Title: Japan's Input to N3388 (Two Kana Characters)
Date: 2008-10-9
Source: Japan
Status: National body contribution
Re: N3388, N3394

1. SUMMARY

Japan national body reviewed the proposal, contacted the original submitter of the proposal, Nozomu Katō, had some discussion with him, and concluded as follows:

Japan supports the encoding of the proposed HIRAGANA LETTER YE in UCS. Japan opposes against the KATAKANA LETTER ORIGINAL E this time.

2. A brief history

Kana is a script derived from Chinese ideographs. The earliest material that can be considered to be written in kana is from late 8th century. It is around 10th century that kana formed a consistent writing system.

Researchers agree that distinction between the sounds /e/ and /ye/ in Japanese language disappeared at least before 10th century. After the days, Japanese language lost the distinction. Researchers discovered the possible distinction of the sounds in the older Japanese language in late 18th century.

3. Concerns on the proposed HIRAGANA LETTER YE

Japan national body understands the requirements discussed in the proposal. We see no strong objection to have that character in UCS.

However, we do not consider that the demand is either high or urgent. In particular, most of the books and papers in the area (study of Japanese classical
literatures and the language) do not use the proposed letter. They usually use side lines or dots on ordinary kana letters for /e/ to denote distinction between /e/ and /ye/ or use original kanji instead of kana shapes when necessary, even in the researchers’ hand-written manuscripts or woodblock printed books. Modern researchers more often use romaji (Latin transliteration) when discussing sounds of historical Japanese language. Use of the proposed hiragana letter is rare, even in the researchers’ communities.

Japan national body also discussed on the relationship between this proposal and ones so-called hentai-gana (variant kana). It is apparent that there are some demands on the encoding of hentai-gana in Japan for some limited purpose. It is unclear, however, whether they should be handled as glyph-variants of existing hiragana repertoire or encoded as independent characters. In any case, hentai-gana have a variety of repertories and their whole set can hardly be determined. One apparent fact is that there is a hentai-gana letter that has same shape as the proposed hiragana letter, which typical modern Japanese speakers recognize as a variation of え and pronounce as /e/. If we are to encode the proposed HIRAGANA LETTER YE in UCS, we need to make clear that this addition is for a historical letter and is not intended for hentai-gana.

4. Concerns on the proposed KATAKANA LETTER ORIGINAL E

Japan sees several problems with this proposal. Japan does not support encoding of the proposed katakana letter this time. Japan feels that further study is needed.

Japanese language lost the distinction between /e/ and /ye/ before, or as same time frame as the kana formed a consistent writing system. During the dates, distinction of hiragana and katakana was unclear. There were just several (not two) different letter forms to represent same sounds. We see no reason we need set of hiragana and katakana for the purpose of the sound distinction.

The intended use of this katakana letter is that, when an author needs distinction between the sounds /e/ and /ye/, and for some reason the author wants to use katakana to represent the sounds of historical Japanese, use existing
KATAKANA LETTER E to represent the sound /ye/, and use the new letter KATAKANA LETTER ORIGINAL E to represent the sound /e/. This convention is clearly confusing even for experts in this area. Japan national body is not comfortable with promoting this not-widely accepted convention by encoding a new katakana letter as specified in N3388.

Moreover, there is a doubt that the proposed letter (shape) may be inappropriate. As far as Japan national body understands, the shape Okumura proposed in his book for the letter is different from the one proposed in N3388. Of course, UCS encodes characters, not glyphs nor shapes, so this point can be considered as a minor issue.

5. Notes on the attachments
③: Two copies of the book *Kogen E-Ye-ben* (古言衣延辨, Discourse on E and Ye in Old Literatures), that is listed under References of N3388, showing a different shape for the letter corresponding to KATAKANA LETTER ORIGINAL E.
I: 1891 reprint by Unkondo.
II: 1835 manuscript.
④ and ⑤: Examples from modern researcher's papers. These tables are called *kana jitai hyo*, list of shapes of letters appearing on a particular old manuscript. Researchers require distinctive notations for /e/ and /ye/ as the index to the table. ④ uses ideographs, 衣 for /e/ and 江 for /ye/. ⑤ uses ordinary katakana エ for /e/ (that is to represent /ye/ in the convention proposed in N3388) and an ideograph 江 for /ye/.