

Review Article

Review of *Chimei Jion Tenyorei* by Motoori Norinaga

Kohei Nishimura\*

1. Introduction

This article provides an overview and critique of *Chimei Jion Tenyorei* (地名字音転用例 [Examples of Sino-Japanese Reading Diversion in Place Names]; hereafter *CJT*), one of the most important works of Motoori Norinaga in his study of *jion* readings (Sino-Japanese readings), published as a 46-page booklet in 1800. This study organizes and investigates the patterns of unconventional *jion* readings of *kanji* found in old place names in Japan, showing that these patterns were more systematic than previously thought.

The author, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), was a *Kokugaku* (Japanese National Studies) scholar during the Edo period, and is often regarded as the one of most influential figures in this traditional academic area. Although his main purpose was to investigate Japan's indigenous philosophy, his scope of study ranged from philology and classical literature to graphology and many other related areas. The study of *kanji* usage in ancient Japanese texts was also one of his important academic topics, which he thought was necessary for understanding the philosophy of ancient Japan, his most important lifelong academic subject.

This article first provides an overview of the study, followed by a discussion of its flaws, focusing on the author's assumption about the underlying phonological structure of *jion* in place names. Arguably, this problematic supposition stems from the fundamental ideology of the author's academic activities.

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\* Assistant Professor at the School of International Politics, Economics and Communication, Aoyama Gakuin University

## 2. Overview

In the introduction of this booklet, the author stated the main question of this study: many Japanese place names contained various unconventional readings of *kanji*, which seemed very irregular at first glance. The author argued that this situation had been caused by a social requirement that place names throughout Japan be recorded with a pair of *kanji*, pointing to *Niji-rei* (二字令 [the Two-Character Edict]) issued by the Yamato Court in 713, as a representative case. Because numerous Japanese place names were inconsistent with the phonological structure of conventional *jion* readings based on two *kanji* characters, various unconventional readings had to be established. At the same time, the author demonstrated that the great majority of unconventional readings were not irregular but rather possessed underlying systematicity.

The main part of *CJT* was devoted to providing examples of *jion* readings of *kanji* derived through unconventional operations on phonological structure; the author classified Japanese place names with unconventional *jion* readings into 21 sections,<sup>1)</sup> yielding a total of 194 examples. It is noteworthy that the pronunciations of the listed place names were meticulously substantiated by *Wamyosho* (和名抄) or other historical documents, including *Kojiki* (古事記), *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), and *Fudoki* (風土記). In the context of the academic methodology of this period, his positivist approach was revolutionary.

The 21 sections can be reclassified into several parts, mainly according to the phonological operations they exhibit (cf. Yuzawa 1979, Okimori 2007). Sections 1–9 discuss alternations of the second vowel of *jion* with a CVCV structure, which could be regarded as the utilization of *nigo-gana*, a specific pattern of *manyo-gana*. The author classified these examples by focusing on the phonological alterations from conventional *jion* readings to unconventional forms. A representative example of each section is provided below:<sup>2)</sup>

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1) In the original text of *CJT*, the author did not number these sections; the section numbers in this article are provided by the reviewer.

2) The examples are presented in the following order: place name, the *kanji* character in question, alternation in readings, and section number.

- |        |             |                              |     |
|--------|-------------|------------------------------|-----|
| (1) a. | 相模 sagamu   | 相 : sau → saga               | § 1 |
| b.     | 印南 inami    | 南 : naN → nami <sup>3)</sup> | § 2 |
| c.     | 信濃 sinano   | 信 : siN → sina               | § 3 |
| d.     | 播磨 harima   | 播 : haN → hari               | § 4 |
| e.     | 愛甲 ayukaha  | 甲 : kahu → kaha              | § 5 |
| f.     | 秩父 titibu   | 秩 : titu → titi              | § 6 |
| g.     | 葛筋 katosika | 筋 : siki → sika              | § 7 |
| h.     | 佐伯 saheki   | 伯 : haku → heki              | § 8 |
| i.     | 拝師 hayasi   | 拝 : hai → haya               | § 9 |

The author regarded the operations in Sections 1 and 4 as different from those in the others since they also involved alternations on consonants as shown in (1a) and (1d), which the author called *tenyo/tenji mochiitaru* (転用 / 転ジ用イタル [using alternatively]), contrasting *tsuyo* (通用 [using commonly (across the corresponding *kana* row)]) in the others. In addition, Section 9 should be distinguished from the others because it involves a vowel-to-glide alternation, as in (1i).

Sections 10 to 18 primarily consist of examples of vowel alternations in the first syllable of *jion*, alongside a few examples of other operations. The author regards the examples in these sections as involving the same operation, *tsuyo*, focusing on the fact that no shift to other rows within the *kana* system occurred. The following serves as an example:

- |        |             |                  |      |
|--------|-------------|------------------|------|
| (2) a. | 英虞 ago      | 英 : ei → a       | § 10 |
| b.     | 菊池 kukuti   | 菊 : kiku → kuku  | § 11 |
| c.     | 宿久 sukuku   | 宿 : syuku → suku | § 12 |
| d.     | 筑紫 tukusi   | 築 : tiku → tuku  | § 13 |
| e.     | 寧楽 nara     | 寧 : nei → na     | § 14 |
| f.     | 阿拝 ahe      | 拝 : hai → he     | § 15 |
| g.     | 各務 kagami   | 務 : mu → mi      | § 16 |
| h.     | 塩冶 yamuya   | 塩 : eN → yamu    | § 17 |
| i.     | 等力 todoroki | 力 : riki → roki  | § 18 |

Section 19 discusses miscellaneous patterns; it reports various operations that the author thought were difficult to account for systematically. Some of

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3) The capital “N” represents a moraic nasal segment (*hatsuo*n).

these operations were likely ad hoc; therefore, their orthographic transparency was much lower than in the other sections. Examples are presented below:

- (3) a. 対馬 tusima      対 : tui → tusi      § 19  
 b. 早良 sahara      早 : sou → saha      § 19  
 c. 物理 motorowi      理 : ri → rowi      § 19  
 d. 任那 mimana      任 : niN → mima      § 19

The last two sections show interesting deviations between *kanji* and its readings. Section 20 consists of monomoraic place names, which require special treatment because Japanese place names were forced to be described using two *kanji* characters, as argued above. This section provides examples that satisfy this requirement by inserting a redundant *kanji* character whose phonetic quality is identical to that of the vowel in the first character. Consider the following examples:

- (4) a. 紀伊 ki              § 20  
 b. 都宇 tu              § 20  
 c. 弟翳 e              § 20  
 d. 呼喚 wo              § 20

This operation is fascinating because the inserted *kanji* character, which was ignored in the pronunciation of the place name, must have a structure that facilitates such elision, which can also be interpreted as vowel fusion. This clearly demonstrates that phonological grammar plays a decisive role in selecting *kanji* characters.

Section 21 shows place names that were thought to be originally written with three *kanji* characters, but one of them was deleted to follow the two-character requirement. The following examples illustrate this process, where the square symbol (□) denotes a deleted character:

- (5) a. 武蔵 muzasi      武蔵□              § 21  
 b. 安宿 asukabe      安宿□              § 21  
 c. 美作 mimasaka      美□作              § 21  
 d. 拳母 koromo      拳□母              § 21

Similar to the place names in Section 19, they exhibit low orthographic transparency, meaning that *jion*-based phonological deduction is inadequate. Consequently, the correct pronunciation of these place names was dependent on preexisting lexical information, rendering it inaccessible to those without prior

knowledge.

### 3. Discussion: Flaws and their Root

Considering the era in which it was conducted, this study was pioneering yet contained several notable flaws from the perspective of modern phonology. A fundamental issue lay in the author's assumption that the unconventional *jion* readings were necessarily derived from conventional ones used in Japanese of the period, which he called *hon-on* (本音 [authentic sound]). Based on this assumption, the study failed to capture the phonological contrasts originally inherent in Chinese characters, even though they were crucial to the phonological structure of *jion* readings in Japanese. As will be discussed later, this idea was likely a reflection of the author's nationalistic ideology, which is largely peripheral to formal academic analysis from a modern perspective.

We now examine the specific limitations of this analysis. The primary problem lies in the treatment of nasal segments. The author assumed an underlying moraic nasal (*hatsuon*) lacking place specification for some unconventional *jion* readings in Sections 2, 3, and 4. However, this assumption fails to account for their variations, which correspond to the original place specification in Chinese. In addition, because velar nasals in coda position were lost in *jion* readings, it was difficult to account for the occurrence of velar stops in Section 1.

It is often assumed that the author lacked sufficient knowledge of place variation among moraic nasals (Komatsu 1961, Yuzawa 1979). However, given the author's meticulous analytical approach, it is improbable that this deficiency was the leading cause. In addition, Inukai (1998) pointed out that the author likely possessed some knowledge regarding the place of articulation of nasals; therefore, it is probable that such distinctions were excluded from the author's analysis for other reasons, as will be discussed later.

Second, in Sections 5–9, the author posits an underlying vowel in the second syllable of a *nigo-gana* reading, unless it ends with a moraic nasal. This underlying structure necessitates treating the operations in these vowels as alternations in vowel quality, as shown in (1). However, to accurately account for vowel distribution in the second syllable, both conventional and unconventional readings should be treated as vowel epenthesis instances.

Moreover, as Okimori (2007) demonstrates, accounting for the original phonological structure of Chinese characters makes it possible to systematically account for most of the miscellaneous patterns in Section 19 and the deletion patterns in Section 21. Regarding the analysis in these sections, it is suggested that this issue led to several interpretational errors in some place names.

The most significant contributing factor to the author's assumption of the insufficient underlying *jion* forms was his excessive idealization of Japanese culture and language and underestimation of those of foreign countries, including China. For example, in *Kanji San-on Ko* (漢字三音考 [Analysis on the Three Reading Variations of *Kanji*]), another important work of his *jion* study published in 1785, the author insisted that speech sounds of foreign languages, including Chinese, were vague and unrefined while Japanese speech sounds were much more aesthetic and sonorous than those of other languages. From a contemporary scholarly perspective, the author's ideas should be regarded as deeply biased and fundamentally erroneous. Nevertheless, as this was an unquestioned premise, it likely served as the primary reason for excluding Chinese-like forms and adopting conventional *jion* readings as the underlying forms in his analysis.

#### 4. Concluding Notes

As we have seen, the author's analysis of *jion* readings of old place names was remarkably pioneering for the era. In addition to the author's meticulous observations and analytical prowess, this work maintained a consistently positivist stance, prioritizing empirical support from philological and historical records. This synthesis of keen observations and empirical analyses rendered this study a superior piece of academic research.

However, from a contemporary perspective, certain analytical flaws are evident. These issues appear to stem not from a lack of analytical capability on the part of the author, but rather from an underlying ideological bias characterized by an excessively xenophobic stance and an idealized view of Japanese culture and language. Nevertheless, such a nationalistic ideology served as the primary motivation for the author's research. The author's lifelong scholarly aim was to elucidate the nature of Japan and its philosophy

before the influence of foreign cultures and languages, most notably Chinese. Therefore, it is self-evident that without his ideology, his monumental achievements, including *CJT*, would never have come to fruition. This study is particularly interesting because it reflects the duality of the author's perspective.

## References

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