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.

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On Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan, there still exists an Ainu aboriginal population, although small in number, 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 Fukushima (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
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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.

References
Fig. 1 HOKKAIDO AND TOHOKU 6 PREFECTURES IN EAST JAPAN
(Regional map)
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**Fig. 2** JAPANIZED PI-NAY (Pebble River)
Fig. 3 JAPANIZED KOTAN (settlement)
Fig. 4  JAPANIZED PENKE (upper) and PANKE (lower)
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