

On Japanese recording of some Ainu toponyms in the late 18th century

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Abstract

Some Japanese text of late 18th centuries written by officials who inspected southern Kuril Islands provide us with valuable data of how Ainu toponyms were recorded for the first time. Japanese authors mention Ainu toponyms when describing their trips along the islands and accompany them with explanation of names or description of places to which the toponyms relate. At the same time, collation of etymology of Ainu names and their descriptions by Japanese provide ground for questioning some names to be toponyms and raises some issues concerning the usage of toponyms in Ainu everyday life and the influence of recording toponyms on their being.

Keywords: toponyms; Ainu; Japanese; Kuril Islands; cartography; oral societies

1. Introduction

In this brief article I would like to raise a question: how and to what extent toponyms were used by Ainu in everyday life and how recordings of toponyms could influence their being. I want to focus on two texts written by Japanese government officials of the late 18th century: “Ezo soshi” (“Ainu notes”) written in 1790 by Mogami Tokunai, the first Japanese who deliberately visited the island of Iturup in 1786 (Mogami 1972: 375-378), and a letter by Kondo Juzo written in 1799 on Kunashir to his friend Furukawa Koshoken (Kondo 1935: 1339-1343). Both texts are remarkable for registering the moment of naming some geographical objects or recording toponyms reported by local people.

2. Representation of Ainu toponyms in Japanese texts

“Ezo soshi” by Mogami Tokunai consists of three main and two additional volumes, which contain in a total of 45 short articles about Ainu traditional practices or the author’s trips to distant islands. The article about his trip to the island of Iturup belongs to the first additional volume of the paper. Mogami describes his trip around the island from its southwestern to the northeastern tip along the Okhotsk shore and then the Pacific shore. All toponyms are mentioned in chronological and geographical (according to the author’s moving) order (spelling of all toponyms is according to Mogami’s records in katakana): *Itoiya*, *Herutarube*, *Moyoro*, *Atsusanobori*, *Moshirinoshike*, *Etorofuwatara*, *Shanaa*, *Shochikiya*, *Sharushamu*, *Hinnebetsu*, *Toushiruru*, *Rebunshiri*. Mogami provides most of these toponyms with brief explanations of their meaning.

Unlike Mogami, Kondo Juzo presents Ainu toponyms of Kunashir without any special order. In his letter, Kondo expresses his intention to publish a book entitled “Eight views of the island of Kunashir” upon his return to Japan and describes places of interest that he managed to visit and observe. He mentions *Seseki*, *Kusarichi*, *Otachippu*, *Chachanuburi*, *Shokebe*, *Onnebetsu*,

Ruyobetsu, *Bauchi* and *Atoiya*. He provides these names with brief descriptions of characteristics that mark the places out and help to understand their meaning.

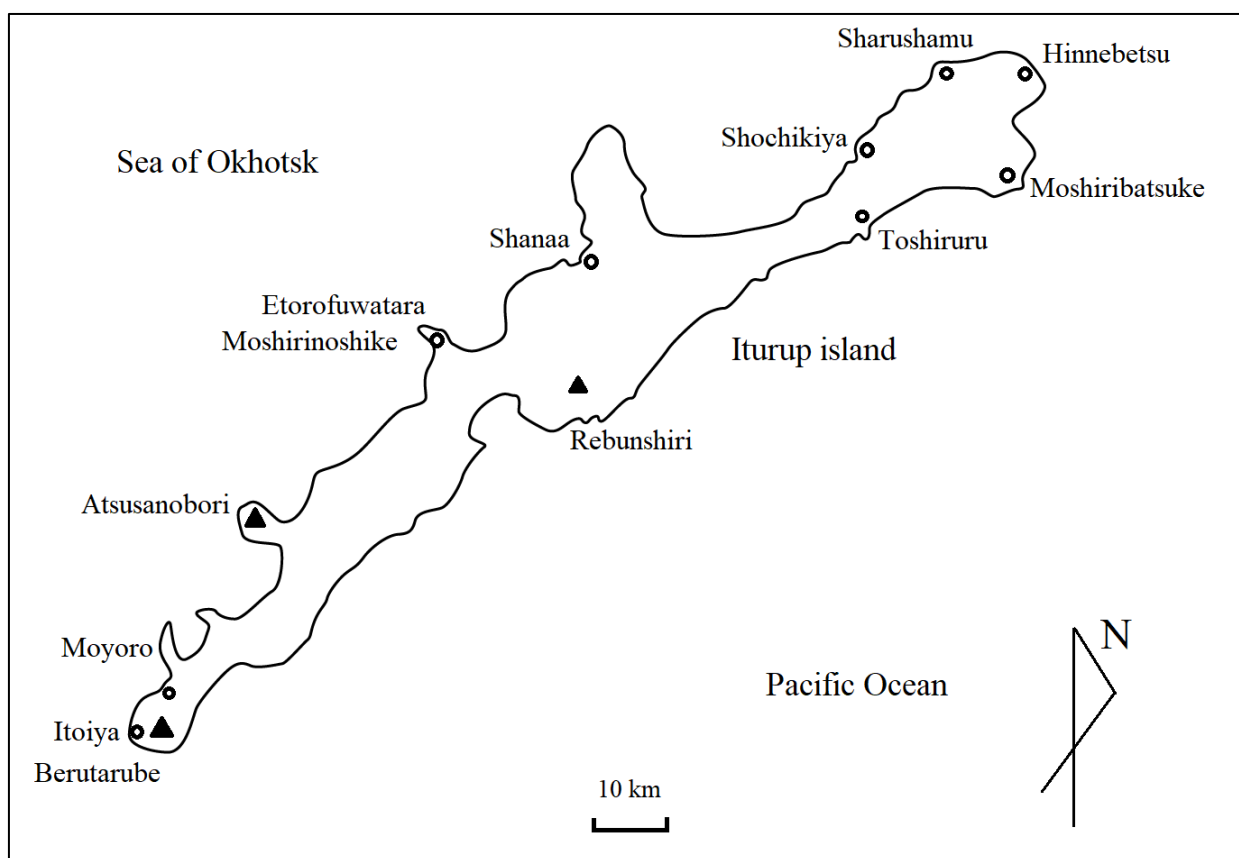


Fig. 1. Map of Iturup island with toponyms mentioned by Mogami Tokunai in “*Ezo soshi*” (drawn by the author)

3. Toponyms that seem credible

Some of the toponyms mentioned by Mogami and Kondo later came into use and were fixed on Japanese maps and a few of them are still in use, even today in Russia. They are, for instance, the mountain names *Berutarube* and *Atsonupuri* (*Herutarube* and *Atsusanobori* in Mogami’s spelling) on Iturup as well as *Tyatya* volcano (*Chachanuburi* in Kondo’s spelling) on Kunashir. *Berutarube* originates from Ainu *Pe retar pe* “a place (thing) where the water is white”. *Atsonupuri* is from *Atusa nupur* “naked mountain”, while *Chachanuburi* is from *Caca* “old man” + *nupur* “mountain” (Batchelor 1889).

Highly credible look also toponyms with the formant *betsu*, which originates from the Ainu *pet* “river”. *Hinnebetsu* seems to derive from Ainu *pinne* “male” and *pet*. *Onnebetsu* is from Ainu *onne* “old” or here “big” and *pet*. Kondo says that this river is the biggest among those flowing down the mountain of *Chachanuburi* (Kondo 1935: 1340). *Ruyobetsu* is from *ru* “whetstone”, *o* “to be in quantity” and *pet*. Kondo mentions that there are lots of porphyrite near this river (Kondo 1935: 1340).

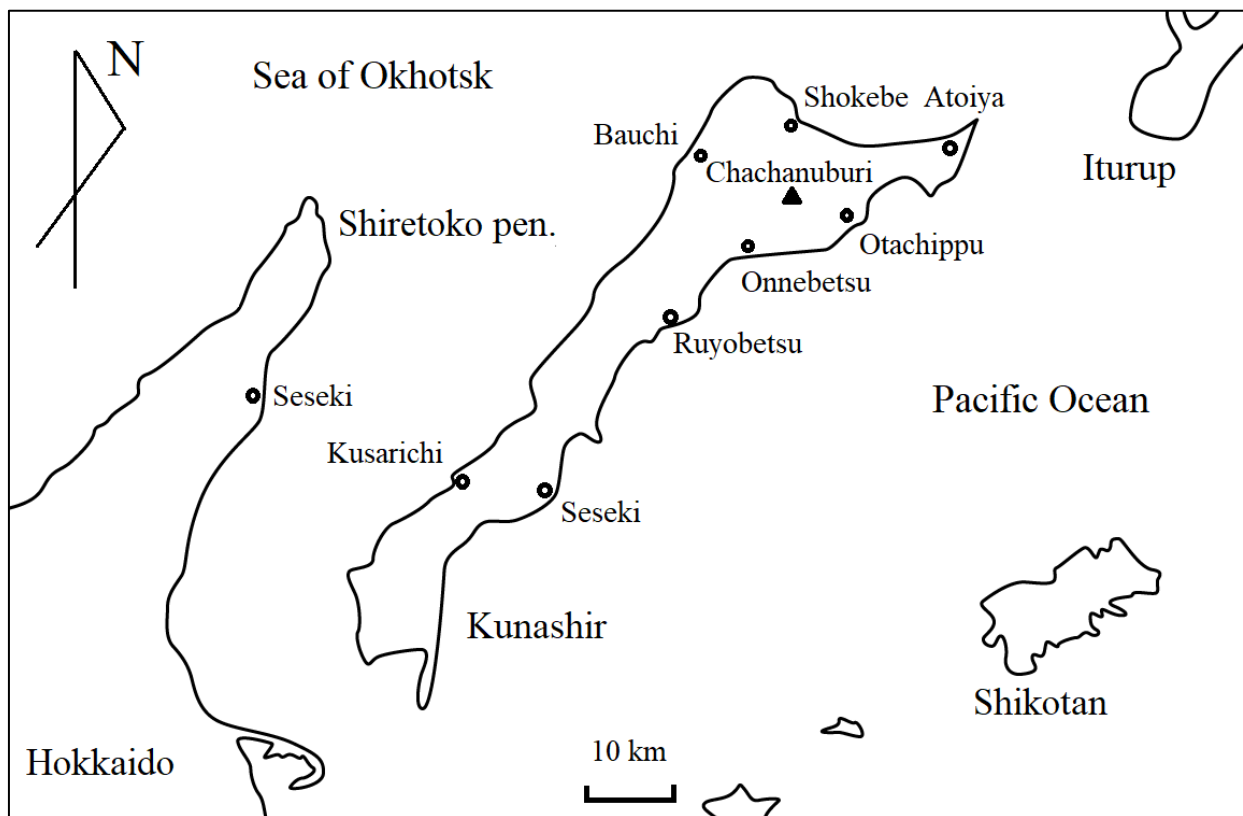


Fig. 2. Map of Kunashir island and neighboring lands with toponyms mentioned by Kondo Juzo in his letter to Furukawa Koshoken (drawn by the author)

According to Kondo, two toponyms on the island of Kunashir are related to Ainu legends about Okikurumi, an Ainu cultural hero, whom Kondo links to Minamoto-no Yoshitsune, a legendary Japanese warrior who was told to escape to the Ainu lands. The first is *Kusarichi*, a place with bizarre columnar basalt formations (now cape Stolbchatiy, lit. “columnar”). Kondo says that they look like Japanese armor waistcloth *kusazuri* and the Ainu believe that Yoshitsune removed and left his *kusazuri* in this place and later they had dried under the sun (Kondo 1935: 1340). *Kusarichi* thus can derive from Ainu *kusari* “armor”, from Japanese *kusari* – “chain” (Dobrotvorskii 1875: 156). The second is *Otachippu*. It is a sand mountain with snow underlying at a depth of about half a meter if dig sand up. The toponym thus derives from Ainu *ota* “sand” and *cip* “boat”, “ship”. According to the local legend, Kondo explains, Yoshitsune’s ship was abandoned in this place and turned into a sand mountain (Kondo 1935: 1340).

The commentary made by Mogami about the name of *Etorofuwatara* looks quite controversial, according to him, this is the rock that gave a name to the whole island of Iturup *Etorofu*. Mogami explains that *etorofu* means “nose” in Ainu while *watara* is “rock” in Japanese. He says that the form of *Etorofuwatara* resembles *agemaki*, a Japanese knot with three decorative loops, and, according to one legend, Ainu gave this name to the rock because it looked like a knot *agemaki* on the swords of two Ainu gods, Okikurumi and Samaikuru (who, adds Mogami, were possibly Yoshitsune and his companion Benkei), who moved to Ainu lands in the ancient times (Mogami 1972: 376). Nevertheless, what “nose” in the name of the rock and a knot *agemaki* have in common remains unclear. Actually, *Etorofu* can be etymologized as *Etu-oro-o-*

p with *Etu* “nose”, “cape”, *oro o* “to be filled with” and *p* “thing”, thus *Etorofu* means “a thing filled with capes”.

4. Toponyms that do not look like toponyms

At the same time, some toponyms mentioned by Mogami and Kondo do not seem to be toponyms at all. For instance, Mogami says that the rock Etorofuwatara is located in the place named *Moshirinoshike* “almost in the middle of the island” (Mogami 1972: 376). *Moshirinoshike* obviously derives from *Moshiri* “land”, “island” and *noshike* “middle”, which is literally “the middle of the island”. Thus, *Moshirinoshike* could be used by Mogami’s Ainu guides just as an indication of distance, but not as a regular toponym.

In much the same way, Kondo writes that “in a place named *Seseki* (on Kunashir) there is a hot spring that bubbles right in the sea” (Kondo 1935: 1340). *Seseki* originates from Ainu *sesek* “to be hot” and *i* “a nominalizer”, thus *seseki* means “hotness”. This word was often used for hot springs. In later maps there are at least three places on Kunashir indicated as *Seseki*, while today *Seseki* hot spring on Shiretoko peninsula is one of the most famous and popular resorts in Hokkaido. It seems reasonable enough that *Seseki* was just an appellative in Ainu that was mistakenly understood as a toponym by Kondo.

Another example of a possible appellative taken as a toponym is the word *Atoiya*. Kondo mentions it as a place on Kunashir that serves as a departure point further to the island of Iturup (Kondo 1935: 1341). Mogami writes: “when they travel from Kunashir to Iturup people land in whether *Itoiya* or *Herutarube* (*Beretarbe*)”. *Itoiya* may be a mistaken *Atoiya* (Mogami uses both spellings in different places), which derives from *Atui* (sea) and *ya* (shore). This word appears on later maps as a toponym in the corner points of several Kuril Islands: Kunashir, Iturup, Urup, and others. Thus, *Atuiya* seems to mark the points where local Ainu waited for the weather good enough to travel to another island of the archipelago and back. If this suggestion is correct, then *Atuiya* too was an appellative adopted as a toponym by the Japanese.

The last example of a doubtful toponym is *Rebunshiri*, mentioned by Mogami as a name of a mountain on the island of Iturup. He writes that the mountain *Rebunshiri* can be observed from the northern part of Iturup’s Pacific coast when one looks in the southwest direction. He describes this mountain as a volcano full of sulfur fumaroles and hot springs on its surface. It is clear that “*Rebunshiri*” refers to one of the volcanos in the central part of Iturup (now their names are Baranskogo, Tebenkova, and Ivan Grozny, formerly Sashiusu, Odamoi, and Yakeyama respectively). The problem is that *Rebunshiri* derives from Ainu *Rep-un-sir* and means “land/piece of land that lies over the sea” or simply an island. It is a regular name for small islands separated from the bigger ones by the sea (a well-known example is the island of Rebun northwest of Hokkaido). It seems that Mogami used an Ainu phrase “[the mountain that appears] on the land over the sea” as a name for the mountain itself, since Ainu names for mountains regularly contain the formant *-nupur* or at least some nominalizer (*-p* “thing” or *-us* “place”) but not *-sir* “land”, “island”. Wasn’t it one more example of registering a situational, spontaneous description of the place as a toponym?

5. Conclusions

This brief study of some Ainu toponyms on the islands of Iturup and Kunashir mentioned in Japanese sources in the late 18th century shed light on the process of how toponyms were recorded for the first time by the representatives of a literate society. We managed to see that among the toponyms there were both credible ones and those that could not be toponyms at all at the time of their registration. This raises some questions for further consideration. Were Ainu toponyms proper or common nouns (appellatives) in Ainu's everyday conversation? Or both existed simultaneously? And if so, what was their proportion? Were there cases of fabrication of toponyms in response to inquiries from Japanese officials, or registering situational, spontaneous descriptions of places as toponyms? I hope that further study of Ainu toponyms in comparison with later maps and descriptions, as well as with special reference to the usage of toponyms in Ainu folklore texts, could clear at least some of these questions.

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