

## Book Reviews

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### **The Role of Contact in the Origins of the Japanese and Korean Languages**

J. MARSHALL UNGER

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xiii, 175 pp. + works cited, indexes

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This rich, lively book is a significant contribution to ongoing debates about the origins of the Korean and Japanese languages and the nature of their relationship. Through original analyses of linguistic and literary evidence and critiques of alternate theories – supplemented by surveys of archaeological and anthropological studies – Unger argues for the following points:

- 1) Korean and Japanese diverged from a common earlier language, 'proto-Korean-Japanese' (pKJ), which was once spoken throughout the Korean peninsula.
- 2) In the northern part of the peninsula, pKJ developed into pre-Korean; in the south, contact, most likely with a no-longer-extant, non-Sinitic 'language (or perhaps a group of languages) of coastal China' (19) contributed to the development of pre-Japanese.
- 3) As pre-Korean speakers pushed southwards, pre-Japanese speakers came to be concentrated in the southern end of the peninsula, from where they crossed over to the Japanese archipelago as a migrant population (the Yayoi people) during the first millennium B.C.E. The language of the Yayoi migrants was proto-Japanese, while a remnant population on the Korean peninsula continued to speak what Unger labels as para-Japanese.
- 4) Subsequent linguistic contact with Old Korean, especially during the Kofun period (roughly the mid-third through late sixth centuries C.E.), produced a number of late loan-words in Japanese whose presence obscures the more distant common origins of the two languages.

Even after a century and a half of scholarship the genetic affiliation of Japanese – that is, what other languages it is related to through descent from a common earlier language – remains controversial. Korean is the most popular candidate for a sister language, but there are strong counter-arguments to this connection, and one of Unger's major concerns is to refute some of the more forceful of these.

In addition to geographical proximity, the pKJ hypothesis is supported by lexical similarities and extensive syntactical parallels. But progress towards proving that Korean and Japanese diverged from a common origin is impeded by the paucity of early written evidence: solely in Chinese characters for the early periods, and severely limited in quantity for Japanese before the eighth century C.E. and Korean before the fifteenth. There are many words in both languages for which no cognate relationship

has been proposed, and those pKJ etymologies that have been argued for are often controversial.

Alternative explanations for the similarities between the two languages are: that both are members of a larger language family ('Macro- Altaic'); that they were originally unrelated but converged due to contact before or after the Yayoi migration; or, that the resemblances between them are due to chance or to linguistic universals. Unger dismisses all of these alternatives as unsatisfactory, but focuses primarily on convergence hypotheses. He argues that if the Yayoi migration were the cause of a convergence, Japanese would have to have been a Jōmon language, which would lead us to expect much greater dialectal diversity, and a clearer relationship to Ainu. On the other hand, the common elements that were produced by post-migration contact (especially during the Kofun period) are insufficient to explain all of the similarities between the two languages. Because both Yayoi and Kofun are too late to be points of divergence, the resulting hypothesis is that Korean and Japanese diverged from pKJ on the Korean peninsula, significantly before the Yayoi migration.

The most prominent recent critiques of the pKJ hypothesis are those of Christopher Beckwith and Alexander Vovin, both of which support the notion of convergence. Beckwith's argument is grounded in the longstanding hypothesis that while Korean is descended from the language of the early peninsular state of Silla, unrelated languages were spoken in its rivals Paekche and Koguryo. Based on place names recorded later in the *Samguk sagi* (1145 C.E.), he argues that Koguryoan and Japanese are descended from a common language, proto-Japanese-Koguryoic, whereas the apparent parallels between Japanese and Korean are due to borrowing. Unger's response, partly inspired by an observation by John Whitman, is that the parallels with Japanese apparent in the *Samguk sagi* toponyms stem not from a distinctive, non-Korean Koguryoan language, but rather from the para-Japanese that would still have been spoken on the peninsula after the Yayoi migration (263). According to Unger, Vovin's strategy is to systematically undermine the etymologies that support the pKJ hypothesis, but this involves inconsistent reasons for dismissing cognates, lack of attention to syntactical parallels, and heavy reliance on 'missing data' (35) from Eastern Old Japanese and Ryūkyūan (absences that, Unger argues, can largely be attributed to the nature of the sources that attest to those dialects).

The first half of the book is devoted to reviewing the evidence in support of the pKJ hypothesis (citing work principally by Samuel Martin, John Whitman, and Bjarke Frellesvig) and arguing against the Beckwith and Vovin critiques. Beginning with a substantial chapter on synonyms in Old Japanese (interpreted, in a revision of an earlier Unger study, as signs of borrowing from Korean), the second half focuses mainly on the nature and timing of the Kofun period contact between Old Korean and Old Japanese. One reason for the prominence of this 'supplementary hypothesis' (21) is that isolating late loans from this period is intended to strengthen and clarify the case for a much earlier common origin.

Drawing on Barber and Barber's recent application to mythology of concepts from linguistics and cognitive theory, Unger devotes a chapter to 'implicit similes' in some of the most familiar narratives of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. His initial suggestion that the 'leech child' (*piru-kwo*; modern *hiru-ko*) 'represents the planet Mars' (126), partly via an etymological link with the Korean word for flea, is a bold conjecture that posits astronomical lore in a mythological context often noted for its

absence.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by an extensive discussion of volcanic imagery in the Izanami/ Izanagi and Amaterasu/ Susa-no-wo narratives, which provides the basis for a grand scheme of ‘two historically different narrative traditions’ (136) associated with the Yayoi and Kofun periods.<sup>2</sup> Like most prior scholarship, this discussion emphasizes what might be termed \*myths (borrowing the linguistics asterisk notation for unattested or speculative forms) rather than the narratives as they occur in the specific eighth-century contexts of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. But the notion of extensive volcanic imagery is intriguing, and this chapter will be of great interest to anyone working on early Japanese literature, history, or religion.

A chapter on the Korean connections to Kofun period culture includes a discussion of the technology of mounted archery (drawing on an earlier study by Reiner Hesselink) and a tantalizingly brief survey of the role of immigrants in written and oral communication. It also revisits Gari Ledyard’s classic treatment of the ‘horserider theory’, which bears careful attention even if one disagrees with its notion of a Puyo invasion of the archipelago.<sup>3</sup> The implications of Unger’s multi-ethnic, multilingual account of the early history of Korea and Japan come into clearer focus here. As he emphasizes, the Kofun period makes more sense if we do not assume that ancient societies functioned like modern nation-states.

After a survey of the linguistic history of the Korean peninsula, the book concludes with a chapter returning to the question of the divergence of Japanese from pKJ. Citing Wilhelm Solheim’s archaeologically grounded arguments for a prehistoric Southeast Asian trade network, Unger speculates that contact with an associated language (perhaps a lingua franca with an Austronesian connection) contributed to the emergence of pre-Japanese in the southern peninsula. As he indicates, this would fit with the Japanese connections to southern China and Southeast Asia often posited by linguists, anthropologists, and archaeologists.

Within just 175 pages of main text (including footnotes) in a generously sized and legible typeface, this book cites a wide range of scholarship and weighs in on numerous controversies within and beyond East Asian historical linguistics. Much will prove heavy going for readers without a linguistics background, and although the book is written with admirable clarity, more could have been done to lay out the connections between the arguments and the structure of the chapters. (It is unfortunate that there is neither a general index nor an index of proper names, although navigation is assisted by a detailed table of contents, frequent cross-references, and indices of Japanese and Korean terms and their English glosses.) This is less a comprehensive survey or introductory overview than a bulletin from the front, with numerous citations of forthcoming or unpublished works, and thoroughgoing revision and reworking of Unger’s own earlier theories. Such immediacy makes for a dynamic book, but also a difficult one to assess, in part because of the range of

<sup>1</sup>Further consideration of the Mars theory would be enriched by attention to earlier discussions of stars and Japanese myths (see Fukushima Akiho, ‘Ushinawareta hoshi no shinwa’), and also to the Kofun period star maps discovered in the Takamatsuzuka and Kitora tombs, the former of which Unger mentions in passing (127).

<sup>2</sup>As Unger notes, following Donald Philippi, there has been some speculation about volcano myths by scholars such as Nakajima Etsuji and Matsumura Takeo (he might also have cited Masuda Katsumi’s classic, *Kazan rettō no shisō*), but this does seem to be the first time anyone has proposed such a widespread connection.

<sup>3</sup>Unger’s chapter should be read alongside the (uncited) account of Korean-Kofun period connections in William Wayne Farris’s *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures*.

knowledge required to evaluate it, but also because the arguments are often sketched out rapidly.

As a provisional intervention into an ongoing debate – or rather, into several interlocking and overlapping debates – this book leaves one eager to see the responses of historical linguists and archaeologists, especially those whose theories it critiques. It also whets the appetite for more from Unger himself, who will certainly continue to develop these ideas. This challenging work requires real commitment from its readers – especially non-linguists – but the intelligence and verve with which it is written, and the remarkable range of information and insight it incorporates, ensure that it richly rewards the effort.

### Texts Mentioned

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### **Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories: Narrative, Ritual, and Royal Authority from *The Chronicles of Japan* to *The Tale of the Heike***

DAVID T. BIALOCK

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007

xiv, 322 pp. + notes, bibliography, glossary of Chinese characters, index

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David T. Bialock's *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories* represents an impressive work of scholarship that is wide-ranging in its exploration of texts and thoroughgoing in its investigation of often overlooked facets of works such as *Heike monogatari*, *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, and *Ōkagami*. According to Bialock, twentieth-century literature and history scholars' efforts at 'constructing a classical canon and narrative of Japan's national emergence all but effaced these [non capital-centric] geographies and spaces in the interests of national unity and one national space' (3). One of his primary goals, therefore, is to '[provide] an eccentric reading of the earlier canon that recovers some of the discursive terrain of the medieval *Heike* that has been concealed by earlier canonical readings of the classical tradition' (4). This desire to recover, a term that recurs frequently over the book's eight chapters, propels Bialock's methodology, which centers upon performing a series of astute re-readings of canonical texts that foreground