

Changes and Traces of Ainu Place Names in Contact with Japanese

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Abstract

At the 17th ICOS conference in Helsinki, I gave a paper entitled “Ainu Substratum in the Distribution of Japanese Microtoponyms” and I now would like to present my continuing studies on this topic. In Tohoku (North East District of Japan), there remain many place names having the same word structures as the names in Hokkaido where there still remain Ainu aborigines. But many names in Tohoku have changed through contact with the Japanese language, and it is necessary to interpret these names as to how they changed from Ainu to a Japanized word.

On Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan, there still exists an Ainu aboriginal population, although small in number,¹ most place names in that area are derived from the Ainu language. However, in Tohoku (North East District in Japan), consisting of the six Prefectures Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Miyagi, Yamagata, and Fukusima (Fig.1), there also remain many place names that have the same word structures as Ainu names in Hokkaido. Many of these names in Tohoku have changed through contact with the Japanese language, and it is necessary to interpret the names as to how these changed from Ainu to Japanized words.

For example, *Pi-nay* (‘pebble river’ in Ainu) appears in Tohoku as *Hi-nai* in the Japanized pronunciation (Fig.2). Most typically, it is written with the Chinese letter designated with A in Fig.2. This distribution continues from Hokkaido to Northern Tohoku, whereas the Chinese character designated as B (*Hi* ‘Japanese Cypress’) is used for *Hi-nai*, its distribution given as B1 and also *Hinoki-nai*, designated as B2. *Hi* and *Hinoki* are cognates; and *Hinoki* is actually written with two different characters given as B2 or B3. The words *Hi* and *Hinoki* actually don’t refer to a cypress tree; these names are located beyond the northern limit of Japanese cypress wild growth (Hayashi 1990). Therefore these Chinese characters are merely used as substitute characters.

In Fig.2, the most typical *Hi-nai* (A) is shown by a black dot, and the other type of *Hi*-(B) and its variants: 1 (*Hi*), 2 (*Hinoki*), and 3 *Hino-ki*) are shown by the three numbers. A white dot indicates the usage of other, less commonly used, characters. These are used for a more Japanized form, half translated to Japanese, *nay* ‘river’ >-*sawa/zawa* or *-kawa/gawa*, e.g., *Hi-sawa*, *Hi-gawa*, as indicated on the Figure 2 in the parentheses.

The distribution shows a continuation of usage of the term from Hokkaido, and a gradual change southwards from A to B. Specifically, one finds that in Central Tohoku the old names have disappeared and that there are only traces of the word in the mountainous region of South Tohoku.

Some Ainu names occurring frequently in Hokkaido have not as yet been recognized in the Tohoku District as derived from the Ainu language, such as *Kotan* ‘village, settlement’, *Penke* ‘upper’, *Panke* ‘lower’, and *Nupuri*, ‘mountain’.

In the case of *Kotan*, two patterns are recognized (Fig.3). In the Northwest corner of Tohoku, in the Aomori Prefecture, the Name *Kotani* (C in Fig.3) (in Japanese ‘small valley’) might be

derived from Ainu *Kotan*, because valley is *Ya* not *Tani* in Tohoku. This character pattern is also found in the neighboring Niigata Prefecture. Also *Kotate* and its variants exist all over Tohoku. *Kotate/Kodate* and *Furutate, Furudate* (*Furu* is another reading of the character *Ko* ‘old’) are indicated as D group characters. *Tate* is also written with the character E ‘shield’. This pattern is recognized in the Yamagata and Niigata Prefectures.

These *Kotate* names and variants were hitherto regarded literally as building names; however the *Kotan* name probably has been confused with the building *Tate* names. Thus, *Kotan* changed to *Kotate*, and *Ko* ‘old’ changed its reading to *Furu*. And these names show a distribution throughout Tohoku.

Penke ‘upper’ and *Panke* ‘lower’ are also frequently occurring pair names in Hokkaido. *Penke-to* ‘upper lake’ and *Panke-to* ‘lower lake’. In Tohoku, these pair names cannot be found. However there are some infrequent names that could be derived from these names. Fig.4 shows two Japanized names, *Benke* and *Bange*. *Benke, Benkei* might be from *Penke*, and *Bange* ‘foot of slope’ might be derived from *Panke*. The reason why pair names disappeared could be the sound of these words: *Penke* and *Panke* are similar and confusing in Japanization process, and the Japanese *Kami* ‘upper’ and *Shimo* ‘lower’ are names that already held a dominant position.

Nupri ‘mountain’ is a very frequent mountain suffix in Hokkaido such as *Atusa-nupuri* and *Nisey-ko-an-nupuri*. But this suffix cannot be found in the Tohoku District. Instead, throughout the Tohoku district, one finds the name *Mori*, an Old Japanese suffix designating ‘mountain’ (see Fig.5). Among the *Mori* names, there are a considerable number of *–no Mori* names. *No* is the preposition ‘of’ e.g., *Higasi-no-mori* ‘Mountain of the East’; *Higasimori* has the same meaning ‘East Mountain’. Ainu *Nupuri* names might be buried among these *no Mori* names, and some of them might be of Ainu *Nupuri* origin. Distribution of the name is continuous in Hokkaido.

Conclusion

Through this method it is expected that one might reconstruct original Ainu names that have disappeared from Japanized names.

Note

1. The number of Ainu is hard to determine. Estimates seem to range from 24,000 to 150,000. The discrepancy exists because many Ainu have hidden their origin because of discrimination. Native speakers of Ainu are basically extinct; estimates of living first language speakers of Ainu are around ten.

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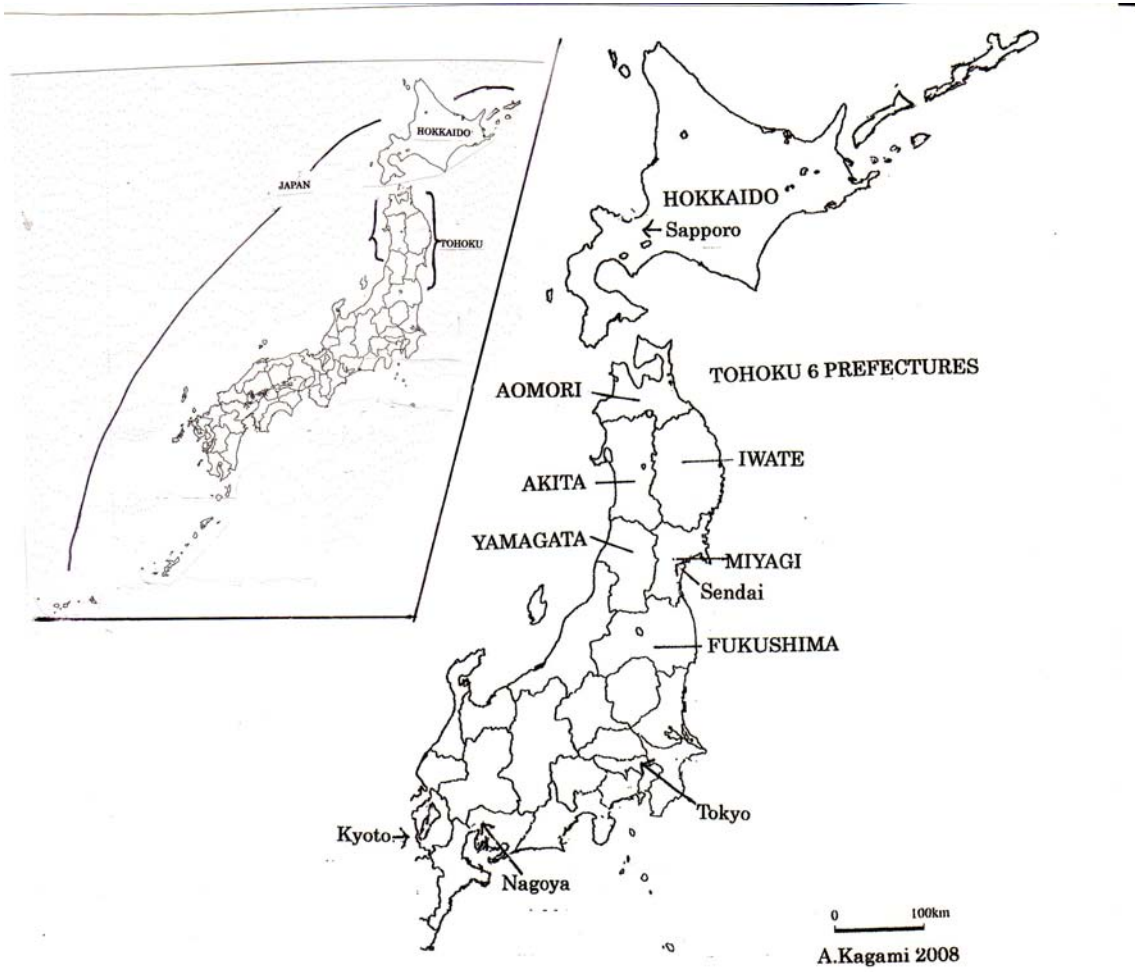


Fig.1 HOKKAIDO AND TOHOKU 6 PREFECTURES IN EAST JAPAN
(Regional map)

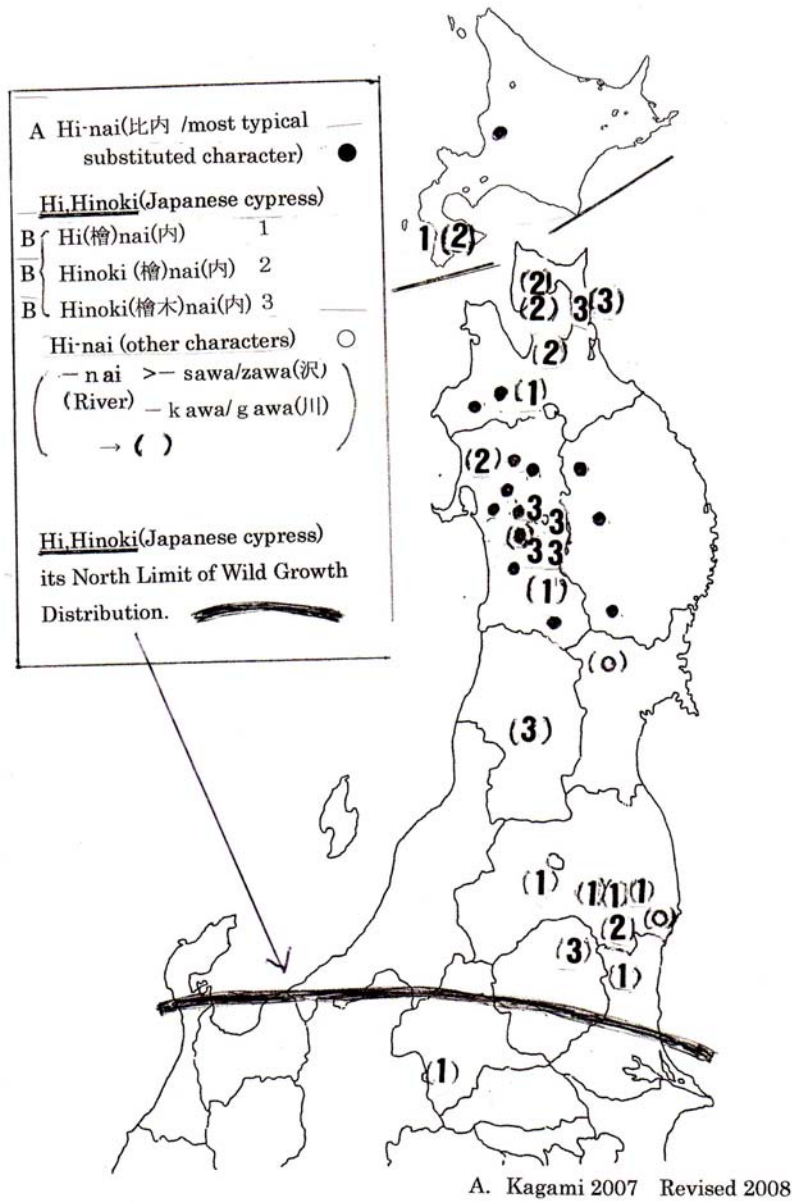


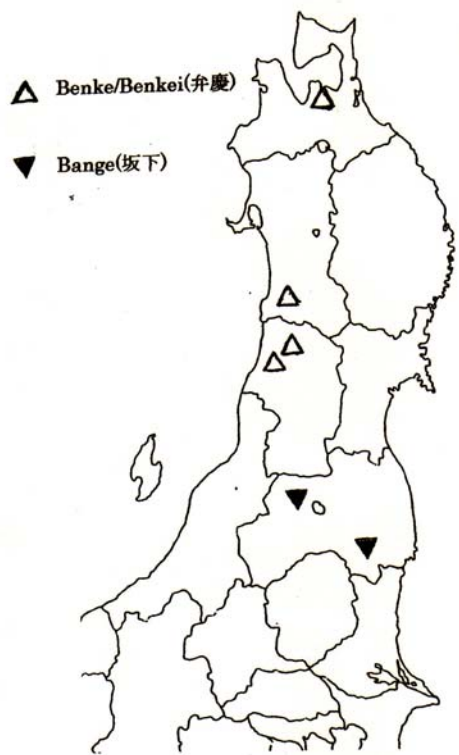
Fig.2 JAPANIZED PI-NAY(Pebble River)

- C ■ Kotani(小谷) D ● Kotate/Kodate(小館・古館) E ▲ (小楯)
○ Furutate/Furudate(古館) △ (古楯)



A. Kagami 2003 Revised 2008

Fig.3 JAPANIZED KOTAN(settlement)



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Fig.4 JAPANIZED PENKE(upper) and PANKE(lower)



Fig.5 JAPANIZED NUPURI(mountain)

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