

INTRODUCTION

Alexander VOVIN

University of Hawaii at Manoa

The present book, *Perspectives on the Origins of the Japanese Language*, has grown out of the collaborative effort that has been undertaken at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in April 2001 — March 2002. During my stay at this renowned institution I was invited to lead an international research committee on the current state of affairs in the research on the genetic affiliation of the Japanese language. I must confess that my leadership was in most aspects quite nominal — I am much obliged to my friend and colleague Prof. Osada Toshiki¹ (currently of Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto), who is one of the world's leading experts on Munda languages (and also on all other Munda studies), as well as one of the greatest specialists in general linguistics in Japan, who has taken upon himself the numerous tasks of organization and directing the meetings of this research committee. Without his constant help and advice the outcome of our activities could not even be half as successful as it was. Prof. Osada has also carried out more than a lion's share of the editing of the present volume, since there are more articles written in Japanese than in English, and since he had graciously taken upon himself all the tasks of communicating with Nichibunken's publishing committee and overseeing the product going to Nichibunken's Press. I would like to use this occasion to express my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Osada — a great scholar and man.

I would like to express my gratitude to many other people, both in Nichibunken and outside of it, who have contributed greatly either to the meetings of our research committee, or/and made my and my wife Sambi's stay in Japan very pleasant during the last year. I am most grateful to Prof. Suzuki Sadami, who has graciously agreed to be my research counterpart at Nichibunken, in spite of the fact that his research interests are quite different than mine, and who helped me on many occasions with his advice. My sincere gratitude goes also to many other Nichibunken faculty, who either helped me in many ways and/or simply made my stay in Japan very enjoyable: former director Prof. Kawai Hayao, present director Prof. Yamaori Tetsuo, Prof. Akazawa Takeru, Prof. James Baxter, Prof. Inaga Shigemi, Prof. Inoue Shoichi, Prof. Kasaya Kazuhiko, Prof. Komatsu Kazuhiko, Prof. Kuriyama Shigehisa, Prof. Shirahata Yozaburo, Prof. Sonoda Hidehiro, Prof. Uno Takao, and Prof. Yasuda Yoshinori. I am most grateful to all members of the research committee (Prof. Blaine Erickson, Prof. Fukui Rei, Prof. Hino Sukenari, Prof.

1 I cite Japanese names in the Japanese order: family name first, given name last, and Western names in western order: given name first, family name last.

Itabashi Yoshizo, Prof. Kazama Shinjiro, Prof. Kirikae Hideo, Prof. Kobayashi Masato, Prof. Kodama Nozomi, Prof. Minegisi Makoto, Prof. Nakagawa Hiroshi, Prof. Onishi Masayuki, Prof. William Rozycki, Prof. Takahashi Yoshiharu, Prof. Tsumagari Toshiro) who were kind enough to attend six required meetings in Kyoto in spite of their very busy schedules. I am also grateful to our guest speakers (Dr. Stefan Georg, Prof. Mark Hudson, Prof. Juha Janhunen, Prof. Matsumoto Katsumi, Prof. Sakiyama Osamu, Prof. Leon Serafim, and Prof. John Whitman) who travelled from different locations in and outside of Japan to deliver their presentations. I would also like to use this occasion for expressing my gratitude to the Nichibunken staff: Ms. Okuno Yukiko, Ms. Sasaki Ayako, Ms. Shinohara Hatsue from the foreign exchange office, the librarians: Ms. Danmoto Sachiyo, Ms. Nakamura Setsuko, as well as many other people on the Nichibunken staff that are too numerous to mention here individually — I hope they will forgive me for expressing a collective gratitude.

The research committee represented an international forum, with scholars participating from Japan, the United States of America, Finland, and Germany. Unfortunately, some members of the committee were not able to submit their papers for the present volume. It is a real pity, because all papers presented throughout the year were very interesting and stimulating. We have also included one paper by Ms. Kerri Russell, who did not take part in the research committee meetings, but the editors decided to include her paper on the basis of its scholarly merit and relevance to the present topic. Ms. Kerri Russell has also contributed considerably to the present volume as an Assistant English Editor. The same is true of the paper by Prof. Nakagawa Hiroshi, who did not have a presentation during the committee meetings, although he did participate at most meetings. I would like to express gratitude to him for submitting a written paper for this volume.

Not all papers presented here deal with the problem of Japanese language origins directly. Roughly speaking, all papers can be divided into those that deal with genetic affiliation of Japanese, or the problems of its reconstruction, or the questions of prehistoric migrations both to and within the Japanese archipelago, and those that deal with typological issues relevant for reconstructing the prehistory of the Japanese language.

Instead of simply characterizing these papers, I would like to say several words about the presentations done at the committee meetings, with the exceptions being made for the paper of Ms. Kerri Russell,, as well as the paper of Prof. Nakagawa Hiroshi, which, as mentioned above, were not among the original presentations. The reason that I am focusing on the presentations rather than the papers is that not all of the papers were submitted, and because I regret this, I would like to give credit to the many outstanding presentations I was entitled to hear.

Prof. Blaine Erickson provided us with a thorough and persuasive reconstruction

of the canonical root shapes for Old Japanese. Needless to say, this is one of the major prerequisites for reconstructing proto-Japanese canonical root shapes and for comparing them to any other language.

Prof. Fukui Rei's presentation dealt with some problems of interpreting Old Korean language data, and particularly of Old Korean's phonological and writing systems that potentially have a great significance for comparison of Japanese and Korean.

Prof. Hino Sukenari convincingly demonstrated that Eastern Old Japanese avoided raising the mid-vowels *e and *o to /i/ and /u/, which happened in Western Old Japanese. This discovery is of paramount importance for the reconstruction of proto-Japanese vocalism.

Prof. Mark Hudson has argued for the arrival of the Japanese language to Japan during the Yayoi period on the basis of the idea that more often than not a language spread co-occurs with introduction of agriculture. In spite of the fact that I remain personally unconvinced by his views, it was an extremely interesting and stimulating presentation.

Dr. Stefan Georg presented a wonderful critique of the Altaic theory as currently "enshrined," at the same time vouching his support for the genetic affiliation between Japanese and Korean. I am personally grateful not only for his support of comparative work on Japanese and Korean, but also for his criticism of the "Altaic" theory: I am happy to use the occasion to thank my friend Stefan for being very instrumental for my conversion from an almost religious believer in the "Altaic" theory to a critical Altaicist.

Prof. Itabashi Yoshizo's original presentation was on the theory of the mixed origins of Japanese (Altaic-Austronesian), but the paper he presents in this volume deals with the well-known problem of Koguryo placenames and their relevance for the history of both Japanese and Korean. There are many innovative insights into this old problem in this paper, and it was a pleasure to read it.

Prof. Juha Janhunen's presentation provided several hypotheses for what he calls "a framework" for the study of Japanese language prehistory. It was certainly interesting and stimulating to see and hear some of his ideas, but since both his presentation and his paper do not include any language data, it is nearly impossible to argue with his premises: one can just agree or disagree with them in *general* (and I do agree with some, but not all).

Prof. Kazama Shinjiro's presentation on contrastive grammar analysis of Japanese, Korean, and other "Altaic" languages, although largely concerned with typology, and not with the genetic relationship of Japanese in a pure sense, was certainly very instructive in many respects, bringing to our attention some commonalities, as well as some differences, that had not been explicitly pointed out before.

Prof. Kirikae Hideo's presentation on the inclusive/exclusive first person marking in Ainu, although not directly connected with the central topic of our committee, was certainly one of the best talks. I certainly wish that I would have been able to hear it seventeen years ago, when I began to study the Ainu language — it would have undoubtedly

solved many bizarre problems I had back then in analyzing Ainu folklore texts.

Prof. Kobayashi Masato presented an innovative point of view on the origins of sequential voicing (*rendaku*) in Japanese. As much as I myself agree with a more traditional interpretation of the problem, I find Prof. Kobayashi's proposal interesting and worth further consideration.

Prof. Kodama Nozomi's presentation, although it dealt predominantly with the Dravidian languages that represent his primary research interests, will certainly be of great interest to anyone concerned with the problems presented by agglutinative languages, of which Japanese is one.

Prof. Matsumoto Katsumi presented a new and innovative idea concerning the origins of Japanese which is based on his linguo-geographic theory. With all due respect to many interesting insights and ideas I could find in both his presentation and paper, I fail to see how this new theory can possibly replace the Comparative Method in determining the genetic relationship of languages.

Prof. Minegishi Makoto's presentation dealt with a new parametric approach to comparative morphology. This is a new theory, in a sense challenging the traditional point of view that holds that any typological features are irrelevant to proving the genetic relationship. As much I stick to the traditional point of view myself, I can clearly see that there are several points brought up by Prof. Minegishi that need to be answered anew by traditionalists like myself. Even more, some of his points, like the point about the Japanese predicative compounds, might have a deep impact on the comparative studies of Japanese.

Prof. Nakagawa Hiroshi's paper deals with the historical relationship between Ainu and Japanese. Besides stating that there is no genetic relationship between these two languages, Prof. Nakagawa also comes to the conclusion that both Ainu and Japanese used to be much more typologically dissimilar in the past than they are now. This is a very interesting observation, and I tend to agree with it completely. There is also an innovative approach to the direction of borrowing regarding some vocabulary items shared by Ainu and Japanese.

Prof. Onishi Masayuki's presentation on the comparison of Ryukyuan with Japanese brought up a number of serious problems regarding the reconstruction of proto-Japanese, that have been either ignored or not fully answered before. It was certainly very instructive presentation, and I have learned substantially from it.

Prof. Osada Toshiki presented an excellent analysis of the problem of why the origins of the Japanese language has fallen out of favor with serious younger scholars in Japan. Prof. Osada has pointed out several serious problems that had plagued the research on comparative Japanese for years, some of them being universal and some peculiar to Japan. Although we do not necessarily agree on the possible outcome of the whole field, with Prof. Osada belonging more to the "pessimist" group (although he accepts a possibility that the problem may be ultimately solved), and myself to the "optimist" group regarding the possibility of solving the problem of the Japanese language origins (see

below), I would highly recommend that anyone interested in the field to read his paper in the present volume with great care.

Prof. William Rozycki's presentation was mainly concerned with proving the thesis that the Japanese language arrived to the Japanese archipelago during the Yayoi period. Although I personally find the linguistic part of the evidence presented not entirely convincing, it was an interesting and stimulating presentation.

Ms. Kerri Russell's paper deals with the contraction and monophthongization of vowels in Old Japanese. I believe that in her paper she has offered a successful solution of this problem that was mind-boggling for many generations through a very careful scrutiny of the texts.

Prof. Sakiyama Osamu offered us an up-to-date version of his mixed-language theory of the Japanese language origins, involving both Altaic and Austronesian. As much as I remain unconvinced by the majority of his Austronesian etymologies, which, in my opinion, can not be reconciled with Japanese due to the lack of regular phonetic correspondences, some of his proposals definitely merit further investigation into the matter.

Prof. Leon Serafim has presented a very convincing and unorthodox interpretation regarding the homeland of Ryukyuan speakers in the Japanese archipelago. On the basis of the analysis of common innovations in morphology, he argued that the ultimate departing point in Ryukyuan migration down the Ryukyuan islands must have been around North-Western Kyushu and/or Western Honshu, and not in the Kagoshima or Nagasaki areas.

Prof. Takahashi Yoshiharu presented a paper criticizing the Japanese-Tibeto-Burman genetic relationship hypothesis by Prof. Nishida Tatsuo. Prof. Takahashi, who is himself critical of the said hypothesis, expressed the opinion that Prof. Nishida's hypothesis was meant to be a joke. I wish his point of view were true — Prof. Nishida is certainly a renowned linguist in Tibeto-Burman studies.

Prof. Tsumagari Toshiro's presentation on morphological commonalities between Japanese and Manchu-Tungusic was certainly one of the most informative and promising advances in this area that I have seen for years. Many of his examples are so striking, that they can hardly be ignored.

My own presentation dealt with a critical survey of various theories of the origin of the Japanese language, with an emphasis on the critique of the current Altaic theory. In addition, I have presented some new morphological parallels between Japanese, and other Altaic languages, with a predominant accent on a possible Japanese-Korean-Tungusic connection. I have also provided a new proposal concerning a correspondence between proto-Japanese accent classes and vowel reductions in Korean.

Prof. John Whitman presented thorough and convincing arguments for reconstructing six rather than four traditional vowels for proto-Japanese on the basis of both internal and external evidence. His position is echoed by the recent findings of Prof. Hino Sukenari (see above), as well as by arguments long brought into play by Prof. Leon Serafim on the basis of evidence from the Ryukyuan dialects, and more recently by Prof.

Marc Miyake on the basis of evidence from Go-on readings. We can see here a pattern of a new emerging consensus, which will surely have its impact not only on the reconstruction of proto-Japanese, but also on external comparative work involving Japanese.

For good or for bad, we did not manage to solve the riddle of the Japanese language origins within a year, and this should come as no surprise, because this problem has baffled many of the best minds of the last two centuries. In a sense, our little group was divided into two groups, that I will provisionally call “pessimists” and “optimists” (without any derogatory meaning attached). The “pessimists” generally believed that the problem has no solution, no matter what one tries to do, while the “optimists” emphasized that ultimately we might be able to find an answer. In spite of such a division in our opinions, we, nevertheless, managed to come to a consensus on two important points, that I am going to outline below.

First, we have agreed that the Altaic theory, in the shape as it is currently enshrined, has too many holes and contradictions with the Comparative Method. Needless to say, all of us rejected unanimously the Japanese-Dravidian and the Japanese-Austronesian hypotheses. One member of the committee (Prof. Itabashi Yoshizo) and one guest speaker (Prof. Sakiyama Osamu) voiced their support for the mixed language hypothesis (Altaic-Austronesian). On the other hand, two other members (Prof. Blaine Erickson and myself) and two guest speakers (Prof. Stefan Georg and Prof. John Whitman) were in favor of a more traditional approach, arguing for a genetic relationship between Japanese and Korean, with a more speculative, but still quite feasible link to Manchu-Tungusic. The latter idea was, to a certain extent, supported by another member of the committee, Prof. Tsumagari Toshiro.

Second, we basically agreed that Japanese must be an intrusive language in Japanese archipelago, that migrated from the Asian mainland. And regarding the time when the Japanese language came to Japan, most of the members and guest speakers seemed to agree that it was in the Yayoi period (3rd century B. C. E. — 3rd century C. E.), although there was one clear dissenting voice in favor of the early Kofun period (4th century C. E.), expressed by myself.

It is my pleasure to present together, with my friend and colleague Prof. Osada Toshiki, the present volume which contains so many outstanding papers.

Alexander Vovin
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA
March 9, 2003