol, 2014, p. 134). It is a "cursed" name that reminds Koreans of a "bloody" history (Chol, 2014, p. 134).

On the other hand, the Japanese are against the co-naming of the Sea of Japan to the Sea of Japan/East Sea because they argue that it would cause confusion and maps would have to be revised. Also, the United Nations recognized the Sea of Japan as the standard geographical term in 2004. The United States' Board of Geographic Names has also recognized the Sea of Japan as has the United Kingdom, France, Germany and China ("The One and Only Name," 2015). To obtain a dual-name system, North Korea, China and Russia would also have to agree to the change as proposed by the Republic of Korea (Casino and Shin, 2010).

For Advanced Placement Human Geography students, making the connection between the renaming of the Salish Sea and renaming of the Sea of Japan would be very valuable within the political and cultural units of the course. I would start by asking students to review several maps on the Internet and see how many maps were labelled "Sea of Japan" and how many were labelled "East Sea." I would then ask them why they think there are two names used to represent one sea. The next step would be to carry out research on the history of the renaming of the Sea of Japan to the Sea of Japan/East Sea. I would make reference to the recent article in *The Washington Post* titled, "Japan Frets Over Virginia Proposals on Textbooks' Labeling of Asian Sea." According to the article, the governor of Virginia had introduced legislation to change any new textbooks labels that have named the "Sea of Japan" to include the name "East Sea" (Vozzella, 2015)—an indication of the international scope of the issue. My students would then be asked to present their prior knowledge about Indigenous Canadians and to identify similarities between them and the people of Korea regarding the colonial legacy and

discriminatory treatment each group has endured. I would guide the students in researching the renaming of the Salish Sea and discuss the political and cultural issues surrounding that decision. A key question would be, "Why were there few, but manageable, political issues surrounding the Salish Sea name change?" Expected responses would be, for example, that the Canadian government did not have to address treaty negotiations to suggest the name change, and that there were few political issues between Canada and the United States regarding the change. The name change was also proposed by the colonial governments in the spirit of reconciliation towards the subjugated group. Finally, the renaming of the Salish Sea waters did not eliminate prior maritime names. The students could then compare the similarities and differences in renaming the water body between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago to the dual name Sea of Japan/ East Sea. By comparing the two renaming issues, the students would have the information necessary to take an informed position. In this way, they would be able to consider history, social justice, and international policy positions of both the Republic of Korea and Japan.

The renaming of the Salish Sea has been a much easier process than the renaming of the Sea of Japan/East Sea. The reasons for the renaming of the Salish Sea were twofold: ecological and for decolonization. Most people were in favour of the change and/or did not see a political agenda because of the positive effects it would have on the Coast Salish people as well as the bodies of water it encompasses. The same cannot be said for the renaming of the Sea of Japan to the East Sea. Although both Indigenous Canadians and Koreans share a history of oppression, there have been few attempts by the Japanese to reconcile with the people in the Republic of Korea. From these two examples, the Advanced Placement Human Geography students can learn more about cultures and political organization. It is important for students to compare the two renaming processes so they can understand why renaming is more complex in some areas than others, and so that they can examine the great symbolic power that geographical names carry.

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