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The Resurgence of Okinawan Language Through Contemporary Okinawan Literature

a talk by

Professor Katsunori Yamazato

University of the Ryukyus

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In the Meiji Era, the Japanese central government began forcing the Japanese language on the people of the former Ryukyuan Kingdom. Seeking to unify Japan through a single language (*kokugo*), the government disparaged Ryukyuan languages as mere dialects (*hōgen*). 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.

Katsunori Yamazato is Professor of American Literature and Culture, University of the Ryukyus, where he is also Director of the American Studies Center. He was director of the Pacific and North/South American Research Project “Human Migration and the Twenty-first Century Global Society” and founding director of the International Institute for Okinawan Studies. He now chairs the Committee for Research, Art, and Education for the Okinawa Prefecture Promotion Committee, focusing on the revival of the Ryukyuan languages.

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*.

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