In the Meiji Era, the Japanese central government began forcing the Japanese language on the people of the former Ryukyu Kingdom. Seeking to unify Japan through a single language (kokugo), the government disparaged Ryukyuan languages as mere dialects (högen). In Okinawan schools, children were educated to identify themselves as culturally Japanese and were forbidden to speak their own languages.

The prejudice against Ryukyuan languages as inferior forms of Japanese became commonplace in Okinawa and persists to this day. However, a new generation of scholars, citizens, writers, and educators is working to revitalize the languages. As Professor Katsunori Yamazato will explain, literary authors are at the forefront of this vital movement.

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Professor Yamazato has published almost forty books, including translations from English into Japanese of such American writers as Gary Snyder. His recent books include Human Migration and Literature and Living Spirit: Literature and Resurgence in Okinawa.