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【Article】

The Standardization of Geographical Names in the United Nations and Its Relationship with the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale

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Abbreviations List:

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council
IMW: International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale
UN: United Nations
UNCSGN: UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
UN-GGIM: UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management
UNGEGN: UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names
UNRCCA: UN Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas
UNRCCAFE: UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East
UNRCCAP: UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific

1. Introduction

Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) are neighboring countries with close cultural ties, including extensive tourist exchange. However, several outstanding diplomatic issues remain unresolved between the two, such as the name "Sea of Japan."[1] South Korea raised this issue in 1992 at the Sixth United Nations (UN) Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), arguing that

the sea surrounded by Japan, South Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation should be called the East Sea instead (金子, 1993). The UNCSGN had been established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1967. South Korea repeated this claim at subsequent conferences since 1992 (丸 山, 1996; 谷 岡, 2002), including at those of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)[2], which was formally established by ECOSOC in 1973 (ECOSOC 1973: 93). However, the claim was deemed not appropriate by UNCSGN or UNGEGN, in light of Resolution 8, which was adopted at the first UNCSGN in 1967, recommending that the geographical names authorities of the nations concerned should reach agreement on conflicting names and the applications of the features beyond their sovereignty (United Nations 1968: 12). This suggests that the UNCSGN is not intended to settle conflicts concerning names of features that would extend beyond the sovereignty of the member states.

Article 1 of the UN Charter states that the UN's purposes include "*To maintain international peace and security" and "To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, ...*"[3] Since UNCSGN was established by ECOSOC, which is primarily responsible for the achievement of the latter purpose of the UN, there must have been an international problem to be solved through international cooperation beyond simply settling conflict in geographical names outside the relevant nations' sovereignty. What, then, was the international problem that initially led ECOSOC to establish the UNCSGN and the UNGEGN? According to the UNGEGN mandate, "*During the debates of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1948, the problem of standardization of geographical names was raised, particularly with regard to cartographic services.*"[4] This suggests that, while geographical names often give rise to international political disputes, the issues addressed by ECOSOC concerning the standardization of geographical names were primarily technical in nature, relating to cartographic services rather than political conflicts among member

states. Accordingly, this paper seeks to present a detailed historical background and a forward-looking perspective on the UN's efforts to standardize geographical names from a technical standpoint. It does so by extending the account of 村 上(2025) on the UN's standardization process—across three distinct historical phases—with new insights derived from additional research and a newly discovered material.

Regarding the first phase, 村上 (2025) notes that in 1948 ECOSOC adopted a resolution recognizing the need for accurate maps to achieve the UN objectives. Subsequently, in the 1950s, ECOSOC identified the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (IMW) project[5] as a potential means of meeting this need. At the same time, ECOSOC recognized that accelerating the IMW project would require the standardization of geographical names. However, the IMW project had formally commenced as early as 1909, prior to the First World War. This raises the question of whether the standardization of geographical names had not been necessary much earlier than the 1950s. In fact, the author discovered a report from the third international conference of the IMW project held in 1928, among the materials collected and archived by Naomasa Yamasaki, a professor of geography at the University of Tokyo. This paper examines the content of that report to shed light on early discussions concerning issues of the standardization of geographical names within the IMW community.

In addition, 村上 (2025) notes how discussions at ECOSOC on standardizing geographical names were developed during the process of member states' map preparation under the IMW project. However, the IMW project effectively ended following the 1989 fourth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas[6] (UNRCCA), which decided further UN involvement was unnecessary (United Nations, 1989). Hence, with the IMW project that initiated the establishment of UNCSGN no longer continuing, the need for discussions on geographical name standardization within the UN should have diminished. Nevertheless, UNCSGN continued until 2017, for about 30 years. This paper reviews the circumstances

surrounding the termination of the IMW project and examines how this development impacted discussions on geographical name standardization within the UN.

Furthermore, 村上 (2025) points out that the dissolution of UNCSGN and UNGEGN in 2017 and founding of a new UNGEGN were influenced by the launch of global geospatial information management efforts in 2011 in the UN. However, no specific details were provided about UNCSGN's internal issues. This paper gauges the UN Secretariat's perspective on issues concerning UNGEGN, based on the Secretariat's contribution to the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029.

Understanding this technical genealogy is vital, as contemporary debates over geographical nomenclature often obscure their roots in standardization efforts rather than pure geopolitics. Building upon what 村上 (2025) addressed, this paper aims to further clarify that the issue of geographical names at the UN stemmed from the technical aspects of cartography.

2. The Beginning of the IMW Project and Discussions on Standardizing Geographical Names

The IMW project originated from German geographer Albrecht Penck's proposal in 1891 at the Fifth International Geographical Congress in Bern, Switzerland, to create world maps of uniform specifications (Boggs, 1929). At that time, European countries produced their own national maps with differing scales, projections, languages, and symbols, resulting in a "cartographic babel" (Boggs, 1929). Penck's proposal was groundbreaking, aiming to generate immense scientific and educational value for the 20th century by developing 1:1,000,000-scale maps as a common map for humanity with unified map specifications through international cooperation. (小笠原, 1962; Pearson and Heffernan, 2014).

Although welcomed by scientists, the number of countries actually participating in the mapping effort was initially limited, partly due to political considerations (Boggs, 1929; 小笠原, 1962; Pearson and Heffernan, 2014). For instance, France opposed

setting the IMW prime meridian at Greenwich and did not join the project, though the international conference on prime meridian in 1884 had designated Greenwich as the prime meridian, and the United Kingdom (UK), opposing France's proposal of adopting metric system for IMW specifications, also abstained (Pearson and Heffernan, 2014).

Later, Italy, Germany, and others acknowledged the project's value and began producing 1:1,000,000-scale maps for their overseas territories. Subsequently, the UK hosted the first international conference on IMW in 1909. Participating nations brought prototype maps developed domestically and discussed the specifications for IMW. The conference defined the scale (1:1,000,000), map sheet extents, Greenwich as prime meridian, meters as unit, and Roman alphabet usage (Boggs, 1929; Pearson and Heffernan, 2014).

Four years later, the second conference was held in 1913 in Paris, attended by three Japanese delegates including Naomasa Yamasaki (only civilian with two other military officers). The conference established the UK's Ordnance Survey as IMW secretariat and refined various specifications including geographical names notation and transliteration standards favoring Roman characters (Service géographique de l'armée, 1914).

The outbreak of the First World War soon halted the IMW project. However, progress continued in regions less affected by the war (Boggs, 1929). The third international conference in 1928 in London saw Yamasaki again representing Japan with two other officers. After 15 years since the previous meeting, discussions included reviewing IMW specifications and notably the problematic Japanese geographical names notation (Boggs, 1929). Yamasaki's report on this meeting, typed on letterhead paper bearing the seal of the Ministry of Education at the time, is preserved at The University Museum, The University of Tokyo (東京大学総合研究博物館・本郷本館). It was examined by the author during a research project conducted under the supervision of Prof. Aeka Ishihara (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tokyo). The report, titled "Resolution on the International Map of the World,"[7] summarizes the background

leading up to the discussion of the transliteration of Japanese geographical names during the debate on agenda item "Selection of Geographical Names." This study demonstrates for the first time the analysis of the issues with Japanese Romanization on IMW based on this primary historical source. The original Japanese text of relevant section of the report[8] was translated into English by the author and reproduced below.

Selection of Geographical Names (Excerpt from Yamasaki's Report)

Regarding the selection of geographical names, the British committee member stated, "We wish to leave the choice of geographical names to the discretion of the publisher." While this issue itself was straightforward and met with no objections, the spelling of geographical names (Romanization) presented a difficult challenge, with the spelling of Japanese geographical names being the primary focus of discussion.

The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names at the Central Bureau noted that maps issued by the Japanese government employed two distinct methods of geographical names transliteration. Specifically, the Land Survey Department's international maps and 1:2,000,000 scale maps of Japan, as well as the Hydrographic Department's nautical charts, used the "Japanese-style Romanization." Conversely, topographic and geological maps from the Geological Survey of Japan (Ministry of Commerce and Industry) and various maps from the Ministry of Railways used the "Hepburn Romanization."

This made it impossible to determine which system was officially recognized by the Japanese government. Consequently, in October 1827 [sic], the Japanese ambassador stationed in London was asked to:

a. Be reminded of the differing spelling systems in Japanese government publications.

b. Confirm whether the new spelling system (Japanese-style Romanization) was officially recognized or merely the independent decision of each ministry.

c. Unify the spelling system of the official language if the latter (independent

decisions by ministries) is the case. And be strongly reminded that the long-established Hepburn system is preferable, and that abolishing it would cause significant confusion in academic and business circles.

In response, the Japanese government replied in May of this year, stating "Japan has two systems: the Hepburn and the Nippon Romazi Kai systems. While the former has a long history and the latter is an improved, newer system, both have their strengths and weaknesses. Neither can be said to fully represent Japanese pronunciation in the most appropriate manner, and it is not easy to decide which is the official one. Therefore, it has been decided to leave the choice to the discretion of each government agency." In order to claim that the differences between the two systems are not significant, the Japanese ambassador provided 14 specific spelling examples.

However, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names of the Central Bureau, after discussing these examples, argued that these differences were not negligible. The Committee pointed out that while Japan claims the differences are small, if they are compared to the 47 basic sounds and 72 sounds (presumably including voiced, semi-voiced, and contracted sounds) of standard Japanese, they represented one-fifth of the total sounds. Considering all sounds, the proportion was not insignificant. They prepared a statement presenting various evidence for discussion, distributed it to participants, and raised awareness.

Regarding this issue, while the U.S. representative also expressed uncertainty about the choice and advocated for the need to standardize notation, the representatives from Egypt and Afghanistan emphasized their view that "it should be left to the parties concerned in that country." The British committee members, having anticipated this issue beforehand and understanding Japan's circumstances well, desired to resolve it as amicably as possible. The day before the committee meeting, after the event organized by the Geography Congress Executive Committee concluded, Congress Secretary-General Close, along

with other British committee members, expressed a desire to discuss this matter informally with the Japanese representative. The representative gladly agreed, and both sides exchanged views. As a result, the representative emphasized that unifying the Romanization of Japanese geographical names into a single system was of utmost importance, and there was no objection to adopting some form of resolution. The representative expressed that was indeed the most desirable outcome. The British committee members further proposed explicitly stating in the resolution that the unified system should be the "Hepburn system." However, the Japanese representative argued that, setting aside personal views, it would be more appropriate from the standpoint of the Japanese delegation not to specify a single system. The British side accepted it, and the following resolution was finally drafted and submitted to the committee.

Resolution:

> *The International Conference on World Maps, held at the Royal Geographical Society in London, requests Professor Naomasa Yamasaki, representative of the Japanese government, that the Japanese government adopt an officially recognized unified system for the Romanization of Japanese geographical names.*

Following the committee discussions, the British member presented this proposal. The Japanese representative agreed and promised to promptly convey this intention to the Japanese government upon returning home. The resolution was passed by the committee as presented.

This document demonstrates that at that time Japanese government maps contained two romanization schemes based on the discretion of respective organizations. Therefore, the IMW Secretariat raised concerns, noting that the difference between the two notations was not insignificant. But Yamasaki successfully persuaded the other participants not to adopt a resolution that requests Japan to unify the transliteration

of Japanese geographical names in the Hepburn romanization on IMW. The adopted resolution only requested the Japanese Government through Yamasaki to adopt an official unified method of romanization.

村上(2025) notes IMW sparked discussions on geographical names in the 1950s at ECOSOC, leading to the establishment of UNCSGN in 1967. However, Yamasaki's report in 1928 demonstrates these issues arose over twenty years before they were discussed in the UN in the 1950s. Pearson (2006) indicates that by 1926, just before the third IMW international conference, IMW maps mainly covered Europe, South America, Africa, and parts of Asia, mostly compiled by countries where Romanized geographical names posed no difficulties. Furthermore, most maps of Africa and Asia were compiled by the colonial powers, and it is naturally presumed that the methods for writing geographical names established by these colonial powers were used. Only Thailand and Japan developed IMW maps independently using Roman characters transliterated from their non-Roman official scripts. According to Kanchanawan (2006), romanization in Thailand was introduced, though imperfectly, in 1913 using King Rama VI's method, and it can be assumed that this method was in use in 1926. Therefore, it can be concluded that Japan was the only country at that time that uniquely used two different romanizations on official maps, which was why this issue was raised as an agenda item at the third IMW conference. This suggests that the challenges of Romanizing geographical names were a natural consequence in the early stages of the IMW project. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the issue of geographical names romanization was anticipated to surface before ECOSOC started its discussion on geographical names in the 1950s.

3. The End of the IMW Project and the Continuation of UN Geographical Name Conferences

According to 村上(2025), ECOSOC recognized, soon after the Second World War, an international problem concerning insufficient accurate mapping for appropriate

resource development worldwide. ECOSOC considered the IMW project as a solution and even took initiative to transfer the IMW secretariat from UK to the UN. However, in the process of advancing it, ECOSOC identified in 1953 the necessity of standardizing geographical names (ECOSOC, 1953). This need led to serious discussions culminating in the first UNCSGN meeting in 1967 and the subsequent establishment of UNGEGN, fostering UN efforts toward standardizing geographical names.

Prior to the discussions of geographical names standardization, ECOSOC had recognized the need for regional cartographic conferences by member states (ECOSOC, 1953). The UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East[9] (UNRCCAFE) was established with its first meeting in 1955 in India (United Nations, 1955). This first UNRCCAFE discussed IMW and continued its discussion through its sixth meeting, encouraging countries to publish the IMW sheets assigned to them. For example, during the fifth UNRCCAFE (held the same year as the first UNCSGN), Resolution 19 urged countries to complete publishing the IMW (United Nations, 1967):

> *Resolution 19. International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale*
>
> *The Conference,*
>
> *Noting that large areas remain to be covered by the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (IMW),*
>
> *Urges that all countries endeavor to publish this Map in the very near future.*

From the seventh meeting onward, however, UNRCCAFE adopted no resolution on IMW. After UNRCCAFE was renamed to the UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (UNRCCAP) in 1980, its tenth meeting in 1983 made a final attempt to encourage member states to continue IMW preparation and submission to the UN (United Nations, 1983).

In contrast, the UN Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas (UNRCCA), established in 1977, took no resolutions on IMW up to its second meeting. However, at

its third meeting in 1985, Resolution 9 addressed IMW's future（United Nations, 1985: 25）:

Resolution 9. Future of the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale

The Conference,

Recognizing that since 1953 the United Nations has assumed responsibility for co-ordinating international efforts towards the completion of the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale,

Noting that the rate of producing revised sheets in the series appears to have slowed,

Learning that some Member States are according a low priority to the maintenance of sheets in the series,

Aware of the link between the International Map of the World and the mapping programme co-ordinated by the International Civil Aviation Organization,

Recommends that the United Nations should:

(a) Consult with the International Civil Aviation Organization about the existing and future role of the International Map of the World in aeronautical charting;

(b) Undertake an early study of the present and future uses of the International Map of the World by Member States and non-governmental organizations and, if justified, submit proposals for an alternative programme of map coverage of world-wide interest;

(c) Submit the results of the study at future United Nations regional cartographic conferences.

Due to the declining priority of member states and the resulting delay in updating the IMW, the UN was requested to conduct a review of the IMW project. Pearson and Heffernan (2014) point out that this development was driven by the rapid expansion of air routes by commercial airlines after the First World War and the growing need for aeronautical charts. In fact, efforts to develop international aeronautical charts

(World Aeronautical Chart: WAC) began in 1944, and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was established in 1947. (Pearson and Heffernan, 2014).

Accordingly, the UN Secretariat convened an ad hoc expert group meeting in December 1986, which concluded in its report that after examining the future of the IMW project in light of the latest map development technologies, it was impossible to present a realistic solution to the problems facing the IMW project. The main points noted by the ad hoc expert group in its report are listed below (United Nations, 1990):

a. *The Group finds that IMW appears no longer appropriate or feasible.*
b. *The probability of successful production of any international map series is remote.*
c. *The Group recommends the UN no longer monitor IMW programs urging production and reporting.*
d. *The Group recognizes ICAO obligations and recommends member states maintain aeronautical overprints on IMW maps where applicable.*

This report was examined and approved essentially verbatim at the 11th UNRCCAP in 1987, adopting the resolution: "*The United Nations should no longer continue to monitor the IMW programmes*" (United Nations, 1987). The 4th UNRCCA in 1989 also endorsed this report without elaborating on its content by only stating "*The Conference, ... Endorses the recommendations of the Group*" (United Nations, 1989). On the other hand, this same resolution emphasized the need for a worldwide digital map database at 1:1,000,000 scale. Thus, it can be assumed that printed IMW maps were considered outdated, and with growing emphasis on aeronautical charts, the IMW project effectively ended after losing institutional support due to the 1989 resolution (Pearson, 2006; Pearson and Heffernan, 2014).

Despite this, the 12th UNRCCAP renewed its discussions on IMW as it recognized that some member states supported the continued development of IMW and adopted a resolution that recommended the UN to revise the outdated IMW specifications established in 1962 (United Nations, 1991). However, there are no records of this

topic in subsequent meetings of UNRCCAP and UNRCCA, suggesting little practical progress.

Since UNRCCAP and UNRCCA resolutions required ECOSOC approval, ECOSOC in 1991 recorded approving the activities of the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development, which was in charge of cartography in the UN in supporting these meetings and their resolutions at that time, effectively formalizing the UN withdrawal from IMW involvement.

However, the conclusion of the IMW project signifies that the standardization of geographical names, which originated from the necessity to advance the IMW project, has lost its original status as an international issue. In other words, the UN has lost the original justification for undertaking the standardization of geographical names. However, UNCSGN, UNRCCAP, and UNRCCA continued deliberations on geographical name standardization. Actually, the 13th and 15th UNRCCAP adopted resolutions that recognized the awareness of member states on the importance of standardizing geographical names. The resolutions addressed the need for national standardization among member states and international support for it, as well as the vital role standardized geographical names play in supporting international communication and socioeconomic and sustainable development (United Nations, 1994; 2000).

4. Impact of the Establishment of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management on UN Geographical Names Standardization Efforts

村上(2025) notes that the establishment of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in 2011 triggered reforms leading to the dissolution of UNCSGN and UNGEGN in 2017, while ECOSOC approved a newly created and budget-reduced UNGEGN. In addition, ECOSOC clarified the respective roles of the new UNGEGN and UN-GGIM, while requesting

UNGEGN to formulate a strategic plan and programme of work (ECOSOC, 2018; 2019). Why then did ECOSOC press UNGEGN relentlessly for these institutional and operational reforms?

The reason can be glimpsed in the following contribution by Stefan Schweinfest, the then Director of Statistics at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and head of the UNGEGN Secretariat, included in the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 (UNGEGN, 2021):

> *In 2017, precipitated by a need to reform and modernize its operations, to be more agile and aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and the work of ECOSOC, a reset button was pressed.*

Schweinfest stressed by using a word "*reset button*" that pre-2017 UNGEGN activities inadequately addressed the evolving UN challenges and emphasized the importance of the need to align UNGEGN efforts with UN priorities as a vital expert committee. The Director's emphasis on operational modernization should be understood within the broader UN reform agenda of the 2010s, which prioritized organizational efficiency and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

He also stressed the importance of ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and revision of plans to adapt continuously, not as one-time efforts by his following statement in the same document with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

> *We hope that with approval and implementation, UNGEGN will realize increased operational efficiency and more effective allocation of resources. ... Successful and robust plans and work programmes must be continuously monitored, evaluated and revised to adjust to internal and external changes along the way, it is an ongoing process - not a one- time activity. I am pleased to recognize the inclusion of monitoring and evaluation controls in the implementation component of the document.*

He also advocated for establishing a UNGEGN trust fund to secure resources beyond the limited UN regular budget by stating *"Another item for future work includes the*

establishment of the UNGEGN trust fund. All work programmes need resources for effective and efficient implementation, monitoring and overall sustainability. Corollary activities such as identification of initiatives to be resourced, and the identification of donors to contribute to the fund, are necessary." This is something demanded not only of UNGEGN but also of UN-GGIM, given the constraints in the UN's own regular budget (ECOSOC, 2016: 4), and it underscores the renewed importance of securing its own budget.

UNCSGN and UNGEGN had been working on standardizing geographical names for over 20 years after the IMW project concluded, as mentioned earlier, based on the need for standardization within member states and the perspective of supporting socio-economic and sustainable development, presumably as new international problems to be resolved through international cooperation. However, as Schweinfest's contribution makes clear, UNGEGN was not fully engaged in activities that adequately addressed the UN's evolving priorities as the times changed. In fact, an ECOSOC report in 2022, which summarizes how various committees under ECOSOC have addressed the 17 SDGs, shows that while UN-GGIM directly supports all 17 SDGs, UNGEGN supports only about 35% (ECOSOC, 2022).

As 村上 (2025) points out, the emergence of UN-GGIM, established in 2011 to address the latest global geospatial information management needs, and its remarkable achievements over the subsequent five years highlighted a stark contrast with the limited outcomes focusing only on toponymy produced by UNGEGN, one of only two ECOSOC expert committees in the field of cartography, the other being UN-GGIM.

Moreover, while UN-GGIM was provided with no UN regular budget, UNCSGN and UNGEGN had regular budget to hold 22 days of meetings over five years. This is likely why ECOSOC undertook reforms regarding UNCSGN and UNGEGN.

5. Conclusions

This paper attempted to complement 村上 (2025) on the following three points

regarding the UN standardization history on geographical names:

First, it reveals through the newly discovered document that issues concerning Japanese romanization arose before the IMW's secretariat was transferred to the UN. During the early stages of the IMW project, participating countries primarily had no particular issues with Romanized geographical names. However, discussions about unifying the two existing systems of Japan, i.e. the Japanese-style romanization and the Hepburn systems, suggested challenges that would later emerge as the IMW project gained full momentum. It also foreshadowed the significance of geographical names romanization issues that became apparent after the IMW secretariat was transferred to the UN.

Second, it traces the IMW's trajectory following the establishment of UNCSGN and UNGEGN. These two bodies initially solidified the UN's efforts in geographical names standardization. However, rising priorities for international aeronautical charts and digital mapping rendered printed IMW obsolete, ultimately leading to the project's conclusion. Nevertheless, it was noted that the efforts of UNCSGN and UNGEGN to standardize geographical names continued in order to meet the needs for standardization within member states, facilitate international communications, and support socioeconomic and sustainable development. These needs might have been considered to redefine the international problem that should be resolved through international cooperation on the standardization of geographical names.

Finally, it discusses, as UN-GGIM was established in 2011 without a regular budget and became active, the budgetary contrast with UNCSGN and UNGEGN, whose conference expenses were secured through the UN regular budget, became apparent, leading to institutional reforms. It also notes that, in addition to budgetary issues, the activities of UNCSGN and UNGEGN had been insufficiently addressing the evolving challenges facing the UN over time. Regarding this point, the discussion was based on a contribution from the then Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, who supported the activities of UNCSGN and UNGEGN at the United Nations Secretariat.

By addressing these three points, this study presents a more comprehensive understanding of the history of UN geographical names standardization. It complements and extends the account provided by 村上 (2025). These historical events of IMW and the standardization of geographical names in the UN are chronologically summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. History of IMW and the standardization of geographical names in the UN.

Year (AD)	Event
1891	German geographer Albrecht Penck proposes the development of IMW at the 5th International Geographical Congress in Bern.
1909	The First IMW International Conference is held in London, defining the scale (1:1,000,000), metric units, and the use of the Roman alphabet.
1913	The Second IMW International Conference is held in Paris. The UK's Ordnance Survey is established as the IMW secretariat, and transliteration standards for geographical names are refined.
1914–	IMW project is largely halted due to the outbreak of the First World War.
1927 (October)	The IMW Central Bureau queries the Japanese ambassador in London regarding the inconsistency of Romanization (Hepburn vs. Japanese-style) in Japanese government maps.
1928 (May)	The Japanese government responds that the choice of Romanization is currently left to the discretion of individual government agencies.
1928 (July)	The Third IMW International Conference is held in London. Professor Naomasa Yamasaki attends, and a resolution is passed requesting that the Japanese government adopt an officially recognized unified system for Romanization.
1948	ECOSOC adopted a resolution recognizing that accurate maps are essential for achieving the United Nations' objectives.
1950	The problem of standardizing geographical names is first raised during debates at the ECOSOC.
1953	ECOSOC assumes responsibility for coordinating the IMW and identifies the necessity of standardizing geographical names as a technical challenge for cartographic services.
1955	The First UNRCCAFE is held, encouraging the publication of IMW sheets.

1967	The First UNCSGN is held. It adopts Resolution 8, recommending that nations reach agreements on names for features extending beyond their sovereignty.
1973	UNGEGN is formally established by ECOSOC.
1977	The First UNRCCA is established.
1985	The Third UNRCCA adopts Resolution 9, calling for a study on the future of the IMW due to its declining priority among member states.
1986	An ad hoc expert group concludes that the IMW project is no longer appropriate or feasible given modern technology and the rise of aeronautical charts.
1987	The 11th UNRCCAP resolves that the UN should cease monitoring IMW programs.
1989	The Fourth UNRCCA endorses the end of the IMW project, shifting focus toward digital map databases at 1:1,000,000 scale.
1991	ECOSOC formally approves the UN's withdrawal from the IMW project.
1992	At the Sixth UNCSGN, the Republic of Korea first raises the naming dispute regarding the "Sea of Japan".
2011	UN-GGIM is established and the first meeting is held.
2017	ECOSOC dissolves the original UNCSGN and UNGEGN, replacing them with a single new UNGEGN to modernize operations and reduce budget costs.
2021	New UNGEGN formulates its Strategic Plan and Programme of Work (2021–2029) to align with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

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Appendix:

The entire original Japanese text relevant to the section of “Selection of Geographical Names” in the Yamasaki's report on the Third International Conference of IMW:

地名ノ撰擇ニツキテ

地名ノ撰擇ノ問題ニ關シテハ英國委員ハ之ヲ發行者ノ意見ニ一任セント欲スル旨ヲ表明セルガ此問題其物ハ甚單純ニシテ何人モ異議ナカリシモ之ニ關聯シテ地名ノ綴リ方ニツキ爰ニ困難ナル問題ニ逢着シシカモ專ラ本邦地名ノ綴リ方ニツキテ論議セラレタリ、是ヨリ先キ中央局ニ於ケル常設地名委員ハ本邦官廳出版地圖ニ於テ地名ノ綴リ方ニ二種ノ別アルヲ見、即チ陸地測量部ノ國際地圖、二百萬分ノ一日本圖、水路部ノ諸海圖ハ所謂日本式ローマ字ノ綴リ方ヲ用ヒ商工省地質調査所ノ地形圖、地質圖、鐵道省ノ諸地圖ハ依然ヘボン式綴リ方ヲ用ユルヲ以テ何レガ本邦政府ニ於テ公認セルモノヤ其ノ取捨ニ迷ヒ昨 1827 年［sic］10 月在ロンドンノ帝國大使ニ向テ 1. 日本政府ノ出版物ニ於テ綴リ方ニ此等ノ差異アルコトニツキテ注意ヲ促シ 2. 新式ノ綴リ方ハ日本政府ニ於テ一般ノ用語トシテ公認セルモノカ、若シクハ單ニ當該官廳當事者一己ノ意見ニヨルモノナルカ 3. 若シ果シテ後者ノ場合ナランニハ宜シク公用語ノ綴リ方ヲ一定サレタク且ツ希望スル所ハ既ニ長年月慣用スル所トナレルヘボン式綴リ方ヲ採用サレタクヘボン式ノ撤廢ハ學術界並ニ實業界ニ於テ多大ノ混亂ヲ來スモノナル所以ヲ強調セシガ大使ハ本邦ニ移牒シテ意見ヲ徵シタルノ結果本年五月ニ至リ之ニ答フルニ次ノ言ヲ以テセラレタリ、曰ク日本ニ於テハローマ字ヲ以テスル日本語ノ書キ方ニヘボン式日本ローマ字會式ノ二種アリテ前者ハ多年慣用ノ歷史ヲ有スルト共ニ後者ハ其ノ改善セル新法ナルコトヲ主張セルモ兩者各得失アルト共ニ何レモ最モ適切ニ日本語ノ發音ヲ表ハシ得ルモノト思ハレズサレバ何レヲ以テ全然公用ノ綴リ方トスベキカハ今容易ニ決定スル能ハザル所ニシテ姑ラク之ヲ當該官廳ニ一任スルコトトセリ、勿論兩者ノ差ハ多大ニハアラズ委細ハ別表ノ如シトテ十四個ノ綴リ方ヲ示サレタリ。

中央局常設地名委員ハ上述ノ經過ヲ述ベタルト共ニ此ノ十四個ノ綴リ方ガ決シテ「多大ニアラズ」ト云フベキモノニアラズシテ之ヲ日本語ニ普通ナル四十七音及ビ七十二音（濁音半濁音拗音等ヲ合シテノコトナラン）ニ比スレバ五分ノ一ニ上リテ決シテ多大ニハアラズト云フベカラズトシテ種々ノ例證ヲ擧ゲテ議論セルステートメントヲ作リテ參列者ニ配布シ其ノ注意ヲ惹起セリ

此ノ問題ニツキテハ米國委員亦現ニ取捨ニ迷ヘル旨ヲ述ベテ統一ヲ望ミ之ニ反シテエジプト、アフガニスタンノ委員ハ姑ク當事者ニ一任スベシトノ意見ヲ強調スル所アリシガ英國委員ハ豫メ此事アルヲ慮リ且シ本邦ノ內情ヲ悉知シテ最モ圓滿ナル解決ヲ得ルコトヲ欲シタルヲ以テ委員會ノ前日地理學大會實行委員會ノ催サレタル後幹事長クロースハ他ノ英國委員ト共ニ此問題ニツキ本委員ト非公式ニ懇談センコトヲ希望セルヲ以テ本委員ハ喜デ之ニ應シ互ニ意見ヲ交換セル結果本委員ハ本邦地名ノ綴リ方ヲ一定ノ書キ方ニ統一スルコトハ最モ必要ニシテ何等カノ形式ニ於テ決議スルハ固ヨリ異存ノアルベキ筈ナク其ノ最モ希望スル所ナルヲ述ベ英國委員ハ更ニ之ヲヘボン式ニ統一セントノ意ヲ決議文中ニ明記セントノ意見ヲ提出セシガ本委員ハ本員一己ノ私見ハ別トシテ本邦委員ト

シテハ寧ロ之ヲ明記セザルヲ以テ妥當トスル旨ヲ主張シ英國委員モ亦其ノ意ヲ諒トシ終局共ニ次ノ決議文ヲ作成シテ英國委員ノ手ヨリ之ヲ委員會ニ提出スルコトノ申合セヲナセリ

決議案

ロンドン王國地理學會ニハ會合セル國際世界地圖協議會ハ日本政府代表者山崎直方教授ニ望ムニ同國政府ガ日本地名ノローマ字綴リ方ニツキ公認セル一定ノ形式ヲ採用サレンコトノ希望ヲ容レラレンコトヲ以テス

斯クテ本委員會ニ於テハ討議ノ末英國委員ヨリ本案ヲ提出シ本委員ハ之ニ贊成シ歸朝ノ上ハ直ニ復命シテ十分ニ其ノ意ノアル所ヲ傳フベキ旨ヲ述ベテ本案ハ直ニ委員會ヲ通過セリ

（Endnotes）

1 The web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Japanese Government explains the history and Japan's position on this issue of name "Sea of Japan", Retrieved 23 October 2025, from
https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/page1we_000109.html

2 The web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Japanese Government describes how Japan responded to the claim made by South Korea during UNCSGN and UNGEGN meetings, Retrieved 23 October 2025, from
https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/page1we_000111.html

3 UN Charter: Retrieved 23 October 2025, from
https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

4 UNGEGN web site: Retrieved 23 October 2025, from
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/mandate/

5 The name of this project has been changed in UN documents. It was initially "1/1,000,000 Map of the World," which was changed to "International One Million Map of the World," and, finally, to "International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (IMW)." To maintain consistency in the project name, the most recent name is used in this paper.

6 The UN Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas (UNRCCA) was established in 1977 and has been convened every four years since then until it was discontinued in 2016 by ECOSOC.

7 The original Japanese title is『國際百萬分ノ一世界地圖ニ關スル決議』（山崎直方報告書、東京大学総合研究博物館所蔵）.

8 The section on this particular subject is documented on pages 6 through 10 of the original report. The entire original Japanese text of this section is duplicated in Appendix.

9 UNRCCAFE changed the part of its name referring to the regional extent it covered from Asia

and the Far East to Asia and the Pacific in 1980, which resulted in the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (UNRCCAP).

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