

Paper Records Containing Okinawan *Kaida* Characters

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Abstract

This short paper will discuss several sheets of paper containing Okinawan *kaida* characters, which are stored in the library at the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan. While they have been reproduced several times, there has never been a published attempt at reading them or identifying their origin. In this work, we will show that they originate in the village of Sonai on Yonaguni, that some of the characters were written by islanders and others were written by someone with training in writing Japanese, and that they are probably records of foodstuffs possessed or paid over a period of several months, and a record of residents or taxpayers in various families. They form one of the longest records in *kaida* writing seen so far.

1. Paper documents stored in the University of the Ryukyus

The original is stored in the University of the Ryukyus library¹, with a monochrome copy also available in the Ishigaki Yaeyama Museum². Please refer to the appendix for copies of the original.

1.1. Writing practice

The first page begins with the Japanese title, 与那国島の象形文字 (“Yonaguni Island Pictographs”), with カイダー (“*kaidā*”) to the right of 象形文字, *furigana*-style, to show that *shōkei moji* (“pictographs”) should be read as *kaidā*. It is possible that the *kaidā* part only extends as far as 象形文, meaning that the reading should be カイダー字 *kaidā-ji*.

The remainder of this page and the beginning of the next one appear to be a recopying, by a mainlander or other person who writes Japanese natively, of something originally written by an islander. The flow of the brush, stroke order and direction, and general character shape seem to indicate a pre-existing tendency to follow the natural writing style of Japanese kanji. (We shall see the contrast with islander-written material in the following pages.)

¹ Senbaru 1, Nishihara-chō, Nakagami-gun, Okinawa Prefecture.

² This chapter will use the original, superseding the monochrome copy obtained by the author from Ayano Shimabukuro on a visit to the Ishigaki Yaeyama Museum in 2009 and the color digital photo taken in 2009 by a visitor to Yaeyama, available at (as of 2014-11-30): blogs.yahoo.co.jp/syakusime/GALLERY/show_image.html?id=40136283&no=1

1.2. Numeral practice

The first three lines consist of numerals from 1 to 14. The copyist adds notation for stroke order and direction for the numbers 4, 9, and 10, all of which differ from how they are written in kanji, so we can perhaps conclude that the islanders wrote the other numerals with the same general stroke-order principles (strokes start on the left and go rightward; the horizontal line in a cross is written before the vertical line). Specifically, the number 4 (ㄥ) begins with the horizontal line at the top extending to form the right half, with the line forming the left half written second; in kanji the left side is written first. The number 9 (ㄥ) looks basically identical to the kanji 九, but the islander writes the horizontal stroke first. In the number 10 (十), the vertical bar is written first.

After transcribing numbers up to 14, the copyist shows each multiple of ten, using special concatenated forms for 20, 30, 40, and 50. While Common Japanese (CJ) regularly used forms similar to this for 20, 30, and 40 (in principle, though not in form: 廿 or 廿、卅、卅), no special form for 50 is known in CJ. The forms for 60 through 90 are unabbreviated and are basically the same as in CJ: 六十、七十、八十、九十.

The *kaida* numeral for 100, ㄥ, which resembles a cursivized kanji 百, is followed by repetitions of that character for 200 and 300. The number 1000 can be given either by the sign for 100 with that for 10 appended to the bottom, or by its own symbol, ㄥ, which closely resembles CJ 千.

Finally, the copyist gives one seemingly-random number as an example: 354, which he writes as ㄥㄥㄥㄥ十ㄥ : three repetitions of 100, then 5, then 10, then 4. (Note that this time a more CJ-like form of 50 is used.)

1.3. Sample expressions and pictographs

The copyist offers one example expression: 1 to 5 *shō* 8 *gō* of rice (note that the CJ gloss does not mention rice).

Following this is a collection of random characters mixed with multi-character expressions. We see:

- mountain, board, bamboo, one bull, two cows,
- cattle [beef?] 3 *kin* (with gloss added to show that the *kaida* character for *kin* is a scale), pig, goat,
- chicken 4 *kin*, fish, vegetables, *daikon* radish,
- *wara* rope 200 *hiro*, water, 1 load, person (with CJ gloss 人の形 “shape of a person” added)
- potato, rice plant, barley, beans
- *hie* grain, red beans, millet, *sake*, soy sauce

This writing practice continues onto the right side of the third page and is repeated, with annotations presumably inserted by the Japanese-writing copyist, on the left side of the final page of the document. This section concludes with:

- vinegar, miso, firewood 6 bundles, *tōgan* gourd
- house, grave, boat

The following section was (judging from the handwriting) written by an islander and is, like many other examples of *kaida* writing, a record of dates, families, and the foodstuffs or animals that they own, are contributing, or are paying.

1.4. The islander's handwriting

The upper half shows payments or holdings of rice (𠔿) and fish (𩺰) during the month of February of an unknown year. (The existence of a February 29 indicates that the year would be a leap year.)

The bottom half contains several examples of two different kinds of entries: one with *dahan* plus the *kaida* character for "person" (𠄎) repeated a number of times, and another with rope [*baranna*] plus the numeral "100" (𠄎) repeated multiple times. Nae Ikema (b. 1919), one of the few living people to remember *kaida* writing, maintains (p.c., 2006) that this kind of rope was measured in *hiro* (尋); one *hiro* is 6 Japanese *shaku* (尺) or 1.818 meters. Like the nearly-equal English fathom (6 feet; 1.829 m), it is a traditional measurement for sea depth. Unlike measurement of rice, in which a unit is only written once, with a following numeral indicating multiples of it, on this document "100" is repeated multiple times.

There are approximately 49 different "family signs" called *dahan*, which each family created to indicate itself in written records, and the readable ones all seem to be families in Sonai, the largest village in Yonaguni. Sonai is the source for the majority of previously-discovered *kaida* records. The *dahan* appearing in this document were matched with those appearing in the records compiled by Yukio Nishime of Yonaguni for the island's Board of Education (1993), and were also viewed by Ms. Toshi Sakihara (b. 1925), formerly of Sonai and currently resident in Saitama prefecture. They are numbered using the scheme described in chapter 7 of the present author's thesis, *Native Writing Systems in the Okinawan Islands*, in which Mr. Nishime's 332 *dahan* are basically arranged in the Japanese phonetic *kana* order, separated by village. When these numbers appear, they are contained in square brackets, like this: [332].

1.4.1. Attempted decipherment

The document is too large to present the translation in line with the original, so please refer to the appended full-size copies.

[top half, page 3]

first month 15th day
[92]Fukuyama rice 2 5-gō
[47]Agura rice 2
[112?]Kidamuta rice 1

2nd month 4th day
[d3] [25]Kananbarati rice 8 (? *original unclear*)

2nd month 23rd day
[d5] rice 1
[d6] rice 12 8

[top half, page 4]

2nd month 27th day
[92]Fukuyama rice 2 5-gō

2nd month 27th day
[87]Tata scale fish 6 1/2

2nd month 29th day
[d11] rice 4-*shō*.

3rd month 8th day
[65]Mainuisuka fish rice 1
[165]Kunda fish rice 2
[d14] fish rice 1 5-gō [struck through]

3rd month 17th day
[125]Kumimuta fish rice 2

7th month 22nd (?) day
[d16] scale 7 half (?) rice 5

[margin of next page]

[d17]
7th month 22nd day
[198]Inaga [d18?] year?

[bottom half]

[195]Inaga person x2
[96]Maihama? person d16 person
[96]Maihama? person d17 person x2
[96]Maihama? person

[d21] rope 100 x4
 [259] Arayati rope 100 x2
 [d22] person fish [d23] person
 [5] Arasata millet 5 [20] Ugimacha person
 [d26] person x3 [d27] person [76] Utibara person fish person x2
 [152] Irimachida fish person [176] Tsuihanda
 [d31] person [170] Tamanka person 4-*gō* 1 *shaku*
 [97] Maihama person x8
 [d34] person x4
 [d35] person x1
 [182] Fukuyama person x4 [d37] person x5
 [78] Ubudata person [d39] person
 [d40] person x2 half [d41] person
 [d42] person x6 fish? (fish 1 added)
 [160] Urasata person
 [d44] person x5 fish person [d45] person x4
 [d46] person [d47] person x2
 [d48] person [125] Kumimuta? person x3

While the pictographs are clear enough that they can be translated with confidence, many of the *dahan* are close but not identical to established forms. Rather than incorrectly attribute these to the wrong families -- most of whom live on Yonaguni to this day -- the present author has only translated exact matches, leaving all other *dahan* numbered in the form **d00**, where the 49 *dahan* appearing here are numbered and replaced by names if they can be conclusively identified.

We will take the characters 正 月 to mean the first month of the year, with 正 being a distortion of the kanji 正. While today in CJ, the word *shōgatsu* 正月 (usually preceded by an honorific *o-*) refers specifically to New Year's Day and the festivities that surround it, and not to the first month of the year, in Yonagunian, the first month of the year is commonly called *sungati* (*sunati*), which corresponds etymologically to this word.

1.4.2. More than 70 persons

The bottom half shows the “person” *kaida* character, 人, approximately 73 times. Each *dahan* has anywhere from one to eight “person” characters following; this could represent the number of taxpayers in each house, or, with a happier interpretation, the number of participants in a gathering or festival. The tax regime differentiates between multiple types of obligors, however, and this document has at most two types of people – full-size 人 characters and smaller ones added in the margins³ – and we might be able to consider that the bottom half might be something other than a tax record.

³ Professor Yutaka Yoshida of the University of Kyoto has suggested the possibility that the smaller ones are children.

1.4.3. *Dahan* uncertainty and other questions

The *dahan* for the Utibara family, number [76] in the list in chapter 7, looks similar to the character for 'black rope' 纆, but its position before a 'person' glyph, as seen in most of the other entries in this portion of the document, seems to be evidence that it is a *dahan*, and we will read it that way here.

The line containing **d31** and the Tamanka family is somewhat unclear. Given that one *gō* (180 ml) is typically written with a square (□), a rectangle bisected both vertically and horizontally, creating a box divided into four, is a typical way of abbreviating four *gō*. However, a horizontal line normally indicates one *shō* (1.8 liters), as seen above for February 29th. Since one *shō* is ten *gō*, and the larger units are invariably written first, we might be able to conclude that in this case, horizontal lines are being used for some smaller unit, such as the *shaku* (18 ml), normally a triangle, or the *sai* (1.8 ml), normally written with vertical lines, making the expression either 4 *gō* 1 *shaku* or 4 *gō* 0 *shaku* 1 *sai*, for example, or that the line is simply a kind of underline or check mark. Sudō, in his chart of *kaida sūchūma* variations (1944: 254), includes a horizontal line as an alternate symbol for *shaku*, used only on Yonaguni. We shall take this expression to be the only surviving example of this exception, and read it as 4 *gō* 1 *shaku*.

What appear to be the last characters added to the manuscript, rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise, are a *dahan*, the date July 22, another *dahan*, and then a mysterious glyph (or pair of glyphs) followed by the sign for “year”. For the left part of the first one, we have seen an element that resembles 丂 in the top left corner of several *dahan*. We assume that this symbol indicates a sub-family or partial family. The opposite part, or main part, could be a *dahan* by itself. Another possibility, given that the “year” sign appears directly below, is that the left half is a cursivized numeral 2 (二), and that the right half is a 4 (四), making the combination – which seems to sum up several months of records – a reference to the 24th year of Meiji, 1891, which is a plausible date for this kind of document.

This is doubtful, however, for at least two reasons: numbers in the 20s are consistently written with 廿 in every other place in this document, and the document cannot indicate records from 1891 because, as we have already seen, the date February 29 – which did not occur in 1891, a non-leap year – appears. If there were more open space after it, we might be able to consider the possibility of it marking the beginning of records for 1892, with the reader continuing up and to the left (where 正月十五日, January 15, appears), but as it is, the *dahan* possibility seems stronger.

2. Conclusion

This document in the *kaida* writing system is one of the longest seen so far, and is consistent with existing records which include dates, family names, numbers, and animals and foodstuffs. It also contains characters written by someone familiar with Japanese writing, giving

us valuable information on stroke order and direction. While confirmation of many of the *dahan* is still incomplete, we can still determine that the families are from the village of Sonai on Yonaguni, and it is hoped that further research will reveal the families indicated by the unknown *dahan*.

References

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琉球大学にあるカイダー文字の紙片

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キーワード: 与那国 カイダー字 不完全な表記法 沖縄の文字

要旨

本稿は、琉球大学の図書館に整理番号なしで保管されている、八重山・与那国島の象形文字「カイダー字」で書かれた紙片を取り上げる。コピーはとられているものの、読む試みも、もともと作られた場所を特定する試みも今までなかった。屋号を示す「家判(ダハン)」を読んでもみると、紙片は与那国の祖納からと見られる。紙片は、島民が書いた部分と日本語話者が書いたと見られる部分から成り、またその内容は、数ヶ月に渡り保有した、または納めた食物と、各家族の構成人数、または納税者などの記録のようだと推測する。

(ローザ・マーク)









