

Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien
German Institute for Japanese Studies

DIJ Forum



Thursday, 23 January 2014, 18.30 h

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Language, Security and Freedom in the Ryukyu Islands

This presentation is about language choice in Okinawa. Three languages are at issue, Ryukyuan, Japanese, and English. The Japanese language spread campaign in the Ryukyus from 1880 onwards entailed restrictions to the freedom of language choices and local identities in the Ryukyus. Hence, it was contested and needed coercion and ideological enforcement in order to be realized. Japanese language use in Ryukyuan families and neighborhoods from the 1950s onwards differs however. It was carried out in a quest for freedom from US occupation by Ryukyuan themselves. That the hopes for improved societal well-being associated with exclusive use of Japanese have not come true is crucial for our understanding of current efforts of language revitalization. These are carried out in the name of freedom and are contested by some because more freedom always coincides with less security. The desire to balance security and freedom makes communal life conflict-ridden. Which of the two desires will prevail over the other in the Ryukyus is not entirely clear yet, but it appears that the pendulum is swinging towards the freedom end at the present.

Patrick Heinrich is professor at Dokkyo University. His present research focusses on language endangerment and globalizing sociolinguistics. His latest publications include *The Making of Monolingual Japan* (2012) and *Netto jidai no kotoba to shakai* [Language and Society in the Internet Age] (2013, with Nobuyuki Tsukahara). He is the general secretary of the Ryukyuan Heritage Language Society.

The lecture will be given in English. It will take place on **Thursday, January 23, 2014 at 6.30 p.m.** at the DIJ. Admission is free, please register at forum@dijtokyo.org

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