

History and Current Status of Japanese Minority Languages

—The Cases of Ryukuan Languages and Ainu Language—

NISHIUMI Maki, Professor, Chuo University, Tokyo

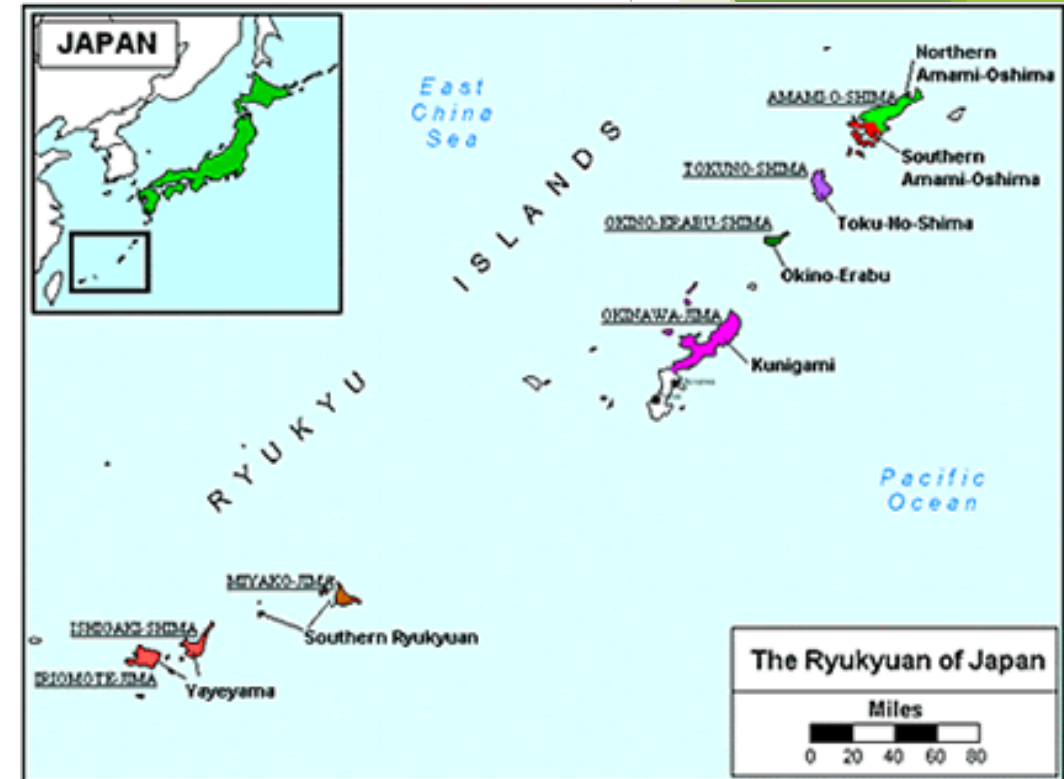
Introduction

- ▶ Culture = “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs,” (the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO, 2001)
- ▶ Among 2473 languages investigated by UNESCO experts groups (“The Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger”, UNESCO, 2010)
 - ▶ **178** languages are spoken only by 10-50 persons
 - ▶ **146** are spoken only by lesser than 10 persons
 - ▶ **577** are in danger of extinction
 - ▶ **230** have really extinct after 1950s.

- ▶ Without appropriate measures, almost half of languages used today in the world would disappear in the end of the 21st century.
- ▶ Ryukyuan Languages and Ainu Language, about which I will speak today, are both included in the list of language in danger of extinction.

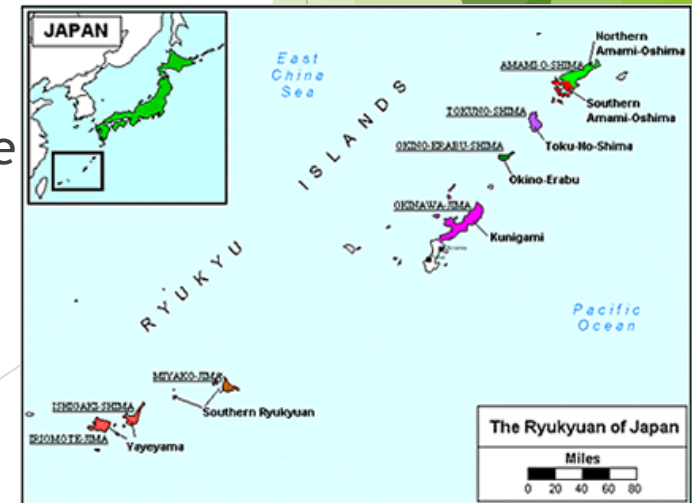
Ryukyuan Languages

- ▶ Ryukyuan Languages are composed of several sub-categories, and “the Ryukyuan Languages” are general term of these languages. :
 - ▶ the northern languages (Amami and Ryukyu)
 - ▶ the southern languages (Miyako and Yaeyama)



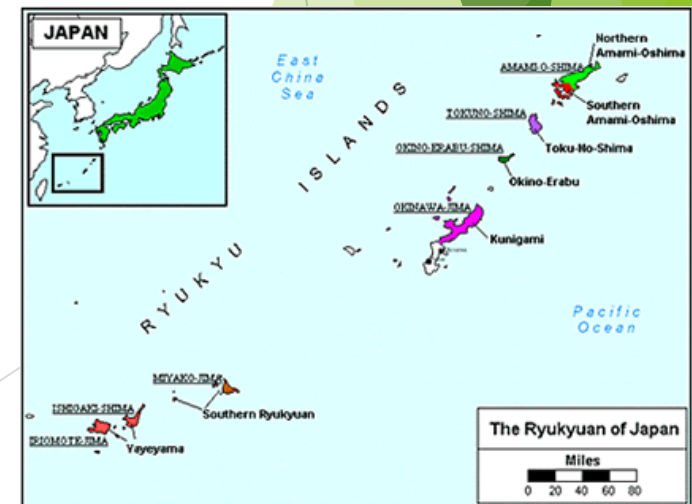
Ryukyuan Languages

- ▶ Ryukyu was a Kingdom established in the 15C and maintained an feudal relationship with China Empire.
- ▶ The independence of the Kingdom was infringed in the early 17C. It was gradually incorporated in the Japanese Tokugawa-Shogunate system, maintaining however the feudal relationship with China.
- ▶ In 1871, the Meiji Government incorporated decisively Ryukyu to Japanese territory. Since then, Ryukyu became one of Japanese prefectures and the Kingdom was dismantled after more than 400 years existence.
- ▶ Modernization of language education by Meiji Government = Language of Tokyo became Central language or common language.
- ▶ When a pupil uses a “dialect” (Ryukyuan Languages) in a school, he or she was punished by being forced to put this plate on his or her neck. This discipline subsisted in Okinawa even after the WW2.
- ▶ = Movement of intensification of using Standard Language
(Hyojungo-Reiko-Undo)



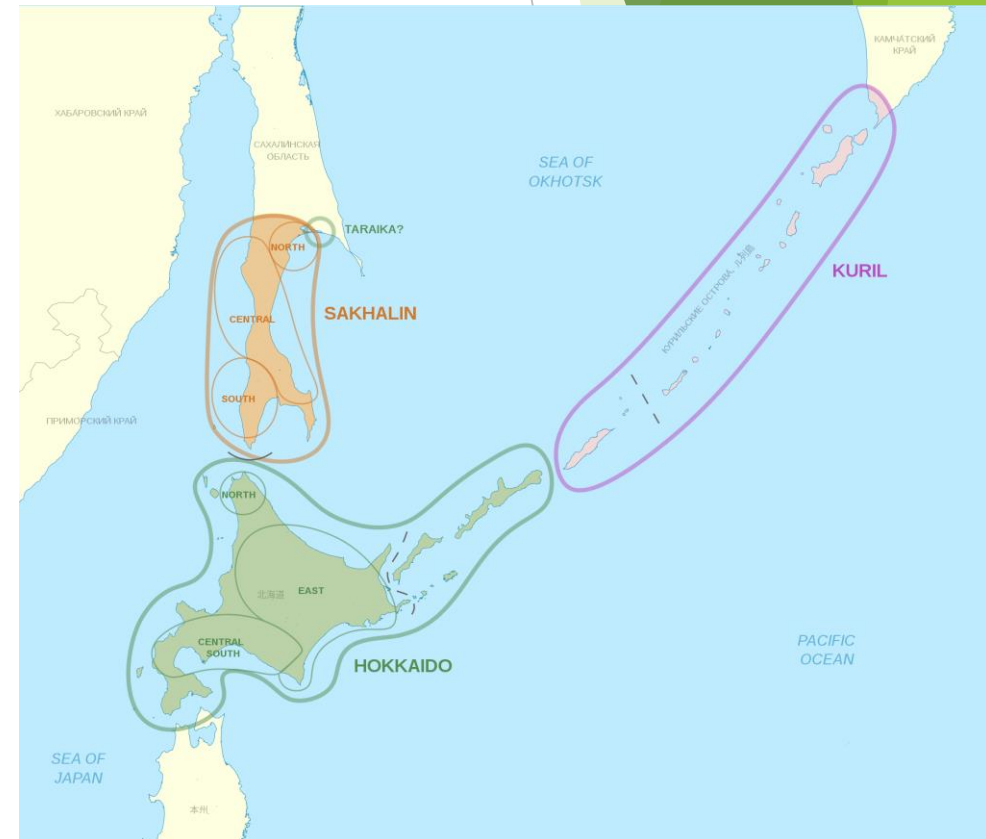
Ryukyuan Languages

- ▶ After WW2, the US Authority administered Okinawa → **great importance to the English education, but at the same time, the promotion of Ryukyuan Culture**
- ▶ At the beginning of the US administration, Ryukyuan Languages were freely used not only in the private space but also in the public space.
- ▶ After 1950 approximately, the Hogen-fuda and Hyojungo-Reiko-Undo reappeared and implemented in all over the Okinawa district until the second half of the 1960s.
- ▶ Why this policy in this post-WW2 period?
→ Freedom of thought and expression under Constitution



Ainu Language

- ▶ Ainu people lived in large northern regions of Japan, namely Tohoku, Hokkaido, Karafuto, Chishima.
- ▶ possessed a large economic network in the Okhotsk Sea area
- ▶ As a hunting people, Ainu people has their own culture and religion, including their own language. But nowadays, it is almost extinct. The very small population of Ainu in Hokkaido accelerates this tendency.
- ▶ The fact that Ainu people has never had their own country and were exposed themselves before the Japanese invasion especially in the Meiji period also explain historically this present situation.



Ainu Language

- ▶ After the 15th century, Japanese entered into Ezo (old name of Hokkaido) and began trade with Ainu.
- ▶ In the end of 18th century, the incorporation of all Ainu people to a Japanese clan.
- ▶ Russia's approach to Ezo for trades and the refusal of Shogunate from the fear of direct control
- ▶ The Commerce and Friendship Treaty (1854) and Kuril and Sakhalin Exchange Treaty (1875)
 - ▶ All Sakhalin belonged to Russia, and All Kuril to Japan
 - ▶ Ainu people allowed to decide freely their place of residence and nationality
 - ▶ Policy change of Japanese Government to force Ainu people in Sakhalin to move Hokkaido in order to avoid the Russianization of Ainu in Kuril Islands
- ▶ Strengthening of "Japanization"
 - ▶ A law called "Hokkaido Kyu-dojin Hogoho" (1899) → Naming Ainu people as "former indigenous people, with pejorative connotation" (Kyu-dojin)
 - ▶ Ainu language, Ainu manners and customs were strictly prohibited

Ainu Language

- ▶ Law amendment in 1919 and 1937
 - ▶ Ainu elementary school was abolished and coeducational system was newly institutionalized
 - ▶ Reflection of certain desire of Ainu people.
 - ▶ Segregation between Ainu and Japanese pupils → educational disparity, discrimination and many difficulties in their daily life

Conclusion - What is a present situation of these two language?

▶ Ryukyuan Languages

- ▶ Now recognized as languages to be protected and succeeded
- ▶ The negative evaluation of these languages is now denied officially
- ▶ However, these languages are in danger of extinction according to UNESCO and they will disappear by 2050 without appropriate policies
- ▶ Recently, public authority takes positive measures to protect and promote these languages
- ▶ To make really Ryukyuan Languages living and daily used ones, the speakers of these languages must have a consciousness that Ryukyuan Languages are independent languages, enhance their expression ability by importing Japanese words and use these languages to write academic articles, theater pieces and novels etc.
- ▶ Intercultural activities → the sustainability of these languages

Conclusion - What is a present situation of these two language?

▶ Ainu Language

- ▶ Compared with Ryukyuan Languages, Ainu language is declining more severely, because of quasi-extinction its speaker
- ▶ Ainu language is no more used in daily life
- ▶ The use of Ainu language remains at the level of ceremony and symbol.
- ▶ For the purpose of Ainu Language's survival, we need:
 - ▶ To find potential speaker of Ainu Language and reeducate them;
 - ▶ To train Ainu Language teacher;
 - ▶ To prepare an appropriate textbook of it;
 - ▶ To study it and accumulate research result.
 - ▶ Recently Japanese

Conclusion - What is a present situation of these two language?

▶ Ainu Language

- ▶ Compared with Ryukyuan Languages, Ainu language is declining more severely, because of quasi-extinction its speaker
- ▶ Ainu language is no more used in daily life
- ▶ Despite of youth learning of the language in the classroom of Ainu language in Hokkaido, their purpose is not to use it in daily life
- ▶ The use of Ainu language remains at the level of ceremony and symbol.
- ▶ For the purpose of Ainu Language's survival, we need:
 - ▶ To find potential speaker of Ainu Language and reeducate them;
 - ▶ To train Ainu Language teacher;
 - ▶ To prepare an appropriate textbook of it;
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 - ▶ Recently Japanese
- ▶ Recently attitude changes of the Japanese government towards Ainu Language from the viewpoint of legislation, national jurisprudence. It is our duty to materialize these tendency and save this language from danger of extinction.