

On the Ainu origin of the ethnonym Emishi/Ebisu/Ezo

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Abstract

The main arguments of the Ainu origin of the name Emishi were presented by Kindaichi, however, that these arguments were presented rather haphazardly. This paper is aimed to represent facts found by Kindaichi in a more systematic way. It is possible to say that the Japanese form *emishi* is the oldest form. Japanese *emishi* was derived from Ainu **emciu*. The form *ebisu* came out from the form *emisu*. Key points of transformation of **emciu* into *ezo* are the following: 1) *emchiu* became *enju*: [m] of *emciu* became [n] under the influence of subsequent alveolar/alveolo-palatal sound [t]/[tç]; 2) Ainu language doesn't distinguish voiced and unvoiced consonants, so *emciu* became *enju*; 3) *enju* was pronounced as *enzo* in Tōhoku. Ainu word-form *enju* can't originate from Japanese *ezo*: if *ezo* would be borrowed by Ainu it would become **ento*. Also the word *enciu/enju* was used as self-naming by Ainu in sacral narratives/in tales.

Keywords: Emishi; Ainu; Kindaichi

1. Introduction to the problem

Emishi is an ethnic group mentioned in old Japanese chronicles/recordings (Nihon Shoki 日本書記, Tenshoki 天書記 and so on). This ethnic group is also called Ebisu and Ezo. Emishi people are generally considered as direct ancestors of modern Ainu or as an ethnic group related to Ainu.

Key arguments in favor of the Ainu origin of the name Emishi were presented by Kindaichi Kyōsuke (Kindaichi 2004: 109 – 117). It should be noted, however, that these arguments were presented rather haphazardly.

Kindaichi states that the initial form, from which words *emishi/ebisu/ezo* were derived, was the word **emchiu* that is supposed to have existed in ancient Ainu (Kindaichi 113 – 114). And arguments for the fact that *emishi* is a name of Ainu origin are the following: 1) in the book of Tenshoki 天書記 in the fragment where emperor Keikō informs Yamato-takeru about Emishi is the following phrase: 自称_蝦夷_ “call themselves Emishi” (Kindaichi 2004: 110); 2) word *emchiu/enju* was used by Ainu as a self-naming in sacral songs and belongs to a very archaic level of Ainu lexis and so it could not be borrowed from Japanese (Kindaichi 2004: 116)

In this paper we want to represent facts found by Kindaichi in a more systematic way and to enforce them.

2. Transformations of word-forms

2.1. *Emishi* and **emchiu*

As it was said above, it is possible to suppose the existence of form **emchiu* that hasn't been fixed in any real text ever, but this form can be reconstructed from the Japanese form *emishi* that is the earliest Japanese word for this ethnic group (Kindaichi 2004: 113 – 114).

It is possible to state that the Japanese form *emishi* is the oldest since it was recorded by man'yōgana: 衣彌詩 (see Nihon shoki maki 03 Jimmu tennō). In Old Japanese words consisted of V and CV syllables only, and thus, it is possible to say that the form *emishi* better reflects the consonants rather than vowels of the original form, and so it is fairly logical to reconstruct the initial form **emchiu*. In practical Ainu orthography this word-form should be recorded as *emciu*.

2.2. *Emishi* and *ebisu*

The form *ebisu* came out near the Heian period due to the following turn/process: [m] → [b], and this form derived not directly from *emishi*, but from the form *emisu*, that was a variant of *emishi* (Kindaichi 2004: 112).

2.3. *Enju* and *ezo*

At the first sight the form *ezo* hardly can be derived from *emishi/emciu*. Should be taken into account the fact that Ainu language doesn't distinguish voiced and unvoiced consonants (Kindaichi 2004: 113), i.e.: the word-form of **emciu* could also have the variant of **emju*, but the form **emju* is unknown; instead of it there is the form of *enju*.

Kindaichi offers the following explanation of the transformation of **emchiu* into *enju*: the [m] sound in the form of **emchiu* became [n] under the influence of the subsequent *chi* syllable (Kindaichi 2004: 114). Here can be added the following: the [m] sound in Ainu and in Japanese is bilabial nasal sound, while [n] in Ainu and in Japanese is alveolar nasal sound; Ainu [t] is alveolar plosive and Japanese [tɕ] is a voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate, so it is fairly natural to suppose that in fast speech [m] could become more alveolar, i.e.: could become [n] under the influence of the subsequent alveolar [t].

Kindaichi points on the fact that in Tōhoku¹ word *ezo* can be heard in the variant of *enzo* (Kindaichi 2004: 115).

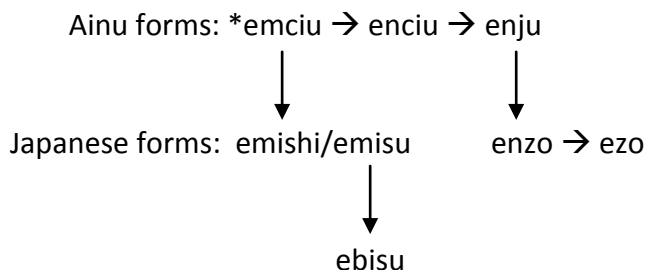
This *enzo* is already very close to the *enju* except for the ending vowel.

And here should be taken into account another fact that in Tōhoku the [u] sound is usually pronounced unrounded, with flat lips, and thus *ainu* "human being" becomes *aino*, *kamui* "spirit", "deity", becomes *kamoj*, *inau*² becomes *inao* (Kindaichi 1993: 133).

All the above said can be summarized in the following scheme:

¹ The origin of the word *ezo* is closely connected with the Tōhoku region (see fig 1).

² Inau is usually wood stick arranged by curly shavings, an inseparable attribute of any Ainu rite.



The form of *emishi/emisu* seems to be the oldest Japanese form, *ebisu* appeared later and *ezo* seems to be the latest.

If we suppose that Ainu words *enju/enciu* originated from Japanese word *ezo* then it contradicts the processes that took place when a Japanese word was borrowed to Ainu. Japanese [o] has never become [u] in Ainu, Japanese sound [z] becomes [nt] in Ainu, Japanese [d] becomes [nd] in Ainu, for instance: Japanese *azuki* “red beans” became *antuki* in Ainu (Vos 1990: 175), *kosode* – a type of short-sleeved Japanese garment, the direct predecessor of the kimono becomes *kosonte* (Vos 1990: 176) this *kosonte* is pronounced as [kosonde]. And, thus, if Japanese word *ezo* would be borrowed by Ainu it would have become **ento*.



Fig. 1. The Tōhoku region (map has been made after Google maps screenshot)

3. Kanji

It is noteworthy that word *emishi* was often recorded by the following kanji: 毛人, for instance, in the book of Song dynasty 宋書 or in Jōgū Shōtoku Hō Teisetsu 上宮聖徳法王帝説. 毛人 literally means “hairy people”, and this correlates well with the fact that the Ainu were often described as hairy people.

It should be noted that the reading *emishi* was simply ascribed to the signs 毛人, and the same took place in the case of signs 蝦夷 which are usually used in modern Japanese for words *emishi/ezo*, i.e.: words *emishi* and *ezo* were simply ascribed to these kanji meaning “hairy people” and “shrimp barbarians”.

The sign 夷 was a standard Chinese sign used to denote different ethnic groups that were considered as ‘savage’/‘barbarian’ by Chinese and later this practice was borrowed by Japanese. The reason why the sign 蝦 was chosen for the name *emishi/ezo* is unclear, it is possible to suppose that the sign was aimed to point the fact that *emishi/ezo* ate much shrimps/ seafood.

4. The use of the word *emchiu/enju* as self-naming

The phrase 自称_蝦夷_ “call themselves Emishi” from the book of Tenshoki is an important fact, but much more important is to find samples of Ainu folklore in which word *emchiu/enju* would be used.

Kindaichi gives the following samples of folklore, but doesn’t explain from what folklore narrative they were taken:

Ainu itak ani – in human language

enchiu itak ani – in people’s language

Arkir kamui – half kamuy

Arkir enju – half human (Kindaichi 2004: 113).

Enchiu and Ainu, both mean “man” in opposition to “kamuy”, and both mean “we” in opposition to strangers. Elders, when asked about the difference between them, confidently answer that the word *enchiu* is word for “human being” in *kamuy itak* (Kindaichi 2004: 116); *kamuy itak* means “words of *kamuy*”.

This *enchiu/enju* was not a word of everyday use; it was used as self-naming by Ainu in sacral songs and belongs to a very archaic level of Ainu lexis (Kindaichi 2004: 116).

Kindaichi points that Ainu have a sense of distinction between their original words and words of Japanese origin, and hints that the word *enchiu/enju* can’t be a loanword from Japanese since it belongs to very archaic lexis (Kindaichi 2004: 115 – 116).

The supposition that borrowings can’t enter the lexis used in sacral songs is actually very controversial; it is incorrect to state that a word can’t be a borrowing since it is used in sacral songs.

However, it is possible to state that no ethnic group would use as a self-naming a word that is used as a pejorative naming for it by other ethnic groups. Words *emishi/ezo* had pejorative connotations in Japanese and that’s why hardly could be borrowed by Ainu as self-naming.

We could not find fragments containing word *enchiu/enju* in the folklore of Hokkaidō Ainu, but found a fragment with this word in a text of Sakhalin Ainu dialect recorded by Bronisław Piłsudski, namely in the Tale about a woman with toothed vagina:

Tani (1) *énčiu* (2) *utara*(3) *keraj*(4) – *kusu*(5), *tani*(6) *am-pókhi*(7) *oxta*(8) *ámpe*(9) *aśin*(10) *kusu*(11), *anékojajrájkixçi*(12) (Piłsudski 1912: 88).

Now(1) due to(4 – 5) the men(2 – 3) now(6) since(11) things(9) in(8) my vagina(7) has become renewed(10) I am thankful to them(12).

There is a comment of Piłsudski to this fragment:

enciu, ‘a man’, a name of men (and Ainus) given them by the gods. The Ainus of Saghalien use it in prayers and in poetry, when gods and men are named in contrast. The word is taken from the Japanese language, in which the word *izin* means, ‘a barbarian, a foreigner’ (Piłsudski 1912: 92).

The note about the meaning of word *enciu* perfectly correlates with the above said, but the supposition about the origin of word *enciu* from Japanese 異人 *izin* is completely off base: 1) Japanese word *izin* had a pejorative connotation, 2) if *izin* would really be borrowed by Ainu then it would be **incin*, and would never become *enciu*.



Fig. 2. The island of Sakhalin (map has been made after Google maps screenshot)

It seems that in the time when Kindaichi made his research the word *enciu/enju* was very seldom used by Hokkaidō Ainu since they were undergone a rather serious Japanese influence and the word *enciu/enju* became associated with the Japanese word *ezo* that had a pejorative connotation, while Ainu of Southern Sakhalin who hadn't been undergone serious Japanese influence yet continued to use word *enciu/enju* as their self-naming.

5. Conclusion

Summarizing all the above-said it is possible to state that Japanese words *emishi*, *ebisu* and *ezo* originated from Ainu word **emciu*.

Now it isn't possible to say something definite about the etymology (original meaning) of the word **emciu*, so it can be a matter of a future consideration.

However, it is possible to say that in the word-form of **emciu* can be singled out the suffix of *-iw* that is known in such forms as for instance: *iwaniw* "six persons" or *arwaniw* "seven persons".

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