

There are Nine Languages in Japan:
First Step towards the Revival of Ryukyuan Languages is
to consider them as 'Languages' instead of 'Dialects'

Fija BYRON

In February 2009, UNESCO identified approximately 2500 languages as being endangered of becoming extinct. Among them eight languages of Japan were listed: Ainu language of Hokkaido, Hachijou language of Hajijyou-jima island, Ryukyuan languages of Amami, Kunigami, Okinawan, Miyako, Yaeyama, and Yonaguni. Including the Japanese language, which is not facing an extinction, there are nine languages altogether. Whereas Okinawan and Ainu languages are generally known as languages, the remaining six languages are not. The reason behind the fact that most people are not familiar with them is that, with the exception of the Ainu language, they have been addressed as 'dialects'. This way of addressing our languages is hurting our pride as Okinawans and is becoming a factor causing discrimination.