

Speaker's Note

【Item 4a : Introduction to Standardization of Kanji Related to Notation of Geographical Names】

This presentation will give an overview of the most recent efforts on the standardization of kanji characters in Japan is introduced. First of all, let me explain as a background information about Japanese writing system.

Japanese writing system has three types of characters, which are “HIRAGANA”, “KATAKANA” and “KANJI”. “HIRAGANA” and “KATAKANA” are phonetic characters. “KANJI” is an ideogram derived from Chinese characters, so that a character itself has its own meaning. Example 1. on the slide shows a Japanese sentence with English translation. In this sentence, the characters in blue are “HIRAGANA”, those in green are “KATAKANA”, which is used for words derived from outside of Japan, and those in red are “KANJI”. For "KATAKANA" and "KANJI" words, corresponding English translation is added above or below the characters. This may be a rare writing system in the world. However, Japanese language is written using a mixture of three different types of characters.

OK, that's enough for background information on Japanese writing. So now, let's move on to the main topic on geographical names. In Japanese geographical names, many of them are written in KANJI characters. However, certain KANJI characters have variants. that is, there are cases where the same geographical name may be written in slightly different KANJI characters. In the case of Example 2, historically, KANJI characters shown on the bottom line were used first, but now those shown on the top line has also come to be used. As a result, as you can see from the two photos, both KANJI characters are actually used in our daily lives today.

There are several reasons why this situation has come up. One major factor is that some of the KANJI characters historically used in geographical names have changed over time. As shown in Example 2, even today, there are many cases in Japan, where slightly different KANJI characters refer to the same thing, not only in geographical names. Given these circumstances, the Japanese government started working from 2010 to standardize the KANJI characters used by administrative agencies. In response, Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, as the national mapping institute, has changed the specifications of the KANJI characters used in its geographical name database for map development in March 2024 to align with this standardization efforts.

A detailed report about the changing specifications of KANJI characters in geographical name database will be presented by my colleague, Ms. Fujiwara, under Agenda Item 5b. Thank you very much.