

【Handout at the presentation : Distribution Maps and list of river names】

SIDG "XIth Congress of the International Society for Dialectology and Geolinguistics (SIDG)" in Marburg, Germany. On September 7-11, 2026. [8th, Sep. 2026. 2:45pm - 3:15pm, Location: Seminar Building 201 (+2?0010).Sessin: Geolinguistics across Borders III,

Distribution of River Names (Hydronym) in Japanese and East Asian Languages and Their Geolinguistic Interpretation

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Abstract;

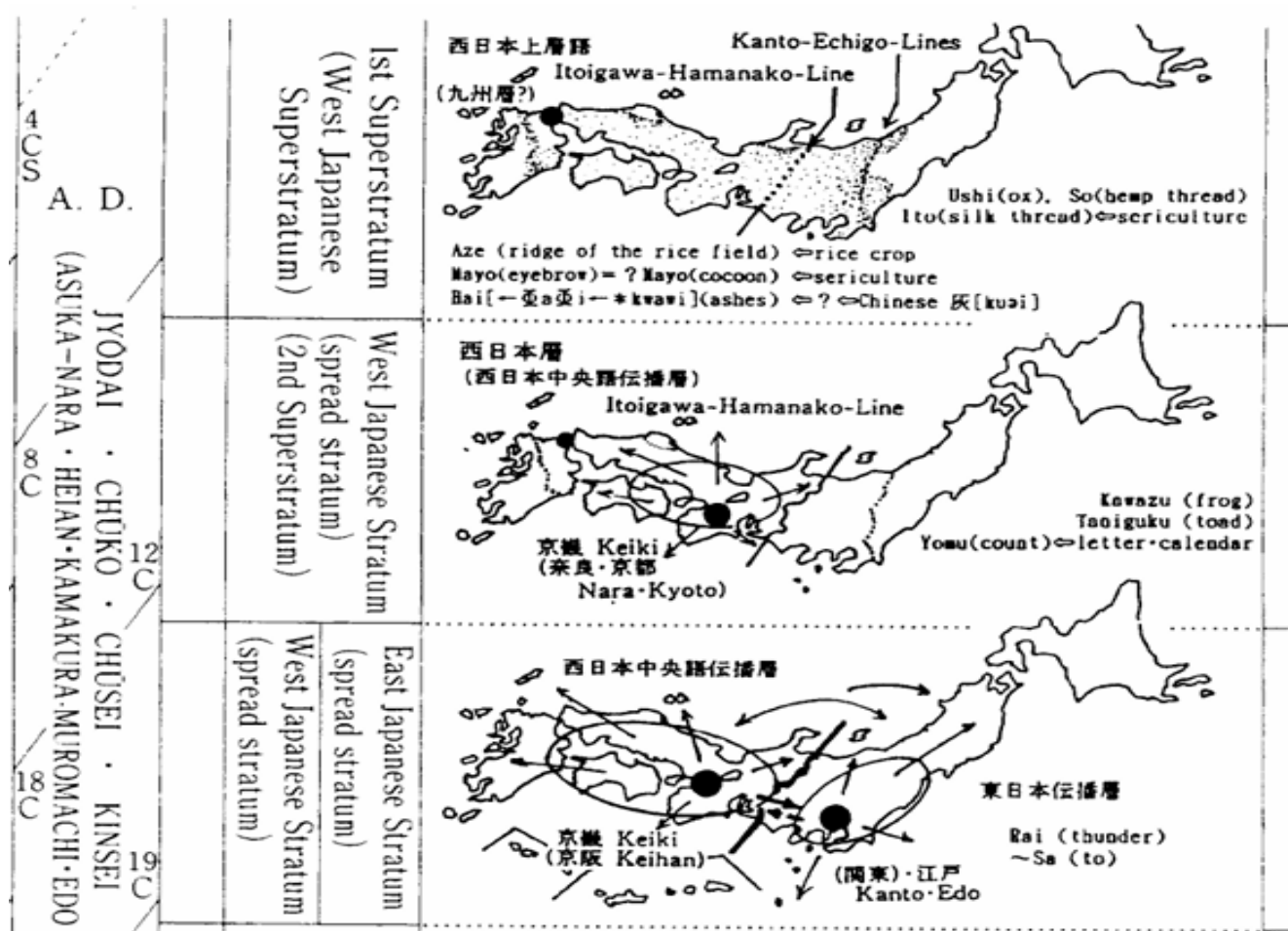
By investigating the distribution ranges of Hydronym as for river names and watercourses in Japanese, Ainu language, Korean and East Asian languages from a geolinguistic perspective, we can reveal the ancient distribution and the historical sequence of influence from East Asian languages on Japanese Dialects.

Keywords: river names, hydronym, East Asian languages, Japanese, Geolinguistics, Historical Stratification of Japanese River Names

Owaternames in English: river, stream, lake, swamp, pond, reservoir, sea, ocean, bay etc.

OJapanese waternames: Kawa<*Kapa <*Kap, *ka(川 river<), Sawa <*sapa (沢 stream), Numa <*Nuba, Nu (沼, Swamp), Ike (池 pond, 貯水池 reservoir, "Ike~" as for live, living :「生」)、Mizu-umi (湖, lake)、umi (海, sea, 海洋 ocean)、wan (湾, bay)

◆Japanese Kawa 河川(<峡)<kapa<* [kap̄] ← (Modern Korean 협 [çɛp̄]) ← Middle Korean 「峽」* [hɟəp̄] ← Middle Chinese「峽」 [hʷɛp̄] ← Old Chinese「峽」 * [gʷrep̄] (ABE2026,this paper)





- 1, ウィーレック博士記念論集－河川名分布－安部清哉.pdf <https://xgf.nu/oi5rS>
 - 2 木部先生ムートンテキスト安部 1 章 The classification and division of Japan.pdf <https://xgf.nu/uxVXC>
 - 3、Asia <<音韻対応 河川名 <https://xgf.nu/rxc74>
 - 4、国語学 54－3 関東における sjl214101116cs <https://xgf.nu/4npiw>
 - 5 Rivername, SAWA, SHIGA<<.202503 安部河川名「サワ」さわ沢「シガ」 <https://xgf.nu/rZuaf>
 - 6 NAI, TANI, SAWA, NUMA, YACHI, IKE etc. <https://xgf.nu/CkN6G>
 - 7 Distribution of River Names (Hydronym) <https://xgf.nu/jr3f4>
 - 8 Distribution of River Names (Hydronym) in Japanese and East Asian <https://xgf.nu/MBRLZ>
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1. Introduction

2. The Earliest Possible Stratum: Southern and Monsoon-Asian Connections

2－0. Significance of rivernames in geolinguistics

In this section, the significance of studying “rivernames” in geolinguistics is discussed, followed by several examples of the rivernames found in Asia.

It has been pointed out that studying rivernames is one of the best approaches to geolinguistic research on a considerably wide geographical area.

According to Krahe (1954), it has been proven that, of all proper names, rivernames are the oldest and boast the longest continuity. Krahe (1954) further argues that rivernames, thanks to their above-mentioned unique characteristics as linguistic material, best help shed light on ancient civilization, and migrations within the European continent.

Further, Schostakowitsch (1926) identifies unique patterns in word-endings of Siberian rivernames and argues that the pattern derive from an ancient language which once was used by a vanished ethnic group who lived in the region.

Based on these studies of European languages, Kim (1983) studies the genealogy of the Korean languages. As a way of illustrating differences among the Kokuryo language of the Northern Korea as well as Southern Korean languages of Pekche and Silla, Kim (1983) reports different rivernames used in these three languages in old Korean Peninsula.

Likewise, Abe (2001.11, 2003.7, 2003.7.29 & 2004.7) found that rivernames which supposedly evolved from the same etymons as the rivernames in the Japanese language are widely distributed throughout East Asia.

Abe’s recent work (2013 & 2025.5), including this article, follows the aforementioned studies on European and Siberian rivernames and is the first to identify patterns of rivername distributions all across Asia.

Other studies on river names also support that researching river names and water-related vocabulary is useful for studying the history of a language.

◆Statement of the problem ; What Historical Period Do Present-Day Place Names Reflect?

— The Chronological Stratification of Japanese Place-Name Distributions: Territorial Expansion of the Yamato Court and the Eighth-Century Linguistic Boundary

For data on the geographical distribution of place names, I use the atlas compiled by Kanji Kagami (1958). This work is regarded as one of the most highly respected sources for the geographical distribution of Japanese place names.

One of the most important problems in interpreting history on the basis of place-name distributions is determining what historical period the present distribution of place names reflects—that is, to what period the observed distribution can reasonably be attributed.

Regarding this question, I (Abe) propose the hypothesis that the distribution broadly reflects the place names of the first half of the eighth century. This hypothesis is based on two historical observations.

First, under the Taihō Code (Taihō Ritsuryō), the legal and administrative system established by the Yamato court in the early eighth century, place names throughout the country were reported to and recorded by the central government.

Second, in many areas there is a close correspondence between the geographical extent of Yamato court control around the eighth century and the uneven geographical distribution of place names that have survived to the present day.

In other words, during the first half of the eighth century, a nationwide survey and registration of place names conducted by the government appears to have resulted in local place names becoming established as officially recognized names. Within the territory controlled by the Yamato court, these place names consequently became relatively fixed. In areas that had not yet come under Yamato court control, however, place names were not fixed through this administrative process. Older local place names therefore survived there and were only gradually standardized or established at a later date.

For these reasons, the first half of the eighth century can be regarded, approximately, as a chronological boundary: within the territory of the Yamato court, newer place names became established, whereas in areas outside its control, older place names tended to survive.

The clearest example of this pattern can be seen in the geographical distribution of the river-name element **"Nai"**, **"Numa."** **"Nai"** and **"Numa"** are distributed primarily outside the territory controlled by the Yamato court in the eighth century. Within the territory under Yamato court control, by contrast, the form **"Tani"** and **"Ike"** are distributed instead. Thus, the geographical distributions of **"Nai"**, **"Numa"** and **"Tani"**, **"Ike"** reveal a clear contrast between an older and a newer form.

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- Figure 1.11: River names with the suffix -tani (Original map: Kagami 1958: 14 [From Suzuki 1978: 135]).



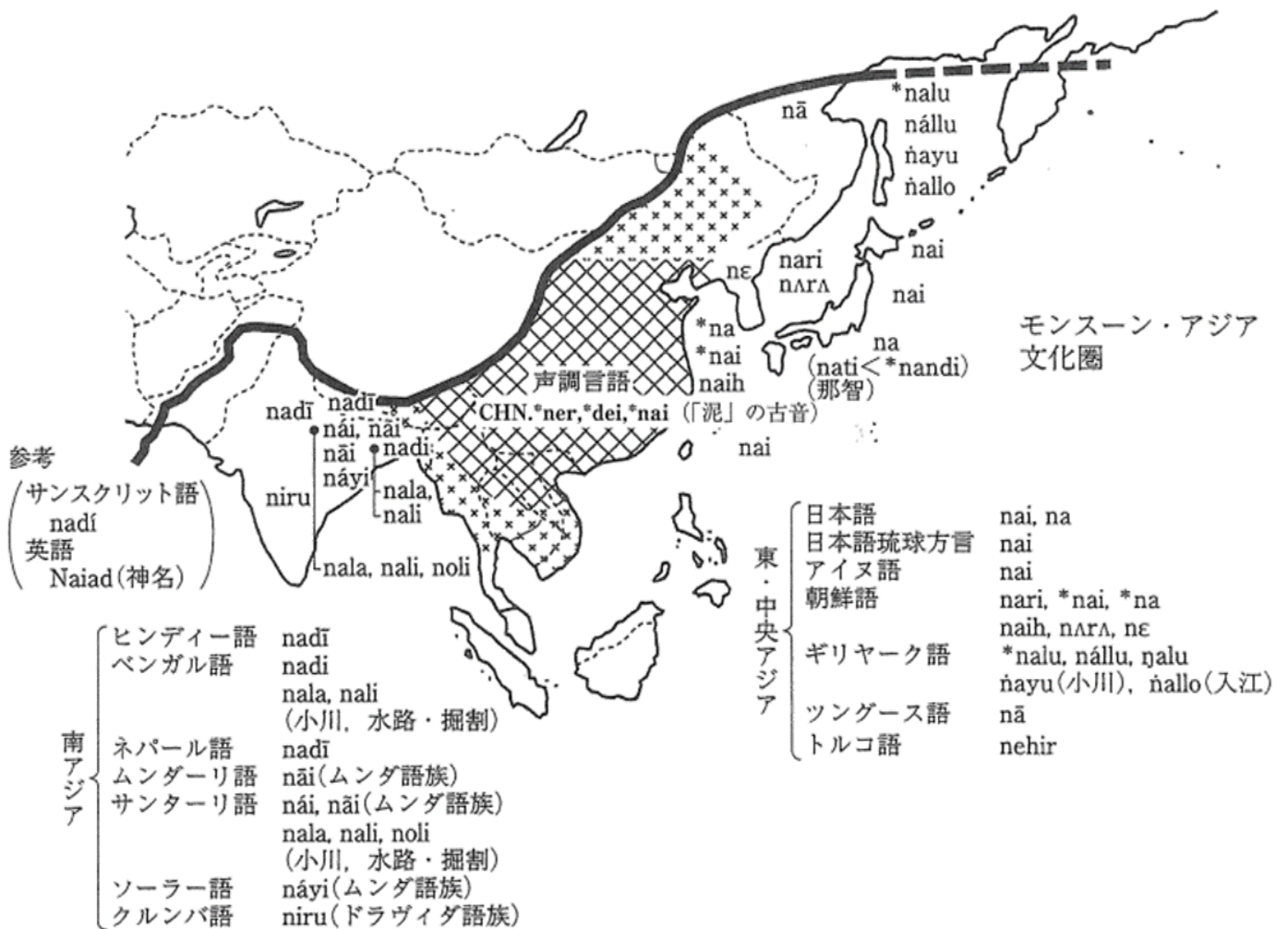
Figure 1.11: River names with the suffix -tani (Original map: Kagami 1958:

Appendix: The lists and Distribution Maps of rivername, (watername) :

1) rivername, “nai” < “*nahdi”

● Distribution patterns of a rivername, “nai” < “*nahdi”

○East Asian Languages <*nahdi	
Japanese	na (Old Japanese; cf. ABE 2004. 7)
Japanese	nai (Ryukyuan Dialect ; sonai, pinai)
Japanese	nai (Tohoku Dialect ; nai, sappinai)
Japanese	nati (river name; nati river)
Chinese	nai, nei, ner, ndei (ancient CHN.)= 濤・泥 : river, mud.
Korean	nari, naih, n _{ar} Λ, *nai, *na (ne : modern Korean) (Middle & Old Korean, and Korean Dialects)
Tungus	Nā
Gilyak	*nalū, nāllu, ŋalu, (ñayu for a small river , ñallo for a small bay. [ñ] means [n] have ‘ ’ mark over it.)
○South Asian Languages <*nahdi	
Mundari (Munda)	nāi (a big river, from Bhaduri’s A Mundari-English Dictionary) .
Santāli (Munda)	nāi (Hunter,1978); nāi (a river, from Campbell’s English-Santali Dictionary)
Santāli (Munda)	nala, nali, noli (stream, ditch, from A Comparative Study of Santali and Bengali) .
Sāvāra (Munda);	nāyi
Kurumba (Dravidian)	nirū
○West Asian Languages (Altaic Languages) <*nahdi (cf. *nahdi>Naiad)	
Turkish	nehir [nehíɽ]



2) rivername, "sawa" < "*sapa" < *saba, & *sungey in Tryson 1995

Ainu	sa (river sides, plain, Batchelor's Dictionary)
Ainu	sar(*sar·ga<*sanga, swamp, from Slawick)
Ainu	sara (A plain covered with a kind of sedge, Batchelor's Dictionary)
Korean	sir<*sər (small river in "Sangoku-Iji")
Naanai (Tungus)	siru<*sər (sand)
○Austronesian; rivername	
①*AKL (Aklanon)	suba?
*PAL (Palawan)	sopa?
*KAG (Kagayanen)	sūba?
SAB (Bangingi Sama)	sowing
②*MUR (Murut (Timugon))	sungoy
*BAT(Batak Toba)	sungε
*MIN (Minangkabau)	sungay

*IND (Indonesian)	sungai
MAD (Madurese)	sungay
③*RTU (Rotuman) (Polynesian)	sɔfu
PHN (Proto-Hesperonesian)	sungay
PWMP(Proto-Western-Marayo-Polynesian)	sungey (cf. MGY=MALAGSY MERINA in Tryson 1995)

The Austronesian word form described above is documented in Tryson (1995) also refers to the following word forms and meaning in its appendix.

①AKL	Proto-Southern Philioppines *subaʔ
PAL	sapaʔ (small river); sɔsapaʔ (stream, brook)
KAG	subaʔ(river) ; sapa (stream, brook)

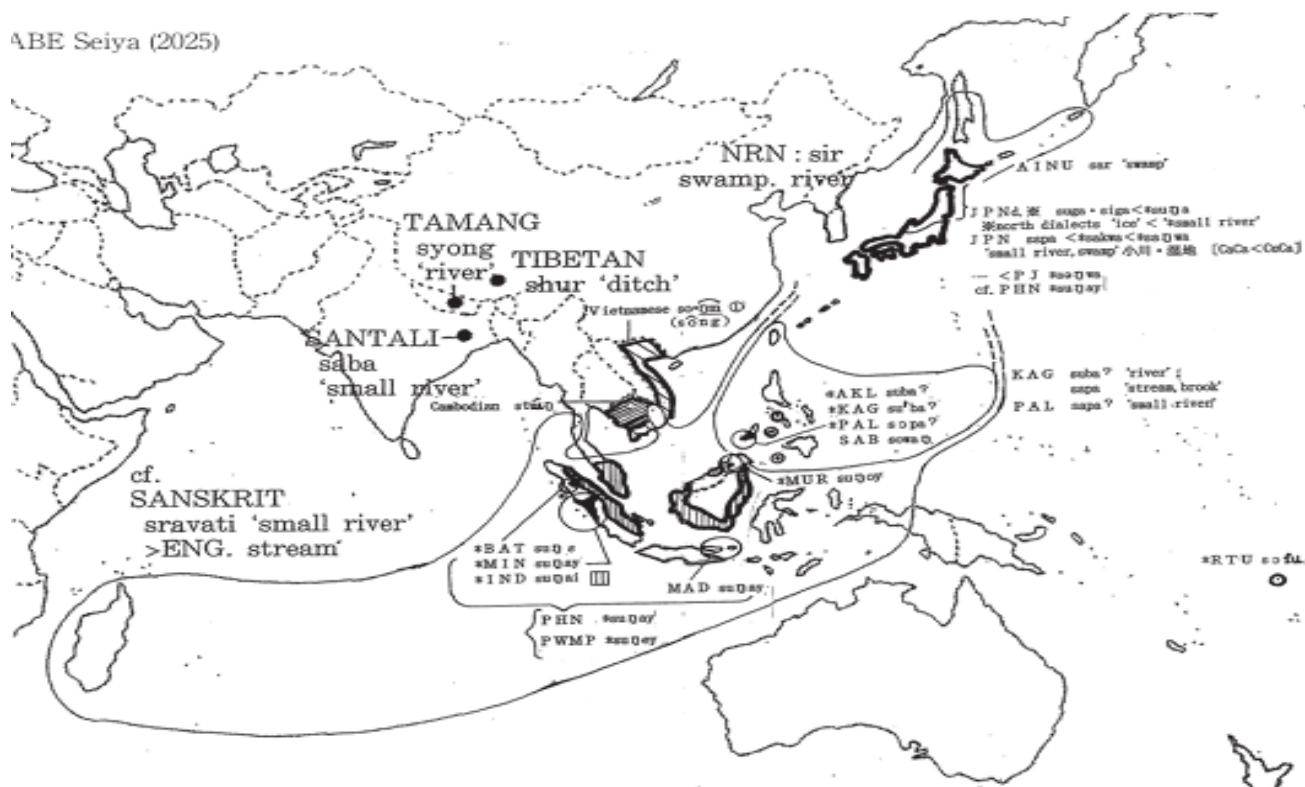
Furthermore, a “sungay” derivative in Santali (one of the Mundari languages which belongs to the Austro-Asian language family) is saba. It can be assumed that this “saba” evolved from the same etymon as did other derivatives in East Asian languages. The examples from those languages are repeated below.

Santali	saba (small river), by <i>Campbell's English-Santali Dictionary</i>.
	cf. Japanese; sapa, *saba (small river, swamp)
	(cf. *səngway>*savay>sravati (SKT)>stream (English))
PAL(Palawan)	sapaʔ (small river)
KAG(Kagayanen)	sapa (stream, brook), subaʔ(river)
	cf. AINU; sar (swamp)

Though these language originate from places far away from one another, all of these derivatives share the vowel, “a (or ə)”. The evolution of rivernames in this particular language group can be assumed as:

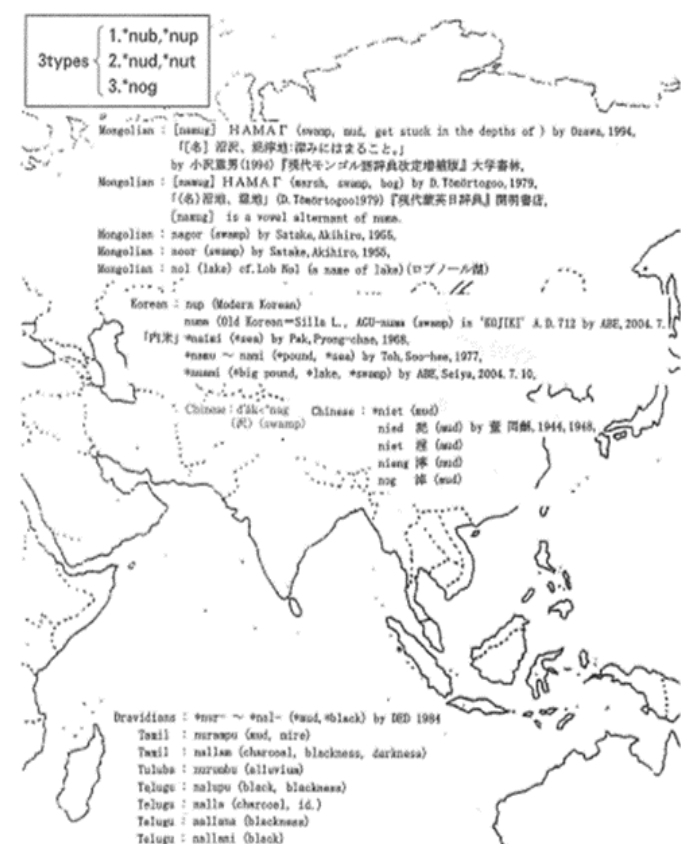
*saba<*sagwa < (*sar<*sargwa)<*sangwa <*sangway (or *səngway)

As illustrated below, the “səngay” derivatives are distributed as far as Austro-Asians in India, Austronesians in the Pacific region, and Japanese and Ainu in north eastern Asia. Of these languages, the close relation of Austronesians and Ainu has been pointed out by Murayama (1993).



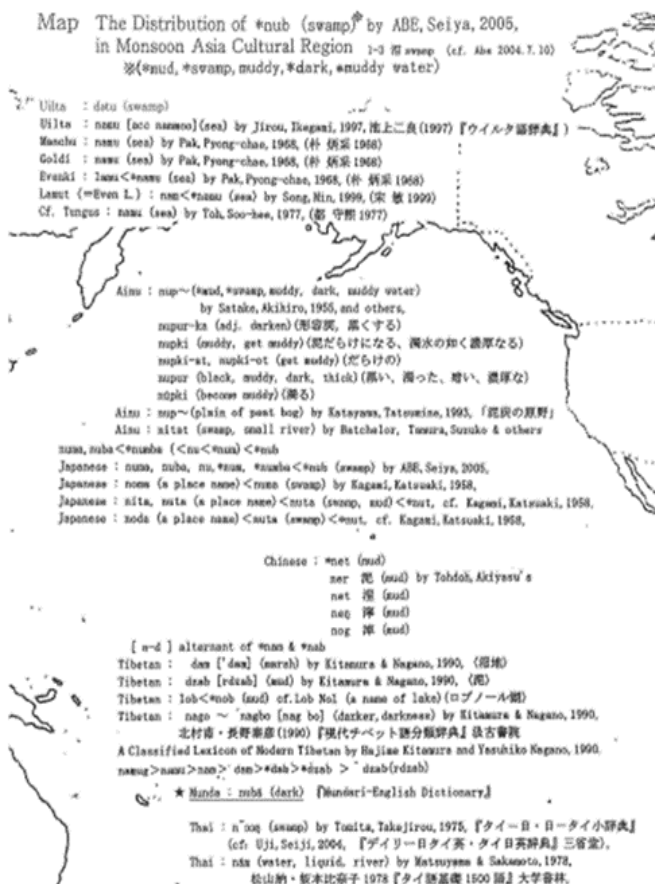
● Map: Distribution patterns of "numa"<"*nub" (for swamp, mud, black)

圖8 「沼(泥・黒) : ヌマ・ヌバ



の言語地図」(安部 2000 を地図化)

Map The Distribution of *oub (swamp)* by ABE, Seiya, 2005,
in Monsoon Asia Cultural Region 1-3 附 swamp (cf. ABE 2004.7.10)
※(*nud, *swamp, muddy, *dark, *muddy water)



Japanese	*nub>*numb(>*num>nu),>*numba>nuba/numa, (swamp, mud, dark) (Abe, 2005.5).
Ainu	nup- (*mud, muddy water)
Ainu	nupur-ka (adj. blacken)
Ainu	nupki (wear mud, thick as muddy water)
Ainu	nupki-at, nupki-ot (mud all over)
Ainu	nupur (black, thick, dark), by Satake, 1955.
Ainu	nup-, (peat moor) by Katayama, T. 1993.
Korean	Nup, Silla language, “agu-numa”
Munda	Munda; nuba (dark) cf. Bhaduri, A Mundari-English Dictionary

Figure 1.10: Suffixes in names of lakes and wetlands -ike and numa (From Kagami 1958: 18).

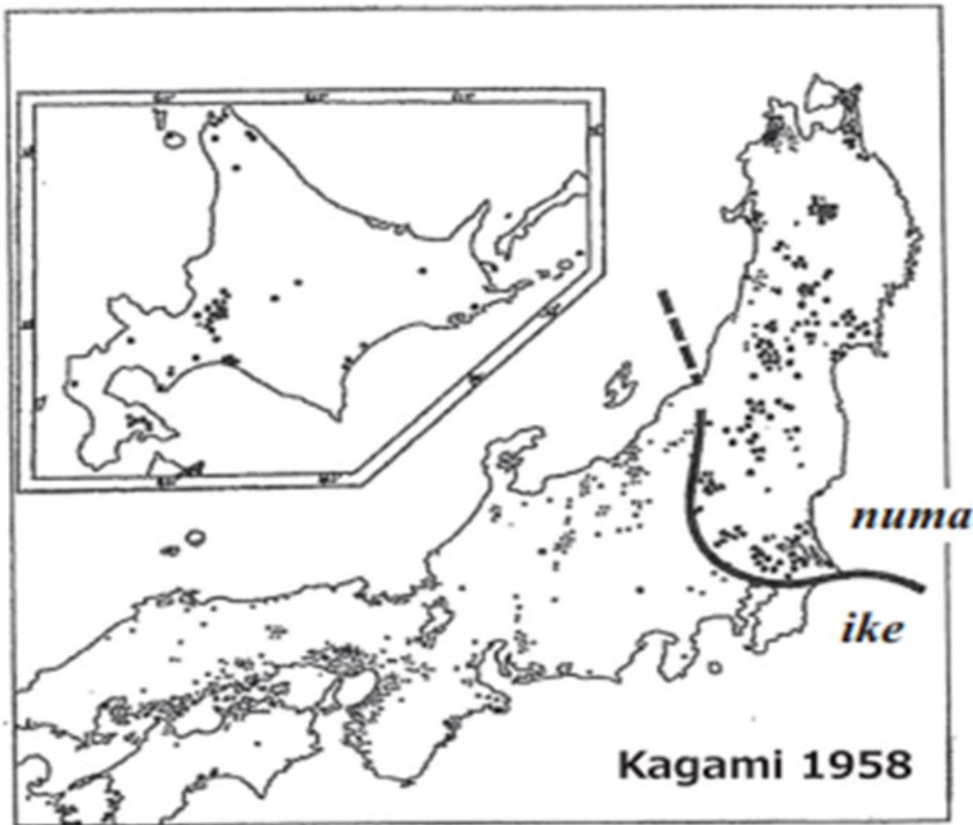


Figure 1.10: Suffixes in names of lakes and wetlands -ike and numa (From Kagami 1958: 18).

- Figure 1.11: River names with the suffix -tani (Original map: Kagami 1958: 14 [From Suzuki 1978: 135]).



Figure 1.11: River names with the suffix -tani (Original map: Kagami 1958:

Map [6] :Distribution Area of Sites with a Certain Burial Practice in the Late Yayoi Period (ca. 1st-3rd centuries CE)

[6] 方形周溝墓の分布（弥生時代の墓制） 山岸良二(1981)

III 最近調査された主な遺跡

弥生後期までの方形周溝墓 ⇨
の東遷ライン

1990年現在でもほぼ同様とされる。
(山岸氏私信による。山岸(1996)参照)



● Map: Distribution patterns of “jatsu” < “*jat~” (left side) and sawa < “*sapa, saba” (right side)

【図4】ヤチ・ヤツ・ヤト（谷地、谷津、谷戸）の地名分布 鏡味完二（1958）

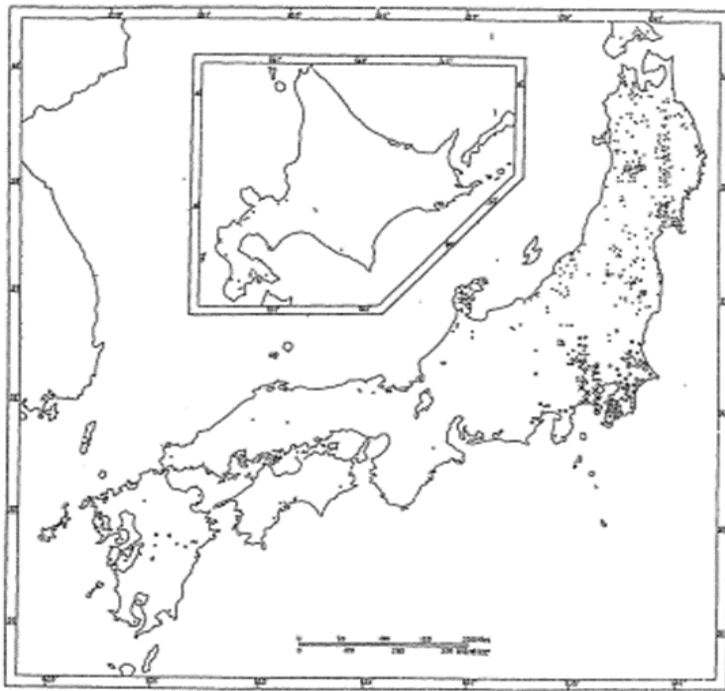


Fig. 313 Yati • Yatu • Yato

黒点：Yati（谷地），
 黒点：Yatu（谷津），
 小黒点：Yato（谷戸）（1個），
 大黒点：Yato（10個）。

【図3】サワ（沢、さは）の地名分布 鏡味完二（1958）

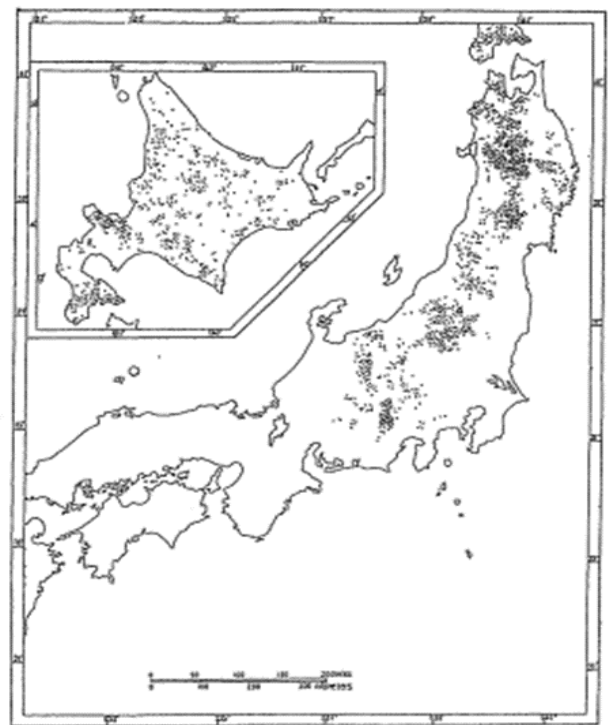
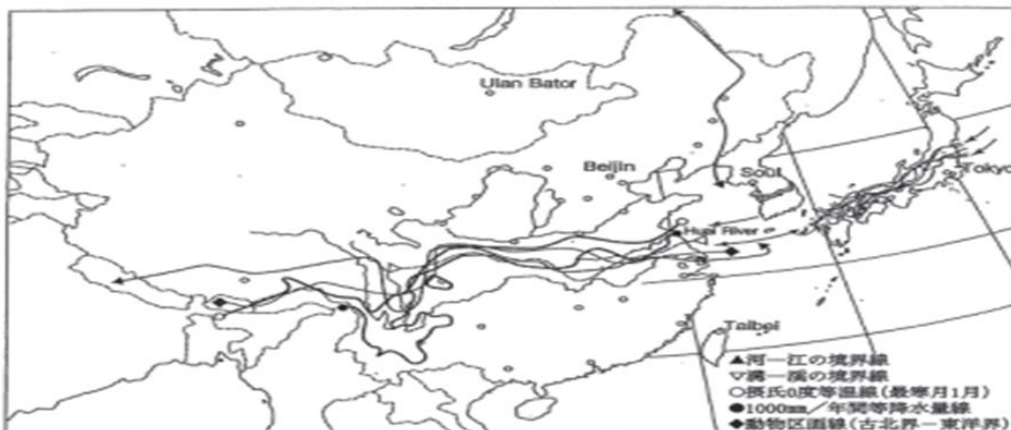


Fig. 13 河川名の路尾：～沢

小点：1個，黒点：10個，著るしい東北日本型分布，九州に分布なし。

● Map COMPOSIT BORDERS OF LANGUAGES OF LANGUAGES, CULTURE AND CLIMATE IN ASIA (from ABE 2013)



- ▲—▲ North-south dividing line for the use of “he 河” and “jiang 江” in river names of China
- ▽—▽ North-south dividing line for the use of “xi(chi) 溪” and “gou(kou) 溝” in river names of China
- Isothermal line at 0 Degrees Celsius (coldest month: January)
- Isohyetal line at 1000 mm per year
- ◆—◆ Faunal realm (palaeartic realm - oriental realm)

Figure 1.13: Composite borders of languages, culture, and climate in Asia (From Abe 2013a: 509, *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyū* 15).

- ▲—▲ North-south dividing line for the use of “he 河” and “jiang 江” in river names of China
- ▽—▽ North-south dividing line for the use of “xi(chi) 溪” and “gou(kou) 溝” in river names of China
- Isothermal line at 0 Degrees Celsius (coldest month: January)
- Isohyetal line at 1000 mm per year
- ◆—◆ Faunal realm (palaeartic realm - oriental realm)



Figure B. Composite borders of languages, culture and climate in Europe (ABE2013)

図B ヨーロッパにおける言語、文化、気候の複合境界線 (安部 2013)

- Centum-Satem border (dotted line is the border with a different interpretation)
- ▽ 0°C isothermal line (coldest month: January)
- Presence of sibilance (the boundary lines of the presence current and past)
- Distribution boundaries of blood type O in 60% of population
- ◆ Hybridization zone of *Mus musculus domesticus* and *Mus musculus musculus*

■ Rhein-Main-Donau river line

The Scope of Southern Language Influence on Japanese Dialects

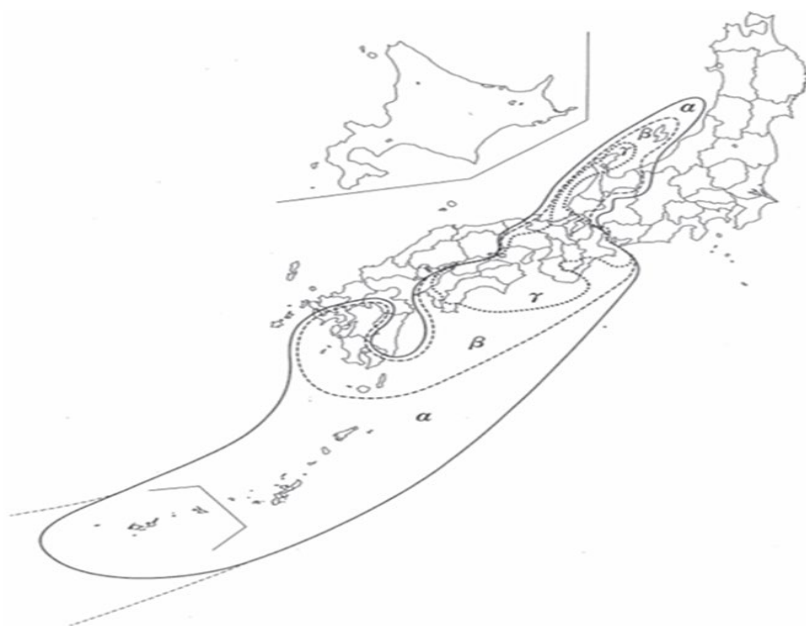


Figure 1.17: Distribution of the nai-rin dialect region (y), and yomu 'to count' (a) and the lengthened pronunciation of monomoraic words (a) (From Abe 2023: 76, *Gakushūin Daigaku Bungakubu Kenkyū Nenpō* 69).

The Northern Expansion of the Yamato Court: Its Scope and Chronology



Expansion of the Territory under the Yamato Court 7th – 9th Centuries

