

Yoshio NISHI (西義郎)

Professor Yoshio Nishi, a Japanese Tibeto-Burman linguist, passed away on August 03, 2019. He was 85 years old.

He was born in Ōita Prefecture, Japan, in 1934. After his high school days there, he entered the International Christian University, Tokyo, in 1954 as one of the first generation students. This university was and still is quite unique in Japan's post-war academia in that its founding spirit is 'liberal arts', instead of education by subdivided disciplines. In such an environment, he first met linguistics through Professor Roy Andrew Miller. In the introduction of his 1999 book, he says, "I have not always shared the same views on TB and Sino-Tibetan, but . . . I always remember (Miller) as being the best teacher who ever taught me".

After graduation from ICU in 1958, he joined the M.A. course of linguistics at the University of Tokyo in 1959 and began to study Burmese. The Burmese government scholarship for foreign students at Rangoon University enabled him to expand his knowledge of the language both theoretically and practically. In 1962 he resumed the M.A. course in Tokyo, concentrating on a detailed description and analysis of Burmese auxiliary verbs. According to some people who knew him at that time, his M.A. thesis was 99% done, and at a high level of quality, but it never saw the light of the day because of his perfectionism.

In 1963, he left the University of Tokyo and continued his research as a junior research fellow at the Tōyō Bunko (Oriental Library, Tokyo) from 1966 to 1969. Kyūshū University employed him as an assistant professor of linguistics, working there under Professor Shichirō Murayama, but he quit the post in 1972. He then taught at Kagoshima University (Japanese and Japanese culture; associate professor 1975-1980 and professor 1980-1981), at Ehime University (linguistics and phonetics; professor 1981-1988) and at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies (linguistics and anthropological linguistics; professor 1988-1998) until his retirement in 1998. He became a professor emeritus at the Kobe City University of Foreign Studies in the same fiscal year. Since 1993, he was a visiting professor and distinguished professor

(客座教授) at the Central University of Nationalities (中央民族大学) in Beijing and taught 'History of Burmese and Reconstruction of Proto-Burmese' in 1998 as an intensive course there.

You have an almost perfect list of his publications at Wikipedia, whose URL is: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoshio_Nishi. His works are classified into three groups: descriptive and historical studies of Burmese, description of the TB languages in Nepal on the basis of his own fieldwork, and typological work.

Among 'descriptive and historical studies on Burmese', he himself selected four important articles and reassembled them as a volume named *Four Papers on Burmese* in 1999. The publisher of this volume, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, has not yet posted the whole book to its repository, but three papers out of four, as well as some of Nishi's other articles, are downloadable from the repository of the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka). Its URL is: https://minpaku.repo.nii.ac.jp/index.php?active_action=repository_view_main_item_snippet&page_id=13&block_id=21&pn=1&count=20&order=16&lang=japanese&creator=%E8%A5%BF%20%E7%BE%A9%E9%83%8E.

In relevance to the above, he was also interested in the TB languages in Nepal. His 1977 and 1978 papers dealt with Tamang. After 1980, he joined several field research teams in Nepal lead by the late Professor Hajime Kitamura and Dr. Hiroshi Ishii (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and visited many places mainly along Marshandi and Trisuli Valleys, where a variety of TB languages are spoken. He worked on Hayu, Bantawa, Magar, Manchad, Rangpa, Gurung, Limbu, Manang, Rai, Ghale and so on, and those descriptive results appeared in *The Sanseido Encyclopaedia of Linguistics* and in his 1990ab, 1991, 1992cd papers. Besides the above-mentioned TB languages of Nepal, he also described Tibetan dialects there. He analysed the register in Kagate (1978), and wrote "Tibetan dialects in Nepal --- Kagate, Sherpa, Jirel and Lhomi" YAK No.3, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The revised version of this paper (ms.) was presented at the Annual Conference of the Linguistic Society of Nepal in 1980. In connection to these, he did fieldwork in

northern India and distributed a handout, “Tibeto-Burman languages in Uttarakhand” (1992: ms.) at the Kyoto University TB linguistics meeting.

His articles on typology are limited in number. Inspired by the late Professor Mantaro Hashimoto, however, Nishi attached great significance to linguistic typology for historical study. As early as 1979, he talked about “The PASSIVE VOICE in Kham” and surveyed in 1985 the direction markers which appear in the verb phrases of some TB languages. He presented a paper, “Some typological features in the Himalayish languages” (ms.) in 1990 at the Kyoto University Linguistic Circle and summarized its essence in the 2000 paper.

I must add that he was very eager to help younger scholars make their prospective works known to the public. Graham Thurgood's *Notes on the Origins of Burmese Creaky Tone* (1981) and Carol Genetti's *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Dolakha Newari Dialect* (1994) appeared as part of the *Monumenta Serindica* series from the Research Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. These publications were realized by Nishi's strong support.

He devoted himself to the research of TB languages, and his contribution to TB linguistics is thus a great boon to us. May his soul rest in peace.