

# Introduction

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In memory of Professor Silvio Vita  
(1954-2023)

In October 2022, the ISEAS (Italian School of East Asian Studies - Scuola Italiana di Studi sull'Asia Orientale) in Kyoto organised an international workshop titled "Exploring Linguistic Diversity in Japan: How Philological and Linguistic Analysis Can Work Together" and dedicated it to the memory of language historian Professor Alexander Vovin (1961-2022), one of the most important figures in the West in recent decades, in Japanese historical linguistics studies. The event involved participants from several continents who had been academically connected with Alexander Vovin, and had made the relationship between philology and historical linguistics the main subject of their research.

The workshop hosted a stimulating discussion among scholars whose research focused on the geographical space of Japan, albeit with different linguistic subjects or approaches. Afterwards, with the scientific coordinator of ISEAS, Professor Silvio Vita, and in collaboration with the researchers who had participated in the workshop, it was decided to organise a publication presenting the results of their research. The ISEAS Scientific Committee, chaired by Professor Giorgio Amitrano, welcomed the idea of publishing this volume in Ca' Foscari Japanese Studies, being Ca' Foscari University of Venice one of the institutions supporting ISEAS activities.

This volume brings together a selection of four works: "Adopting a Philological Approach Toward *Chishi* (地誌)" by Étienne Baudel; "Elements of Sakhalin Ainu Phonetics, Phonology, and Morphosyntax in Bronisław Piłsudski's Corpus of Ainu Folklore" by Elia Dal Corso;

“The Language of Miyako Oral Traditions” by Aleksandra Jarosz; “Reflexes of Proto-Ryukyuan Mid Vowels in *Haedong chegukki*” by Marc Miyake.

The first essay proposes an analysis of sources dating back to the Edo period that describe Hachijō, a small endangered Japonic variety spoken on three islands (Hachijō-jima, Hachijō-kojima, and Aogashima) located south of the Izu archipelago, approximately 300 km south of Tōkyō. The considerable number of available sources from the Edo period provides a detailed description of the Hachijō language over a period of about 100 years. The philological analysis of these sources may be of fundamental importance for reconstructing any diachronic changes in this language variety, which is considered the sole remaining form of Eastern Old Japanese.

The essay by Elia Dal Corso presents linguistic data from a collection of traditional Ainu folklore published in 1912 by Bronisław Piłsudski, compares them with more recent data collected in the 1960s-1970s, and analyses the existing differences between the East Sakhalin and West Sakhalin Ainu subgroups. In particular, the author focuses on phonemic inventory and phonotactic rules, some phonological alternations, and verbal morphology, highlighting a number of important differences between the two Ainu dialect sub-groups of East Sakhalin and West Sakhalin. Following the general discourse of this volume, the author has underlined how the description of data from old sources can contribute to the advancement of the historical linguistics of East Asian languages.

The third contribution by Aleksandra Jarosz points out that, although many Ryukyuan language varieties do not possess an established ‘literary language’, there is ample room for using the sources of phonographic transcriptions of oral texts like, for example, those of the Miyako language, such as songs, chants, narratives, proverbs, etc., dating back to the eighteenth century as the basis of what the author defines as “Miyako philology”. The language of the Miyako oral traditions displays numerous archaisms and stylisations and a diachronic and comparative analysis of this data provides insights into the otherwise impossible history of the language, which also has interesting implications for the study of the Japonic languages in general.

The last article, by Marc Miyake, relies on the *Haedong chegukki*, a Korean work from the early sixteenth century, which provides important information for the reconstruction of Proto-Ryukyuan phonology, adding new elements to the results achieved so far by other scholars, and questioning some aspects of these earlier studies. Miyake, starting from a survey of hangul transcriptions of Proto-Ryukyuan mid vowel reflexes in *Haedong chegukki* Okinawan, comes to propose the reconstruction of \*əj and \*a(:)j in Proto-Ryukyuan and a later date for the realisation of aspiration before non-low vowels. As the author himself admits, the elaboration of such theories requires

a comparative analysis of the Old Okinawan of *Omoro sōshi*, the native spelling of the Old Okinawan of *Omoro sōshi* and the modern Ryukyuan varieties. Nevertheless, this contribution reaffirms the importance of the interplay between philology and linguistics, especially in historical linguistics.

I am, therefore, particularly pleased that a selection of the papers originally conceived for the Kyoto workshop organised by ISEAS is now being printed and will contribute to the studies of historical linguistics related to the Japanese archipelago and promoting the support philological studies can provide to linguistic research.

It deeply saddens me that, just as we were about to start editing this volume, Professor Silvio Vita, my long-time friend and colleague, passed away prematurely. The editing of the collection of essays, which I was to share with Silvio, was therefore carried out by me alone, but it is to him that I dedicate this book.