

The Politics of Difference and Authenticity  
in the Practice of Okinawan Dance and Music in Osaka, Japan

by  
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For My Family

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which Okinawan music and dance, especially *eisā* (a folk dance genre) and *min'yō* (folk songs), are practiced and interpreted by diasporic Okinawans and Japanese enthusiasts in Osaka, Japan. From 2007 to 2008, I conducted ethnographic research on activities that incorporate Okinawan music and dance, especially *min'yo* and/or *eisā*. This research was conducted in Osaka and the neighboring Kansai area, mainly in Taisho Ward, which has the biggest concentration of diasporic Okinawans and is visited by Japanese enthusiasts of Okinawan culture.

I primarily approach Okinawan dance and music as expressions of cultural difference, and focus on changes that have occurred in actors and their interpretations of Okinawan music and dance practice as the overall attitudes towards Okinawan difference have changed in Japan. Japan has long been dominated by the hegemonic ideology of ethnic, cultural and social homogeneity, and I explore how the apparent recognition and celebration of Okinawan difference, in comparison to the negation of ethnic and cultural diversity, can either enhance equity between groups or reinforce the existing cultural hierarchy. Also, I examine how different actors attempt to establish or recover authenticity in their practice, their identity, and/or their personhood through their practice and interpretations, thereby illustrating that authenticity does not exist independently but is constructed through practice by the collective participation, interaction, contestation, and reflection of actors.

I explore two prominent aspects of Okinawan music and dance practice in Osaka, namely, cultural activism and cultural appropriation. Okinawan music and dance as cultural activism started occurring in the mid-1970s by diasporic Okinawans as a means to contest the dominant ideology of Japanese homogeneity, assert Okinawan difference, and build communality through collective participation in music and dance as both performer and audience. Cultural appropriation by Japanese enthusiasts of Okinawan music and dance, on the other hand, has occurred on a large scale since the 1990s, when Okinawan music and dance became popular nationwide in media and popular culture. Through active participation in

Okinawan music and dance practice, Japanese Okinawaphiles not only pursue the pleasure of exoticism but also the authentic personhood.

While such Japanese fascination with Okinawan music and dance has had positive effects on the reception of Okinawan difference and provides many diasporic Okinawans with opportunities to boost their self-esteem and increase their means of livelihood, it also distracted mainstream Japanese from realizing the political and social marginalization of Okinawa in the past and present, undermines Okinawan cultural activism, and results in the Japanization of Okinawan music and dance, which causes Okinawa critics and cultural activists to express discontent. This continuing gap between Okinawans and Japanese illuminates the fact that the apparent recognition and celebration of Okinawan difference does not necessarily lead to overcoming the continuing socio-cultural asymmetry, but often disguises it. However, the case of the appropriation of Okinawan dance by Japanese gay males in LGBT activism illustrates that the effects of cultural practice on politics of difference are ambivalent, and unpredictable.

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

This study explores the ways in which Okinawan music and dance, especially *eisā* (a folk dance genre) and *min'yō* (folk songs), is practiced and interpreted by diasporic Okinawans and Japanese enthusiasts in Osaka, Japan. Okinawan music and dance practices had once been regarded as shameful expressions of Okinawan cultural difference, despised by Japanese, and actively hidden by Okinawans under the pressure of cultural assimilation, until they were selected by a number of Okinawans in the mid-1970s as the means to fight the assimilative force of mainstream Japanese society and assert Okinawan identity in the context of cultural activism. Since the 1990s, Okinawan music and dance have become increasingly popular and desired among the mainstream Japanese population, within which Japanese Okinawaphiles have actively pursued their consumption and performance.

From 2007 to 2008, I conducted ethnographic research on a wide arrange of activities that incorporate Okinawan music and dance, especially *min'yō* and/or *eisā*, in Osaka and the neighboring Kansai area, mainly in Taisho Ward which has the largest concentration of diasporic Okinawans. The activities I observed included: lessons, practices, performances, and socializing of *min'yō* classes and *eisā* clubs; live shows at Okinawan music pubs and restaurants; concerts of major and underground Okinawan music performers; private parties and annual community celebrations in the Okinawan neighborhood; Okinawan cultural festivals; and public lectures or events that centered on Okinawan issues and/or social and ethnic relations. I collected various texts from these occasions, including books, brochures, advertisements, photos, videos, musical recordings, and notes. I also conducted open-ended interviews with various individuals with whom I became acquainted on the above occasions.

The key question I explore is how the apparent recognition and celebration of minority difference, in comparison to the negation of ethnic and cultural diversity, can enhance equity between groups, or instead reinforce the existing cultural hierarchy. I ask this question as Japan

as a society has long been dominated by the “hegemony of homogeneity” (Befu 2001), erasing and silencing existing ethnic, social and cultural diversity. The main mechanism by which the Japanese government and mainstream society have dealt with social and ethnic minority groups has been the denial of their existence, and the assimilation of differences, rather than through outright oppression. Despite the decades to century-long struggles of different minority groups for social recognition and equal treatment, in postwar Japan, the main mode to maintain the hierarchy between the majority of Japanese and minority groups has been to render social and cultural difference invisible, thereby constructing the entire society and nation as a homogeneous entity (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002; Yoshino 1992), while minority groups have responded to this by either becoming invisible, namely assimilated, or by resisting and making themselves visible (De Vos and Wagatsuma 1966; Lee and DeVos 1981; Neary 1997; Ryang 1997; Weiner 1997, 2004). It has only been since the 1990s that the discourse of ethnic and cultural diversity such as “multiethnic state” (*taminzoku kokka*) and “multicultural society” (*tabunka shakai*) have emerged and are gaining currency among the general public, with a vision of harmonious and egalitarian social relations based on the notion of human rights (*jinken*) (Tai 2004; Tsuneyoshi et al. 2011; Burgess 2004; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008).

Under such circumstances the increased recognition and even celebration of Okinawan cultural difference, at first glance, seems the indication of an increased equity between Japanese and Okinawans, and a more harmonious relationship between them. However, is it the case? Critiques of current practices of multiculturalism point out that racial and ethnic hierarchy is maintained and reinforced under the disguise of multiculturalism through more subtle manifestations of ethnic/racial prejudice and discrimination (Hall 1990; Shamsul 1999; Povinelli 2002). These include: stereotyped representations of minorities (hooks 1992; Shohat and Stam 1994); cultural appropriation and exploitation of minorities by dominant groups (Root 1996, 1997), and the dominant group’s failure to “embrace [minority] culture at the human level” (Hall 1997, 32) or recognize the political autonomy of minorities (Postill 2006); and finally, fixed lifestyles that are tied to minority collective identities, which may deny individual autonomy (Appiah 1994; Povinelli 2002).

Does this paradox of cultural acceptance and social marginalization of minorities apply to the politics of difference in Japan? This question was translated to specific research questions such as: How has the Okinawa Boom (the increase of positive media representations of Okinawa

since the 1990s) affected the ways in which people participate in and interpret Okinawan music and dance practices? What kinds of meanings are produced from such a process? How are such meanings associated with participants' attitudes towards ethnic relations? Overall, how do changes in Okinawan popular music and dance in mainland Japan affect ethnic relations between Japanese and Okinawans?

With these questions in consideration, this study ethnographically examines changes that have occurred in the practice of Okinawan music and dance in Osaka from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, examining the main actors of the practices, their socio-cultural contexts, and the meanings they have constructed out of their practice at different moments in time. I focus on the two most prominent aspects of Okinawan music and dance practice: 1) the affirmation and assertion of ethnic identity by diasporic Okinawans, which is often associated with cultural activism and 2) the entertainment-oriented, apparently depoliticized cultural appropriation by mainstream Japanese.

### **Hegemony of Homogeneity**

In this section I will discuss how ideologies of homogeneity have constructed the modern Japanese society as a whole based on sameness, from postwar reconstruction until the 1990s, when the economic recession set in and economic polarization extensively affected Japanese society. There have been a number of studies on the subject of Japan's homogeneity, both outright confirmations of the premise (Nakane 1970; Vogel 1963) or critiques of it (Dale 1986; Yoshino 1992; Weiner 1997; Befu 2001; Oguma 2002; Morris-Suzuki 1998). The most prominent theme is the ethnic-racial-cultural-linguistic sameness of the entire nation, often referred to as "the myth of monoethnic Japan" (Oguma 2002), which has shaped the predicament social and ethnic minorities are placed in as Japan's others. Historical studies of Japanese nation-state building reveal that the popular imagination of a monoethnic and culturally homogenous Japan, in which primordial "Japanese folk" have resided from an unknown past, is in fact a modern invention (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Oguma 2002), and it has effectively placed Japan's historical others (former outcastes, later Burakumin), and subjects from territories more recently incorporated through its Imperial advance (Okinawans, Ainu, Koreans, and Chinese) under a strong cultural assimilation campaign since the late nineteenth century. When the Japanese

Empire lost its colonies as the result of defeat in the Pacific War, Japan returned to its claim of being a monoethnic nation, denying the presence of ethnic minorities within its territory (namely, Ainu and Okinawans) and remaining former colonial subjects (Korean and Chinese). In postwar Japan the notion of ethnic homogeneity maintained the social marginalization of ethnic minorities, including Burakumin (former outcaste group), *nikkeijin* (South American labor immigrants of Japanese origin) and other labor immigrants along with the abovementioned groups (Weiner 1997; Douglass and Roberts 2000). The discourse of *nihonjinron* (“theories of Japaneseness”) is the most salient feature of postwar Japanese nationalism. It consists of essentialized and often racialized ideas about Japaneseness, in which the inherent ties between the nation, biology, language, and culture of Japan are assumed (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002; McVeigh 2004; Weiner 1997).

The ideology of monoethnic Japan has forced minorities into cultural assimilation, and has denied them equal treatment. Many studies of ethnic minorities in Japan have demonstrated the disadvantageous nature of their living conditions in Japanese society and their struggle for legal and social equality (e.g., De Vos and Wagatsuma 1966; Lee and De Vos 1981; Neary 1997; Ryang 1997; Siddle 1997; Weiner 1997). In response to the political action of minorities, which has been enhanced by global human rights discourse starting in the early 1980s (Tsutsui 2007), overall minority conditions have significantly improved. And ethnic/racial diversity has become more visible due to the influx of foreign workers, who have tempered popular notions of a homogenous Japan (Douglass and Roberts 2000). However, ethnic discrimination now takes subtler, more indirect forms while overtly political messages are often met with public apathy (Izutsu 2005). The ideology of monoethnic/racial Japan is still dominant (Condry 2006) and is now maintained by “locking non-Japanese minorities into various enclaves” (Burgess 2004).

Moreover, there has also been a significant class component in the postwar construction of Japanese homogeneity, as in popular expressions such as “classless society” and “the one hundred million all middle class” (*ichioku sō chūryū*) in popular and academic literature (Nakane 1970; Kariya 2010), which has effectively marginalized those could not fit in the middle class ideal. As I will examine in Chapter 2, the notion of ethnic-cultural homogeneity and that of class homogeneity, namely, middle class consciousness were conflated in people’s lived experiences, stigmatizing social and ethnic minorities on multiple levels.

Since most of my study deals with the relationship between Okinawans and Japanese, I will primarily focus on the ideology of ethnic and cultural homogeneity in Japan, and the tension it creates for Okinawans. However, while the hierarchy in cultural and ethnic difference has been maintained between mainstream ethnic Japanese and ethnic and/or social minorities under the widespread beliefs in Japan's ethnic homogeneity, in practice the prejudice and discrimination against ethnic and social minorities were also significantly class-based. Ishida and Slater point out the lack of attention given to social class in studies of ethnic groups and identity in Japan, arguing for the need "to understand how class is always already cross-cutting other forms of social order, including especially race and gender" (2010a, 10). Even in studies of ethnic relations and identity, consideration of class is important, because:

While seeing that many features of ethnic identity are widely shared, different places within the class position enable individuals to differently deploy, exploit, and benefit from the social networks, cultural forms and sub-cultural capital that come with ethnic status. The class complexity of ethnic groups has often been overlooked by theorists of all political orientations in an effort to focus on the set of traits that define a particular minority population relative to the "Japanese" majority, but the results can lead to a lack of appreciation of the dynamism and diversity therein. And, just as class structures ethnic groups' internal diversity it also places parameters on the group as a whole. The streaming of immigrant ethnic groups into the lower reaches of society has much to do with the shifting needs of capital as it does with racism or claims of "cultural difference." (Ishida and Slater 2010a, 11)

Until the economic recession of the 1990s and the consequent economic uncertainty and polarization, discussion of socio-economic class was somewhat absent in public discussion, as the majority of Japanese have accepted the treatise of the classless-ness of Japanese society rather uncritically. In the meantime, studies about class in modern Japan have been separated from other domains of social distinction (Steven 1983; Stevens 1997; Ishida 1993). Through the examination of ethnographic cases, I will discuss the intersection of class and ethnic relations, by illustrating how marginalization based on socio-economic class cut across different minority groups in Osaka, and also how responses to the assimilative force of Japanese mainstream society diverged within an ethnic group, Okinawans in Osaka, along the class division. In addition, I would like to add that the dominance of middle-class consciousness also greatly shaped normative gender and sexuality, which has marginalized families (Chapter 3) and individuals (Chapter 7) who don't fit in the prescribed gender or sexuality, although its operation is not as obvious as the other two factors discussed above.

## **Okinawa's Place in Japan**

The late nineteenth century annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom to Japan as Okinawa Prefecture was one of the early signals of the establishment and expansion of Japan as a nation-state and imperial power, a process that produced major minority groups in Japan. As with the Ainu, Okinawan language and customs became subject to strict assimilationist policies of the Japanese imperialist powers; those policies were later applied to Japan's colonies in East and Southeast Asia (Tomiyama 1990; Field 1991; Christy 1997; Morris-Suzuki 1998; Beillevaire 1999). The economic deprivation of Okinawa that followed the annexation resulted in massive labor migration to mainland Japan, Japanese colonies in Micronesia and the Philippines, Hawaii, and North and South America. On mainland Japan, immigrants concentrated in newly industrialized areas such as Osaka, Kanagawa, Tokyo, and Fukuoka. Socio-economic and cultural marginalization, which Okinawans in Okinawa also suffered, were exacerbated in diasporic settings, due to their poverty and to daily contact with Japanese who assumed that Okinawans were inferior (Rabson 1999; Kishi 2001). Prejudice against Okinawans had resulted in disproportionate Okinawan civilian casualties in the Pacific War, when Japan strategically abandoned Okinawa to the Allied Forces. Moreover, the deep-rooted suspicion that Okinawans were imperfect and disloyal imperial subjects even led the Japanese army to commit indiscriminate killings and to enforce the collective suicide of many Okinawans (Field 1991; Figal 2001; Allen 2002; Rabson 2008).

After the war, Okinawa was placed under US military occupation until 1975, which again caused both a tremendous displacement of people and economic deterioration due to the US military's land-seizure. It caused a second wave of laborers to immigrate to mainland Japan (Kishi 2001, 2004; Mizuuchi 2001). It also motivated the "reversion" movement in US-occupied Okinawa whereby Okinawans sought to re-join the Japanese state, which was realized in 1975. However, even after the reversion, US bases have continued to be concentrated in Okinawa to serve the financial and military interests of the Japanese and US governments. Moreover, Okinawans continue to face the negative consequences of this arrangement, such as base-dependent economies, environmental destruction, and the perpetration of crimes by US military personnel (Asato 2003; Inoue 2004; Yamazaki 2004).



## **Okinawans in Osaka: The Local Context**

Osaka provides a good vantage point from which to observe ethnicity politics in Japan, due to its exceptionally visible ethnic diversity, and its long history of Okinawan migration.

Since the 1920s Osaka (and the Kansai region in general) has accepted the largest population of Okinawan immigrants in Japan. Most settled in the rapidly industrializing port area of Osaka City, where they could find employment in metal factories, timber mills, and as port laborers (for males) and in spinning factories (for females). The second wave of massive labor migration from Okinawa to Osaka occurred between the 1960s and 1970s, supplying a cheap labor force during the period of Japan's high economic growth. As a result, Okinawans concentrated in the four districts (Konohana, Minato, Taisho, and Nishinari) near the port of Osaka; the Taisho district hosts the largest Okinawan population concentration on mainland Japan (20,000 out of the entire district population of 80,000) (Kishi 2001; Mizuuchi 2001). Other industrial areas in the neighboring Kansai area, such as Wakayama, Amagasaki, Takarazuka, and Kobe, show similar patterns of Okinawan concentration, albeit on a smaller scale (Mizuuchi 2001; Matsumura 1997).

Moreover, Osaka has a more diverse and larger minority population (especially Okinawans, Koreans, and Burakumin) than most other cities in Japan. Such visibility has not only engendered more strident discrimination but also more active minority responses and subsequent social changes. While different minority groups have resorted to collective action and shared strategies to counter discrimination, and thus contributed to the overall improvement of living conditions, tensions have emerged between these groups over political resources. Thus no minority group, whether Koreans, Okinawans, Burakumin, or others, have had a one-on-one relationship with mainstream Japanese society, but instead have had multiple intersecting relationships with various other groups. The conditions and actions of any minority group cannot therefore be appropriately understood in isolation, but more adequately approached only through an "interactive perspective," in which the complex interactions between minorities who share social context are also taken into account (Okano and Tsuneyoshi 2011).

## The Ambiguity of Okinawan Identity

Studies of Okinawan identity, Okinawan-Japanese relations, Okinawan modern history, and Okinawan immigration invariably point out the strong self-consciousness of Okinawans as a distinctive people and culture as opposed to mainland or mainstream Japanese. However, these studies have diverged significantly in their efforts to determine the kind of category Okinawan identity would fit into, and no one single definition has seemed satisfactory to everyone, whether intellectuals or lay people, Okinawans or non-Okinawans. Sometimes confusion can occur when scholars themselves bring their own analytic tools and impose them on their studies, regardless of what their research subjects might think of themselves. But more importantly, when it comes to Okinawan identity, there seems to be no uniform category within which Okinawans would define themselves, but rather a number of designations from among which actors selectively define the boundary of Okinawans in relation to the Japanese state, the Japanese people, or Japanese culture. In other words, the complex relationship that Okinawa and Okinawans have had with Japan since Okinawa's annexation to Japan have directly affected how Okinawans define themselves, as an ethno-nation/race (*minzoku*), an indigenous people (*senjumin*), prefectural citizens (*kenmin*), or a culture (*bunka*).

In this dissertation I refer to Okinawan ethnicity in the sense that Okinawans are a culturally distinctive group, with their own language, religious system, and customs, and had maintained their status as a separate political entity from Japan until the late nineteenth century. But within Okinawa, there has been significant cultural and linguistic diversity across the islands and there are critics of the idea of a single Okinawan identity. And there are many critics of the notion of a singular Japanese identity, for example those who refer to the long history of local autonomy of each of the historical domains (now prefectures). It was only with the emergence of the modern Japanese nation-state that Japan came to have a singular identity as a monoethnic nation (Morris-Suzuki).

Considering all this complexity, I do not attempt to come up with a single definitive category to put the Okinawan people into neatly, but instead go over common terms with which Okinawans (and Japanese) refer to Okinawans or Okinawan identity, and the implications of each term.

The most common terms that are currently (in the postwar period) used to distinguish between Okinawans and Japanese are as follows: Japanese terms such as Okinawajin (person/people from Okinawa) as contrasted with Nihonjin (person/people from Japan), Yamatojin (person/people from Yamato, i.e. the Japanese mainland), or *hondojin* (person/people from mainland); Okinawan terms such as *Uchinānchu* (Okinawan) as opposed to *Yamatonchu* (Yamato people/person, i.e. Japanese) or *naichā* (person/people from mainland). While the paired terms Okinawajin and Yamatojin, and *Uchinānchu* and *naichā*, are mutually exclusive, Okinawajin and Nihonjin may not be mutually exclusive, as Okinawans are legally Japanese citizens and thus Japanese. Whether they are mutually exclusive depends on the user and the context. If the user intends these terms to be mutually exclusive, the person may be alluding to the colonial relationship between Japan and Okinawa, and ideologically refusing to acknowledge that Okinawa is part of the Japanese state, but believes it should be an independent political entity.

Yamato refers to the dominant ethnic group and culture of Japan. What separates Okinawans from Yamato people is *minzoku* (ethno-nation). Similar to the nineteenth century notion of “volk,” an essentialized and often racialized notion of a clearly defined group of people, the versatility of the term is that it works on a spectrum of biology and culture, always implying both but in varying degrees. In the postwar construction of Japaneseness, inherent ties between nation, biology, language, and culture are assumed (Befu 2001; Oguma 2002; McVeigh 2004; Weiner 1997).

There is a separate term for “race,” *jinchū*, which is less frequently used when referring to Okinawan-Japanese difference. *Jinchū* mainly refers to biological difference between different groups of people, but it’s often used to refer to noticeable, physical difference such as white (*hakujin*), black (*kokujin*), or Asians (*Ajiajin*), which respectively contain multiple ethnic groups (*minzoku*). For example Asians (*Ajiajin*) as a race (*jinchū*) may include different *minzoku* (nations, ethnic groups), and such a notion became the basis of Japan’s Imperial advance into other Asian countries in the early twentieth century, in which Japan claimed to be the liberator of the Asian race from the oppression of the Euro-American race. In the contemporary context, the notion of *jinchū* is sometimes played upon by individuals who want to emphasize the essential, insurmountable difference that even cultural assimilation cannot dilute.

The conflation of culture, people, land, and biology in the term *minzoku* was the main cause for the complexity relating to Okinawan identity. Japan as a nation state was built on the premise that all people who were within its national borders were a part of the same ethno-nation. From the beginning of the annexation of Okinawa and Hokkaido (Ainu territory) into Japan, massive linguistic and cultural assimilation campaigns were imposed upon both, to refashion them as loyal imperial subjects of Japan. During that period, the innate differences between Okinawans and Japanese were not only downplayed, but their historical and mythical affinity was propagated by Okinawan studies of the time, as was the treatise of the shared origin of Japanese and Ryukyuan (*Nichiryūdōsōron*). Yanagita Kunio, the renowned folklorist, argued that Okinawan culture contained the ancient form of Japanese culture, a concept ardently pursued by an influential Okinawan scholar and nationalist, the founder of Okinawan studies in Japan, who took pride in the fact that Okinawa was possibly the origin of Japanese culture. In this ideological construct, Okinawans were Japanese *minzoku*, whose only difference was in their time frame (i.e. they were backwards), and they needed to be civilized to become appropriate members of the Japanese nation state (Oguma 2002).

This treatise was refutable and has been the subject of academic and ideological controversy since its inception, and has never been uniformly accepted by Okinawans themselves. Nonetheless, it has had a great influence on how people have subsequently seen Okinawan difference. Okinawans, probably more than any other minority group in Japan, have keenly felt the double-bind of ethnic sameness and difference. If they emphasized their difference too much, they risked putting themselves outside of the homogeneous Japanese nation, thereby justifying the fact that they were treated differently; if they played on their sameness too much, they risked losing their distinctive cultural identity. The conflicts among diasporic Okinawans in Osaka surrounding cultural assimilation as opposed to cultural resistance, which will be introduced in Chapter 2, capture this dilemma well.

There have been a relatively small group of people who have relied on the notion of indigenous people (*senjūmin*, *senjū minzoku*) to assert the social and cultural rights of Okinawans. They have been trying to mobilize the international discourse of indigeneity and gain international support (Siddle 2003). However, this has not been as widespread among Okinawans or as successful in achieving recognition by the Japanese state, compared to the

Ainu, who have been relying on the same discourse in their movement (Lewallen 2006; Tsutsui 2012), probably because of the abovementioned ambiguity in relation to the Japanese nation.

In the meantime, there is another term that has played a significant part in the postwar Okinawan struggle for recognition of social citizenship. *Kenmin*, literally “prefectural citizen” or “prefectural member,” is an identity based on shared locality – Okinawan Prefecture – and the shared social and historical experiences that are based on that locality, since Okinawa’s annexation into Japan. For Okinawans, this is an equally strong identity as *minzoku*, as their shared history, culture and experience in their shared land traces far back before the Japanese state, without invoking the idea of *minzoku*. In regard to Okinawan modern history, the identity of Okinawan *kenmin* binds Okinawans even more strongly, due to their continuing victimization by both Japan and the US, of which the most traumatic two examples are the disproportionate civilian sacrifice during the Pacific War, and the continuing presence of the US military (Figal 2001, Angst 2001). At the same time, *kenmin* identity, unlike *minzoku* identity, enables Okinawans to demand social citizenship by “asserting the existence a univocal ‘prefectural citizenry,’” as this places Okinawa within the Japanese state, like the forty-six other prefectures of Japan (Ames 2007, 30). Thus in contemporary politics in Okinawa, the regionally-based *kenmin* identity has been effective in asserting Okinawan difference with its ethnic and cultural connotation made implicit, without invoking the precarious *minzoku* identity (whether one might believe in it or not), and also effective in claiming the right to equal treatment as rightful members of the Japanese nation.

In a diasporic setting, however, *kenmin* as a regionally based identity becomes more ambiguous and complex, mainly because they are no longer physically situated in Okinawan Prefecture. As will be shown in Chapter 2, what was emphasized in Okinawan prefectural associations and similar organization was a *dōkyōsei* (roughly translates “characters of people who share the place of origin”) identity coming from the same hometown, or place of origin. And during the Lifestyle Betterment Movement in the prewar period, this regionally based Okinawan identity was mobilized at least once for self-erasure (Tomiyama 1990), to eradicate the cultural and ethnic difference of Okinawans, so that Okinawans would become better Japanese subjects.

Scholars of diasporic Okinawans (Tani 1989, Ishihara 1986) emphasize the incomparably strong *dōkyōsei* of Okinawans, alluding to ethnicity, as compared to people from any other

prefectures of Japan (*tafukēn*). Its resemblance to ethnic identity is so often noted that it has struck me that *dōkyōsei* is in fact a term for ethnic identity from which “ethnic-ness” has been deliberately removed, so that by using it one can avoid the charged question of whether Okinawans are a separate ethnicity or nation.

Thus *kenmin ishiki* (prefectural consciousness) and *dōkyōsei* are two regionally based identities used in reference to Okinawans that do not necessarily invoke ethnic or national implications. However, this inevitably leads to the dilution or eventual disappearance of such identity over time, as opposed to ethnic, cultural, and/or racial identity (racial as in preserved in one’s biology, such as genes, phenotypic differences, or “blood”), which presupposes some kind of an essence that is passed on, at least partly, from generation to generation. This type of dilution or disappearance is the case with young Okinawans in Osaka, or individuals with Okinawan parentage who tend *not* to identify with Okinawans. For them, Okinawan identity is more like a prefectural identity (*kenmin ishiki*) as it is seen among people from prefectures other than Okinawa: one may have a strong, culturally distinctive identity based on native region, but it can weaken over time once its holder leaves the region. It can and does fade away over generations.

Thus they might say something like “My parents are Okinawan, but I am not,” or “My grandfather’s hometown is Okinawa, but I am not Okinawan,” which I frequently heard during my research, which is a vast difference from someone in the same neighborhood, or even in the same family, for example an ardent cultural activist, who might think Okinawans are a different ethnicity or even racial group. According to Kaneshiro (1992), generation gap is the most significant factor in different ways of seeing Okinawan identity, mainly due to the different historical experience and education of each age cohort. But there are other factors involved which require further study.

So far I have explored only part of the various and often ambiguous ways to see Okinawans as a distinctive category of people. It is significant to note that individuals with different backgrounds – ethnicity, age, socio-economic class, and the place they lived during their formative years, participate in the practice of Okinawan music and dance with their own understanding of “being Okinawan,” and often create different meanings of engaging in Okinawan music and dance in Osaka.

## **Ongoing Contestation Over the Narrative of Japanese Nationhood**

These war-related historical and ongoing social problems have shaped the memories and identity of Okinawans in ways that significantly diverge from those of mainland Japanese, and which fiercely erupt in political expressions by Okinawans at certain moments, forcing Okinawans to question their place in Japanese national history (Ames 2007). A few of the recent incidents that have evoked the anger and resentment of Okinawans at their unfair burden of housing US bases include the 1995 kidnapping, beating and gang rape of a twelve-year-old girl by three US soldiers, the sexual assault of a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl by a US marine sergeant in February 2008 (Angst 2001; Johnson 2008), and the Japanese government's 1997 decision to construct a new US Marine Corps Air Station in Nago to replace the old Futenma base, instead of permanently closing it, a decision which perpetuates the danger of continued militarization in the area and of irrevocable environmental destruction of the Henoko Reef. The struggle of local residents and peace activists continues to the present, despite oppression by the Japanese government and conflict among Okinawans themselves (McCormack 2003; Makishi 2006).

The memories of the Pacific War are not left behind as historical, but are a live battlefield where the grand narrative of Japanese nationhood and the contesting narrative of Okinawans struggle, especially as relates to state violence towards Okinawan civilians. The defamation lawsuit against the Nobel Prize winner Ōe Kenzaburō and his publisher Iwanami, which was initiated in 2005 and was dismissed in 2008 at the Osaka District Court during my field research, illustrates the ongoing nature of contest and struggle over the historical narrative of Okinawa. The lawsuit pertained to one of the “group suicides” of Okinawan civilians that occurred across the Okinawan Islands during the Battle of Okinawa, which resulted in over 1,000 deaths. It is alternatively called “forced collective deaths” by peace activists and their supporters, as the available evidence, including the testimony of survivors, strongly support the Japanese military's active involvement in these deaths, such as through direct orders to commit suicide rather than surrendering, or the distribution to villagers of weapons such as hand grenades with which to kill themselves (Field 1991).

Political conservatives have been denying the involvement of the Japanese military in this violence, and the Japanese Ministry of Education has attempted to delete or minimize references to the Japanese military from descriptions of “group suicides” in school textbooks. The plaintiffs of the Ōe-Iwanami case were a former garrison commander and the brother of a late former

commander, who were stationed at one of the major group suicide sites and are believed to have ordered the group suicide, although they have denied their involvement. They claimed Ōe's descriptions in his essay "Okinawa Notes" (1970), based on his visit to the site and conversation with local residents, were lies and thus defamatory. Based on the fact that this lawsuit occurred, the Ministry of Education decided in 2007 to delete references to the involvement of the Japanese military in mass suicides from school textbooks, despite ample evidence and witness testimonies from across the islands of Japanese military involvement. Their intention was to maintain the mainstream national narrative that these deaths were voluntary, patriotic acts undertaken by Okinawans in order to serve Japan to their death rather than surrendering. This decision caused massive protests by Okinawans in Okinawa and on the mainland; one of these protests was the Okinawan Prefectural Rally on September 29, 2007 in Ginowan, Okinawa, at which more than 110,000 Okinawans reportedly gathered (for the process of this court case, see Rabson 2008; McCormack and Norimatsu 2012).<sup>1</sup>

This court case was going on at the Osaka District Court throughout my research period, and it provided me with a chance to sense the gap in understanding and interest between Okinawans and Japanese regarding the historical facts surrounding Japanese atrocities during the Pacific War, the court case, and the decision regarding school textbooks and its implication. Okinawans in Taisho Ward, my main field site, had been following the progress of both the lawsuit and the controversy over the textbook accounts, and some of them (especially the members of the Gajimaru Club and Kansai Okinawa Bunko discussed in Chapter 3) participated in person by gathering at the District Court for each court hearing, waiting through the raffles for admission tickets, patiently and dauntlessly in face-to face conflict with aggressive right-wingers who glared at them, waved wartime Japanese flags, cursed them and yelled swearwords such as "traitors!" (*baikokudo*) in an attempt to intimidate them. On the day of the all-Okinawa Prefectural Rally, these groups organized street protests near the Taisho station, at which they distributed leaflets and displayed hand-made posters about the collective suicides, the Ōe-Iwanami case, and the ministry decision. However, although the process of this lawsuit was covered by major national newspapers such as *Asahi* and *Yomiuri*, as well as major Okinawan newspapers such as the *Okinawa Times* and *Ryukyu Shimpo*, none of these three incidents were

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<sup>1</sup> The Okinawa population at the time was estimated about 1,400,000, which means about one out of twelve Okinawans joined this rally.



widely known or had attracted the attention of the Japanese individuals I encountered in Osaka, even those who were enthusiastic about learning, consuming, or performing Okinawan music and dance. This gap in knowledge and interest (in the US military presence in Okinawa as well as in historical narratives regarding the Battle of Okinawa) is not a coincidence, but an indication of power asymmetry. This is a type of asymmetry that has systematically been cultivated throughout history, which has allowed the majority population to not know or be interested in those issues that don't threaten or seriously affect their existence, symbolically or practically, while minorities like Okinawans cannot afford to be disinterested in such issues which are connected to both their symbolic existence (their place in the Japanese nation and citizenship) and actual existence (the economic, social, and environmental costs of hosting the most of US bases). And such a gap remains a constant source of doubt and soul-searching for Okinawans, surrounding the question of whether Okinawans, more than a century after their annexation to Japan, truly have reached equal footing in terms of economy, social justice, and historical narratives beyond their formal, legal citizenship as Japanese citizens.

### **Japanese Fascination with Okinawan Cultural Difference**

As discussed in the previous sections, Okinawans have been through various historical situations that have forced them to constantly question their social citizenship, socio-economic autonomy and environmental justice, and membership in the narrative of Japanese nationhood, despite their legal citizenship and rights as Japanese since Okinawa's annexation into Japan in the late nineteenth century. However, Japanese reception of Okinawan cultural difference went through a relatively drastic change in the late twentieth century. Initially, Okinawan culture, including language, lifestyle, and customs, were subjected to a heavy assimilation campaign following annexation, and both in Okinawa and in the mainland diaspora, Okinawan cultural difference was considered backwardness. It was not simply a source of ridicule or an obstacle to social upward mobility, but at extreme times, it was an issue of life and death for Okinawan individuals – during the Pacific War, such difference (e.g. lack of Japanese language proficiency and use of Okinawan dialect) was considered to be an indication of Okinawan lack of loyalty to the Japanese Empire, thus justifying the Japanese military's use of violence against Okinawan civilians (Field 1992). Thus Okinawans have long internalized a sense of inferiority about their

culture vis-à-vis Japanese culture, except for a limited part that had been passed down from the high court culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had been historically influenced by Chinese court culture and thus was acknowledged by Japanese as a respectable civilization.

Such prejudice against Okinawan culture and the drive towards cultural assimilation continued until the late twentieth century, although in postwar Okinawa, and especially after the reversion, various attempts to search for and express distinctive Okinawan cultural identity through cultural and artistic expression also emerged. Okinawan popular music has been especially such a site of construction and expression of Okinawan identity based on difference (Roberson 2003, 2006). Okinawans' struggle for self-affirmation and the recognition of their cultural difference started attracting Japanese attention in the domain of Okinawan popular music, but in the 1990s, it developed into a full-scale fascination with Okinawan cultural and natural difference in mainstream popular and media culture, in the cultural phenomenon called the Okinawa Boom, as will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The Ryukyu Festival, a large scale annual concert held in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya that showcases dozens of artists performing Okinawan popular music and *min'yō* (folk songs) during the four to five hour long live show, indicates the popularity of Okinawan music among the Japanese audience. At the 2007 Ryukyu Festival held in October at the Kyosera Dome in Taisho Ward, China Sadao stood on stage and gave a speech at the opening. China is a renowned Okinawan *min'yō* musician and also composer, manager and producer of many famous Okinawan popular and *min'yō* singers and groups, including the famous Nenes. On stage, China ceremoniously stood in his formal *haori* dress, kowtowed to the audience and thanked them for the success of the Ryukyu Festival. He said:

Who could have imagined that this [Ryukyu Festival] would have become such a success? All thanks to all of you who have gathered here...May this success not stop now but continue for one year, ten years, no, a hundred, thousand, ten thousand years...! (He then recited the names of famous senior Okinawan musicians, ending with his master, Noborikawa Seijin). Now this is not simply an Okinawa Boom...Okinawa has become a brand. This is a time of Okinawan Dream. Thanks to all of you...

For someone who also participated in the very first Ryukyu Festivals in 1974 and 1975, devoted himself in the promotion of Okinawan popular and *min'yō* music for Japanese recognition, and played the central role in the renewed Ryukyu Festival of the 1990s and 2000s as a producer and manager, his somewhat hyperbolic praise and thanks to the Japanese audience was probably not lip service, but genuine appreciation. Musicians and performing artists like him

had come a long way to let Japanese know the excellence of Okinawan culture, and their lifetime efforts were finally being rewarded.

However, the fact that this celebration of the Japanese acceptance and recognition of Okinawan music, and that the intimidating confrontation between Okinawan activists and Japanese right-wingers at the Osaka District Court happened in the same city, within a couple of weeks, in a location only twenty minutes or so away, begs a deeper observation of this gap between the newly emerging acceptance of Okinawan cultural difference and the continuing social and historical exclusion. What does it mean that Okinawan music and dance, as the most salient element of the Okinawa Boom, is accepted and celebrated by Japanese?

### ***Okinawan Min'yō and Eisā***

Dance and music, as bodily expressions, can be the medium of communicating diverse meanings. In the context of ethnic relations in Japan, Okinawan dance and music were often used as markers with which to recognize, or conversely, express, Okinawan difference vis-à-vis the Japanese. Music and dance are cultural, and detachable markers of ethnicity, unlike physical (physiological) markers of “race,” for example, skin color, facial structure, and physique. One can choose to display or to hide the markers of dance and music, by simply not performing them or keeping them isolated in a certain time and space. At the same time, they have been embodied and ingrained in one’s senses and bodily movement through practice over time. Like language, one cannot simply pick them up or drop them overnight because one hopes to do so, and there will be noticeable differences depending on how long, how extensively, and/or and how intensively one has been exposed to, and has practiced, them. Like language, they are not inherent but inculcated over time, to make them appear inherent to people who can perform music and dance with full proficiency, as if there is a certain essence – the essence of a culture, the essence of a people – that resides within them.

Among different genres of Okinawan music and dance, I especially focused on Okinawan *min'yō* (folk songs) and *eisā* (Okinawan collective drum dance).<sup>2</sup> I will discuss several aspects of these two, as music and dance in general, and as specific genres, that make them significant in understanding the politics of difference in Japan.

Moreover, Okinawan *min'yō* and *eisā* originated from premodern, rural Okinawa, and hence have been widely considered to be “traditional” or “folk” culture. Such characteristics make them effective vehicles with which Okinawans express their distinctive identity in terms of Japanese. They have been effective in expressing Okinawan difference because until the 1980s, ethnic and social minorities in Japan, of which Okinawans are one part, were marked by their cultural differences, their language, name, clothing, and lifestyle, rather than their phenotypic differences. Specifically tied to the land and tradition of Okinawa, noticeably different, partially ingrained (or ingrainable) but also detachable markers, which Okinawans wanted to hide when downplaying their ethnic and cultural difference, and display when emphasizing it.

Whereas these two genres, originally and in the popular imagination “folk” genres, played a significant role in the construction of Okinawa/Okinawans as a distinct culture and a people, based on some kind of primordial essence, in reality both went through significant modification in the twentieth century. These have included changes such as mass-mediation, commodification, and the emergence of individual authorship (as opposed to authorless, orally transmitted traditions), and they have been partly detached from their local, traditional context, and evolved into contemporary performing arts, while retaining their “traditional,” “folk” outlooks. In the 1970s, groups of Okinawan cultural activists in Osaka adopted them as their means of expression. When they did so to challenge the hegemony of the ideology of Japan’s ethnic homogeneity, *eisā* and *min'yō* had new, subversive meanings of subculture. However, such subversive power was temporary and faced the risk of being coopted by mainstream society, and in fact they became popular among Japanese audiences during the Okinawa Boom

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<sup>2</sup> *Min'yō* (literally “songs of people,” “songs of folk”) is a generic term regardless of the place of origin. Thus there can be many categories and subcategories of *min'yō* depending on geographical division and distribution. One can refer to Japanese *min'yō* of broader cultural region (Tohoku *min'yō*), or of a particular prefecture (Osaka *min'yō*) or of a particular town (Kusatsu *min'yō*). And Okinawan *min'yō* similarly can be further divided into Okinawan *min'yō* (originating from the Okinawan Islands), Miyako *min'yō*, and Yaeyama *min'yō*, and each can be subdivided into smaller category by the island of origin.

in the 1990s, and Japanese increasingly participated in *eisā* and *min'yō* as performers and audience.

Once in the realm of popular culture, *eisā* and *min'yō* have been sites in which the diverse relations of power have been critically articulated, contested and negotiated (Fiske 1989; Hebdige 1979). However, conflicts and tensions do not necessarily occur in a binary fashion, and the way in which individuals and groups get involved is not predetermined by one's external position, for example by ethnicity. Commercialization and political commitment are not incompatible but symbiotic, and appropriations and influences occur in intersecting ways (Gopinath 2005, 29; Gilroy 1993). Some minority entrepreneurs or activists may take advantage of existing stereotypes in pursuing their goals (for comparative cases, see Prins 2002; McLagan 2002; Root 1996), while some audiences from the dominant group may reject the dominant or intended meanings and open new, imaginative, and potentially political spaces (Lutz and Collins 1993). Even cases of misguided appropriation may indicate the appropriators' countercultural imaginary (Root 1996) in another domain, as in the case of gay Japanese male appropriation of *eisā*. And finally, there are possibilities for the "new cultural politics of difference" beyond essentialist notions of identity (West 1990), in which people find coalitions beyond ethnic or geographical affiliation that are instead based on common or "translatable" social circumstances (Shohat and Stam 1994; Gopinath 2005).

In short, popular culture is inevitably ambiguous and ambivalent in its political effects (Robertson 1998a, 25-46). In this study, I explore how *eisā* and *min'yō* have been viewed and put into practice differently by different actors at different times and spaces throughout the modern history of Japan, especially in Osaka, and what meanings were constructed by the actors.

### **Min'yō**

In Japan, *min'yō*, literally "songs of the folk" or "songs of people," broadly refers to songs of non-elite people that are supposed to have been passed on by oral tradition, as opposed to elite music such as court music, or to contemporary songs that have known composers or writers, and often have been created and distributed through the mass-mediated market. Okinawan *min'yō* is the Okinawan local variation of *min'yō*. Although the term *min'yō* is colloquially used by its modern-day practitioners without questioning its meaning, it only started being used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by folklorists such as Yanagita

Kunio. It was possibly a direct translation from the English term “folk songs” or from the German term “volksleid,” and before that time *min’yō* songs had been called “songs” (*uta*) or “songs of the village” (*riyō*) – meaning the songs of unrefined commoners who lived in villages (Matsumura 2002, 81-83; Takahashi 2002). The distinction of *min’yō* from non-*min’yō* vocal genres is thus ideological, and arose with the emergence of the concept of the folk. Although *min’yō* was exalted by folklorists and later *min’yō* practitioners and fans as the songs of ordinary people, it was also always looked down upon as vulgar, unrefined plebian music that lacked forms and artistry, since before modern times. However, historical evidence suggests that there were continual exchanges between Okinawan court vocal music, currently called “classical music” (*koten*) and non-elite songs during the Ryukyu Kingdom period, as certain songs used in state rituals, to commemorate the royal ancestors and/or to pray for bountiful harvests, were adopted by commoners who attended those rituals and passed on and modified through oral tradition, while certain popular commoner’s songs were collected, officially recorded, musically refined, and performed in the Ryukyu court. Thus the repertoires of Okinawan classic and *min’yō* overlap to a certain extent, albeit with stylistic differences in the same songs, and the distinction between elite and non-elite music is not always clear-cut.

*Min’yō* covers various types of songs that have had diverse functions in everyday life, and have various styles in tunes and lyrics, vocalizations, and instruments, a variety also present in Okinawan *min’yō*. Due to the distinctive history of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Okinawa *min’yō* has some local characteristics. Songs that are now called *min’yō* emerged from the everyday lives of non-elite people, and thus have different styles, such as lullabies, children’s songs, love songs, labor songs, prayers, and celebration songs. They also have local variations such as differences in rhythm, lyrics, and singing styles, as they emerged from dozens of Okinawan islands that had different natural environments, cultures, and lifestyles. However, scholars and practitioners of Okinawan *min’yō* most commonly associate Okinawa *min’yō* with an Okinawan tradition called *mōashibi*, which translates to “field play” (Matsumura 2002; Teruya 2003). This refers to nightly entertainment gatherings in rural villages that occurred after a long day of field labor, in which unmarried young men and women gathered at a private corner near the village, and chatted, drank, sang, and danced until very late. Romantic relationships ensued during or after *mōashibi*, which was the most common way of marriage for rural Okinawans. Thus *mōashibi* was certainly a significant part of rural Okinawan communities in terms of social

cohesion and reproduction. But at the same time, the spontaneous gathering of young local villagers after their daily labor, the pleasure of communal singing and dancing, and the consequent romances and reproduction of families are all significant parts of the imagery of romanticized Okinawan life and Okinawan *min'yō*.

Another important part of *mōashibi* was the presence of singer-sanshin accompanists. Like other participants of *mōashibi*, they were simply young villagers who were particularly talented in singing and playing sanshin, the three-stringed instrument unique to Okinawa. On Okinawa Island these accompanists were most commonly men, but they were sometimes women in other areas such as on Amami Island. The transmission of songs and sanshin playing from older singers to younger, as well as the creation and modification of songs is believed to have occurred at *mōashibi*, and later on at other village events or private gatherings such as family celebrations. The romanticized Okinawan term *utasa* (“singing man”),<sup>3</sup> which refers to accomplished *min'yō* singers, draws on this imagery of village musicians who were raised in and blessed by community life in its natural life cycle. Although *mōashibi* was subjected to improvement as an outdated, uncivilized, and immoral practice during the modernization and assimilation period following Okinawa’s annexation, it survived in rural parts of Okinawa until after the end of Pacific War, and because of the criticism of *mōashibi* as immoral and delinquent, the *mōashibi* tradition was conversely romanticized and exalted as a symbol of native Okinawa culture in Okinawan cultural nationalism (Teruya 2003).

In its current popular form as a performance genre, Okinawan *min'yō* is commonly performed by either a single or a few singers, usually accompanied by the singer’s sanshin playing. Choruses have become common in the large-scale performances and recitals of *min'yō* schools. Sanshin, the three-stringed instrument with its base covered by snakeskin, is the single most important, indispensable instrument that accompanies *min'yō* singing. The sanshin was derived from the *sanxian*, a Chinese three-stringed instrument bigger than the sanshin, and it was the predecessor of the Japanese shamisen, a three-stringed instrument of various sizes and shapes, usually covered with dog or cat skin, which was transmitted and modified along the premodern East Asian trade route. Usually the sanshin is played alone, although on bigger stages it is additionally accompanied by an Okinawan drums, and much less frequently other

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<sup>3</sup> The immediate image the term gives is that of a lone male musician, although *utasa* (“song” and “person”) is a gender neutral term and not number specific.

instruments such as Okinawan lutes or Okinawan flutes adopted from *koten*. Modern *min'yō* figures such as Fukubaru Choki, Teruya Rinsuke, and Noborikawa Seijin also experimented with the use of non-Asian instruments such as the banjo and the violin (Nakama 2007; Higashi 2003), and Noborikawa even invented an instrument inspired by the sanshin and the banjo called a *rokushin* (Noborikawa 2002). In contemporary *min'yō*, the scope of the lyrics has come to include the modern experiences of Okinawans, such as immigration, poverty, and wartime experiences. Sometimes Japanese popular songs were adapted to the Okinawan *min'yō* style and became more popular as Okinawan *min'yō* than in the original, such as the famous song “A Nineteen’s Spring” (*Jūku no haru*).

There are various singing styles, but certain vocalizations, such as the very high-pitched, nasal singing common in female singing, or the low, grainy voice common in male singing are some of the most common features.<sup>4</sup> It is also rhythmically diverse, from very slow songs which require the singer to control his or her breath rigorously, to very fast songs, called *hayabiki* (fast plucking of the sanshin), which call for the prowess of the singer/sanshin player to manage very fast sanshin playing while singing. Lyrics are usually in Okinawan dialect, however, contemporary *min'yō* songs that were composed or modified by known songwriters sometimes have Japanese lyrics or a mixture of Japanese and Okinawan lyrics.

Although I have introduced the basic, common features of Okinawan *min'yō*, the scope of Okinawan *min'yō* is much wider and more diverse than I can do justice in a brief description. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that in Okinawan *min'yō*, despite its various styles and historical background that suggest that Okinawan *min'yō* was never purely non-elite, spontaneous, or Okinawan, there is a strong notion of “the folk” or “people” of Okinawa, which plays a significant role in the politics of identity and authenticity, as will be illustrated in the ethnographic cases in the following chapters.

### ***Eisā*: The Dance for the Ancestors, and its Aesthetics**

The original context of *eisā* requires additional explanation, as it pertains to the construction of identity and communality that emerged through its practice in my research, even after *eisā* was detached from its original context. *Eisā* was originally performed in rural villages

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<sup>4</sup> To a lesser degree, there are opposite styles in female and male singing.



in Okinawa Island to honor the souls of ancestors who are believed to visit their descendants during the *bon* holiday, or *shichigwachi* (the seventh month) as it is called in Okinawa, as the holiday occurs from the fifteenth to the seventeenth day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar.<sup>5</sup> The name *eisā* is believed to have originated from Buddhist chants to comfort the souls of the dead. Here, it is important to note that in the context of Okinawan rural villages, ancestors were perceived as the collective ancestors of all the villagers, rather than individual ancestors of individual families (Okinawa Zentō Eisā Matsuri Jikkō Inkaei 1998).

Rural villages that had spontaneously formed around the seventh century largely kept their social structures as the basic units of social life, relatively self-sufficient and isolated from each other, even after they were incorporated into the Ryukyu Kingdom. There was a long history of village endogamy, a cognatic descent system, relative isolation, and travel regulations for commoners under the rule of the Ryukyu Kingdom, where a regional community was coterminous with a kinship community, whereas Ryukyu's aristocratic class moved toward a more exclusive patrilineal descent to limit the qualifications for the inheritance of social status and economic resources. Village tombs were a very common burial practice until the seventeenth century in rural Okinawa, in which residents of the village collectively used the same graves for centuries, by placing the bones of the dead in vaults made of coral or naturally-formed limestone caves near the sea. Sacred places in and near the village were associated with the founders of the villages, and village "gods" who oversaw the safety and prosperity of the villagers were conflated with ancestors. The notion of clearly defined individual genealogy was a relatively new concept, institutionalized among Ryukyuan aristocrats in the eighteenth century, and spread among commoners and across rural regions only in the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century (Cho 2000).

Thus in rural Okinawa, where *eisā* originated, ancestors were not tied to their offspring simply by descent, but complexly tied to them by shared land, shared history, and shared genealogy as collectives in which "one village was one clan" (*ichisonraku ichimon*) (Torikoe 1944), and *eisā* as an ancestral ritual and village entertainment was fundamentally an event that confirmed the community as "us" in more than one way. Every year villagers renewed their ties with ancestors by participating in the collective honoring of ancestors as performers or audience.

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<sup>5</sup> Okinawa Island is the largest and most inhabited island of the Ryukyu Islands, and has been the political and historical center of Okinawa.

The audience, children, grownups, and the elderly, who were also past performers or future performers, connected with the performers of the present by watching and cheering, and in doing so, the intense aural, visual, and sensory stimuli was accumulated in each villager's lived experience by annual repetition. This is still the case in certain villages in Okinawa, where *eisā* is still performed as an ancestral ritual (Nelson 2008; Okinawa Zentō Eisā Matsuri Jikkō Iinkai 1998).

In traditional village *eisā*, the ties between the ancestors for whom *eisā* is performed, and offspring who perform *eisā*, are composed of descent (in historically endogamous rural villages), and the shared space-time of the village and its history, even if the land itself might currently be physically severed from its original occupants due to displacement by US military bases (see Nelson 2008 for an ethnographic case). Thus *eisā* has been traditionally significant to maintain and renew the sense of communality in the given social group.

However, the reason *eisā* became popular outside of village ritual owes more to its aesthetic. *Eisā* is a collective drum dance performed to Okinawan *min'yō* tunes, played and sung by sanshin accompanists called *jikata*. Dancers consist of either exclusively young males or young males and females. The male dancers, in showy costumes that imitate those of warriors in the Ryukyu Kingdom period, usually play different kinds of Okinawan drums and shout in coordination while dancing, exhibiting almost acrobatic moves. Male bare hand dancer moves are masculine and reminiscent of the traditional Okinawan martial art, karate. Female dancers, if they are part of the group, perform a hand dance (*teodori*) with their bare hands, while holding a small fan or pinwheel, or small Okinawan instruments like *samba* or *yotsutake*, highlighting their femininity and grace.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the warrior-like male costumes, female dancers don a short, simple, unassuming gown made with Okinawan printed fabric, tied with a simple cloth belt, which is reminiscent of peasant girls of rural village.

The dance in and of itself is a spectacle. The deafening sounds of drumbeats and coordinated shouts, and majestic and graceful moves of young dancers, all orchestrated by seasoned *jikata* accompanists – its audio and visual impact grabs the audience and makes them part of the dance. *Chimu dondon* (it makes your heart throb) is a common Okinawan expression

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<sup>6</sup> *Samba* and *yotsutake* are small, castanet-like hand-held percussion instruments of Okinawa. The *samba* is made with three wooden plates strung together, and *yotsutake* is made with four separate bamboo pieces.

when one describes *eisā*. And such aesthetic qualities of *eisā* are the main reason behind its popularity beyond its original scope, rather than its meaning in ancestral worship.

The symbolic meaning of *eisā* as the dance for ancestors, or dance for the dead, and the aesthetic qualities of *eisā* as a collective drum dance, have travelled different paths when *eisā* was taken out of its original context, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Because of this, when *eisā* is practiced and performed outside of its original context by different actors, different emphases are given to the meaning of the dance, sometimes creating tensions between different readings of it. Where some might see the distortion or corruption of the once-sacred dance, others might see creative adaptation. In following chapters, I will discuss how these different qualities come into play for different actors who have adopted *eisā* for their mode of expression, and how they have interpreted them.

### **The Researcher's Positionality**

This study partly grew out of my desire to understand ethnic relations in Japan, and more broadly, the politics of difference in human society, desires which formed throughout my lifetime before they took on a more academic and anthropological outlook. My father was a *zainichi* Korean, whose life path had been shaped by all of the historical and social forces I have discussed in my dissertation. He smuggled himself into Japan in the 1930s as a teenager, to escape the poverty that Japanese colonialism brought on his farming family, he survived the harshest times for Koreans in Japan, struggling with not only poverty but also outright discrimination against Koreans, experiences which were not different from what the Okinawans in my dissertation experienced first-hand. Despite all the obstacles, he became a successful businessman. And yet he sent me from Japan to Korea at age two, to grow up as a “proper Korean,” which means that as a Korean, ethnicity, nationality, culture, and language all align in me, unlike some of my *zainichi* Korean relatives. He thought that my life would be better off that way, not being a second-class citizen who would continually question her presence in the place where she grew up and lived.

But his decision and its consequences made me ask similar questions about what might have been, only from the other side of the sea, where the myth of a monoethnic state and cultural homogeneity and intolerance towards those who were deemed “different” was no less strong. As

I grew up in Korea, I watched his life and those of my extended family in Japan as ethnic minorities, and the meanings of Korean diaspora for them became more complex and diversified, from their sense of loss, oppression, and longing for “home,” to a sense of rootlessness and uncertainty, to complete assimilation, to the development of a new sense of being diasporic Korean. The sensibility that was cultivated in me was transferred when I encountered the histories and lives of Okinawans during my graduate school years in Korea, as I accompanied my then-advisor Professor Kyung-Soo Chun on his research trips to Okinawa as an assistant and interpreter. As I decided to study Okinawans in mainland diaspora, I found the opportunity to look at minority politics in Japan in a larger context than simply observing the single minority population that I was most intimate with, namely *zainichi* Koreans, and I also acquired a more distanced, and yet partly invested viewpoint to observe and interact with minority individuals and groups during my research.

Although I do not and cannot specify every single moment that my positionality affected my interpretation of data, I am aware that it has guided me throughout my research and shaped this dissertation to a significant degree, from my interpretation of happenings in the field site to specific questions I asked or courses of actions I took at specific research moments, to my relationship with my research subjects, which I have tried to the best of my ability to support with analytic rigor and previous academic findings.

### **Mapping of Chapters**

Among the variety of groups and individuals I encountered during my field research, I will mainly discuss in this dissertation four groups that illustrate aspects of cultural activism and/or cultural appropriation: two Okinawan-based cultural activist groups; one Okinawan restaurant-bar *and min'yō* school that mainly hosts Japanese; and an *eisā* group of a sexual minority, who are mostly Japanese gay males. These four cases of cultural activism and/or the cultural appropriation of Okinawan music and culture illustrate that it is not a single axis of difference, namely ethnicity (Japanese and Okinawan), but multiple intersecting factors such as socio-economic class, geography, generation (age), and in the last case, sexuality and gender, that affect the different ways in which people practice Okinawan music and dance and construct different meanings around it. Moreover, although the two dominant aspects of Okinawan music

and dance, cultural activism and cultural appropriation, seem largely oppositional, and are often considered oppositional by some of the actors, a closer look reveals that elements of cultural activism and cultural appropriation are inextricably entangled in actual practice, through the intricate network of participants.

In the following chapters, I compare the two most salient aspects of the practice of Okinawan music and dance. Part One deals with Okinawan music and dance practice as cultural activism, in resistance to ethnic discrimination and cultural assimilation.

In Chapter 2, I explore the history of Okinawan immigration in Osaka, to illustrate that the Okinawan community in Taisho constitutes a mosaic piece of the socio-economic-spatial configuration of inequality in Osaka. Okinawan immigration to Japan started after Japan's annexation of Okinawa in the late nineteenth century, and heavily increased in the 1920s and 1930s due to the increased need of labor in the industrialization of the Japanese nation-state, and the economic collapse of Okinawa. Okinawan communities formed starting in the 1920s in fast-industrializing areas of Osaka, especially near the Osaka port. Along with Japan's historical social minorities (Burakumin, day laborers, and the poor) and the new colonial subjects (Korean immigrants), Okinawans were situated at the social and geographical margins of the modernizing and industrializing city of Osaka.

In Osaka, Okinawans occupied a lower socio-economic rank and areas less desirable for residence. The conflation of socio-economic, ethno-cultural, and geographical marginalization constructed Okinawan identity as a shameful one. In the 1930s, elite Okinawans led the Lifestyle Betterment Movement to avoid Okinawan discrimination, in which they urged Okinawans to voluntarily assimilate and to eradicate all visible Okinawan differences. This deepened the socio-economic stratification among Okinawans, and led to the ghettoization of poor Okinawans. Kubun-gwa, the Swamp," was a vivid example of stratification among Okinawans. Located in the middle of Taisho between the 1950s and the 1970s, this area was known as "the Okinawan Slum" due to its high concentration of poor Okinawans. Personal accounts of diasporic Okinawans reveal the stark difference between life inside and outside of Kubun-gwa, how Okinawan identity was conflated with poverty and shame in their minds, and how poverty was seen as the utmost manifestation of Okinawan discrimination. A comparative look reveals that this overlapping stigma was not unique to Okinawans, but a common condition across social and ethnic minority groups in Osaka, groups which constituted "the crescent of minorities"

(Mizuuchi 2003) along the southern half of the Osaka loopline, thereby constructing the image of the exotic yet dangerous Minami (South) in the socioscape of Osaka. In the postwar period, Osaka saw the second wave of Okinawan labor immigrants that emerged in the 1950s and peaked in the 1970s, of young, single, undereducated workers who were recruited as a cheap labor source for Japan's postwar reconstruction. They faced dehumanizing treatment on the mainland, including exploitative working conditions, anti-Okinawan discrimination, poverty, and isolation. Some individuals developed various mental or social problems that were referred to as "collective employment disease," which led to the cultural activism discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 explores the Gajimaru Club, the Okinawan cultural activist group. The Gajimaru Club was formed in 1975 by young, single, disenfranchised Okinawan workers. They came to Osaka and the Kansai region through collective employment arrangements during Japan's postwar high industrial growth in the 1960s and 1970s, and they suffered dehumanizing working and living conditions, such as exploitation, ethnic prejudice and discrimination, which led to an internalized sense of inferiority, and isolation, which led many Okinawans to symbolic (and sometimes literal) deaths.

The Gajimaru Club mobilized *eisā* and *min'yō* as a means of self-empowerment and assertion of Okinawan difference. By displaying their cultural difference in public, the Gajimaru Club tried to make themselves visible against the forceful assimilation that erased and silenced their difference, a strategy that emerged across minority groups in Osaka during this period. Also by adopting *eisā*, a dance considered to be a low, shameful Okinawan custom by elite Okinawans, they developed a collective identity as working class, diasporic Okinawans that connected them with underprivileged Okinawans from earlier immigration.

They started the Taisho Eisā Festival for themselves and for other diasporic Okinawans, and established an outreach station (Kansai Okinawa Bunko) to educate the general public and to collaborate with other marginalized groups. The popularity of *eisā* and the Festival grew over time, partly due to their success in activism and the community's support, and partly due to the influence of Okinawa Boom that started in the 1990s. However, as the appropriation of the event by Japanese enthusiasts increased, Gajimaru's reaction turned from an initial welcome to ambivalence over the Yamatoization of their practice: in their view, Japanese appropriation undermined the Gajimaru Club's core principles, namely social justice for Okinawans and the solidarity of Okinawan groups and communities, and it deteriorated the authenticity of *eisā* and

reduced it into mere entertainment, stripping it of its meanings as the dance for the ancestors and as the symbol of Okinawan identity and communality.

To counteract the negative effects of Japanese appropriation and retain the authenticity of their practice, the Gajimaru Club took up the following approaches in the 2000s: they became more exclusivist in membership and leadership, putting Okinawan descent and embodied culture at their core; they continued to educate Festival visitors about Okinawa's asymmetrical relationship with the Japanese state in the past and present, while resisting the pressure of commercialization; they retained their alliance with other ethnic and/or social minority groups, as one of these marginalized groups; and they reinterpreted the Okinawa-Japan relationship in a broader sense of the political economy of the Japanese state and society beyond ethnic difference.

Chapter 4 explores Taisho Okinawa Children's Club (TOCC), another cultural activist club formed in 1978 that used Okinawan *min'yō* and *eisā* as the means to promote Okinawan identity and the self-esteem of young diasporic Okinawans. Inspired by the Liberation Education Movement (LEM), it targeted school age children of working class Okinawan immigrants. In the 1970s discrimination against Okinawans was still in its height, and the stigmatization of Okinawan cultural expression, and its association with poverty and low social status affected Okinawan children who were born and grew up in Osaka. They developed a sense of inferiority, humiliation, and fear of exposure as Okinawans. They felt antipathy to their ethnic origins, felt alienated from their elders as from mainstream Japanese, and felt a sense of deficiency from being neither Japanese nor Okinawan enough.

The organizers of TOCC taught children Okinawan *min'yō* and *eisā* as a means of teaching them about the Okinawan language, history, and culture, thereby narrowing the gap between generations. Children's performance in the Okinawan community brought out emotional responses from grownups, and opened up conversations across generations, resulting in self-reflexivity on their Okinawan identity. Also, children studied various social issues, such as discrimination, war, and colonialism, which allowed their Okinawan identity to become an entry point to understanding larger social problems. As the LEM had emphasized, such engagement of the whole community, the respect of children's autonomy, and exposure to larger social issues had empowering and transformative effects,

However, as living conditions for Okinawans in Taisho changed over the following decades, the Club's organizers moved away from ostensible LEM strategies. They took a more accommodating approach for their members who were now not necessarily either Okinawans or underprivileged, in an attempt to reach out to so called "Okinawa Lovers" and guide them to see beyond the stereotypical representations presented by the Okinawa Boom. However, such attempts proved hard to realize, and the Club faced the criticism that such a turn was too much of a concession, to the point of losing its purpose.

However, I argue that the Club's continuity with its past is carried on at another level. Voluntarism, spontaneity, fun and excitement, love of art and music, and a focus on families and community are values that are continuously emphasized as "Okinawan" values, regardless of the ethnic identity of members, and it gives "being Okinawan" new meanings that go beyond ethnic or cultural distinctions.

The chapters in Part Two deal with the aspect of cultural appropriation of Okinawan music and dance by Japanese, especially after the cultural phenomenon called the Okinawa Boom in the 1990s. Chapter 5 examines the Okinawa Boom – the Japanese celebration and appropriation of Okinawan difference – in a broader context, including analyses of media and popular texts (movie, drama, internet). I discuss the increased Japanese appropriation of Okinawan music and its effects, and Okinawan criticism of Japanese appropriation. In the Okinawa Boom, Okinawa is imagined as "the islands of comfort/healing" (*iyashi no shima*), where carefree, laid-back Okinawans live a happy life in a tropical paradise, devoid of hardship and conflict, extend unconditional hospitality to visitors, and cultural and natural difference is accentuated and celebrated.

For self-proclaimed Okinawaphiles, their interest in Okinawa is articulated in pathological terms, as an addiction-like attraction that eventually develops into desire of assimilation (into Okinawan culture). Such Japanese enthusiasts' knowledge and notions of Okinawa tend to be limited and caricaturistic, often expressed in the form of keywords. Okinawan responses to Japanese appropriators are ambivalent, ranging from welcome and pride, to unease and open indignation. Critics say that the Okinawa Boom is a form of cultural exploitation, an "unconscious colonialism" (Nomura 2005) which essentializes Okinawan difference, covers up the history and reality of Okinawan marginalization, and serves the voyeuristic and escapist desire of Japanese.



In the latter half of the chapter, I focus on the particular appeal of Okinawan music to Japanese appropriators. Okinawan music is central in Okinawan cultural identity, and also in Japanese imagination as influenced by the Okinawa Boom. It is believed that Okinawa music, especially *min'yō*, has an organic, inseparable relationship to its culture, climate, and people, and thus epitomizes authentic life and selfhood and embodied historicity, as opposed to fossilized Japanese *min'yō* and to commercialized Japanese popular music. Like the tourist in MacCannell's book (1976), Japanese appropriators pursue the accessible exotic and seek authentic life and selfhood at the same time, paradoxically hoping that the alienation and fatigue of the self in postindustrial society can be remedied by consuming and performing someone else's (i.e. Okinawan) music. Japanese attraction to Okinawan music and dance (especially *eisā*) has resulted in the rise of facilities that provide Okinawan music (such as Okinawan music restaurant-bars, Okinawa *min'yō* classes and coterie clubs) and Okinawa cultural events, both in Okinawa and on the mainland. While it means increased opportunities for Okinawan musicians, there are voices of concern that it undermines the autonomy of Okinawan musicians, drives out less well-off Okinawan audiences, and modifies Okinawan music to the extent that its authenticity is compromised.

Chapter 6 ethnographically explores an example of the Japanese appropriation of Okinawa *min'yō* in the context of hobby and entertainment activities, looking at an Okinawa *min'yō* class and Okinawan restaurant-bar in Taisho. As the Okinawa Boom arose, Taisho Ward became an accessible, shortcut source of so-called Okinawan culture, which provided its Okinawan residents with means of livelihood, and allowed them to reevaluate their culture and identity and to reposition themselves in relation to Japanese as well as other Okinawans.

Japanese Okinawa lovers (*min'yō* students) are impassioned, in-depth hobbyists who pursue the experience of difference through their bodily engagement (learning to perform *min'yō* and *sanshin*) and interpersonal engagement with Okinawan hosts (*min'yō* teachers). Okinawan hosts accommodate them, by offering them experiences full of the tangible cultural differences between Okinawa and Japan (e.g. tales of Okinawa, Okinawan food and drink, Okinawan hospitality), backed up by the fame of certain Okinawan music figures made available by the Okinawa Boom. Okinawan hosts rely on and reinforce the Japanese stereotypical view of Okinawa, and avoid invoking the charged memories of Okinawan marginalization, by omission or neutralization (Japanese responsibility is made invisible). These entrepreneurs are not naively

taken advantage of by Japanese, nor simply driven by material gain, but act with their own agency and perspective.

In this setting, Japanese students pursue further authentic Okinawan experiences, and try to distinguish themselves from generic, superficial Okinawa fans. They attempt “Okinawan Play” (cf. “Indian Play” in Deloria 1998), by emulating their Okinawan hosts, and also by blurring the borders between Okinawan and Japanese. Some individuals attempt to tap further into authentic experience by getting more deeply (or intrusively) engaged with their Okinawan host, or his Okinawan sponsor (*min'yō* master), which can create tension even among Japanese students, let alone being criticized by Okinawan activists.

I discuss the fact that Japanese students and Okinawan hosts are in a symbiotic relationship, in which the Okinawan hosts endorse the authenticity of the practice of Japanese students, while Japanese students provide their hosts with the recognition, respect, and authority that they might lack among their fellow Okinawans, thus empowering them to a certain extent. However, this reciprocal relationship is a precarious one, as Japanese fans can move on and find a more accommodating host, or even go independent, which confirms the criticism of Okinawan cultural activists that cultural appropriation can and does reinforce the exploitative relationship between Japanese and Okinawans.

In the last chapter, I explore Tingāra, a gay men's *eisā* group, and discuss another dimension of politics of difference, namely that of sexual difference and emergent gay subjectivities. This group's nearly total invisibility until the end of my research paradoxically reveals how strong the implicit heteronormative pressure on sexual minorities is, despite the lack of legal regulations and obvious oppression of non-conforming sexualities and gender, and the abundance and seeming freedom of non-normative sexual and gender expressions in Japanese entertainment and media.

Tingāra's men, predominantly Japanese individuals, participate in the club's activities primarily to socialize with other gay men. Using code-switching of various degrees, from heterosexual male mannerisms to campy expression of homosexuality and transgenderism, Tingāra members navigate across domains of visibility and invisibility. Spatial distinctions, physical (public and private spaces) and virtual (Internet and offline), play an important role in such navigation to create a communal space for them, while rendering them invisible to (and thus protected from) mainstream society, safely hidden in plain sight. They playfully appropriate

*okama* (a conflation of homosexual and transgender) stereotypes in self-mocking *homoneta* (“homo stuff”) jokes, to create bonds between members, what I call a homosocial confirmation of homosexual identity (cf. *Nightwork*, Allison 1994), and also to build alliances across sexuality with knowing, supportive heterosexual individuals.

Tingāra’s case provides significant insights when considering the dichotomies created by the other informants in previous chapters and also by myself: Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan; pre- vs. post-Okinawa Boom; activist approach vs. hobbyist approach; and identity assertion-confirmation vs. entertainment. Tingāra complicates the dichotomy of cultural activism (by Okinawans) and cultural appropriation (by Japanese), as in this case *eisā* has been appropriated by Japanese hobbyists, who happen to be gays, and used in the context of LGBTQ activism. This became possible because *eisā* had been decontextualized, and therefore was available to non-Okinawans, as the result of the Okinawa Boom, which is the main criticism of those who characterize the Okinawa Boom as cultural exploitation. Moreover, Tingāra’s indifference to authentic Okinawanness, and their unabashed modification of *eisā* conversely illuminates what is at stake in the practice of Okinawan music and dance for Okinawan cultural activists and Japanese appropriators. Tingāra’s use of *eisā* is strikingly similar to that of early Gajimaru members, as they use *eisā* as a means of bodily expression of communality with fellow gay men, having fun together, which was the main strength of early Gajimaru Club.

In the Kansai Rainbow Parade, Osaka’s biggest LGBTQ event, Tingāra walks and dances as part of the procession. Their participation reveals how complex and uncertain individual member’s attitudes are regarding the increasing public presence of self-identified gay males, and the precarious position they occupy in “coming out” halfway. The original meaning of *eisā* as the dance for the dead/ancestors, which has created a new “us” in a diasporic setting for cultural activist groups, is unexpectedly reenacted when members find in the parade an opportunity to mourn for and honor anonymous gay men who suffered from societal negation and self-alienation. I argue that despite individual uncertainties and ambivalences, such experience of the collective performance of *eisā* and their interpretations of it are transformative for them, towards the collective gay identity that is in the making.

### **Note on pseudonyms**

In this dissertation, I have extensively used pseudonyms for individuals and groups to protect their privacy. I have only used the real names of individuals and groups in cases where they already have appeared under their real names in publications and interviews that I quote in my dissertation.

## **PART I: DISCRIMINATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM**

### **CHAPTER II**

#### **Okinawans in Osaka: The Social and Geographical Configuration of Inequality and the Overdetermination of Stigma**

This chapter examines the history of Okinawan immigration in Osaka from the beginning of the twentieth century. The development of Okinawan settlements in Osaka reveals how Okinawan immigrants were recruited to provide cheap labor for Japan's industrialization and nation-state building process. Along with groups who have been Japan's historical social minorities since premodern times (Burakumin, day laborers, and the poor), and Japan's more recent colonial subjects (Koreans), Okinawans came to constitute a mosaic piece of the socio-economic-spatial configuration of inequality in Osaka. Below I will briefly discuss how Okinawans, formerly Ryukyans, emerged as a political entity in East Asia's international relations in premodern times, and how they came to lose independence and become incorporated as part of Japan.

#### **From the Ryukyu Kingdom to Okinawa Prefecture**

From 1429 to 1609, most of the Ryukyu Archipelago, the chain of islands that stretch from the island of Kyushu in Japan to Taiwan, was ruled by the Ryukyu Kingdom. The Kingdom was established when Chuzan, one of the three city-states that occupied Okinawa Island, conquered the other two, Hokuzan and Nanzan, founded a unified kingdom, and dominated the outer islands of the Archipelago, Miyako and Yaeyama Islands in the south and the Amami Islands in the north (figures 2 and 3). The Ryukyu Kingdom flourished for the next two centuries

through maritime trade with Southeast and East Asia, benefiting from its tributary relationship with China.

However, in 1609, the Ryukyu Kingdom was invaded by the Satsuma Domain of Kyushu and quickly defeated. Satsuma seized the Amami Islands as its own territory and put the rest of the Ryukyu Kingdom under its rule. Satsuma's aim was to benefit from Ryukyu's tributary trade with China, and enhance its prestige vis-à-vis the Shogunate and other domains. As the Shogunate largely closed its doors to international relations except for with Korea (via Tsushima), the Dutch (via Nagasaki), the Ainu (via Matsumae), and China (via Ryukyu and Satsuma), the Ryukyu-China relationship had an increased importance to the Tokugawa Shogunate as well as to Satsuma. From Satsuma's invasion until the late nineteenth century, the Ryukyu Kingdom was under dual subordination, while maintaining its quasi-independent status as a Kingdom. Satsuma kept up the illusion of Ryukyuan independence so that Ryukyu could continue its tributary relationship with China. Ryukyu was under the direct rule of Satsuma, a premodern Japanese state ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate, and was therefore paying tax to Satsuma and paying tribute to the Shogunate in Edo (modern Tokyo). This served the symbolic purpose of demonstrating the authority of the Shimazu family (the rulers of Satsuma) and the Tokugawa Shogunate (the central government of feudal Japan) before other domains, because the kings and ambassadors of Ryukyu took trips in long processions to Edo to pay tribute to the Shogunate, referred to as "the Ascent to Edo" (*Edo nobori*). To support this purpose, Satsuma not only kept Ryukyu's "foreign country" (*ikoku*) status, but also its cultural distance from Japan by prohibiting the import of Japanese artifacts and customs into Ryukyu which had been freely exchanged before Satsuma's invasion, and by allowing the Kingdom to retain its Chinese-influenced customs and import new customs from China (Kerr 1958; Cho 2000; *Ryūkyū Shimpō* 1989; Smits 1999).

Ryukyu's quasi-independence came to an end when the Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown and Imperial rule was restored with Emperor Meiji coming into power in 1868. The Meiji government started extensive reforms in all aspects of the state, including politics, the economy, the social structure, the military, and foreign relations, emulating European nation-states and empires of the time. In the process of "re-inventing Japan" as a modern nation-state with clearly demarcated borders, Japan first forcefully incorporated peripheral buffer zones that had had quasi-foreign status, namely Ryukyu and Hokkaido, as official parts of Japan (Morris-

Suzuki 1998, 21-28). Through the series of changes called “the Ryukyu disposition” (*Ryūkyū shobun*) (1869-1879), the Ryukyu Kingdom lost its formal independence, Ryukyu’s last King Shō Tai abdicated, and Ryukyu was annexed to Japan as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879 (Miyagi 1996, 211-232). The annexation of Ryukyu was one of the early signals of the establishment and expansion of Japan as a nation-state and imperial power, a process that produced major ethnic minority groups in Japan, namely Okinawans, Ainu, Koreans, and Chinese. As with the Ainu, Okinawan language and customs became subject to a massive assimilation campaign. These assimilationist policies were later applied to Japan’s colonies as the Japanese Empire advanced into East and Southeast Asia (Tomiyaama 1990; Field 1991; Christy 1997; Morris-Suzuki 1998; Beillevaire 1999).

### **The “Pavilion of Anthropology” in 1903**

Before I move on to discuss the history of Okinawan migration, I would like to diverge to mention an incident that occurred in Osaka that reveals the implications of the cultural and ethnic difference of newly incorporated minorities in the context of Japanese nation building and imperialism.

While Meiji Japan consolidated its peripheral zones within its borders and incorporated frontier populations as Japan’s subjects, anthropology (*jinruigaku*) was emerging as a scientific discipline. Tsuboi Shōgōro, the founder of Japanese anthropology and the first chair of the anthropology department at Tokyo Imperial University, first organized an anthropology research group in 1884 consisting of students and faculty of biology and medicine, to discuss the racial origins of Japanese and the classification of the indigenous population (Oguma 2002, 12-15, 53-58).

In 1903, the anthropology department of Tokyo Imperial University, under Tsuboi’s guidance, organized a racial exhibit called the *Jinruikan* (meaning “pavilion of anthropology”; introduced as “the building of the world natives” in English print) at the Fifth Osaka Industrial Exposition. In addition to illustrations and explanations of races worldwide, the *Jinruikan* displayed living “tribal” (*shūzoku*) individuals, such as Koreans, Ainu, Taiwanese aborigines, Ryukyuan, Javanese, Turks, and Indians in their traditional costumes. Chinese, Korean, and Okinawan officials and students who were in Osaka strongly protested such treatment of their compatriots as barbaric. Although Tsuboi removed the individuals in question from the exhibit

when the protest occurred, he continued the exhibit and defended it by asserting its academic significance. He asserted through newspaper columns the significance of anthropological knowledge of races (*jinsū*) for the public, using examples of race exhibits at the 1900 Paris Exposition that he had visited (Kinjo 2005, 29-67; Christy 1997, 141-142).

As the title of the Exposition implies, this type of exposition was frequently held in big cities of Japan during this period, to display Japan's progress as a modern nation and its capacity to have a colonizing mission. Following the Osaka Exposition, racial exhibits became a part of the regular repertoire in expositions. In the Osaka Exposition, the implication of Japanese colonialism was clear, in that most of individuals who were displayed were newly colonized (Ainu and Okinawans) or yet to be colonized (Koreans, Taiwanese aborigines, and Javanese).

In addition, Kinjo Isamu, who writes about this incident, discusses a significant point regarding Okinawan elites' responses to this incident, which set the tone for elite Okinawan attitudes towards future discrimination against Okinawans. Both the Okinawan newspaper the *Ryūkyū Shimpō* and the letter of protest expressed that they were particularly insulted by the fact that the females in the exhibit were in fact prostitutes but were presented as Ryukyuan women of high status, and that Ryukyuan were displayed with inferior and barbaric peoples such as Ainu and Taiwanese aborigines. They lamented that even though Ryukyu was now Okinawa Prefecture, a rightful member of civilized Japan like other prefectures, their customs were so drastically different that only Ryukyuan were singled out to be included in an exhibit that was little different from a freak show (*misemonogoya*) under the disguise of an academic exhibition. Kinjo criticizes this attitude of elite Okinawans as colluding with their own colonizer and discriminator, by distinguishing themselves from those who were deemed more inferior and more discriminated against, while blocking the possibility of Okinawan self-reflexivity on their place in the structure of discrimination (2005, 51-56). The logical solution of elite Okinawans at this time was a more complete Japanization, and this incident set the tone for the attitude of Okinawa elites toward Okinawan cultural difference, which was invoked when Okinawan labor immigration increased in Osaka and Kansai in the next decades, and with the Lifestyle Betterment Movement in the 1930s.





**Figure 1: Photo of the individuals displayed at the *Jinruikan* (courtesy of Kansai Okinawa Bunko)**

### **Okinawan Settlement in Osaka in the Early Twentieth Century**

The first Okinawan immigration started after the annexation of Okinawa, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1935, 15 per cent of the entire Okinawan population had emigrated to mainland Japan as well as to overseas destinations such as Taiwan, Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Mexico, Cuba, Malaya, Hawaii, Micronesia, the Philippines, and the Americas (Nakasone 2002, 17). Until the 1920s the rate of Okinawan overseas immigration to other destinations was as high as their immigration to mainland Japan, because the Japanese government encouraged overseas immigration from impoverished prefectures, and because Japan was equally foreign to Okinawans as other foreign countries were due to linguistic and cultural differences. However, immigration to mainland Japan increased when the Japanese government put restrictions on Okinawan migration, while not on those of other prefectures, based on the alleged cultural incompatibility of Okinawans with the host population in the countries Okinawans migrated, and their “lack of competence and work ethics.” After the 1924 US federal immigration act banning immigration from Japan, Okinawan movement to mainland Japan became full-scale immigration during the 1920s and the 1930s, responding to an increased need for labor in the industrializing Kansai region, the collapse of Okinawan agriculture due to the severe drop of the sugar price in the world market, and the great famine of the 1920s known to

Okinawans as “Cycad Hell” (*Sotetsu Jigoku*)<sup>7</sup> (Kaneshiro 2008, 109-111; Nakasone 2002, 16-17; Tomiyama 1990, 78-82; Shinjo 1997, 178-181).

Okinawan immigration to mainland Japan concentrated in the Hanshin Industrial Region in Kansai, especially in Osaka and Hyogo Prefectures (fig. 4). Osaka, known as “the Manchester of the Orient” by then, attracted the largest population of Okinawan immigrants, while other Kansai regions such as Wakayama, Amagasaki, Takarazuka, and Kobe, showed similar patterns of Okinawan concentration, albeit on a smaller scale (Mizuuchi 2001). Not only Okinawans, but immigrants from other impoverished rural areas in Western Japan such as Shikoku and Kyushu, and from Korea, then Japan’s colony, also concentrated in Osaka. The fast-industrializing wards surrounding what is now the Osaka Port, including Minato (literally “port”), Taisho, Nishinari, and Konohana wards, especially attracted this population. These bay-facing areas expanded towards Osaka Bay through a series of land reclamation programs from the Edo period through the mid-1920s (Osaka Toshi Kyōkai 1983; Osaka Taisho Kuyakusho 2007). In fact, almost the entire extent of what is now Taisho Ward, except for its northern tip of Sangen’ya, is comprised of reclaimed land (fig. 5).

By the late nineteenth century, this area had developed primarily to accommodate manufacturing and transportation industries for international trade. The Osaka Spinning Factory, the very first gigantic spinning factory, stood in Sangen’ya in Taisho in 1883, which initially allowed the nation to compete with other modernized, industrialized nations in the international market (Osaka Taisho Kuyakusho 2007, 37). It and other textile factories hired young female workers on a large scale, while abundant opportunities for manual labor in metal factories, timber mills, shipyards, and the port attracted male workers (Tomiyama 1989; Kaneshiro 2008).

By the 1920s, Okinawan communities called “Okinawan villages” started forming in these wards, the biggest one in Kitaokajima and Kobayashi in Taisho, especially along the Shirinashi river (fig. 5) (Mizuuchi 2001; Kaneshiro Yoshiaki 1996). The concentration of Koreans was also very high in Taisho, especially in Minamiokajima. After the end of the Pacific War these Korean residents returned to Korea, or relocated to join the Korea town in Higashinari and Ikuno Wards in the eastern part of Osaka.

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<sup>7</sup> During the 1920s, many impoverished Okinawans resorted to starch from the stems and fruit of the cycad plant to ease their starvation, and died from food poisoning from toxic residue in these plants (Shinjo 1997).

Immigrants to these industrializing areas, regardless of their places of origin, occupied a low socio-economic rank in the changing social structure of Osaka in modernizing Japan. Okinawans who grew up in Taisho during the prewar period remember that it was a mixed residence of Okinawans, Japanese, and Koreans. They also recall that their small, already crowded *nagaya* houses were jam-packed beyond their capacity with temporary Okinawan residents who depended on Okinawan families who lived there, and how they became aware of their difference as Okinawans through the eyes of Japanese neighbors and classmates. (Kaneshiro Yoshiaki 1996, 44-47).<sup>8</sup> Added to their generally inadequate living conditions, the culturally different lifestyles of Okinawans and Koreans, a significant part of which derived from their poverty and lack of social networks outside the community, created further justification for prejudice against these two groups. The widespread use of the “No Ryukyuan or Koreans” (*Ryūkyūjin Chōsenjin okotowari*) signs in rental housing and employment (Kaneshiro 2008) is a commonly told example in recounting the history of Osaka’s Okinawans, offered as evidence of the treatment of these two minority groups in Osaka between the 1920s and the 1940s.

However, it is important to note that Okinawan communities in Osaka were not a monolithic ethnic minority, but the stratification among Okinawans was developing from the outset. There had been a small number of highly educated, well-off elite Okinawans who had settled on the mainland (mostly in Tokyo, but in Osaka and Hyogo as well) much earlier than the undereducated, poor Okinawan immigrants who migrated in large numbers starting in the 1920s. A significant number of elite Okinawans had been from former aristocratic families of the Ryukyu Kingdom, and they occupied a higher social rank as doctors, industrialists, high officials, educators, and politicians. These elite (*meishi*) Okinawans came to be influential figures in Okinawan communities and organizations in Osaka. As shown earlier in the discussion of the *Jinruikan* incident at the 1903 Osaka Exposition, elite Okinawans accepted the view that Okinawan cultural difference was a sign of Okinawan inferiority and justification for discrimination early on. Partly convinced by their own experience, they believed that upward social mobility and equal treatment could be achieved by erasing Okinawan difference and becoming fully assimilated.

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<sup>8</sup> *Nagaya* houses were wooden, two-storied longhouses that accommodated several households in one building, allocating each household a very small living area and little privacy. They were common in low-income areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in large Japanese cities such as Tokyo and Osaka.

However, the process of Okinawan assimilation in Osaka was not simply about overcoming cultural difference, but was closely associated with the process by which Okinawan laborers were absorbed into the urban proletariat. In Japan's modernizing-industrializing labor market in the early twentieth century, visible markers of cultural difference, such as language, clothing, food, and customs were measured against "being Japanese," which was equated with the competent, diligent, and productive worker. When such differences were found in minority groups, not only Okinawans but also Koreans or Burakumin, they were associated with a lack of worth as laborers, which resulted in very tangible outcomes in the labor market, such as differential wages, treatment in the workplace, and employment opportunities (Tomiyama 1990). The assessment that manifestations of Okinawan cultural difference led to the unfavorable treatment of Okinawans was an accurate one. However, such understanding put the responsibility for discrimination on individuals and groups who were discriminated against, thereby blaming the victims, and demanded change from the side of the recipients of discrimination. As a result, Okinawan leaders, in their attempt to rectify the mistreatment of diasporic Okinawans, organized themselves based on what Tomiyama calls a "regional identity from the shared place of origin, with the aim at self-erasure" (*jijitsu e mukau dōkyōsei*) (1989, 180).

### **Voluntary Assimilation in the Lifestyle Betterment Movement**

From the 1930s to the 1940s, elite Okinawans in Osaka launched a voluntary assimilation campaign called the "Lifestyle Betterment Movement" (*seikatsu kaizen undō*). They claimed that it was Okinawans themselves who were responsible for discrimination and mistreatment by Japanese, because they adhered to their unrefined customs and shameful behavior. They urged fellow Okinawans to eradicate anything associated with Okinawa, such as dialect, Okinawan-sounding names, clothing, food and drinks, everyday lifestyles, and folk music and dance, in order to become "excellent Japanese nationals" and "proper citizens of Osaka" (*rippana Nihonjin* or *Ōsakajin*) (Tomiyama 1990, 195-249).

Nakama (2001) compares the difference between uses of the terms *Okinawajin* and *Ryūkyūjin* in news records and personal accounts during this period. *Okinawajin* (person/people from Okinawa) connoted that Okinawans were from Okinawa *Prefecture*, like any other Japanese would come from a prefecture. Thus *Okinawajin* signified that Okinawans were part of Japan, the civilized modern nation-state, an identity diasporic Okinawans aspired to. On the other

hand, *Ryūkyūjin* (person/people from Ryukyu) connoted that Okinawans were from Ryukyu and therefore not proper Japanese, but outsiders of the Japanese nation, and was thus an insult; even more so in the case *Rikijin* (an ethnic slur with a condescending tone). A record of a fist-fight between an Okinawan man and a Japanese man in 1939 illustrates the charged emotions of Okinawans behind these expressions, the anger from non-recognition, the desire to become proper (and thus equal) subjects of Japan, and the pride and joy when accepted as such. It happened in Minato Ward at a seeing-off gathering for Okinawan soldiers who were going to the Second Sino-Japanese War. The local Okinawan organization was celebrating and honoring them, when a Japanese passer-by, noticing their Okinawan names on the banners, cynically uttered “Oh, they are *Ryūkyūjin*!,” at which an Okinawan participant shouted “What are you babbling at these brave warriors you *hikokumin*!,” with a fist landing on the insulter’s face (Nakama 2001, 52).<sup>9</sup>

This desire to become proper Japanese by expunging Okinawan traits from their lives and their bodies turned to bitterness when Okinawa was separated from Japan at the end of the Pacific War and came under the jurisdiction of the United States. A 1951 article written by an Okinawan in Osaka expressed that anger and bitterness: “What an irony of history this is...after seventy long years of anguish, our young men of Okinawa, who have finally transformed into excellent Japanese now, sacrificed their young life in the war. How could that war result in the question of where Okinawa belongs? One cannot even begin to describe the strong emotions that our predecessors, and the souls of young people who sleep under the Tower of Virile Youth and the Tower of Himeryuri, would be feeling...” (Tomiyama 1990, 267).<sup>10</sup>

This case of Okinawan voluntary assimilation strongly resonates with McCormack’s study of Burakumin, the former outcastes, after the abolition of their outcaste status and relabeling as “new commoners” in the late nineteenth century (McCormack 2013). Before the formation of the modern Japanese state in the Meiji period, this outcaste population had been excluded from most social and economic privileges allowed for the rest of population, based on the state-sanctioned hierarchy of Tokugawa Japan in which one’s status as *eta* (abundant filth) or *hinin* (non-human) was determined at birth and hereditary. In the Meiji period, Japan abolished

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<sup>9</sup> *Hikokumin* literally means “non-national,” but its nuance is close to “traitor.” It refers to the lack of loyalty to the Japanese nation-state of the addressee, an utmost insult for proper subjects of Japan. Even today it is used as an insult by Japanese rightwing extremists.

<sup>10</sup> Both are memorials of the dead from the Battle of Okinawa.

the status system and the outcaste population was legally included as a legitimate part of the nation-state. However, most of them remained socially excluded, their stigmatization explained differently, this time based on their alleged differences due to Korean or Chinese origin or race, or faulty genes.

In the meantime the official narrative of equality during the Meiji era explained poverty and social marginalization in terms of “people being responsible for their own circumstances” (McCormack 2013, 139), and thus attributed their social exclusion to their squalid living conditions and undignified jobs, lack of proper Japanese-language skills, and alleged immorality and criminality. There were former outcaste and new commoner organizations in the 1880s and 1890s that advocated self-improvement as the primary step to liberation from prejudice, giving up “the evil ways of *eta*” and “cultivating respectable behaviors,” and “engaging in practices advocated by conventional morality” (135-141). There were cases of Buraku reform programs in which educated, aspiring middle-class Buraku men led the villagers to improve their conduct in order to become respectable members of the Emperor’s state (McCormack 2013). Thus both the Buraku reform movement in the late nineteenth century and Okinawans’ Lifestyle Betterment Movement of the 1930s and 1940s illustrate how cultural differences of ethnic or social others were considered not simply as neutral differences, but as deficiencies that made them “not Japanese enough” to be a proper subjects of the new, modernizing nation-state and empire of Japan.

### **Stratification among Okinawans**

This attempt at self-erasure, voluntary assimilation, did not bring about a total eradication of Okinawan customs and cultural difference from diasporic Okinawans. Instead, the process of cultural assimilation occurred unevenly along the socio-economic division among Okinawans, and the class division among Okinawans largely resulted in their cultural and geographical division, as well. Successful, upwardly-mobile Okinawans who aspired to be included in mainstream Japanese society chose to distance themselves from impoverished Okinawans by moving out of Okinawan communities and into more Japanese-dominated residence areas, dropping their Okinawan lifestyles. Upon moving out of the Okinawan community, they were under the more extensive and pervasive gaze of mainstream Japanese society. Some even chose to pass as Japanese by adopting Japanese-sounding names and cutting ties with the Okinawan

network (Kaneshiro Yoshiaki 1997; for a fictional illustration, see Kushi 2000). On the other hand, impoverished, working-class Okinawans did not have the necessary resources for successful assimilation even if they wanted to. Many of them did not have enough education to be able to eliminate their Okinawan dialect, for example, or enough money to move out of their impoverished, slum-like neighborhood, which itself functioned as a sort of ethnic marker.

The second consequence of the Lifestyle Betterment Movement was that it had a great influence on the overall attitudes of Okinawans toward their own cultural difference. Okinawan cultural difference came to be considered a source of shame which justified discrimination against Okinawans. Thus the display of Okinawan cultural difference, such as Okinawan language, food, customs, and entertainment (mainly music and dance), disappeared from the public domain, especially from the gaze of Japanese. Okinawan cultural expressions remained in varying degrees in interpersonal interactions between Okinawans, especially in private or semi-public Okinawan-only occasions such as family celebrations at home, entertainment in Okinawan restaurants, and events held by Okinawan organizations. Okinawans still made and ate Okinawan food, for example dishes made with pig ears, feet, and innards, but they learned not to serve them in company [of Japanese] because it was embarrassing (Kaneshiro 1997).

Before I further discuss the historical example of stratification among Okinawans in Osaka, I will briefly discuss the stratification of different Okinawan music and dance genres between “high” and “low” Okinawan culture, and the complex relationship Okinawan *min’yō* had with diasporic Okinawans. Performing art and entertainment genres that originated in the Ryukyu Kingdom, such as *ryūbu* (Ryukyuan court dance) and Okinawan *koten* (Okinawan classical music), were introduced to Japanese audiences in Tokyo and in Osaka soon after Okinawan annexation. These forms were highly regarded by the Japanese audience, as the refined culture of the Ryukyu civilization, backed by its historical relationship with Chinese civilization, escaped the criticism of elite Okinawans during the Lifestyle Betterment Movement. However, folk genres such as *min’yō*, Okinawa sumo (wrestling), Okinawa *shibai* (theater), and playing *sanshin* (referred to by the derogative name *jabisen*, “snake-skin banjo”) were despised as low culture and thus targets of eradication (Kuriyama 2008, 39-54). *Eisā* had been closely tied to ancestral rituals in local village life, and was not introduced on the mainland before the end of the Pacific War.

One of the common tales that I repeatedly heard during my fieldwork was that people used to play the sanshin in a closed closet, covering themselves with thick blankets, so that the sound of the sanshin wouldn't be heard by their Japanese neighbors (Iguchi 1999; Takahashi 2006). This tale of "playing sanshin in the closet," regardless of how often and widely it actually happened, is cited and recited as evidence of oppressive assimilation into Japanese society, and of Okinawans' persistent love of their music.

### **Kubun-gwa: The Ghettoisation of Okinawan Difference**

This cultural stratification between elite Okinawans and lower-class Okinawans resulted in the ghettoisation of Okinawan cultural difference, contained and segregated from mainstream society. For underprivileged Okinawans in pockets of Okinawan concentrations in Osaka and Hyōgo (notably in Takarazuka and Amagasaki), assimilation into mainstream Japanese society was not a viable option, and their stigma as undesirable, improper members of society was overdetermined by cultural, socio-economic, and geographic factors. On the other hand, such segregation allowed them to express their cultural distinctiveness relatively freely inside the ghetto. This geographical and cultural segregation continued into the postwar period, as late as the early 1980s. Miyamoto Keizo, a Gajimaru member since the early 1980s, recalled how Okinawan restaurants, unlike their 1990s Okinawa Boom counterparts that were in effect urban tourist sites for Japanese, were off-limits to Japanese customers unless accompanied by Okinawan friends who knew how to behave like Okinawans. Miyamoto is a Japanese man married to a second-generation Okinawan who was born and grew up in Taisho. He said that Japanese, or even younger Okinawans who couldn't speak the Okinawan dialect, wouldn't venture into Okinawan restaurants without anticipating somebody picking a fight with them. Keizo would go with an Okinawan neighbor to one of those restaurants. The moment the two of them stepped into the restaurant, his Okinawan neighbor would suddenly lapse into thick Okinawan dialect that Keizo couldn't understand. Keizo was able to go back by himself only after he went in the company of an Okinawan and became acquainted with its owner and other Okinawan customers there personally.

Kubun-gwa in Taisho is the single most vivid example of such overlapping stigmatization, which epitomizes Okinawan discrimination on the mainland in the eyes of diasporic Okinawans. Kubun-gwa means "the Hollow" in Okinawan dialect: *kubun* comes from



the Okinawan equivalent of the Japanese word *kubomu*, “to hollow,” and *gwa* means “little,” a diminutive endearment Okinawans attach to the names of things and people; in this case it indicates the attachment Okinawans had to this place. Located on a corner between Kitaokajima and Kobayashi (fig. 6), this swampy low-lying area surrounded by what was then known as the Taisho Canal (currently Taisho Inner Port) and several log ponds for timber mills, originally belonged to a land reclamation company and then to Okinawa City. However, it was several meters below the sea level, constantly waterlogged, and often flooded by typhoons and heavy rains, and therefore remained vacant. Poor immigrants from Okinawa and elsewhere who couldn’t find or afford housing occupied this area after the end of the Pacific War. They covered the muddy ground and built barracks there, using lumber they recycled or stole from the nearby timber mills (fig. 7).

Osaka City took on large-scale land readjustment projects, including raising the ground of the area near the bay and housing improvement projects across the city, focusing on areas devastated by the US air raids, but it was not until the late 1960s that the city undertook such projects in Taisho. By then, there were about 370 households living in Kubun-gwa, about 30 per cent of which were Okinawans, but in news media and to the general public it was known as “the Okinawan Slum” (Mizuuchi 2008). Buyouts, evictions, and relocation were not effective as most residents were not landowners but tenants or illegal occupants, and when one barrack was demolished and its occupants relocated, there would be a new barrack built and inhabited by new occupants. Kubun-gwa’s condition worsened as the ground raising of the surrounding areas went on; surrounded by dumps of construction waste that were used as land-fill, the relative level of this area became even lower, causing it to become more waterlogged (fig. 8) (Mizuuchi 2008; Kaneshiro 2008).

Several accounts of diasporic Okinawans illustrate the conditions of Kubun-gwa during this time. Kaneshiro Munekazu, the current representative of the Taisho Okinawa Children’s Eisā Club, was born in 1957 and spent his childhood in Kobayashi in the 1960s and 1970s. He recalled that he and his friends would play around the canal and log ponds in the Kobayashi neighborhood, which timber mills used to use to store lumber, and that the sky was always covered in a thick smog which triggered his asthma. Houses were flooded after heavy rains, and parents packed food and sent their children to school to take shelter when a typhoon came. Taxi drivers refused to go beyond Taisho Bridge (at the entrance of Taisho Ward) for fear that their

cars would be soiled or damaged on the unpaved, muddy roads. And yet, people in his neighborhood still tried to distinguish themselves from those in Kubun-gwa, saying “no, we are not from that part [Kubun-gwa] of Kobayashi, but the Keyaki bridge side.” He also recalled how he envied decently built houses his Japanese friends lived in at Hirao, right across Taisho Road, which not only looked good but also provided each family with enough space and privacy, unlike the shabby, barrack-like houses of many Okinawans in Kobayashi (Kaneshiro 1996; 2008, 109-119).<sup>11</sup>

Kinjo Isamu, a second-generation Okinawan local historian who wrote about the 1903 *Jinruikan* incident discussed above (Kinjo 2005), and former Children’s Club organizer, recalls that his parents kept pigs and grew Okinawan vegetables at the corner of their house in Kitaokajima. Their relatives and acquaintances from Okinawa would build a barrack in the empty spaces of Kubun-gwa in the blink of an eye, using discarded or stolen timber and depending on reciprocal labor, and the laborers always ended up gathering, drinking, grilling meat, playing sanshin and singing, and enjoying Okinawan entertainment like Okinawan sumo (wrestling), or Okinawa *shibai* (theater). Isamu recalls his parents (and Isamu himself) were “full-disclosure Okinawans” (*Okinawa marudashi*) and quite proud of Okinawan customs, but such naked expression of Okinawan cultural difference by lower-class Okinawans, in turn, reinforced the idea that Okinawan culture was “backward,” “unhygienic,” and “inferior.” Isamu himself was nervous that he would be pointed at as Okinawan once outside of his Okinawan neighborhood, and wondered why Okinawans were all so poor and spoken badly of. He recalls the moment he realized that extreme poverty was the evidence of Okinawan discrimination, when his high school teacher showed his class a movie about Buraku living conditions. A Buraku Liberation Movement sympathizer, the teacher’s intention was to inform his students about the reality of impoverished Burakumin in their dilapidated houses, which to Isamu looked better than life in Kubun-gwa. After the movie was over, Isamu walked up to his teacher to say, “Teacher, I’m an Okinawan. Buraku is certainly terrible, but the place Okinawans live, is even more terrible,” upon which the teacher felt silent (Kinjo Isamu 1996, 91).

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<sup>11</sup> As the land and housing improvement projects in Kobayashi were completed, many Okinawan families moved to various areas within Taisho, especially to Hirao. Okinawans are most concentrated in Hirao neighborhood, and generally known as the “Okinawan community”: Kinjo Kaoru, Kinjo Isamu, Kaneshiro Munekazu and other local activists or historians take visitors to Hirao neighborhood for field trips to learn about Taisho’s Okinawans.

Kayoko, a current Gajimaru member and former parent member of the Children's Club, is a Taisho-born and raised second-generation Okinawan (she is the wife of Keizo who talked about Okinawan restaurants above). As a child she experienced both sides of Okinawan life in Taisho during the same period, the more affluent and assimilated side, and the poor, non-assimilated side. She grew up in Izuo where there were few Okinawans. Her parents ran a tailor shop in an arcade and never spoke to her in Okinawan dialect. She felt her mother wanted to “discard Okinawa and become more Japanese-like, which is a sensibility unique among successful Okinawans” (Miyamoto and Miyamoto 1996, 100). She did not grow up having a clear self-awareness as an Okinawan. At school she learned some friends were instructed by their parents not to play with her, although they kept playing together. Also she had a Japanese friend who lived in Kubun-gwa but attended her school in Izuo, as her parents didn't want her to mix in with Okinawan children at school near their house (ironically this girl ended up having Kayoko, an Okinawan, as her close friend). Kayoko's parents sent her to her grandparents in Kitamura (part of Kubun-gwa) to stay with them during school breaks, as they were busy with their tailor work. She recalled how it was always hard to walk because the ground was wet and muddy, with planks of wood placed to walk on. Her grandparents had thick Okinawan accents, hummed Okinawan folk songs, and fed her American food sent from Okinawa such as sausages. She described how her grandmother made the best *nakamijiru* (innards soup), a soup mainly made with pigs' innards, a traditional Okinawan dish that is despised or frowned upon by Japanese; Kayoko herself is famous for this soup among her Okinawan neighbors. Until she and her husband, a Japanese, joined Gajimaru Club in the 1980s and sent their daughters to the Children's Club, she didn't feel particularly Okinawan or want to keep her Okinawan legacy. But she vividly remembered the relief she felt when she got married and took her husband's Japanese surname, Miyamoto, discarding her Okinawan maiden name Yonamine (she now introduces herself as both) (Miyamoto and Miyamoto 1996,100-103).

As these accounts suggest, not all Okinawans lived in Kubun-gwa, and all who lived in Kubun-gwa were not Okinawans. However, as in the well-publicized name for Kubun-gwa, “the Okinawan Slum,” class-based markers of otherness such as poverty, low hygiene, lack of sophistication in language and behavior, which were also tied with a specific geographic area, constructed the basis of mainstream Japanese prejudice against Okinawans. This corroborates the idea that their stigmatized status did not solely come from being Okinawan, but was

overdetermined by multiple, correlated factors, namely ethnicity, socio-economic class, and geography. As Kinjo Isamu's realization about Okinawan discrimination which stemmed from watching a movie on Burakumin illustrates, this overlapping of stigma was not unique among Taisho's Okinawans, but common among Osaka's underprivileged, discriminated-against minority communities in geographically segregated areas in Osaka as late as the 1980s.

### **Osaka's Minority Crescent: Spatial Configuration of Social Inequality**

In fact, Taisho's Okinawan community constitutes a mosaic piece of what Mizuuchi, the social geographer specializing in Osaka City's spatial structure and inequality, calls "Osaka's inner ring" or "the crescent of minorities," the geographical development along the Osaka Loop Line (Mizuuchi 2003, 2008b). The Osaka Loop Line demarcates the old boundary of premodern, Edo-period Osaka, along which socially marginalized places such as graveyards, execution grounds, and cheap lodgings, entertainment and red - light districts, and outcaste communities were distributed. This premodern lower class space retained the legacy of social marginalization, even after Japan's caste-like premodern class system was abolished in the Meiji period. This time, stratification was maintained according to the socio-economic hierarchy of emerging capitalism, as factories occupied these area and attracted the new arrival of poor labor immigrants from impoverished areas and colonies, adding to the existing marginalized population and forming a new, urban proletariat. As modern Osaka expanded, developers jumped over this "inner ring" of socio-economic marginalization and spread concentrically outwards to develop suburbs, which were middle- to upper-class residential areas (fig. 10).

The northern half of the inner-ring area was developed and integrated into the downtown area in postwar urban planning and development, partly due to the private commuter railroads and streets leading out of the city. For example, north of Ikaino where Kyobashi Station is, there used to be a slum occupied by a group known as the Apache (*Apacchi*) Tribe (fig. 10). The Apache were poor people of mixed background, mostly Koreans, who built barracks next to the ruins of the Osaka Artillery Factory, which was Japan's biggest military factory until it was burnt down by the US air raids in 1945. The Apache lived off stolen scrap metal from the ruins, which was highly illegal and dangerous due to possible arrest or violence when caught, and the risk of explosion. The mainstream media attached negative stereotypes to these people with their risky

lifestyle as criminal, but also romanticized them as daring in movies and songs. The actual Apache slum was dismantled in 1959, and the factory ruins were cleared and developed starting in the 1960s. Now, a futuristic business complex called Osaka Business Park with high-rise buildings occupies the site.

On the other hand, the southern half of the Osaka Loop Line remained significantly segregated not only in physical geography but also in ideological geography, constructing the image of dangerous and exotic “Minami” (South) in Osaka’s socioscape. A Japanese anthropologist and Osaka native who was born in 1975 and grew up mostly in the northernmost areas of Osaka City and in neighboring Takatsuki City recalled that when he was a teenager, his mother advised him not to go south of Umeda as there were dangerous people there (for people in the southern part of Osaka, Umeda is considered “Kita” (North), and “Minami” usually refers to the entertainment area surrounding Namba) (Ota Shimpei, personal conversation).

To address this issue of geographical distribution of minority groups and social inequality in Osaka, the Osaka Human Rights Museum (aka Liberty Osaka) organized a lecture series titled “The Loop Line, Discrimination, and Human Rights,” for which the above-mentioned geographer Mizuuchi himself gave a keynote lecture. Each lecture was titled after the Osaka Loop Line train stop that connects to a different minority neighborhood, namely, Tsuruhashi (Korean), Shin’imamiya (day laborers, homeless, the impoverished, and prostitutes), Ashiharabashi (Burakumin) and Taisho (Okinawans). The lecturer-activists, most of whom were born and grew up in these communities, shared their personal experiences that were often surprisingly similar to each others’ – experiences in which poverty, people’s prejudice, and shame were very closely associated (fig. 9).

I attended all the lectures, and was struck by the similarities between the lecturers’ accounts. For example, the account of Kim Kwang Min of his childhood in Ikuno strikingly resonated with life in Kubun-gwa. A third-generation *zainichi* Korean activist who was born in 1971 and grew up in Ikuno, Kim recalled how his house and those of his neighbors were often flooded when there was heavy rain. The repeated experience of flooding and the fear of rain during childhood stuck with him, and even as a grownup he still felt scared and restless when it rained heavily, even though he knew his family would be safe in his new house, so much so that his children teased him.

He also pointed out how the common insult used towards *zainichi* Koreans, “Koreans stink” (*Chōsenjin kusai*), was closely related with the living conditions many Koreans were in during the 1950s and 1960s, largely determined by their extreme poverty. There was a common term among Koreans of the time, *tottonari*. It is a compound of *tot*, a Japanized sounding of the Korean word *targ* (chicken), and the Japanese word *tonari* (neighbor, next). *Tottonari* meant a plot of land right next to a chicken coop, or sometimes a pigsty, which nobody would want to buy except for poor Koreans, let alone consider it for residence. But poor Koreans had no choice but to buy the cheapest land like that, build long houses and live squeezed in with several other Korean families right next to the chicken coop or pigsty, which was very unhygienic and “just horrific” according to Kim’s father and relatives (Kim 2008, 47-48). “Some people say ‘Koreans stink’ (*Chōsenjin kusai*) is a discriminatory expression (*sabetsu yōgo*) and one shouldn’t use it. No, I believe them when people say ‘*Chōsenjin kusai*.’ I am sure Koreans stank like hell. And were dirty.” He emphasized to his audience, the majority of whom were Japanese, that the important thing regarding discrimination is not to avoid the expression itself simply because it is rude, but to understand what is behind it, why Koreans stank. To understand the poverty and discrimination, the social inequality, and the oppression towards people from Japan’s former colony (Kim 2008).

### **Class and Reproduction of Inequality through Education**

Education was an additional factor shared by children in these underprivileged areas that contributed to their marginal socio-economic status, due to the academic gap between them and children from middle- and upper-class households. As a result of successful postwar reconstruction, Japanese society as a whole saw unprecedented economic growth and affluence beginning in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s. During this period, Japan was imagined as an egalitarian “class-less” or “middle-class” society in which the majority of the population identified themselves as middle-class based on meritocracy (Vogel 1963), despite de facto class stratification (Steven 1983; Ishida and Slater 2011). Postwar Japan was imagined as a homogeneous society not only in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture, but also in terms of the distribution of wealth, and middle-class membership was “considered a component part of Japanese social identity” (Ishida and Slater 2010a, 5).

The hegemony of the egalitarian society maintained that one's socio-economic success depended on one's individual efforts and achievements in seemingly equal competitions, especially in school (Kariya 2010). Allinson (1997) describes how family life was affected by such an educational credential society, where "the level and prestige of one's educational qualifications determined the type of job one assumed on leaving school. A clear gradation of achievement emerged which coincided with an equally clear gradation of prestige in the world of work." The division of labor in the typical middle-class family was arranged to ensure the academic success of offspring, in which the "education mom" (*kyōiku mama*) was a stay-at-home mother who devoted herself to the education of their children to make sure they passed the competitive entrance exams for high school and college to ensure their social success, while the "salaryman" (*sararii-man*) dad worked alone to support the family's financial needs (115). (Allinson 1997; Yoder 2011; Goldstein-Gidoni 2012).

By the 1960s, "school credential society" (*gakureki shakai*) became one of the defining characteristics of Japan, in which social mobility depended on one's success in academic competitions throughout school education, especially entrance exams. Academic competition was assumed to be largely equal, if intense and harsh, as the phrase "examination hell" (*juken jigoku*) indicates (Allinson 1997; Kariya 2011).

However, case studies of Japanese education (Okano and Tsuchiya 1999) indicate that to ensure a child's academic success and thereby social upward mobility, parental support based on the strictly defined, gendered division of labor of the stereotypical middle-class household was prerequisite. Such a middle class arrangement effectively excluded from academic competition from and early age children of households that could not provide them with such economic security and home environment, such as single-parent households, working class and/or low-income households, to which many minority households belonged (Okano and Tsuchiya 1999). For example, in working class Okinawan families in Taisho, a father who worked as a manual laborer such as *daraiko* (scrap-metal collector), shipbuilder, porter, or firewood seller couldn't earn an income large enough to support the family. Often the mother had to work at an equally low-paying job simply to meet the family's essential needs. As a result, working class mothers could not assist their children with their academic achievement, unlike the "education mom" of middle-class households. The mother's unavailability was visible in the children's school life not only in their academic ability, but also in their appearance and behavior, which also led to

exclusion and low self-esteem in school settings, not only for Okinawans but also for other minority families. For example, Song (1998), in his study of an elementary school in the middle of Ikuno, the Korean residence in Osaka, observed that it was dirty collars of school uniforms among impeccably clean, daily washed ones that gave a child away as a Korean, as it indicated that the child's mother possibly had to work long hours and couldn't attend to her offspring's appearance as meticulously as a Japanese, middle-class mother would.

Such a gap in parental ability to aid their children with school work inevitably led to lower academic achievement, and often to delinquency, too, which effectively resulted in the lower socio-economic status of the next generation. Scholars of Japan's education system agree that the hierarchical rank-order school system functions as class-sorting and class-reproducing, in which low-ranked middle and high schools tend to accommodate students from working class families who display low academic performance and higher deviant behaviors, which inevitably leads them into the lower class (Yoder 2011; Park 2011; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999).

Kinjo Isamu's school experience was a case in point. In one of his human rights education field trips to the Taisho neighborhood, he explained how a public middle school between Kobayashi and Hirao, his alma mater, used to be famous for sports but notorious for students brawling, both of which were attributed to a high percentage of Okinawan students, who were not interested in studying but in sports or fist fighting.

### **The Second Wave of Okinawan Immigration: Collective Employment**

So far I discussed how Okinawans migrated to and settled in Osaka during the early twentieth century as part of the ethnic and social minority groups that provided cheap labor in the process of Japan's nation-state building, and Osaka's development as a modern, industrial city. Also, I discussed the mechanism by which ethnic and social stigma was conflated with class division and geographical segregation. This configuration started forming in the prewar period, but continued through the postwar era until the 1970s in most minority-occupied areas. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, it continues to the present in places like Kamagasaki.

In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the second wave of Okinawan migration to Osaka from the late 1950s until the mid 1970s, during Japan's postwar reconstruction and the economic growth of Japanese society.



After defeat in the Pacific War in 1945 and the subsequent rule of the Allied Occupation until 1952, Japan attempted to rebuild its infrastructure and enhance its economy. “The era of high-speed growth” characterized the two decades from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s. Once again, “highly mobile, surplus, adult labor from rural districts was...one precondition for high-speed growth,” and was needed as a “large, educable, flexible, and cheap source of labor” (Allinson 1997, 84-85). The primary labor migration pattern during this period was the collective employment (*shūdan shūshoku*) of single, young workers from rural and impoverished areas into major industrial areas. In Western Japan, the main destinations for recruitment were rural areas in Kyushu and Kagoshima prefectures, and in Okinawa (Kishi 2001).

Okinawa, still under the rule of the US military government, was going through serious job instability due to wartime destruction and US military bases’ land occupation, and the resulting high unemployment rate provided a strong push factor for Okinawan labor migration. Brokers sought youth in their teens or early twenties, mostly with only a middle school or high school education. Often brokers recruited soon-to-be graduates of middle schools or high schools with the help of teachers. Teachers, students, and their impoverished families believed that the supposed ideal labor conditions in collective employment contracts would give their youth better chances of work and future education than those available in Okinawa (Kishi 2003). Between 1957 and 1975, 15,000 to 20,000 junior high school graduates annually sought employment on the mainland. In 1974, 46.84 per cent of young Okinawans who sought employment right after junior high school ended up in mainland Japan. As part of the collective employment arrangement, most of them stayed in factory dormitories with other Japanese workers (Kishi 2001; Tani 1989).

Many youth were attracted by the promise of occupational education at in-factory schools, which was often part of the contract. Once they arrived to their workplace on the mainland, however, such promises soon proved implausible given their harsh working conditions, or turned out to have been mere deceptions to lure them into labor exploitation. There were cases in which hospitals that promised employees nursing education deliberately delayed their arrival so that these workers couldn’t be admitted to the nursing school, and instead were forced into menial jobs as untrained workers. In addition, workers received abusive treatment. Working overtime or during holidays without payment was common, and even bathroom breaks were discouraged. Not only harsh treatment and verbal abuse in the workplace,

but also total breaches of labor contracts such as unfair dismissal, delay or refusal of payment, or denial of promised further school education were reported. There were even incidents of workers being raped or swindled by employers or supervisors at their workplaces (Kakihana 1980).

The harsh living and working conditions were not unique to Okinawans. Young, undereducated workers, regardless of their place of origin, who were brought to unfamiliar living and working environments apart from family and other social networks and treated as expendables, found themselves in such a vulnerable position in relation to their employers. However, Tamaki Toshinori, Gajimaru's first leader, observed that Okinawan collective employment youth were systematically more likely to end up in worse jobs. Employers who could afford to provide better working conditions started recruiting early and from local areas first, while those with less resources and motivation to treat their workers fairly sought to recruit through brokers, from remote areas, and among more desperate people who were not likely to come and check the actual working conditions before their work began, a description which fit Okinawans exactly (Kishi 2003, 223-224).

Moreover, the imagined Okinawan inferiority certainly exacerbated their situation. Ethnic slurs targeting their strong accent, lack of proficiency in Japanese (Osaka dialect or other local variations), and inadequacy in social interaction were fairly common. Moreover, employers or managers often took such linguistic and behavioral differences as a sign of laziness, incompetence, and lack of work ethics among workers (Kakihana, 1980). Not unlike during the prewar period, there was implicit pressure and expectations during orientation and recruitment that Okinawan youth, "as the representatives of Okinawa," become proper, diligent Japanese workers (Kishi 2001, 144-148).

There was a high rate of premature resignation among Okinawan collective employment workers, who were disappointed, could not endure their working conditions, and could not adjust to cultural and climatic difference. Tani points out a "distinctively Okinawan U-turn migration pattern," in which a high rate of Okinawan workers who sought employment on the mainland resigned before their contract ended and returned to Okinawa, while fully aware of the bleak job prospect in Okinawa. The resignation rate among Okinawans on the mainland was two times as high as the national average in 1969, when 20 per cent of Okinawan new graduates resigned in a half-year, and a total of 40 per cent resigned in a year and a half. According to a 1977 survey Okinawa Prefecture took in major industrial areas, 66.2 per cent of junior high school graduates

and 67.9 per cent of high school graduates resigned within three years, 57.9 per cent of whom returned to Okinawa (1989, 19-20).

Employers took this premature resignation as a sign that Okinawans lacked work ethics, which in turn justified their abusive treatment of remaining and incoming Okinawan workers. Moreover, when they faced such ethnicity-based discrimination in Osaka, young Okinawans tended to internalize the sense of Okinawan inferiority because of the school education they received in Okinawa, which encouraged cultural assimilation in Okinawa even after the Pacific War and during the rule of US military government. Ironically, during the US military rule, the endeavor to assimilate to Japanese language and culture through education came from a grassroots education movement by Okinawans themselves. Okinawans felt the US military government was no less oppressive than the prewar Japanese regime, and no less indifferent to the rights and safety of Okinawans; they sought reversion to Japan to ensure peace in Okinawa and their equal treatment as Japanese citizens in postwar Japan. Also, the majority of school educators thought full assimilation in Japanese education would ensure the social security and upward mobility of Okinawan students, who they thought would get better job prospects on mainland Japan rather than remaining in Okinawa (Noiri 2011). Thus learning standard Japanese was heavily emphasized, and students' interest or participation in Okinawan traditional practices such as village rituals or folk entertainment, as well as their use of Okinawan dialect, were strongly discouraged as "delinquent behaviors" (Nakamura 1996, 40-42).

If Okinawan immigrants of the early period suffered from ghettoization, it was atomization and isolation that awaited Okinawan youth who stayed even after their disillusionment. Tani (1989) and Kishi (2003) point out the relatively strong network among Okinawans through kin and regional ties, such as numerous *kyōyūkai* groups (friendship clubs based on common hometowns), as seen in Kubun-gwa, which provided a safety net to some degree in time of emergency if one had such connections. Such networks were stronger among Okinawans than people from other prefectures because Okinawans could not rely on more official and institutionalized support, especially during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s when Okinawa was still under the US rule (thus legally not Japan). If individuals couldn't secure such a network and fell between the cracks for some reason, their prospect of recovery was bleak (Kishi 2003, 11-13). So they continued to endure harsh and unstable working and living conditions, unfair treatment, isolation, and prejudice. Or they suffered poverty and isolation after

becoming unemployed. Unemployed Okinawan youth did not even have the ship fare to return, or even if they had, they knew that there would be no jobs in Okinawa for them, and they would be one more mouth for their family to feed, instead of feeding them.

Kakihana Yoshimori, Gajimaru Club's secretary at the time of its formation and long-time supporter of the Taisho Okinawa Children's Club from its formation to the present, writes about the dire situation of the collective employment youth. The term "collective employment disease" (*shūdanshūshoku byō*) spread among workers, referring to physical and psychological problems such as malnutrition, disease, and depression suffered by these young Okinawans. Local and major newspapers reported the high rate of Okinawan delinquency; they committed petty crimes out of economic or psychological desperation. Some attempted or committed suicide. They epitomized the maladjustment of Okinawan youth, but also illustrated the prejudice and intolerance of the host society.

Haitani Kenjiro, the famous Japanese educator and writer, wrote poignantly about conditions that Okinawan migrants were facing his 1978 novel *Teda no fua* (*The child of the sun*). The story revolves around a family who runs an Okinawan restaurant called Teda no Fua and its guests, most of them Okinawan immigrants, who have some kind of scar from the Battle of Okinawa, or from their discrimination on the mainland.

Among them is a character named Kiyoshi, a vagrant fifteen-year-old orphan from Okinawa who had been filled with anger and became a member of teenage gang until he was embraced by other Okinawan migrants in Kobe. Kiyoshi's mother was believed to have abandoned her family (it is revealed by his mother, whom he later reunites with in Kobe, that she was raped by American soldiers and became pregnant, couldn't endure the shame, and left), and his father died soon after. Kiyoshi's older sister left for the mainland to work to support young Kiyoshi, presumably in collective employment, but killed herself at age nineteen leaving her brother behind. Young Kiyoshi first believed his sister killed herself out of fatigue from endless work and responsibilities, thereby abandoning him, but as he came to better understand the life stories of his family and the people around him, he suspected that she, not unlike their mother, was sexually abused or violated in Japan where she lived alone as a vulnerable young worker (Haitani 1978). For this novel Haitani conducted in-depth research in Okinawan communities in Kobe, Amagasaki, and Osaka, and episodes and characters are likely to come from ones he encountered.

The “Yamaguchi incident” in 1974 was one of the most publicized incidents involving Okinawan immigrants, and hit close to home for many Okinawan youth in their mainland destinations, such as Tokyo and Osaka, eventually leading to the birth of Okinawan youth clubs. Yamaguchi, a Miyako-born youth, came to Osaka to work at a food-processing factory after his high school graduation, but he soon quit the job due to harsh working conditions. After wandering between temporary jobs in deteriorating health, he went back to his initial employer for help, only to be insulted and chased off once again. Out of desperation and anger, Yamaguchi set fire to his house, which he thought was empty. Only his wife was at home, who died from the fire. He was arrested and tried for murder. Okinawan youth, including collective employment workers and offspring of prewar Okinawan immigrants, quickly organized from the Tokyo and Kansai areas in order to support Yamaguchi in prison. They hoped the court and news media would find as mitigating circumstances the overall abusive conditions of collective employment and the consequential desperation which Yamaguchi – and many more Okinawan youth – fell into. However, the Japanese court, media, and mainstream society turned unsympathetic, and did not take into consideration the predicament of Okinawan youth. While rendering the employers’ maltreatment as a simple “misunderstanding,” they penalized the Okinawans’ inability or refusal to adapt. Yamaguchi received a verdict of guilty, and while his supporters were preparing an appeal to the high court, Yamaguchi fell into depression and took his life in prison in 1974. A few more suicides by young Okinawans coincided with Yamaguchi’s death (Kakihana 1981; Narisada 1998; Kishi 2003). Young Okinawans who were supporting Yamaguchi were hit hard by his suicide, as they had been empathizing with him due to their own personal experiences. They felt an urgent need to fight such prejudice and isolation for their own survival, and this led to the emergence of Okinawan cultural activism in the 1970s that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I explored the history of Okinawan immigration to Osaka since Okinawa’s annexation by Japan in the late nineteenth century. In Japan’s nation-state building and colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, Japan incorporated Okinawans, Ainu, and Koreans as its subjects, but put them into a lower order than mainstream

Japanese based on their cultural difference, and imposed an extensive assimilation program on them. At the same time, Okinawan and Korean immigrants concentrated in rapidly industrializing sectors in Japan to provide cheap labor. In Osaka, they came to occupy lower socio-economic ranks, along with existing social minorities, and to live in less desirable areas, constituting mosaic pieces of “the minority crescent” of Osaka. Okinawans’ cultural difference was conflated with lower social status, poverty-stricken lifestyle, and residential segregation, and such overlapping stigma gave mainstream Japanese society justification to deny their social citizenship. In the 1930s and 1940s, elite, upwardly-mobile Okinawans organized a voluntary assimilation campaign, in the hope that they could erase the negative markers of Okinawan cultural difference and become fully accepted as proper Japanese subjects. However, this resulted in cultural stratification among Okinawans, divided by class and geography, and constructed Okinawan difference as shameful in Okinawans’ perception from then on.

From the mid-1950s, Okinawans once again were mobilized to supply cheap labor for Japan’s postwar reconstruction and industrialization. However, young, single, undereducated workers who came to the mainland through collective employment arrangements not only suffered harsh working and living conditions, but also Japanese prejudice based on their linguistic and cultural difference, as well as personal isolation. Such conditions led many Okinawan youth to physical and mental illness, delinquency, and sometimes even death. Led by their sense of urgency, Okinawan youth in Osaka and Kansai formed the Gajimaru Club to help them survive the hostility of mainland society and to fight the isolation and alienation of Okinawan youth from society and from each other.



Figure 2: Okinawa’s position in East Asia (McCormack 2009)

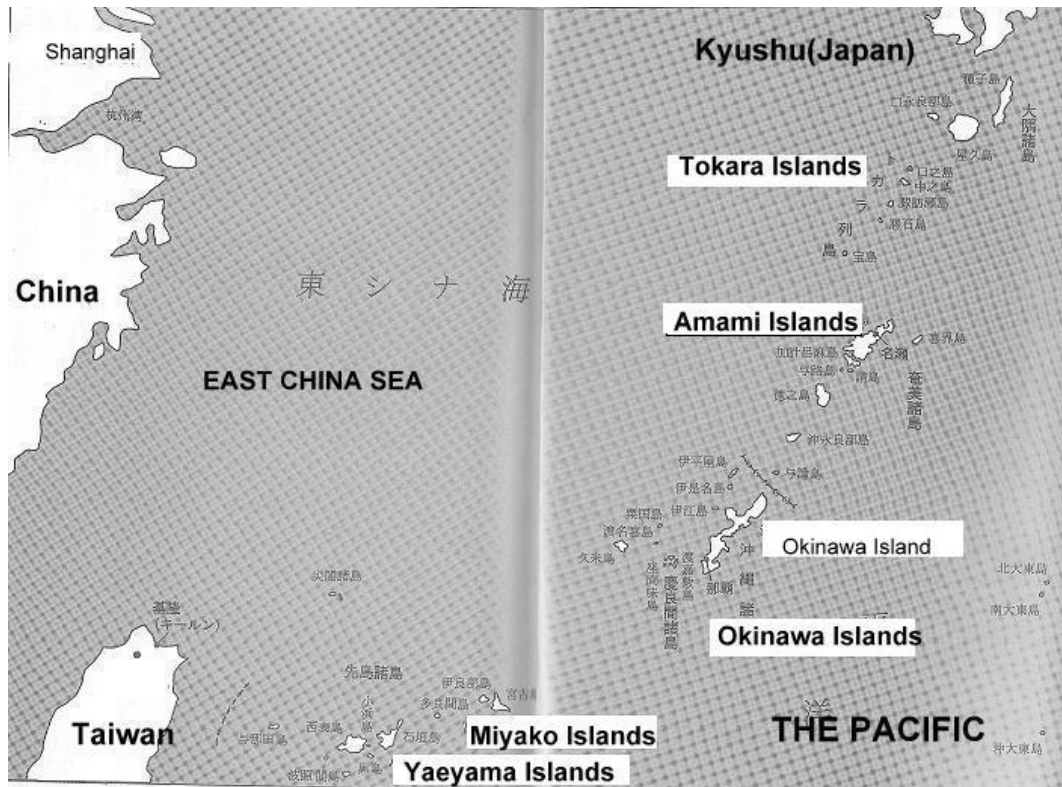


Figure 3: The Ryukyu Islands (adapted from Arakaki et al. 1997)

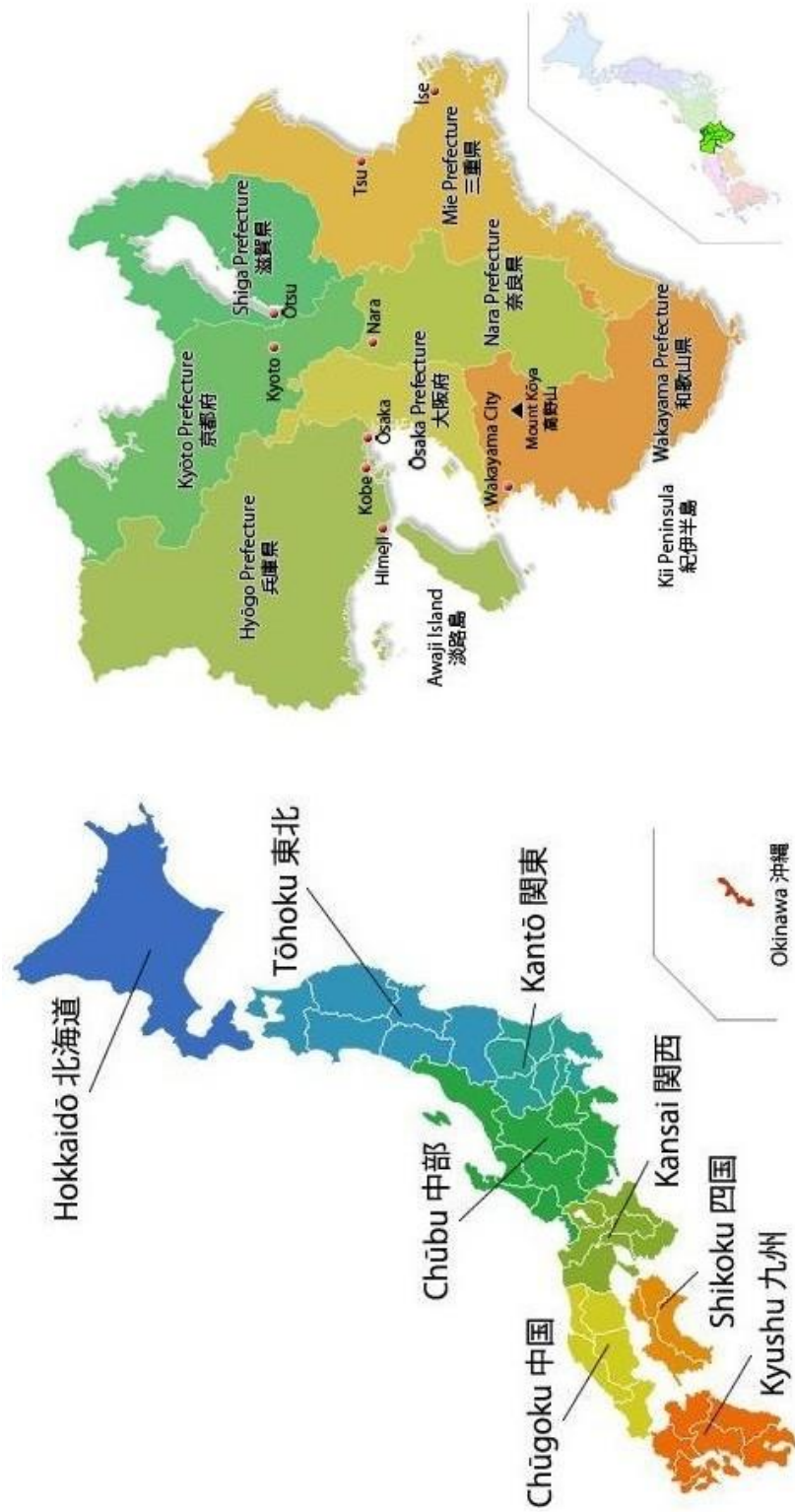


Figure 4: The Kansai area (<http://www.jref.com/japan/travel/regions/kansai/>)



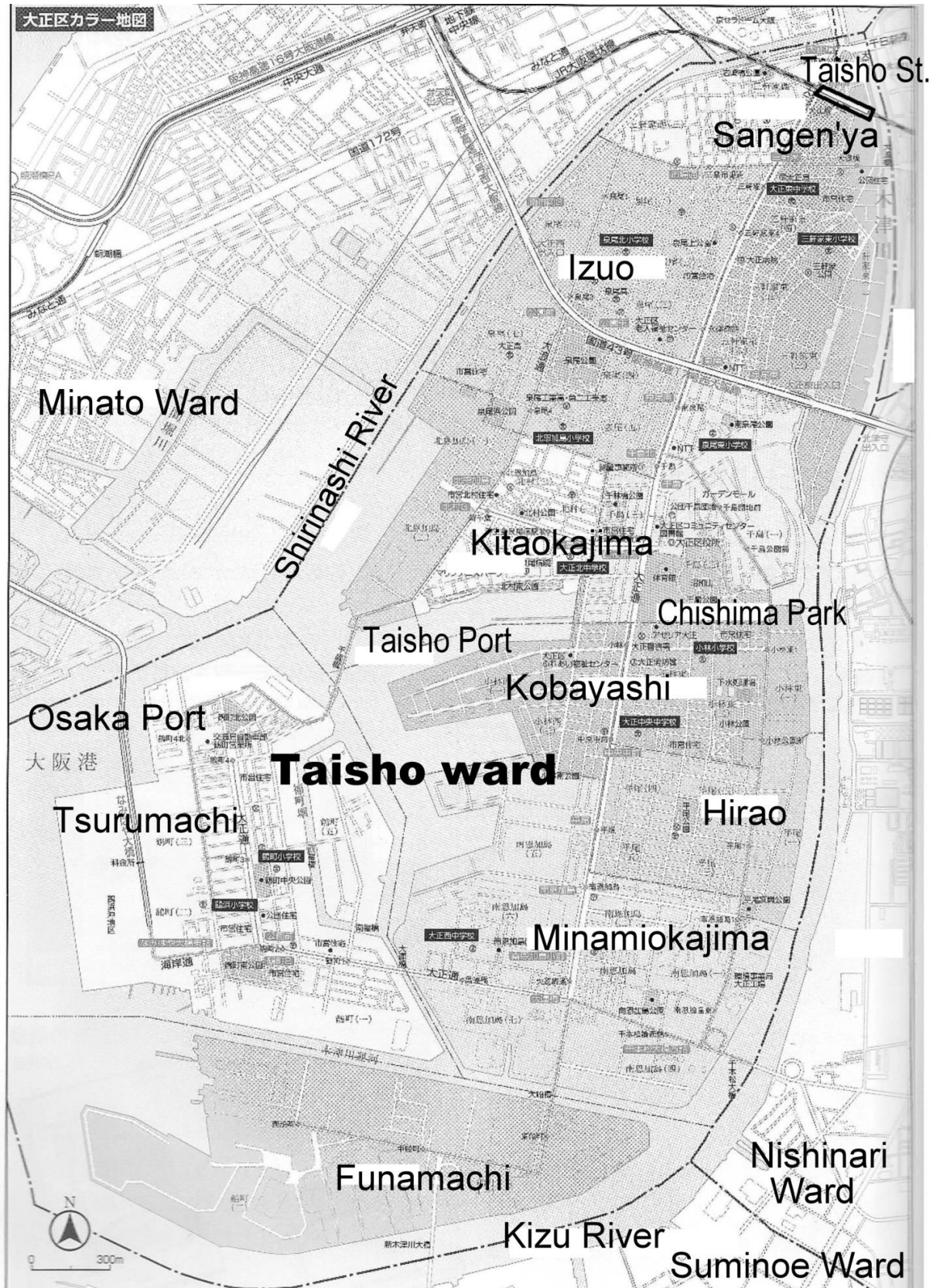


Figure 5: Taisho Ward (Adapted from Osaka Taisho Kuyakusho 2007)

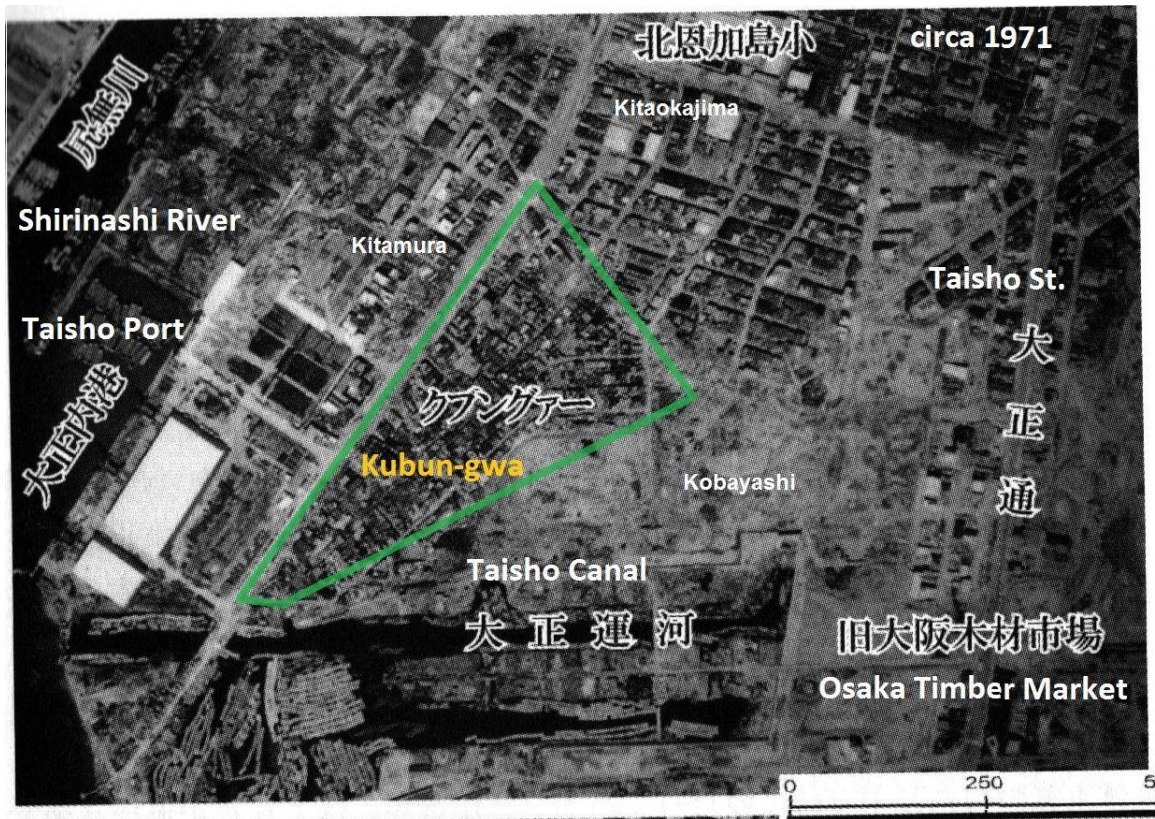


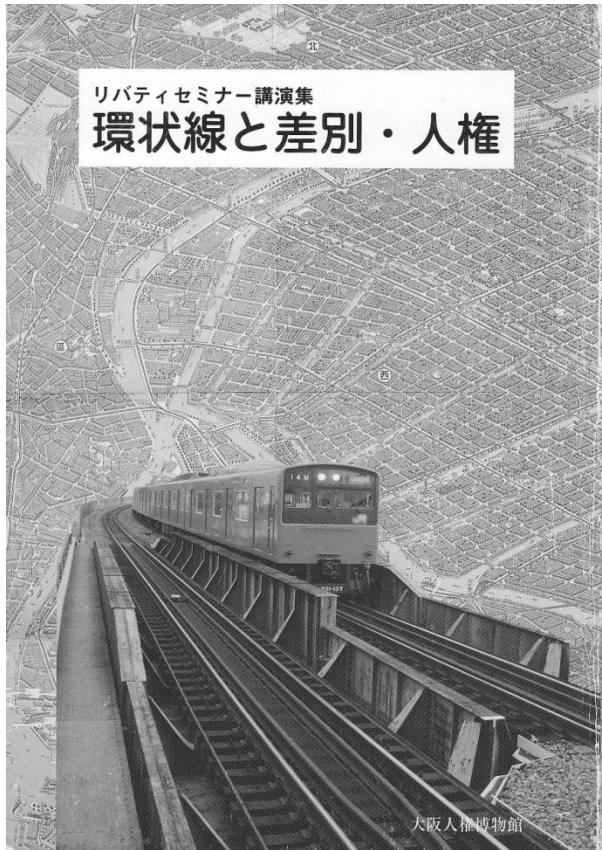
Figure 6: Kubun-gwa, circa 1971 (adapted from Mizuuchi et al. 2008, 258)



**Figure 7: Kubun-gwa in the 1960s and 1970s (Mizuuchi et al. 2008, 259)**



**Figure 8: Kubun-gwa during the ground raising project (Osaka Jinken Hakubutsukan 2000, 84)**



**Figure 9: “The Loop Line, Discrimination, and Human Rights” (Osaka Jinken Hakubutsukan 2008), a lecture series offered by the Osaka Human Rights Museum**

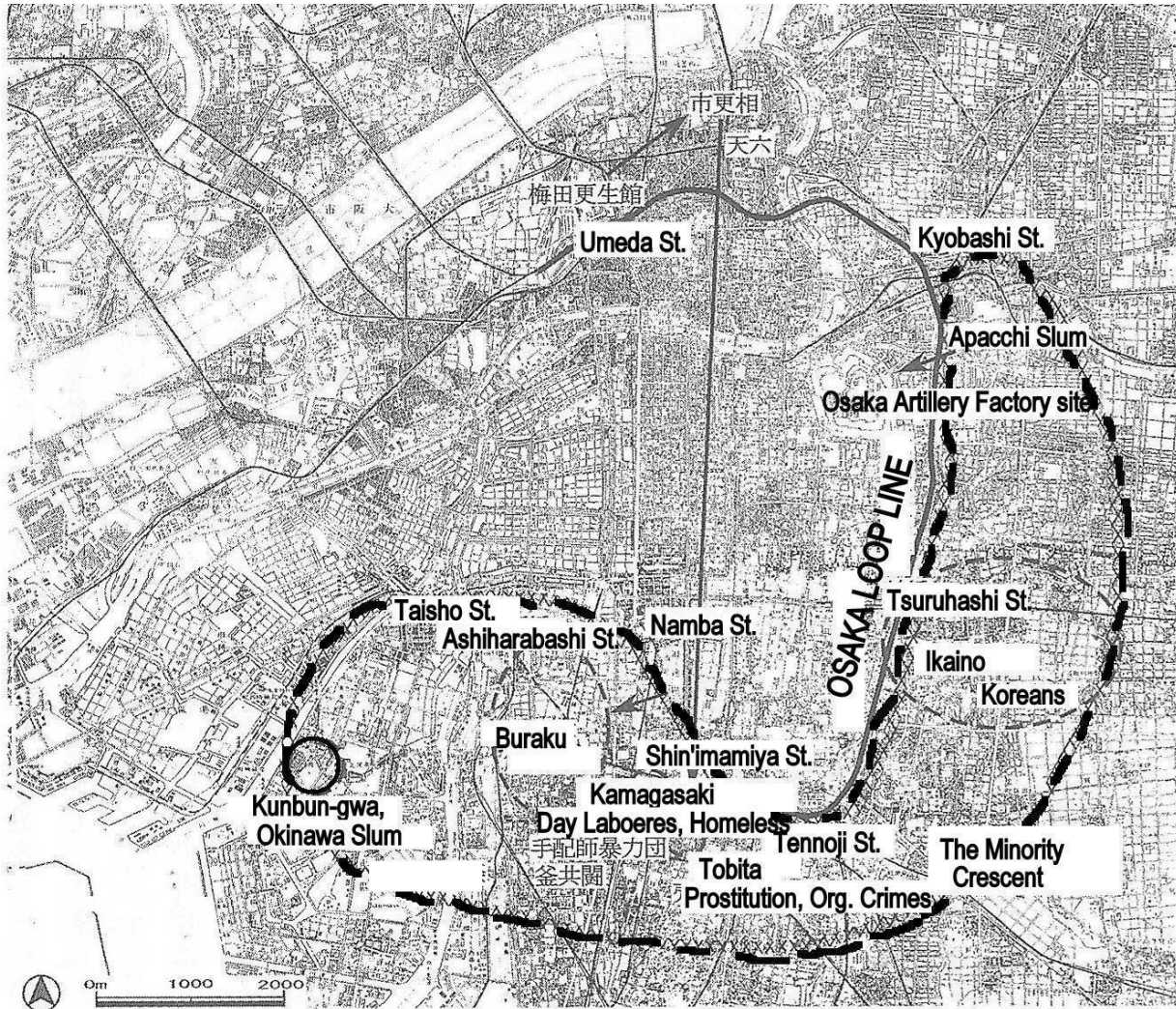


図7 マイノリティの三角地帯

★は、不法占拠バラックで、区画整理局の事業報でも大きく取り上げられた代表的なところを示している。

本図は、2.5万分の1地形図「大阪西北部」「大阪東北部」「大阪西南部」「大阪東南部」(いずれも1947年)をもとに筆者が作成した。

Figure 10: The “Minority Crescent” (adapted from Mizuuchi 2008, 21)

## CHAPTER III

### Gajimaru Club

On the way back from the Toyota Eisā Festival in August 2008, Gajimaru members and I stopped at a rest area near Kyoto for supper. At a store, Yoshiko found *kakinohazushi*, the vinegared rice wrapped in persimmon leaves that was a local specialty. She bought it to show us and to share with us. She said,

I have an unforgettable memory about this. It was before we formed Gajimaru, when we were still trying to save Yamaguchi (from the Yamaguchi incident). On that day, we lost at the trial and came back by train. We bought *kakinohazushi* for lunch before the trial, but forgot to eat because we were so upset. And on the way home, we took it out from our backpacks and shared it. We were all standing quietly on the train, eating and crying. I still remember that day when I see this.

This chapter explores the Gajimaru Club, the group who first introduced *eisā* on the mainland, and the Taisho Eisā Festival that the club organized. The Gajimaru Club was formed in 1975 with the objective of protecting the rights of young, single Okinawan workers who came to Osaka and the Kansai region through collective employment arrangements in the 1960s and 1970s, during the period of high-speed industrial growth. I characterize this group's approach as cultural activism, a new type of anti-discrimination movement that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, based on the fact that they mobilized Okinawan folk music and dance, especially *eisā*, as their means of self-empowerment and assertion of ethnic difference to the Japanese public.

In this chapter, I will explore the development of the Club and the Taisho Eisā Festival over the three decades since their inception in 1975, and the significance of cultural activism, especially in terms of the politics of visibility and communality. In their first two decades, Gajimaru Club struggled with not only the prejudice of mainstream Japanese society, but also the strong objections of elite Okinawans. From the 1990s onwards, their activities came to be more

widely accepted within and outside of the Okinawan community, partly due to the Okinawa Boom. However, members soon realized that the heightened popularity of Okinawan difference and increased Japanese participation also had detrimental effects on their activism and on Taisho's Okinawan community, in the form of the Yamatoization (Japanization) of Okinawan music and dance practices. In the 2000s, they took measures to address these challenges and retain both their agenda and the authenticity of their practice.

### **Collective Employment Disease and The Emergence of Okinawan Cultural Activism**

As discussed at the end of Chapter 2, during the second wave of Okinawan labor immigration from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, many young Okinawan workers faced harsh, dehumanizing working and living conditions. Exploitation, ethnic prejudice, and discrimination at the workplace added to an internalized sense of inferiority and isolation, and led many Okinawan youth to physical and mental problems, delinquency, and crimes, problems which were referred to as "collective employment disease." As in the case of the Yamaguchi incident, this resulted in death (suicides, dying alone, and a manslaughter) (Kishi 2003, 185-190).

The Gajimaru Club officially attributes its birth to the Yamaguchi incident. After Yamaguchi's suicide during his trial, his supporters in Osaka, Tokyo, and Toyota felt the urgent need to do something for their own survival, figuratively and literally, and they continued to communicate about forming a group for Okinawan youth in each region. The Gajimaru Club was the first group to launch, in Osaka in January 1975. More than 250 Okinawans gathered from Osaka, Hyogo, Kyoto, and Nara, and they eventually formed seven branches, four in Osaka and one each in the other three areas (Kishi 2003). The majority of members were collective employment workers, but a small number of second-generation Okinawans from Kansai also joined.<sup>12</sup>

Kakahana, a founding member of Gajimaru, described their sense of urgency as follows: "[Gajimaru's] slogans were born from the painful lessons we learned from the ways many of our young Okinawan brothers and sisters had lived and died, who had been drifting across the gulf

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Yoshiko, who kept Yamaguchi's suicide note, was born in Kyoto with a Japanese father and an Okinawan mother, and grew up in Taisho after her parents passed away at a young age. Also, Kinjo Kaoru, the representative of the Kansai Okinawa Bunko, was born and grew up in Amagasaki.

between Okinawa and mainland Japan because we were here in in Japan” (1981, 80). Even today, the conversation of early members, both among themselves and with current Club members, exudes a strong sense that it was a matter of life and death that they formed the Gajimaru Club, and that it was for their survival, not just in an abstract sense for social acceptance or cultural survival, but for the literal survival of young individuals who were trapped in such a dire situation. Yoshiko, who told the tale of the persimmon leaf sushi, told me that she kept a copy of Yamaguchi’s suicide note until 2006. She said she never opened it again after she first read it when Yamaguchi died, because even as a photocopy, it contained the strong emotions of a dying person which were too painful for her to face again. It was more than thirty years after his death that she released it; in Okinawan ancestral beliefs, the souls of the dead lose individuality and join the collective souls of their ancestors thirty years after death, and the sins of their lifetime, such as suicide, are forgiven. She brought the letter to Yamaguchi’s birthplace on Miyako Island and burned it at his grave, while his father was standing behind her and crying.

Gajimaru started with the following slogans: “1) We Okinawan youth will unite; 2) We will protect the life and rights of Okinawan youth in collective and individual employment; 3) We will protect Okinawa’s natural environment, and enhance Okinawan culture” (Kakinohana 1981, 80). Whereas the purpose of the first two slogans is self-evident from the circumstances of the Club’s formation, the purpose of the third one requires further discussion. The emphasis on Okinawan culture as the means of self-empowerment is in fact what distinguishes the Gajimaru Club from previous organizations that had sought to promote the rights of Okinawans in Osaka. The Club attributed the vulnerability of Okinawan youth to their lack of ethnic pride and their self-hate as Okinawans, and defined Okinawan culture as means “to recover our pride as Okinawan youth” (Kakinohana 1981, 79). They recognized the fact that young Okinawan workers had internalized the inferiority of Okinawan culture through their school education even before their arrival in Japan.

Before the Gajimaru Club, there had been other Okinawan-based societies and organizations since the prewar period and as early as the 1920s (Tomiyama 1990). There were groups organized around more informal, personal networks from their villages, towns, or cities of origin, such as *kyōyūkai* (roughly translates as “gathering of hometown friends”); other types were less personal, more geographically extensive and politically oriented organizations, notably *kenjinkai* (prefectural associations) at various levels. Responding to the pressing demands of



diasporic Okinawans at the time, they carried out various functions for these Okinawans such as mutual support, social networking, and labor union-like functions. When necessary, they organized politically, for example in case of local elections, labor union-like negotiations, and the Okinawa Reversion movement. However, although these organizations operated to protect and promote the interests of Okinawans, Okinawan culture had not been their specific focus.

The Gajimaru Club's orientation and activities were inspired by previous movements that had prioritized securing the rights and interests of Okinawans. The Gajimaru Club's founding members were politically minded individuals who had a clear goal of fighting ethnically based discrimination. They were keenly aware of their social and economic disadvantages and individual isolation. They had participated in the Okinawa Reversion movement, anti-establishment and/or anti-war movements led by leftist Japanese, or the Burakumin-originated anti-discrimination activism called the "liberation movement" (*kaihō undō*).

But by the time of Gajimaru's formation, one way or another, they felt the limitations of previous Okinawan-led activism. Or they were disillusioned by Japanese leftist movements, as Japanese leftist activists were not interested in the specific conditions and needs of different minority groups, but only in mobilizing them for pursuing their own agenda. They felt they needed something for Okinawans, and something beyond just political activism. By the 1960s, there had been Okinawan organizations such as the Okinawa Young Friends' Club (*Okinawa Seinen Tomo no Kai*) and the Deigo Club (*Deigo no Kai*), with the above-mentioned agenda that involved young Okinawan labor immigrants.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the Okinawa Young Friends' Club could be characterized as a precursor of the Gajimaru Club in the sense that it specifically tended to the needs of Okinawan collective youth and provided them with more informal, interpersonal opportunities to connect with other Okinawan youth (Kishi 2003, 179-180).

One of the Gajimaru Club's founding members stated:

It's not that culture is more important than politics [in general], but it was the case for the Gajimaru Club. We fought to protect our human rights, too, like the cases of K hospital and U company [in which the Gajimaru Club acted on behalf of disgruntled Okinawan employees], we didn't think we could defeat discrimination without holding pride in our culture. Before Gajimaru it was different. Like Yamaguchi, and other people who killed themselves, Okinawans were intimidated and developed an inferiority complex once they

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<sup>13</sup> *Deigo* is hibiscus in Okinawan dialect; in Japan, it only grows in Okinawa.

came to Yamato, and committed crimes or suicide. Thus we made it our main focus that we should keep our pride in our culture and ourselves. (Kishi 2003, 194)

The Club's organizers made particular efforts to remind its members of the beauty and excellence of their local, folk culture (*kyōdō bunka*). Even the name of the Club, Gajimaru or "Banyan Tree," has culturally specific meanings for members.<sup>14</sup> In Japan, the banyan tree grows almost exclusively in the subtropical area of Okinawa, and old villages usually have at least one huge banyan tree, often hundreds years old, which along with other subtropical flora form a distinctively Okinawan landscape. Old banyan trees, with their impressive size and appearance, are said to shelter various natural and supernatural lives, including the tree's spirit, *kijimunā*, that appears in various Okinawan myths and stories. Thus the *gajimaru* is an indispensable part of the distinctively Okinawan natural and cultural landscape.

More importantly, the *gajimaru* has a characteristic that had a special symbolic significance to these migrant workers. The *gajimaru*, the banyan tree, starts life as an epiphyte, and grows aerial roots from its branches that will eventually reach the ground, firmly grab soil and gravel and fuse with each other to form thick trunks. In this way, a tiny, insignificant sapling will grow into a massive tree with multiple trunks firmly rooted in the ground, even in barren land. Thus the metaphor of the banyan tree expresses the determination of Gajimaru members to unite and take root. The Club's anthem, "Gajimaru," illustrates the Club members' self-recognition as a diaspora: first, their departure for the long-admired Yamato that seemed to promise better opportunities; yearning for their home and family; and their will to refuse defeat, and to "take root in the foreign land of Yamato," like the *gajimaru*. The original lyrics written by Oshiro Toshinobu, a Gajimaru member and professional *min'yō* singer, are sung to a traditional *min'yō* tune popular in the mid-Okinawa area, and used with various lyrics.

"Gajimaru"

1. From the islands of Uchinā /We had admired Yamato  
Leaving our parents and siblings behind/We have come to Yamato
2. Once we've departed for Yamato/Memories flood in  
My heart is steeped in /Words my parents used to tell me
3. Even though we left Okinawa/We won't be defeated in a foreign land  
We [Okinawan] youth/Will let the world know
4. We [Okinawan] youth /Will gather hand in hand

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<sup>14</sup> It was initially Gajumaru, but later changed to Gajimaru, probably because Gajimaru is easier to pronounce for non-Okinawans; both are Okinawan terms for the banyan tree.

Like Gajimaru / Let us stand strong  
5. Like Gajimaru /Our heart will take root deeply  
As we are in this land of Yamato/We will let our shima bloom

(lyrics by Oshiro Toshinobu, from a Gajimaru leaflet)

The fact that Gajimaru's anthem was in the *min'yō* form also shows that Okinawan music and dance was incorporated as an integral part of their activism. This strong emphasis on Okinawan culture also appears in the second Gajimaru Club Bulletin created in February 1976 (Gajimaru 1976). More than a half of the entire bulletin is given to the section titled "Gazing at Okinawa," introducing various cultural aspects of Okinawa: a member's introduction of her home island, Miyako; a legend of Untamagiru, the mythical hero; poems by Yamanouchi Baku, the famous Okinawan poet; a review of an Okinawan restaurant in Osaka; and an Okinawan food recipe. Learning cultural and historical tidbits and sharing information like where to get decent Okinawan food helped them share their common feelings of nostalgia, as well as their identity and pride as Okinawans. It also introduced *min'yō* and lullaby songs, their lyrics and background.

The Gajimaru Club used *min'yō* to find and recruit members. On the day of a hiking trip that led to the formation of Gajimaru, Tamaki, Gajimaru's leader, was playing sanshin at the train station and shopping mall where the group had gathered for departure. A few Okinawan women heard the sound of sanshin while passing by and spontaneously joined the trip (Kishi 2003, 190-191). Gajimaru members told me that Tamaki also parked his car at a corner in front of a factory or a factory dormitory where collective employment workers were likely to pass by, and with the car windows open, he would play a cassette tape of *min'yō*. Then somebody would stop and peek into the car, asking him in Okinawan dialect, "Brother, are you Okinawan?" All of these examples indicate that, from the beginning, *min'yō* had a significant place in the Club's thinking about its link to Okinawa and Okinawan culture. It is also significant that Okinawan youth used the sound of *min'yō* to send a signal and that this signal was recognized. By virtue of being Okinawans they were marginalized and isolated from each other in the anonymous, impersonal urban space of Osaka, and it was the sound of Okinawan *min'yō*, not their appearance, that revealed them to each other as visible. I will discuss this visibility by music and dance further in the next section.

In September 1975, the Gajimaru Club held the first Okinawan Youth Festival in Chishima Park in Taisho Ward (fig. 5), later renamed the Taisho Eisā Festival. It featured *eisā*, which originated on Okinawa Island, and other folk dances that represented Miyako and Yaeyama Islands (fig. 3). This festival was the first Okinawan cultural festival that featured Okinawan music and dance in public. In other industrial areas where a large number of Okinawan collective employment youth were recruited, groups of Okinawans emerged with a similar agenda, and eventually they started Okinawan cultural festivals of their own. For example, in Tokyo, Yūna Club (Yūna no kai) was launched in 1974 by supporters of Yamaguchi, and it merged with the youth branch of the Tokyo Okinawa Kenjinkai in 1978. They started hosting the annual Ashibasai Eisā Festival in 1985 in Nakano, Tokyo. In Aichi, Okinawan workers employed mainly in the automotive industry started the Toyota Okinawa Friendship Eisā Festival (Toyota Okinawa Fureai Eisā Matsuri) in 1979.<sup>15</sup> And there was also conversation and cooperation between these groups, which continues up to the present.

### **Politics of Visibility**

The Taisho Eisā Festival was groundbreaking in the sense that it made Okinawan cultural difference visible to the Japanese public, a strategy of cultural resistance through the public display of cultural distinctiveness. As the oft-told tale of “playing sanshin in the closet” illustrates, diasporic Okinawans’ love of Okinawan music and dance persisted despite the voluntary assimilation campaign. For the Gajimaru Club, their *eisā* practice in public was the exact polar opposite of “playing sanshin in the closet.”

This strategy of cultural display can be examined in the light of Goffman’s discussion of stigma. In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), Goffman makes a significant differentiation between the “discredited” and the “discreditable”: while “the discredited” have a noticeable marker of their stigma, such as physical disability, skin color, or impoverished outlook, “the discreditable” have a type of stigma that is not noticeable until it is

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<sup>15</sup> Toyota City is where the Toyota Motor Corporation was founded and is still based. The city got its name in 1959 from the Corporation and its founder, Toyoda. The city has relied heavily on the Corporation for its economic development, which was the reason that a large number of Okinawan youth were recruited through collective employment. [check the number]

voluntarily or involuntarily disclosed, such as mental illness, a criminal record, or homosexuality.

In the Japanese context, minority groups of Japanese or East Asian origin, known as “*uchi* (insider) others” (Creighton 1997; Roth 2005) or “long-existing minorities” (Okano 2011), including Okinawans, Ainu, Koreans, Chinese, and Burakumin, lack physical differences that are easily distinguishable from those of mainstream Japanese. Despite widespread stereotypes of certain physical features of minorities that are said to be obvious to the naked eye, in fact there are no easily recognizable visual markers that are directly attached to their bodies such as skin color, physique, hair, or facial features, and thus they do not immediately stand out. More easily recognizable differences, such as accent, bodily postures, name, and residence, are dispensable or concealable, although with varying degrees of difficulty. The dispensability or concealability of stigmas allow those who have this type of stigma to choose to pass – to act “normal” and be invisible, at least at a first glance (Goffman 1963, 73-91).

Minority individuals’ daily interaction with mainstream Japanese at the personal level involves at least some degree of passing, intentional or inadvertent, since people around them would not notice their difference unless it was pointed out, and not every interaction involves such exposure even if these individuals have no intention of hiding their identity. This makes voluntary, full-fledged passing a more viable option for minority individuals (De Vos and Wagatsuma 1966; Murphy-Shigematsu 2002; Creighton 1997).

As in the case of the Lifestyle Betterment Movement, if a minority individual wishes to blend in and they have the resources to do so, they can achieve this by, for example, dropping their dialect or accent, learning to speak the right language, moving into a non-stigmatized neighborhood, getting a more prestigious job than those usually available for lower-class minority individuals, and taking up a mainstream lifestyle. Dropping Okinawan sounding names, accents, food, tattoos, and distinctive sound, namely *min’yō*, were attempts to erase and conceal visible markers so that they would be accepted as respectable Japanese citizens.

This has especially been the case for individuals of the second or later generations who have grown up among mainstream Japanese and became more fully acculturated. Often Okinawan parents encourage their children to get rid of external markers such as accents and deportment in the hope that their children will be accepted without discrimination if they master the Japanese language. Kaneshiro Yoshiaki, the co-founder of the Taisho Okinawa Children’s

Club, a Taisho-born second-generation Okinawan, remembered that his parents would talk to each other in Okinawan dialect, and then shush each other and start speaking Japanese when he or his sister showed up.

Kaneshiro Munekazu, the current representative of the Taisho Okinawan Children's Eisā Club, also Taisho-born, often recounted that his family name used to be Kinjo, the more Okinawan-sounding transliteration of the kanji for their name (金城), when he was little. By the time he went to elementary school, his father's co-worker warned him that the name Kinjo could be confused or associated with the Korean name Kim (金) and thus cause his son to be bullied at school. Thus his father changed their family name to the more Japanese-sounding Kaneshiro. In fact, both Kinjo and Kaneshiro are Japanized transliterations of Kanagusuku (金城), only with different degrees of Japanization. Kanagusuku is a place near Naha on Okinawa Island. Kanagusuku as a family name is kept by Okinawans who emigrated overseas before Japanese assimilation. Kaneshiro himself often uses this example when he explains the cultural assimilation of Okinawans.

However, such efforts to erase, change, or hide ethnic markers such as dialect, name, and lifestyle had a circular effect on the minority individuals themselves: they maintained the invisibility of ethnic minorities, as well as a sense of cultural inferiority. Thus minority invisibility was reinforced by minority collusion. This also reinforced prejudice towards ethnic or cultural difference, due to the fact that such differences were mainly observed among minority communities who did not have any choice but to live in geographically segregated, impoverished ghettos, as discussed in Chapter 2.

In contrast, Gajimaru's bold Okinawans turned the tables with their new daring strategy of wearing their stigma on their sleeve. Presenting their stigma up front could "radically [transform their] situation from that of an individual with information to manage to that of an individual with uneasy social situations to manage, from that of a discreditable person to that of a discredited one" (Goffman 1963, 100). In other words, when Okinawans hid their difference and tried to assimilate, it was Okinawans who had to manage information about their minority existence among the largely ignorant mainstream crowd. With Gajimaru's approach, it was mainstream Japanese who had to deal with their knowledge of the Okinawan presence among them, and the uneasy situations created from such exposure. Such voluntary self-exposure by Okinawans had both an internal effect of affirming their own ethnic identity, and an external

effect of forcing the Japanese public to deal with the de facto presence of ethnic and social minorities. Also, it presumably had the effect of changing widespread stereotypes of Okinawans or ethnic/social others, in the sense that when individuals who could otherwise pass as Japanese openly showed their ethnic otherness, those who held dehumanizing stereotypes might have reconsidered and adjusted their perceptions of such ethnic others.

In that process, the visual and aural qualities of *eisā* and *min'yō* played a significant role. *Eisā*, a collective drum dance, accompanied by *min'yō* and sanshin, is a loud and showy genre that is performed in open spaces. It asserts the performers' presence to anyone in the vicinity, and there is no escaping from the sound of the *jikata*'s sanshin playing and *min'yō* singing, and dancers' coordinated drumbeats and shouts, whether welcomed or not.

It was a bodily statement that they refused to remain silent and invisible, but instead would confront the mainstream Japanese society that had been forcing them to hide and be ashamed of their ethnic and cultural differences. Ethnomusicologist and visual anthropologist Terada Yoshitaka, in his "Music as a means for self-affirmation" (1999), draws parallels between the taiko music of Japanese American youth and the *eisā* of the Gajimaru Club in terms of the distinctiveness and originality of the diasporic rendering of ethnic music. He notes that the loud, eye-catching, and dynamic qualities of taiko music and dance help overcome the negative stereotypes of Japanese Americans – or Asian Americans in general – that they are passive and introverted, submissive, and diligent but not creative. Especially, young Asian American females, who are often subjected to double stereotypes due to their ethnicity and gender, participate and readily perform in public in order to overturn such stereotypes.

The Gajimaru Club's activism strategy of disclosing and asserting their cultural difference coincided with similar strategies by Osaka's other minority groups, such as Koreans or Burakumin, in the 1970s. For example, in Ashiharabashi next to Taisho, which is well known as a historical Burakumin residence, a taiko performance group called Ikari (Rage) formed in the early 1980s with similar motivations.<sup>16</sup> It inspired other Buraku communities to come up with

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<sup>16</sup> The Japanese taikō drum has a symbolic significance in Buraku cultural activism, because it is regarded highly by mainstream Japanese as part of Japanese cultural heritage, *and* it is made with cow hide. Burakumin have been discriminated against because of their occupations that had been often associated with death, such as slaughtering, tanning, and working in graveyards. Thus in Buraku activism taikō is used to assert that discrimination of Burakumin based on their leather-related occupations and reverence for the taikō drum are contradictory.

their own community-based taiko groups. For Koreans, the *honmyō* (real name) movement emerged in the 1970s; individuals chose to use their Korean-sounding family name instead of their more Japanese-sounding alias, which had previously been used to avoid public discrimination (Oh 1987).

Considering the geographical proximity between minority communities within Osaka (fig. 9), and their constant and active interactions within the context of social movements, it is harder to imagine these strategies developed coincidentally and separately than that minority activists often learned from the strategies of another minority movement. In fact, older Gajimaru members retain decades-long close personal relationships with Burakumin or Korean activists, and they recalled that they often visited each others' meetings and events, watched others' performances or offered their own. Further studies will be needed to confirm the broader, overarching circumstances that led these minority groups to choose strategies to make themselves more visible and emphasize their particularities. As the overlapping conditions of Osaka's minority crescent suggests, however, the conditions and actions of one minority group cannot be appropriately understood in isolation or only in relation to mainstream Japanese society, but can be more accurately examined by also looking at their interactions with other minorities who shared the same social context (Tsuneyoshi et al, 2011).

Gajimaru's refusal to remain invisible and silent was as strong as their cathartic pleasure when they performed *eisā* in public. However, they met resistance that was just as strong, not only from Japanese, but from fellow Okinawans, too. New members and visitors to the Gajimaru Club are told of early episodes in which unsympathetic neighbors bellowed at or poured water over the dancing crowd, or called the police to complain about the nuisance; some such resistance continues even today (whether these individuals are all Okinawans or not is uncertain). There were even episodes during which individuals threw stones at the dancing crowds. Okinawans opposing *eisā* performance in public used the expression *hajisarashi*, "exposing one's shame" (Kinjo 2001, 50).

If one considers the history of voluntary assimilation by Okinawans in Osaka, such vehement responses from Okinawans themselves is comprehensible. Resistance to the public

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Interestingly, Ikari initially was inspired by and learned how to perform taiko from an Okinawa-based taiko club, Zanpa (Asai 1992). This deliberate choice of the instrument and the exchange between minority groups suggest it was an example of an "invention of tradition" (Asai 1992).



performance of *eisā* seems to have continued, and the opposition by leaders and members of the Okinawa prefectural organization in Osaka remained even into the 1980s when the *Eisā Festival* gained public approval and popularity among Okinawans and Japanese alike. Kazunori, the current Gajimaru representative, recollected one time when the Gajimaru Club tried to rent sun shades from the prefectural association building which stands right across from the festival site in Chishima Park. Although the prefectural association usually lent these sun shades for Okinawan-related outdoor functions, and even for some local non-Okinawan events, they refused to lend them to the Gajimaru Club.

Prefectural association members were among the most elite Okinawans in Osaka, and they seem to have considered the public display of low Okinawan culture such as *eisā* or *min'yō* an embarrassment as late as the 1980s, not unlike their 1930s counterpart found singing and *sanshin* playing by impoverished Okinawans to be shameful. The conflict within the Okinawan community over the practice of *eisā* in public suggests the multilayered nature of ethnic discrimination that not only involved difference in ethnicity but also difference in class and education which often cuts across and goes beyond ethnic lines.

For Gajimaru's part, they interpreted such resistance itself as an indication of the internalized inferiority that ailed Okinawans. Their belief was confirmed by the tacit approval and support of other Okinawans they encountered. For example, some early members would recall a small *obā* (granny) who would always come and watch their practice silently, and leave without talking to anyone. Nobody knew her story but they could tell that she must have come to Osaka when young as a factory worker or for some other menial job, and that she must have gone through much hardship in Osaka for many years. Her observation indicated approval as well as being a reminder of their responsibility, which was to fight back by openly displaying Okinawan difference – *eisā* – against an openly discriminatory society that did not recognize their difference as legitimate.

The place they gathered to practice *eisā*, too, had a unique, symbolic meaning to them. In the early years they gathered at Osaka Castle Park. Their choice was primarily out of convenience as the Park was located at a major subway-railway junction so that members could gather easily from different places where they were living and working. However, to those aware of Okinawa's historical subordination to Japan, it had a symbolic meaning: Osaka Castle was built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who unified the warring states of Japan in the late sixteenth

century. After unification, he launched campaigns to conquer Korea and China. By way of his war effort, he authorized the Satsuma Domain to invade and put the Ryukyu Kingdom under Satsuma's control, on the grounds that the Kingdom refused his request to aid the campaign. In doing so, Toyotomi launched the long history of Okinawa's subjugation to Japan. Thus politically minded members, such as the first chair Tamaki Toshinori, took pleasure in retaliating to the very Hideyoshi in the land of Osaka, by practicing *eisā* in Hideyoshi's castle (Narisada 1998, 79-80). Even though it was mere dance, it felt like resistance from inside the belly of the beast.

### **Politics of Community and Pleasure**

Another significance of Okinawan music and dance in Gajimaru's nascent Okinawan cultural activism was the emphasis on the pleasure and communality of its members. Previous Okinawan activism had focused on their anti-discrimination agenda, which worked to reveal the reality of discrimination against Okinawans and achieve political and social citizenship. In other words, the main goal of pro-Okinawan activism before Gajimaru had been political, rather than cultural. In their rhetoric, the appeal for the recognition of their cultural difference was absent.

Kishi Masahiko has examined the life histories of former collective employment workers and analyzed the Gajimaru Club's early history (2003). He notes that leisure activities, such as picnics, hiking, sports, and theater-going took up the largest part of the Gajimaru Club's activities, while explicitly political activities were rare. He characterizes Gajimaru's activism as "all-encompassing" (as opposed to only political) with two axes of "culture and play" and "political awareness," and thus sees that a *gemeinschaft*-type world based on interpersonal relationships and political organization coexisted in Gajimaru (190).

Indeed, the Club covered all aspects of the lives of young Okinawan workers: providing mutual aid; creating social networks through socializing and entertaining activities such as parties, picnics, field days, and coming-of-age celebrations; as well as engaging in politically oriented activities, including study groups on various Okinawa-related historical and social issues, and negotiation efforts with employers on behalf of mistreated Okinawan employees (see also Kakinohana 1981; Gajumaru 1976).

A member since the early 1980s once explicitly questioned the usual characterization of the Club by scholars and journalists as “political” (Narisada 1998). He thought Gajimaru was a group to assist with daily life (*seikatsu shudan*) rather than a political group (*seiji shudan*). He likely had in mind the conventional understanding of politics, in which political awareness is expressed through charged slogans, rallies, and protests. In fact Gajimaru has been both – a political and life/living group. For Gajimaru, living together and having fun together through the medium of music and dance was political, because “to live” was in itself a political act when the dehumanization of Okinawans – erasure, isolation, and silencing – was leading Okinawans to symbolic and literal deaths, as in the case of Yamaguchi’s suicide. Having a “life group,” where those isolated Okinawan youth could be their Okinawan selves, be communal, have a means of collective expression, and have fun together, was more political than any slogans and protests could have been.

*Eisā* provided the Gajimaru Club with a new means by which its members expressed their newly gained political awareness through their bodies and feelings, rather than through political slogans, petitions, and rallies. The Club’s *eisā* practice occurred during weekends and on holidays at public parks downtown, or near Okinawan communities. *Eisā* as a genre is engaging and interactive. Unlike *ryūbu*, for example, which has a more recital-like quality in which audience and performers are separated, *eisā* is performed in an open space, such as a street or village square, and during and between dances the audience actively engages with performers, cheering, applauding, handing out drinks, money, or tobacco. Being seen, and being under such a friendly, supportive gaze gave the performers a new sense of empowerment.

The physicality of *eisā* practice in public also offered Gajimaru youth a cathartic and even therapeutic opportunity to express their frustration and rage. One of the early members recalls their practice in the following words: “Our dance was amateurish and pathetic, as we all learned it for the first time anyway...But our faces started radiating with delight and excitement when we danced together. For the first time, I realized that we were in fact much brighter and more carefree people than we thought, even those who usually seemed lonely and withdrawn”. Thus “recovering the pride of Okinawans” through public dance performance felt very real to members, and this provided a strong motivation for the activities of the Gajimaru Club.

## *Eisā* in Diaspora: A New Kind of “Us”

Scholars who have studied the Gajimaru Club’s early *eisā* performances focus on its diasporic innovations. Terada, the visual anthropologist who studied taiko drum dance by young Japanese-Americans and Gajimaru’s *eisā*, emphasizes the unique importance of diasporic, “border-crossing music” as “a means of self-affirmation” as opposed to “place-of-origin-ism” (*honbashugi*), a perspective that sees diasporic musical expression as a mere, and inferior, imitation of the authentic one in the “home,” the place of origin (1997). His points are well illustrated by interviews in his 2003 documentary on the Gajimaru Club, “Eisā in Osaka: A place where thoughts intersect.” Drawing on the significance of diasporic expressions as “breaking with folk tradition” (Iguchi 2000), I will discuss another aspect of Gajimaru’s *eisā*: as a means of building affinity and thereby making a new “us.”

Besides the visual, acoustic, and corporeal qualities of *eisā*, another significance of *eisā* lies in its symbolic meaning as a dance for ancestors. In the Introduction, I discussed the fact that *eisā* was originally a community-based seasonal ritual in honor of the ancestors. It was danced by village youth for the rest of the community to see, in honor of their collective ancestors during the *obon* holiday when the spirits of ancestors are believed to visit their offspring from the other world. Nelson writes, in the context of Sonda *eisā*, historically rooted in central Okinawa:

With the dance, all of the memories that have flooded the consciousness of the dancers and visitors are brought into a relationship, a constellation, with the embodied memories of the *eisā*, their alternative images of the past...At the same time, the dancers and their audience are drawn together, coordinated in the experience, the production of *eisā*. (2008, 200)

In an ideal setting, which is rare even in Okinawa, the boundaries between audience and performers are not as clear as it might seem: part of the audience are dancers of the past, “who have already mastered it, who understand and anticipate it” (Nelson 2008, 198), and part are dancers-to-be, children, who are learning as they watch, listen, and feel – absorbing and memorizing the dance and music in their bodies, with all other sensory and emotional memories.

This partly explains why *eisā* had not been introduced in diasporic Okinawan communities before Gajimaru; Osaka or Taisho Ward did not have intrinsic ties with Okinawans, and diasporic Okinawans were not necessarily tied with each other by kinship, thus *eisā* had little relevance at first. However, I argue that due to its symbolism and its aesthetic properties, especially its collective and interactive qualities, *eisā* was performed in the context of affirming

and reassuring a sense of belonging for dancers and spectators alike, and thus helped build a affinity through which participants defined a new “us” beyond immediate ties with land and kinship. This “us-making” practice involved who the performers identified with as ancestors, and therefore as part of “us,” and was based on what the qualities or experiences were that they interpreted as common. Gajimaru’s *eisā* was one such example, and I will discuss more such examples in coming chapters.

When the Gajimaru Club first decided to perform *eisā*, there were few people who knew how to perform *eisā* even though most collective employment youth came from the rural areas of Okinawa where *eisā* originated. This was due to the assimilation education in Okinawa that continued into the postwar period, during the US military rule. Linguistic and cultural assimilation, especially in school education, was pursued by the Okinawans themselves through their postwar grassroots education movement. It was a firm belief that only reversion to the Japanese state could ensure the rights of Okinawans and stop military oppression by the US military government, and educators focused on preparing their students for the time of reversion, or for life on the mainland in the case of collective employment. They believed that the more linguistically and culturally assimilated students were to the Japanese, the better their chances in life, and especially in employment (Noiri 2011).

Thus interest in traditional Okinawan music and dance was actively discouraged in school and considered delinquent behavior (Nakamura 1996). Legendary Okinawan *min’yō* musicians such as Teruya Rinsuke and Noborikawa Seijin recalled that learning and participating in *min’yō* and *eisā* were considered delinquent behaviors, something for those who “went to the mountain school” (skipping school or work and hanging out with other youth in a hidden place outside the village, where they would spend time chat, play, and even drink) (Noborikawa 2002; Teruya 2003).

Choosing to learn and perform *eisā* in Osaka did not come naturally, but rather it was a conscious choice. Studies on Okinawan identity (Ishihara 1986; Tani 1989; Kishi 2003) suggest that within Okinawa, it was usually a specific *shima* identity that was the basis of self-identification and social networking, instead of a more general Okinawan identity. *Shima*, “island” in Japanese, has additional meanings in Okinawan dialect: it means “home,” its reference varying from a specific home village, to a home island or home region (such as Okinawa, Miyako, or Yaeyama Islands), depending on the intention or the context in which the

word is used. At the most abstract level, *shima* can mean Okinawa in its entirety, as opposed to Japan, or Yamato.

The Okinawan Youth Festival initially featured not only *eisā*, which originates on Okinawa Island, but also *kwichā* from the Miyako Islands and *mamidōma* from the Yaeyama Islands. Narisada (1988) points out that in Okinawa, these dances would have been identified with their specific regions of origin, rather than with Okinawa as a whole, and performers would have identified themselves with specific areas within Okinawa. But for Gajimaru in Osaka, *shima* became the whole of Okinawa in opposition to Japan, and it was primarily through the experience of migration to the mainland, whether temporary or permanent, that most Okinawans came to define themselves as Okinawan, whether through their perceived difference from Japanese, or through the categorical Japanese treatment of Okinawans as others (and thus non-Japanese, or not-enough-Japanese).

The “Rediscovery of Okinawanness” (Kishi 2003, 283) is a common theme in the life histories of Okinawans who experienced mainland migration, histories which have been collected by Tani (1986) and Kishi (2003). Choosing *eisā* as a means to represent themselves resonated with the cultural objectification of folk genres (especially folk dance) in French-Canadian nationalism of the 1980s in Quebec (Handler 1988, 52-80), in the sense that Okinawan youth objectified themselves as a distinctive culture in order to see themselves as having a distinctive Okinawan identity. Through *eisā*, a collective pan-Okinawan identity emerged.

Initially Gajimaru maintained *eisā*, *kwichā*, and *mamidōma* as part of its repertoire, but later focused only on *eisā* and modified the accompanying music. Typically each *eisā* group has a set of *min’yō* songs to which they dance, including “Chujin Nagari,” “Kudaka Manjūshū,” “Suri Agari,” and “Ichubigwa” which all have roots on Okinawa Island, and some of which are specifically tied to the *bon* holiday. Gajimaru, however, replaced some of their repertoire with *min’yō* songs from Yaeyama, Miyako and Amami, encompassing the entire Ryukyu Archipelago, so that it represented all Okinawan cultural variations at least musically.<sup>17</sup>

There were other innovations, too, that were tied to the specificity of diasporic experience. Some were creative solutions for certain limitations. For example, early *eisā* costumes were made out of Korean fabric bought from the Korean market in Tsuruhashi: it was

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s, Gajimaru adopted a Kadena-style *eisā* that was more popular among members as well as among the audience, and the musical repertoire became more typical central-Okinawa style.

much easier on their tight budget than buying Okinawan fabrics, but they came to like the fact that their *eisā* costumes made with Korean fabric were different, and clearly signified that their *eisā* was Osaka *eisā*.

Gajimaru also made some changes that had not been considered appropriate for village *eisā* in Okinawa at the time. In traditional *eisā* in Okinawa, there was (and still is) a strict hierarchy among the positions of dancers and sanshin accompanists, based on seniority and gender. Usually, novices start from lower-rank positions such as bare hand dance (*teodori*) or the small, hand-held drum (*pārānku*) and move their way up to the medium sized, cord-bound drum (*shimedaiko* or *shimedēku*) and then to the big barrel drum (*ōdaiko*, *ufudeku*) as their experience and skills mature. And *jikata*, the sanshin accompanist, is a highly respected position given only to a handful of individuals who not only have talent as a singer and sanshin performer, but also seniority and experience – who have mastered all the repertoire over time and worked their way from bottom to top.

In the Gajimaru Club the hierarchy between *jikata* and *sinkā* (dancers) based on seniority and experience was more or less maintained, as only a few individuals were experienced sanshin players and knew *eisā* before they came to Osaka. However, the division between different dancing positions was not significant as most members were first-time learners. In the initial Hamahiga-style *eisā* that the Club first performed until the mid-1980s, there was little difference in dancing positions, and in the later Kadena-style *eisā*, positions were still a matter of choice rather than hierarchy-based.

Another significant innovation was the disintegration of gender division. In terms of traditional gender division, many *eisā* groups were male-only, and when females were part of the group they were usually given only one position: *teodori*, an elegant, feminine bare hand dance that complements men's masculine drum dance and bare hand dance moves.<sup>18</sup> Despite local variations regarding whether women participated in *eisā*, previously drum dance and *jikata* positions had been almost invariably off-limits to women. In the Gajimaru Club, such divisions were not strongly reinforced, and women were as active and devoted members as men. Although there was a female *teodori* position and women often took it voluntarily, female participants could take a drum-dancing position if they wanted. Thus the position was a matter of skill and

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<sup>18</sup> Some *eisā* groups have a men's bare hand dance position, but it looks masculine, often adapted from movements of karate, the Okinawan martial art.

experience rather than gender, and early members, both male and female, recalled this fact with a ring of pride.

Such innovations were possible because the Gajimaru Club was not tied to a single specific tradition of local *eisā*. Everyone was more or less equal, and bound together by virtue of being in Osaka. This shared identity as Okinawans in Osaka did not stop within the Gajimaru Club, among collective employment youth of the time, but extended towards to the early Okinawan immigrants who had settled in Osaka before them. As the tale of the small *obā* who came to watch Gajimaru's *eisā* practice suggests, they felt a strong affinity with these earlier Okinawan immigrants. But not just any Okinawans: they identified with working class Okinawans in Taisho Ward, as opposed to elite Okinawans, with whom they got into conflicts from the beginning because of the elites' objection to Gajimaru's public *eisā* performance.

Especially, Kubun-gwa came to have a symbolic significance to Gajimaru's identity, manifesting decades-long Okinawan discrimination on the mainland, and the persistence and survival of Okinawans. In addition to the suffering of collective employment youth, the lives of Okinawans in Taisho, "the everyday 'Okinawan Buraku'" (*higoro no Okinawa buraku*) provided them with tangible evidence of the continuing reality of Okinawan discrimination beyond *rinen* (ideology), evidence to which an early Gajimaru member attributed the continuation of the Gajimaru Club as opposed to Tokyo's Yūna Club, which didn't continue (Kishi 2003, 266).<sup>19</sup> In other words, there was a rather abstract perception of Okinawan subjugation commonly known as "the Okinawan problems," such as the war atrocities during the Pacific War or the presence US military bases.

By the time of Gajimaru's formation, Kubun-gwa was going through the last stage of the "Kubun-gwa struggle" – the negotiation over eviction and compensation relating to the City's land improvement project before its completion. They aided Kubun-gwa residents with their negotiation, and co-organized the Kubun-gwa Festival in 1975 (Mizuuchi 2001).

Through affinity based on shared hardship and suffering on the mainland, and also actual cooperation in the Kubun-gwa struggle, Gajimaru members connected to diasporic Okinawans, especially people in Kubun-gwa, as their "ancestors." Although Gajimaru youth, who arrived in Osaka much later, did not necessarily share kinship ties with the Okinawan community from the

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<sup>19</sup> Yūna Club was incorporated in Tokyo Kenjinkai's youth branch in 1988 (Kobayashi 1998).



previous period. Once I asked Shinzato, one of Gajimaru's founding members and current *jikata*, who taught him *min'yō* and sanshin. Although he is originally from central Okinawa, where most of the popular *min'yō* originated, he only started learning *min'yō* and sanshin later in his life in Osaka. By the time I met him, he was an avid sanshin and *min'yō* enthusiast and often referred to himself "the sanshin player" (*sanshin hiki*). He wouldn't let go of his sanshin at any time, and he would play it whenever possible (according to Shinzato, he would keep his sanshin on the passenger seat in his car, and play while he was waiting for the traffic light to change). It sounded obvious that he had learned sanshin at a fairly late point in his life, although he had been in Osaka for almost four decades now that he was almost sixty.

"Me? I learned from my predecessors in Kubun-gwa" (*Kubun-gwa no senpai*).

Prior to this I had heard conflicting stories regarding who Shinzato learned to play sanshin from, although all the stories might have been true (he may have learned from all those people at different points of time). As I will discuss in Chapter 6, "who taught whom" was not a trivial matter for some, as denying a teacher-student relationship in *min'yō* and sanshin, however temporary and informal it was, implied the denial of the teacher's authority, which can offend said teacher. And it is significant that Shinzato, a politically minded, strong-headed Okinawan nationalist, who must have been in a relatively privileged position as an engineer compared to other Gajimaru members in terms of education and socio-economic status, specifically attributed his sanshin skills to the collective "predecessors" (*senpai*) of Kubun-gwa rather than to specific individuals who still resided in Taisho.

In short, the Gajimaru Club constructed a new "us" that was pan-Okinawan beyond the specificity of each member's place of origin, and was also tied to a very specific space, namely Osaka, especially Taisho. Moreover, by identifying with early diasporic Okinawans as their ancestors, they expanded their chronology. For individuals it was a few years spent away from Okinawa, but as a collective their history could be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, beyond their immediate experience.

### **Development of the Taisho Eisā Festival**

In the beginning the scale of the Eisā Festival was small, with about two hundred participants and the only audience being the performers themselves, but it was the first

Okinawan cultural festival on mainland Japan. Its participants recall that performances were somewhat amateurish, but the festival was deemed satisfactory by all members. Greatly encouraged by the success of the festival, the Gajimaru Club held it every year, gradually expanding its scale and improving its quality. The Gajimaru Club contacted other Okinawan youth organizations outside the Osaka area, such as in Aichi and Tokyo, to invite them to participate in the festival. Later on, the Club invited groups in Okinawa as well.

The Taisho Eisā Festival, initially called Okinawa Youth Festival, started as the Gajimaru Club's own event, and well into the 1990s it remained a relatively small-scale event whose main target audience was longstanding Okinawan communities. Until the 1980s, the Festival was held at different parks or schoolgrounds in Taisho or Amagasaki, presumably near an Okinawa community, and from 1980 until the 30th anniversary of the Festival in 2004, it was held at Hirao Park, which is much smaller than Chishima Park and located deeper in the Okinawan community in Hirao. Not only Gajimaru members but residents of Hirao described the low-key, neighborly atmosphere in which audience and performers knew each other personally, using expressions such as “that is so-and-so's nephew” and “that is my son's friend” in a way that made it sound almost like a family picnic or a picnic for the entire neighborhood. It was especially so when the Gajimaru Club worked hand in hand with the Taisho Okinawa Children's Club (see Chapter 4), whose members were Okinawan children from the community in Taisho (concentrated in Hirao), and the children's families actively participated. Looking at photos taken in the 1980s and 1990s of the Festival's audience, Gajimaru members (and Children's Club members) would personally recognize many individuals and remember what they were doing at the time or how they are doing at present. There were photos of *ojī* (grandpa) or *obā* (grandma) in the audience who were standing up and raising their hands in *kachāshi* moves, faces filled with joy.<sup>20</sup> It was an event for Gajimaru themselves, and for Okinawan families and neighbors.

Yoshiko, Shinzato's wife, once told me a story about their son, Futoshi. Shinzato and Yoshiko got married during the preparation of the Gajimaru Club and settled in Taisho, where Yoshiko grew up and lived. Futoshi was born before the first Festival, and as a child he

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<sup>20</sup> *Kachāshi* is an impromptu, festive Okinawan dance that is danced spontaneously at parties or music and dance events, especially toward the climax. It is danced by everyone, not just performers but also audience, hosts, or guests, and indicates irrepressible excitement and merriment of the dancer.

participated in Gajimaru activities with his parents. At age ten, Futoshi was walking around the Taisho neighborhood with Gajimaru dancers for *michijune*, wearing the thick white makeup and *bashōfu* kimono of a *chondara*.<sup>21</sup> After a while Yoshiko noticed her son was staggering, completely drunk. She scolded him, “*Ai* (Okinawan exclamation)! You took *awamori* from *ojī obā*?” At this, he protested, “But you always tell me I shouldn’t turn down anything that *ojī obā* gives to me!” “I didn’t mean alcohol!” “But ma, I didn’t accept tobacco when somebody gave it to me!” She smirked, imitating her little son’s slurry voice at the time. There was a ring of affection, for both her son and for that *ojī* or *obā* who got him drunk, which would have been unacceptable on a normal occasion in modern Japan. It was that sense of an idyllic Okinawan village, where it is forgivable, if not recommended, that a well-meaning elderly person gives alcohol as a reward to a neighborhood kid who is dancing hard as part of *eisā*. It was such a moment of community that was recreated in a corner of Taisho, between Futoshi and his intoxicator, and between them and Yoshiko.

The Gajimaru Club also maintained a close relationship with the second *eisā* club, the Taisho Okinawan Children’s Club, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. The Taisho Okinawan Children’s Club was created for school-age Okinawan children in Taisho, with the objectives of empowering Okinawan youth and promoting Okinawan identity by means of *eisā* and *min’yō*, like the Gajimaru Club. The clubs maintained a sibling-like relationship in the 1980s and 1990s, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Outreach Efforts: Kansai Okinawa Bunko**

As the Gajimaru Club gradually became rooted in the Taisho Okinawan community, with some of the members settled in Taisho or within Kansai, the Club became engaged in outreach efforts to educate the general public about Gajimaru’s agenda and various Okinawan-related issues. In 1985, a founding member, Kinjo Kaoru, established the Kansai Okinawa Bunko (Kansai Okinawa Library) on the second floor of his own house in Kobayashi. The Bunko is a small-scale library doubling as an Okinawan culture center. It shares space with an Okinawan

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<sup>21</sup> *Michijune* is ritual street dancing from house to house. *Chondara* is a clown-like comical figure, who leads, cheers, or dances with the dancers, often soliciting money or *awamori* from the audience

products store run by Kaoru and his older brother, which supports the Kinjos' livelihood. The Bunko houses over six thousand books on various aspects of Okinawan history and culture, with an emphasis on the Battle of Okinawa, the US military presence, and the peace movement, with some additional books about the Amami Islands and the Ainu, that Kinjo himself personally collected or that individuals, organizations, and publishers donated. An open floor surrounded by the bookshelves serves multiple purposes as a space for gatherings, study groups, sanshin classes, lectures, performances, and so on, and is also Gajimaru's office where the Club holds organizational meetings and parties.

Kaoru joked that he made it a library and Gajimaru's gathering place on purpose to justify Gajimaru's presence when many people still did not approve of what the Gajimaru Club was doing: "You can't think people are up to no good when they hang out around so many books." Although it was a joke, it reflects Kinjo's belief that books and knowledge of Okinawa will provide a firm ground for Okinawans in Osaka, while leading Japanese out of prejudice and into a deeper connection with Okinawans. Once Kinjo characterized the Bunko as a port, a harbor, in a series of columns in which he described his personal journey from Ainu lands in Northern Japan to the southernmost islands of Okinawa to find his diasporic self. In his last column of the series, "At the end of the drifting...Kansai Okinawa Bunko" (Kinjo 2007) he wrote:<sup>22</sup>

My journey to pursue my *oji's* (grandpa's) Okinawa has come to an end. However, even in Okinawa, I couldn't find a place where I could return, and started drifting again. However, it was a big accomplishment that I have attained a *sabani* (dinghy). Now I can drift at my will, between Okinawa that doesn't see me as an Okinawan, and Japan that doesn't see me as a Japanese. At a harbor where boats find shelter, diverse people, cultures, lives, and politics intersect. Kansai Okinawa Bunko is such a harbor.

The Bunko does not only collect books on Okinawa, but other historical materials, especially life histories of elderly Okinawans in Taisho. And it offers various first-hand opportunities for interested individuals, groups, and schools to learn about Okinawan history and the history of Okinawans in Osaka, especially Taisho: guided field trips in Taisho; sanshin classes; lectures (on site or by dispatching lecturers) on Okinawan history, culture, or the Battle of Okinawa; and cultural events such as musical concerts or theater by Okinawan performers and exhibitions.

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<sup>22</sup> In this article, Kinjo intentionally rendered the last letter of Bunko (library) as *kō* (港, meaning harbor, port).

## The Success of the Taisho Eisā Festival: The 30th Anniversary

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Taisho Eisā Festival turned from a small, subcultural event of young, underprivileged Okinawan workers, which was previously held to counter the hostility of mainstream society, to a large-scale event in which mainstream individuals and organizations (Japanese or Okinawan) enthusiastically participated. The festival gradually attracted people from outside of Taisho, such as Okinawans from other areas and later from the mainstream Japanese population as well, due to the so-called Okinawa Boom, a heightened interest and popularity in Okinawa through the media and popular culture that started in the early 1990s and reached Okinawan communities in Taisho. Taisho Ward, known for its “Okinawan Slum,” once a destination Osaka’s taxi drivers loathed to drive to for fear of having their cars damaged by mud and dilapidated road conditions (Kaneshiro 2008), came to be covered as the “Little Okinawa you can visit on a bike” by television and magazines (Nakama 2000).

Initially, the Gajimaru Club was encouraged by such positive reception of the Festival and the increasing popularity of *eisā*, and took their success as an indication of increasing cultural acceptance of Okinawan culture. They strived to expand the Festival and spread *eisā*: the Club started to accept non-Okinawan individuals who were interested in *eisā*; taught *eisā* outside the Club to whoever was interested, regardless of their ethnicity; and invited *eisā* groups from various areas in Japan. The subtitle of 1986 Okinawan Youth Festival, “Nihon Rettō Ama kara Kuma kara (“From here and there – everywhere – in the Japanese Archipelago” in Okinawan dialect) reflects the Club’s wish and belief that spreading *eisā* would lead to a broader cultural acceptance and improvement of Okinawans’ conditions.

The post-Okinawa Boom attraction to the Festival, and the Gajimaru Club’s efforts to accommodate the increasing number of participants while honoring the history of diasporic Okinawans, culminated in 2004 when the Festival reached its peak size. The 30th anniversary of the Festival, titled “Rope, Beauty, and the Eisā Festival” (Tsuna, Chura, Eisā Matsuri), included the Grand Tsunahiki (tug-of-war) from Yonabaru on Okinawa Island. *Tsunahiki*, ritual tug-of-war, is an important annual event that goes back more than 400 hundred years to the Ryukyu Kingdom for its origin. It involves two giant ropes that are six feet thick, 300 foot long, and

weigh five tons when combined (Eisā Festival brochure, 2004). The two ropes are joined together and pulled by hundreds of people, encouraged by a dozen individuals in the attire and makeup of the Ryukyu Kingdom who stand on the ropes. Originally intended to pray for an abundant rice harvest and peace for the Ryukyu Kingdom, now it is a major local event that also attract a large number of tourists. The Yonabaru *tsunahiki* is one of the big three *tsunahiki* rituals in Okinawa.

The idea of including the Okinawan Grand Tsunahiki had been a long-cherished dream among Gajimaru Club members: they wished to commemorate the success of the Eisā Festival, which seemed to indicate Japanese society's recognition of the excellence of Okinawan culture, with something Okinawan that was symbolic of the richness of Okinawan history as well as spectacular in itself. Such a wish was shared broadly within Taisho's Okinawan community as well. The Festival Preparation Committee was formed including the Gajimaru Club and other interested members of the Kenjinkai and Okinawan community, and worked in conjunction with Yonabaru Town. The 30th Eisā Festival turned out to be a huge success, especially in terms of scale and spectacle; it presented more than eleven *eisā* groups, two *sanshin* clubs, two Okinawan popular singers, and karate demonstrations in front of more than 20,000 people. The preparation process and the Festival itself was covered by newspapers and broadcasted by television stations in both Okinawa and Osaka. The Taisho Eisā Festival appeared to have established itself not just as the oldest, but also as the biggest and most renowned Okinawan cultural festival outside of Okinawa.



**Figure 11: A painting of the Grand Tsunahiki at the 30th Eisā Festival by an elderly Okinawan (photo taken by author).**

Kaoru showed me a colorful watercolor painting of the 2004 Grand Tsunahiki, about four feet by three feet, made by a first-generation Okinawan man in his eighties who probably came to Osaka in the prewar period. “This old man had never painted in his life before,” he said, “and he finished this painting in a few days after he saw the *tsunahiki*...it must have been his dream come true, to see something like that in Osaka.” The Bunko kept the painting in honor of those *senpai* (predecessors) who finally saw the day that Okinawa was celebrated in the heart of Osaka, after decades of humiliation. Their relentless efforts finally seemed to have paid off.

### **Post Okinawan Boom Problems: The Yamatoization of the Festival**

As the Festival became more popular among Japanese, famous in the mainstream media, and one of the main attractions of the Taisho district, Japanese authorities and elite Okinawan organizations such as the Kenjinkai, which had been inhospitable to the Club, became more cooperative. At the beginning of the 2008 Festival, the head of the Taisho Ward office gave a celebratory speech.

The 30th anniversary’s Grand Tsunahiki was a one-time event that had been carefully planned for a long time and carried out through the cooperation of various parties. However, even after the drama and spectacle of the Grand Tsunahiki was over, the Taisho Eisā Festival

kept its reputation and scale as the biggest Okinawan cultural festival outside of Okinawa, and as a surefire attraction for diasporic Okinawans and Japanese enthusiasts who love anything Okinawan. The number of visitors to the Festival after the 30th anniversary remained steady at more than 10,000 people every year. Scholars, journalists, and media artists who visited the Gajimaru Club during the 1990s and early 2000s, when the Club's activities were still at their height, depicted this first *eisā* club and the host of the oldest and biggest *eisā* festival on mainland Japan in a largely celebratory manner, as a success story (for example, see Narisada 1998; Iguchi 2000; Terada 1999; Ota 1996).

However, a closer look at the Festival itself and the year-round process of its preparation revealed substantial issues behind the apparent success of the *Eisā* Festival, which Gajimaru members found problematic or overwhelming. The increased number of Japanese spectators and increased Japanese participation in *eisā* performances brought about unexpected and unwanted changes as well, and the ambivalence of Gajimaru members grew over time. There were internal changes within the Gajimaru Club, and external changes that came about primarily from the increased Japanese participation.

### **Change in the Gajimaru Club: Size Reduction and Aging**

Over the last three decades, Gajimaru has gone through a somewhat dramatic change in its scale and demography. This was primarily because the constant flow of Okinawan labor immigrants stopped, due to the change of employment pattern: collective employment labor migration rapidly declined after the 1980s (Kishi 2001), while the U-turn migration of Okinawan workers continued. Although they were active and devoted to their agenda while they were in Osaka, most of the early members eventually returned to Okinawa. Yoshiko once told me in a nostalgic and mildly reproachful tone,

When [my husband] Shinzato-san bought our house in Taisho, I first objected because it was way more than we could afford at the time. I told him “Why don't we just rent an apartment unit? We can't afford and we don't need more than that.” But he said, “No, we'll show our *kōhai* (juniors, successors) that we *Uchinānchu* (Okinawans) can indeed settle down and live here in Osaka.” And I didn't oppose him any more. But see what happened. Those liars! They promised to take root in Osaka like Gajimaru, and hauled their asses back to Okinawa just like that!

At the time of its formation, the Gajimaru Club started with about 250 people, distributed in seven branches according to the major areas in Kansai where Okinawan youths



were employed, such as Osaka, Takarazuka, Shiga, Kyoto and Hyogo. At its peak, the number of members exceeded 500 (Kishi 2003). When scholars such as Terada (1999), Narisada (1998), and Iguchi (2000) visited the Gajimaru Club in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, Gajimaru had lost its branches, and there were about forty to fifty active members who came regularly to practice.

When I visited the Club between 2007 and 2008, however, there were only about twenty active members, including members' children, who regularly participated in ordinary functions such as event preparation meetings and stage performance for various events. For *eisā* practice which happened quite irregularly, about once a month or less (it increased during the couple of months before the Festival), usually there were less than ten dancers and one or two of the four available *jikata*, most of whom lived in Taisho. In after-practice socializing, a few more would show up coming from their work. On an occasion like that, the group looked more like a casual gathering of several families rather than an organization of any sort.

The annual *Eisā* Festival was the only occasion when a large number of members gathered and performed. As Kazunori, the current chair, humorously put it, "Gajimaru members mysteriously multiply at the time of the *Eisā* Festival, and they mysteriously disappear after the Festival." Even then the number of participants still did not exceed thirty people. There were a few I hardly saw during the fourteen months of my interaction with the Club. Usually members of Lekio, the small Takarazuka-based *eisā* group that consisted of Okinawan immigrants and their offspring, joined to fill out the numbers when Gajimaru had to perform for various occasions including the Taisho *Eisā* Festival, and Gajimaru members would reciprocate in kind.

Moreover, the composition of the Gajimaru Club had changed greatly. It was not a club for Okinawan *youth* any more – it was a club for families, mostly grandparents, parents, children, and a few single individuals. More than half of the most active members were those who had been members since the beginning, in the mid-1980s or 1990s. They were either from Taisho or had settled somewhere in cities near Osaka, with ages ranging from their early 30s to early 60s. The remaining less than half of the Club, who had been members for under a decade, were either Okinawans between their mid-20s and early 30s, who had individually arrived on the mainland for education or employment, or were Kansai-based Japanese individuals ranging from their early 20s to early 40s who had initially joined through Kansai Okinawa Bunko's activities. Only less than a quarter or so of currently active members (five or six) were young single Okinawans

who came to Osaka seeking work or education; their working conditions were far better as they had more skilled jobs, and they did not experience treatment that was different from other Japanese workers. Older members often joked that the Club was following Japan's current trend as "the aging society" (*kōrēka shakai*). Around 2006, the Gajimaru Club dropped the word "youth" (*sēnen*) from its official title. The Gajimaru Club, once "the gathering of Kansai Okinawan youth," became "the gathering of Kansai Okinawans."

With the Club's decreasing and aging membership, it became less and less feasible for the Gajimaru Club to accommodate the Eisā Festival by themselves. By 2001, the Eisā Festival Executive Committee was formed as the official hosting body, although it was still the Gajimaru Club who made most of the decisions about organization, and supplied human labor, networking, fundraising, and advertising efforts. The Club delegated tasks to volunteers from the Taisho community and from elsewhere. For a couple of months before the Festival, those twenty-some members would work past their full capacity to the point of complete burnout. Even the three young daughters of Club members, aged three to nine, would run around the streets of Taisho distributing leaflets and collecting donations.

But it seemed obvious that the Festival, which now involved 10,000 people, was far more than what a group of twenty-some individuals, ranging from age three to sixty, could handle by themselves. In addition to monetary donations from residents, businesses, and organizations from Taisho, Osaka, Kansai, and even from Okinawa, the Club relied for a substantial portion of labor in preparation of the Festival on the voluntary work of Taisho residents, Festival performers, students of several colleges from Kansai and Okinawa, and several activist groups whose efforts on behalf of the Club would be reciprocated in kind throughout the year.

### **The Yamatoization of the Festival**

It was not simply the decline of the Club's size, the aging of its members, or the exponential growth of the Festival itself that concerned Gajimaru Club members, but also the Japanization of the Festival, their Club, and their practice, or as they put it, Yamatoization (*Yamatoka*). This term comprehensively referred to various changes in the Festival, in their group, in Taisho, in *eisā* and *min'yō*, and in Okinawa and Okinawans, which happened in the process of accommodating the so-called Okinawaphiles (*Okinawazuki*),

Those concerned felt that the heightened popularity of Okinawan folk music and *eisā* during the Okinawa Boom paradoxically undermined the Club's sustenance. The decontextualization of *eisā* from its traditional context, and its increased popularity through the Okinawa Boom facilitated the spread of *eisā* on mainland Japan during the 1990s. The number of Japanese who performed *eisā* rapidly increased, especially in Tokyo and the Osaka-Kansai area where there had been *eisā* groups formed by Okinawans. Japanese enthusiasts either joined in existing youth clubs or associations run by Okinawans, or created their own *eisā* performance groups and called in Okinawans as instructors (Okinawa shi kikakubu 1998).

Many Okinawan organizations, including the Gajimaru Club, initially welcomed such change as an indication of the growing appreciation of Okinawan culture by Japanese. However, these Japanese newcomers came into conflict with existing members over the orientation and activities of the group, as they were mostly interested in performing *eisā* and were indifferent to other Okinawan-related issues. These conflicts brought about divisions in the group, and shifts in the main concerns of the group from engagement in social issues regarding Okinawa, to *eisā* performance and entertainment using Okinawa-related elements, such as music, food, drink, and tourism (Kishi 2003). For example, Okinawans and Japanese who were primarily interested in *eisā* and far less politically oriented diverged from Gajimaru to form their own *eisā* group, Ryūkōden. More *eisā*-focused groups with Okinawan and Japanese members formed in other Kansai areas, such as Okinawa Kariyushikai or Kyoto Ryukyukai.

Another example repeatedly given by Gajimaru members was that the youth branch of Tokyo Okinawa Kenjinkai, another long-standing, prominent *eisā* group, started accepting Japanese members and eventually was "taken over" by them. The incident was repeatedly mentioned with contempt as one of the Okinawa Boom-related absurdities: "Have you ever heard of any other *kenjinkai* (prefectural organization) run by somebody from another prefecture? And nobody thinks it is ridiculous that Tokyoites take over an Okinawa prefectural organization?"

What disturbed Gajimaru members regarding the Japanese taking over of the Festival was the alienation of Okinawans in Taisho, especially the elderly. For the Gajimaru Club, their purpose of utilizing *eisā* was to commemorate the history of diasporic Okinawans, especially those in Taisho whose hardiness and persistence was told and retold in tales of Kubun-gwa. Even today, among Gajimaru members, the focus of the Festival is honoring and entertaining older

Okinawans, whom they call *senpai* (predecessors) or more endearingly *ojī* and *obā* (grandpa and grandma). But as Japanese audience members became a majority and more and more intrusive, it became harder for Okinawan elderly to enjoy the Festival. The phrase “*Ojī* and *Obā* are not dancing with us any more” became common during preparation meetings. For example, during several preparation meetings for the 2008 Festival, members discussed how to ward off intrusive spectators from the seats reserved for seniors. The Club had always set up chairs and shades marked *keirōseki* (seats for seniors) separately, so that they could provide a better view of the entire event to elderly Okinawans. Otherwise they couldn’t compete for a view with younger, stronger spectators in greater numbers. Somebody complained that pushy people would ignore those signs anyway and still barge in and take those seats, to take pictures, or just for a better view in comfortable seats under the shade. And Gajimaru was short of manpower to keep intruders in check, as they were running all over just to manage the all-day event without major accidents.

And during the interactive sessions (there were two or three sessions, featuring *kachāshi* or *kwichā*), everyone was invited to dance on the stage.<sup>23</sup> Young, large outsiders would scramble in as if they were only waiting for this moment, with such a vigor that people from the Taisho neighborhood, especially the elderly, would rather retreat at the sight. Chinami, the young leader of TOCC (Chapter 4) also expressed to me her perplexity at this frenzy-like vigor of Japanese spectators.

“I don’t know how to explain it. [Before the Festival grew this big,] even though we were excited (*moriagari*), it was different. We were just being merry (*tanoshii*). But these days...it doesn't seem normal (*futsū ja nai*). I was shocked when I came back from Okinawa and first saw it [in 2001].”

*Moriagari* refers to the state of collective excitement, enthusiasm, or passion on festive occasions such as parties, concerts, and festivals. Usually it is not only good, but considered necessary for an event to be successful. As a performer or emcee, one’s skill to excite and energize (*moriageru*) one’s audience is important. As a member of the audience one wants and needs to get excited (*moriagaru*) with the rest of crowd. An event is successful when it reaches

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<sup>23</sup> *Kwichā* is Miyako’s *obon* dance. It involves simple, repetitive movement such as raising ones arms up, putting them down, and sideways, while the group is walking round and circle. Anyone can learn quickly by watching it and can participate in the dancing crowd.

and stays in *moriagari*, hosts and guests alike, performers and audience alike; it's a state of connectedness and shared excitement.

But this over-the-top, frenzied *moriagari* was perceived as different, something that Gajimaru members or Chinami had never experienced before. And it didn't appear to be a positive sign to them. Kaoru thought the excessiveness of the *moriagari* expressed by (assumedly) Japanese spectators indicated their lack of consideration for others (i.e. the original host and guests), and was used to release their frustration and stress as they would often do at Okinawan restaurants and music pubs that accommodated Japanese customers. As Kaoru expressed it, it was as if the Festival had become a dumping ground for Japanese intruders, who would bring their emotional waste that was produced during their lives in mainstream society, and dump it at the Festival through their over-the-top *moriagari*, at the expense of the enjoyment of the original audience for whom the Festival was meant: the Taisho community, and especially the *ojī* and *obā*.

While they were discussing various strategies, there was a clear ring of condemnation, and a lament that *ojī* and *obā*, for whom in their mind this event was being prepared, were pushed aside while more and more people who they felt had nothing to do with the event, and who they didn't care about, barged in and took over. They assumed that the pushy spectators would be Japanese and thought local Okinawans wouldn't do it, assuming that Okinawans would know whom those seats were meant for.

When *eisā* was discussed in the context of Japanese intrusion, although not always explicit, there was a sense of indignation against something amounting to sacrilege. Although they acknowledged *eisā*'s use as entertainment, and they themselves danced off-stage just for fun, *eisā* was fundamentally associated with ancestral ritual, which had a sacred meaning. And Japanese appropriation was all the more infuriating because of their disregard for the Okinawan elderly, living ancestors, and it indicated their lack of respect toward Okinawan culture and Okinawans, however much they claimed they loved *eisā*.

The following episode, which happened at the Toyota Eisā Festival, illustrates the changes Gajimaru members regarded as problematic and symptomatic of Yamatoization, and what Gajimaru members regarded as important and authentic in their practice.

## Disappointment at the Toyota Festival

On the morning of a late August day, a dozen Gajimaru members, including their three young girls, and I left Taisho Ward for Toyota in Aichi Prefecture, departing from Taisho station in four cars. We were headed for a Toyota suburb where the Toyota Friendship Festival was going to be held. Established in 1979, the Toyota Festival is one of the three oldest *Eisā* Festivals on mainland Japan, along with Osaka's Taisho *Eisā* Festival and Tokyo's Ashibasai.

I rode in Shinzato and Yoshiko's car with Yumiko, a high-school girl, who was Shinzato's *min'yō* and *sanshin* prodigy and Gajimaru's new *jikata*. She was from an Okinawan family in Nishinari Ward, called a "2.5 generation" as her father was a second generation from Nishinari and her mother was a first generation from Naha. Yumiko and her mother had run a Nishinari-based youth *eisā* group, Deigo Club, for seven years, where she taught *eisā* to her friends and played *jikata*. Recently they passed on its operation to someone else and joined Gajimaru. As the youngest active member (other than members' children), she was cherished by everybody.

Yoshiko was particularly elated. She was excited by the anticipation of showing Yumiko and me the Toyota Festival.

I like the Toyota Festival, because there is still an atmosphere of *Uchinānchu* there, which we have already lost in ours. It's different from the *Eisā* Festival here [in Taisho] or the one in Tokyo. The Taisho *Eisā* Festival has been already changed, Yamatoized (*Yamatoka sareta*). Tokyo, too. When we go to Tokyo to perform, something is different. Everyone is dancing hard, and they are good dancers, but something is different, even to our eyes, who were born and grew up here [in Yamato, not in Okinawa].

Maybe that's the reason why people tend to pay more attention when Gajimaru dances. [Although our dance skills are no better than other groups',] I can feel it when I'm dancing. After our dance, some people approach us and say they want to learn *eisā*. These are people of my age [near sixty]. (Imitating Okinawan accent) "Do you think I could learn to dance even in my age?" they ask, and I tell them, "Sure you can, if I can dance at my age, sure you can learn."

A little past lunchtime, we arrived at the Festival site, a wide clearing in front of a Japanese Shinto shrine surrounded by a forest and rice paddies. We unloaded and carried our instruments and coolers. However, we were somewhat surprised to see that there were no seats reserved for us. Usually Festival hosts make sure to give each performing party a seating space (usually a couple of mats and sometimes shades, marked with the name of the group) so that they can change, prepare, rest, and watch the event. Probably there was a seat prepared but other

spectators took it before we arrived. It was probably an organizational error but it didn't bode well with some members, because from their own experience of organizing the Taisho Festival, it indicated that the host was not in full control of the event.

Soon we realized that there was more than our seating that had gone wrong. We noticed that the *jikata* of the performing group was not experienced or skilled at all. Even I noticed that he couldn't be Okinawan – he was singing in the wrong voice inflection (*fushimawashi*), exaggerating and bending at all the wrong places. That was what typically happened when a *Yamatonchu* (Japanese) singer was haphazardly trying to imitate Okinawan *min'yō* singing, without proper training. It sounded worse, to discerning ears, than when the singer just sang in the manner of any popular song – at least that sounded honest, if amateurish. On hearing this, Asato, the professional *min'yō* singer and Gajimaru's *jikata* who wrote the Gajimaru anthem, angrily squatted and took out a cigarette. “What's going on here?!” He lit it and started blowing out smoke. “Yoshiko! Do something about it!”

“Do something?! What am I supposed to do, stop him?” Yoshiko, who was also obviously annoyed, bluntly responded.

As time passed, it became clear that the Toyota Festival wasn't the Festival that Yoshiko had wanted us young people to experience. Although its scale remained manageable, the main actors and atmosphere had changed. After asking around, Kazunori, the current Gajimaru leader, in his mid-40s, came back and told us that Taikoren, the group that had evolved from an Okinawan worker's gathering, was not fully in charge any more. It had happened around the time of the 2005 Aichi Expo, the World Fair. The Expo organizers were aware of the popularity of the Toyota Festival, and wanted to include *eisā* as a part of their celebration. However, they were reluctant to invite Taikoren, as they didn't think Taikoren was big enough or their dance refined enough to perform at an international event. Instead, they recruited and assembled six smaller *eisā* clubs into the Aichi Eisā Kyogikai (Council), whose membership largely included Japanese hobbyists who were younger and more focused on *eisā*. They used new choreography and training that was more fitting for the big show, and went on stage. Now this assembly was apparently bigger and better at dancing, had more resources, and had become more central to the Toyota Festival than Taikoren was.

Yoshiko, Asato, and Shinzato were increasingly displeased, and grunted whenever they heard the wrong sounds. Yumiko indignantly said, “I hate that people take somebody else's

dance, change it as they please, and do it!” After a while they decided it was not worth paying any more attention and then getting annoyed, and they would rather have fun by themselves. Shinzato, Asato, Yumiko, and Shinzo took out their sanshins from their cases, turned their backs away from the dancing crowd, and started to sing *min’yō* songs on their own.

Kazunori was more laid back and making jokes in a more self-effacing manner. “You know, when *Yamatonchu* dance *eisā*, they look much better than us,” Kazunori told me, “their movement is all coordinated, their techniques are better... This is because they are meticulous, and more, they think there is only one right way for each move, because that’s the only thing they know. But we are not like that. Everyone is dancing as they please, coming up with slightly different moves, so we look all *barabara* (mismatched)...”

When a *jikata* – clearly *Yamatonchu* – was singing in a deep voice like an opera singer, even I found myself cringing because his voice felt so awkward. Kazunori jokingly talked to himself, “Does that sound like ‘I’ll become a thousand strands of wind’ only to me?” I nodded at him, and we exchanged knowing smiles. It was another mockery: “I’ll become a thousand strands of wind” was a popular aria sung by a Japanese opera singer. The popular music video for this song was set in Okinawa, and the singer sang about eternal love in a melodramatic tone, that he would become “a thousand strands of wind” and stroke his dead lover’s grave, in an imaginary place in Okinawa. However, the composer, lyricist, and singer of the song were all Japanese. In another gathering Gajimaru members were mocking the song, saying the song was creepy.

Finally it was Gajimaru’s turn to go onstage. It was Yumiko’s first official stage appearance as Gajimaru’s *jikata*. She stood along with her two teachers, Shinzato and Asato, wearing a costume that her mother made for this specific occasion. Honestly, I wasn’t sure if their dance was particularly better than those of other groups, or better than their own dance on other occasions; it felt to me more or less uneventful. As Kazunori had joked, their dance was not exceptionally coordinated. But it also seemed very familiar, and effortless. Almost everyone had been dancing it for years. They danced and sang merrily. And the three girls who followed their parents here, although they did not dance with the grownups, watched them from the side, as they probably had been doing since their birth, mouthing the lyrics, and clapping and stepping to the rhythm of the drums.



After a few days, I went back to give them the pictures I had taken at the Toyota Festival. Yoshiko said that she asked her husband how they were doing on stage, as he was watching over them from the podium. Compared to other groups, bigger groups that had more and younger dancers, their own dance might look more amateurish and haphazard.

“But Shinzato-san said, ‘No, Gajimaru’s *eisā* was the best. Although you guys may not have been as good or coordinated as other groups, but you guys were vibrant (*hajiketeiru*).’”

Indeed, it showed in my pictures, too. It was clear everyone was enjoying it from the heart – bursting with joy.

### **The Reflection of the Price of Okinawan Popularity**

As Gajimaru members felt Okinawan music and dance practice in general, and *eisā* festivals (in Osaka, Tokyo, and Toyota) were increasingly taken over by Japanese appropriation, the Gajimaru Club reflected on their success. There were growing concerns that *eisā* had lost its sacred meaning of honoring ancestors and had been reduced to a simple “show.” An elderly individual in Taisho reportedly said that it is disgusting to see *eisā* has become some sort of mass game. From this perspective, even the perfect coordination among dancers of newly formed groups and their improved, colorful costumes seemed like a distortion, rather than an improvement, suggesting that *eisā* had become a mere entertainment, disconnected from Okinawans’ lived experience.

More outspoken members, such as Shinzato and Kaoru, described it as “cultural exploitation” (*bunka sakushu*), another form of Okinawan oppression in which mainstream Japanese, who had once discriminated against them and oppressed their expression of cultural distinctiveness, now consumed their Festival, so meaningful to Gajimaru members and Taisho Okinawans, just like another exotic entertainment.

I heard cynical comments like “such-and-such group has gone wrong” (*dame ni natta*) when a formerly Okinawan-based group was taken over by Okinawa enthusiasts and lost its original agenda along the way. This indignation resonates with what many indigenous people feel about “identity piracy” (Harrison 1999) the appropriation by a privileged or dominant group of the dominated group’s cultural artifacts or practices, which they consider to be crucial in their identity construction.

Gajimaru members did not only blame Japanese for the corruption of their practice, but turned their critical gaze towards themselves, too. They questioned whether their own efforts to promote *eisā* somehow contributed to this tendency, whether they were too accommodating to Japanese for their own good, under the illusion that the Japanese desire for Okinawan culture meant greater acceptance and equality for Okinawans. Kaoru traced the circumstances back to the initial objections of older Okinawans to Gajimaru's *eisā*, and tried to reinterpret the meaning of *hajisarashi*. Instead of Gajimaru's initial interpretation of the expression as a sign of Okinawans' sense of inferiority, Kaoru wondered if they could have meant that some things are meant to be kept to themselves, not to be shared with outsiders, in order to retain a sense of identity. If such things were opened up to senseless, disrespectful outsiders, their precious meanings were lost and they turned into mere objects of consumption and pleasure; especially when those outsiders were the mainstream society and the insiders were a minority who were already at disadvantage and desperate to please mainstream society in order to be accepted.

It would be easier to understand if the Okinawa Boom is like the huge stomach of the *Yamato* (mainstream Japanese) society, which gulps down Okinawa. One meets its mouth first before one reaches its stomach, and an elegant name is prepared for this mouth – its name is “understanding” (Don't the majority always say “we would like to ‘understand’ the minority?”).

Ten years ago, we seem to have *dōkasichatta* (a double entendre, meaning “have gone wrong in the head” and “have been assimilated”) in our desperation to be understood, and voluntarily jumped into that mouth. (Kinjo 2007, 154)

Kaoru was not alone in this critical self-reflection of Okinawan complicity. Nomura, the diasporic Okinawan sociologist, points out the collusion of Okinawans who succumbed to the voyeuristic desires of mainstream Japanese by catering to the “Okinawa Disease.” He argues that Okinawans complete the policy of “Japanese rule in the name of love” by voluntarily becoming an object for the Japanese gaze (Nomura 2005). In fact, Nomura used to be active in the Tokyo Okinawa Prefectural Association's youth branch, which according to Gajimaru members was “taken over by Japanese,” and his critique of Okinawan complicity likely developed from his own experience. Nomura not only discussed this matter in his book, but actively exchanged his opinions in person with Kaoru, and he occasionally came to Osaka to give talks or facilitate discussions at Kansai Okinawa Bunko's events for the general public.

## The Gajimaru Club's Responses

To counteract the negative effects of Japanese appropriation and retain the authenticity of their practice, the Gajimaru Club took up the following approaches in the 2000s: they continued to educate Festival visitors about Okinawa's asymmetrical relationship with the Japanese state in the past and present, while resisting the pressure of commercialization; they became more exclusivist in membership and leadership, putting Okinawan descent and embodied culture at their core; they retained alliances with other ethnic and/or social minority groups, as one of the marginalized groups; and they reinterpreted the Okinawa-Japan relationship in the broader sense of the political economy of the Japanese state and society beyond ethnic difference.

I will discuss these in the following sections.

### **“Keep it Handmade”: Against Commercialization**

Earlier I mentioned the drastic decline of Gajimaru in its scale and demography, and the growth of the Festival made it hard for Gajimaru members to carry out all the functions needed to organize the Taisho Festival. Although they delegated some of the functions to volunteers within and outside of Taisho, acting members still did the most of the heavy lifting, organizing, and provided human labor, networking, fundraising and advertising efforts. For a couple of months before the Festival, those twenty-some members would work past their full capacity. During the two Festivals I observed in 2007 and 2008, I witnessed over and over the overwhelmed and utterly exhausted expressions that appeared on members' faces, while they were running around all over Taisho Ward, to get things ready and to handle unexpected incidents, from the trivial to the serious.

And yet, they relied entirely on their own labor and their supporters' voluntary labor rather than charging for admission or hiring services, except for hiring a security service to avoid safety issues that can happen with such a big number of participants. When it came to funding, they still heavily depended on small, local businesses and organizations of local Okinawans in Taisho and in Osaka, except for a few major organizations, such as the Okinawan Prefectural Associations in Osaka and Hyogo and Okinawa's two major newspapers, the *Okinawa Times* and the *Ryukyu Shimpo*. Other supporters were various private businesses owned or run by local Okinawans, such as metal factory workers, a driving school, grocery stores, restaurants, *min'yō*

or *ryūbū* schools, Okinawan goods and music stores, and so on. Most of them were small businesses, which Gajimaru members and volunteers visited individually to collect *kampa* (donations), and the amount of the donations could not have been large compared to the labor required to collect them.

Considering the scale and popularity of the Taisho Festival, it could have easily received sponsorships from larger businesses outside the local or Okinawan networks, and/or charged an admission fee. There were other large scale Okinawan music and dance events, such as the Ryukyu Festival, the Sakishima Festival, and the Kajipitu Festival, which emerged in the post-Okinawa Boom period, that charged for admission and got sponsorships from major businesses. This sponsorship usually came from Okinawan product, tourism, or showbiz-type businesses that inserted colorful advertisements in the festival brochures, very likely targeting Japanese Okinawa enthusiasts. However, such a move was exactly what the Gajimaru Club wished to avoid.

They often used the phrase “keeping the Festival *tezukuri* (handmade)” which they believed was their stronghold against the commercialization of their cultural legacy. Also, the Club took a twofold approach to retaining and expanding their original agenda of “protecting the lives and the rights of Okinawans.”

### **Continued Public Education through Festivals**

Although they regretted the fact that the Japanese appropriation of the Taisho Festival advanced to the point that it undermined the Festival’s purpose, the Gajimaru Club tried to offer visitors to the Taisho Festival an alternative perspective to that of the Okinawa Boom, drawing their attention to the ongoing reality of Okinawa’s marginalization in Japanese history and society, and calling for a critical and reflective gaze in the act of watching the Taisho Festival in the midst of the Okinawa Boom.

Such efforts materialized mainly in two forms. The first was the annual Festival brochure, which was the only item organizers purposefully charged for instead of distributing free, in the hope that those who bought the brochure were interested and invested enough to pay for it, read it, and take what was in it to heart. Starting in 2001 the brochure included news clips, excerpts from books, and poems and essays written by Gajimaru members and guest writers, in addition to the usual content (the program, introduction of performers, and the advertisements of the sponsors). This new addition was meant to provide not only factual information about *eisā*,

other Okinawan customs, the history of Okinawan diasporas in Taisho, in Osaka, and on the mainland, but also offer critical reflections on life in the Okinawan diaspora, the ongoing asymmetry between Okinawans and Japanese, the history and reality of the Battle of Okinawa, the heavy military presence in Okinawa, hardship and sufferings Okinawans had faced on the mainland, and the ironies of the Okinawa Boom and of the success of the Taisho Eisā Festival.

The 2001 brochure included the transcript of a forum, “Looking back on the 27 years of the Eisā Festival,” in which ten Gajimaru members looked back at the history of Gajimaru and the Taisho Festival, and discussed their position as a group, the meaning of their *eisā* when *eisā* seemed like a trend, and where they and the Festival should be headed in the middle of the Okinawa Boom. It seems like this meeting was when the idea of hosting the 2004 Grand Tsunahiki for the Festival’s 30th anniversary came up. In addition to the forum, various essays and poems written by members, Taisho residents, performers, and Japanese participants were included from 2001 on. These personal essays made conscious efforts to examine the past and the present of history of Japanese-Okinawan relations in Okinawa and mainland Japan, all different aspects of them side by side, from the writers own positions: as a diasporic Okinawan, an Okinawan from Okinawa who first visited Taisho, or as a Japanese who had only known about Okinawa through stereotypical images before their encounter in Taisho. Other than academic or activist literature on Okinawa, the Taisho Festival brochures are one of the very few places where the most outspoken vernacular critiques by lay individuals, Okinawan and Japanese, can be found, targeted to lay people who visited the Festival.

Another attempt to attract the Festival visitors’ attention was a small exhibit that stood near the entrance of the Festival, named “By the way, the Okinawa Plaza.” Kaoru explained that the addition of the phrase “By the way” (*dokorode*) was an attempt to call the visitors’ attention to an aspect of Okinawa, without claiming that what was shown in the exhibit was the *only* reality of Okinawa, to remind viewers that such an uncomfortable reality was always going on side by side with the idealized, beautified Okinawa created by the Okinawa Boom that visitors might have been enjoying at the Festival. Two main themes caught my attention when I looked around the booth. The first one was the *Jinruikan* incident, the historical incident discussed in Chapter 2 which had happened a century ago in Osaka, and in fact not far from Taisho.

To critical Okinawans of the twenty-first century, this incident signifies not only Japan’s colonial gaze towards Okinawa as other, exotic, backwards, and deserving subjugation, but also

the layered structure of discrimination and the complicity of Okinawans who tried to identify themselves with the colonizer/oppressor instead of uniting with those who were colonized/oppresed. This incident was made into a play titled *Jinruikan* in 1976 by the Okinawan playwright Chinen Seishin, to remind his contemporaries of the history of Okinawan subjugation by Japan at the time of Okinawa's reversion to Japan. In 2004, during Gajimaru's 30th anniversary, Gajimaru members (under the name of Kansai Okinawa Bunko, rather than as Gajimaru), in conjunction with interested volunteers, Okinawans, Japanese, and other minority individuals, commemorated the (near) 100th anniversary of the *Jinruikan* incident. They organized panel discussions with residents, activists, academics, and artists, held workshops and field trips, put on a performance of the play *Jinruikan*, all of which was recorded and compiled in a book of the same title (*Engeki jinruikan jōen wo jikken sasetai kai* 2005). In all related events and the subsequent book, the point was explicitly and repeatedly made that the Okinawa Boom was yet another version of *Jinruikan*, only a century later, in that Okinawa was once again exposed to the colonial gaze of the Japanese, and that Okinawans were yet again complicit due to their willingness to display themselves and be objectified and displayed for mainstream Japanese, in the futile hope that the Japanese would finally recognize the excellence of their culture and eventually treat them as equals.

The second theme in "By the way, the Okinawa Plaza" addressed the current problem Okinawa is dealing with as the result of the unequal relationship with mainland Japan: the disproportional presence of US military bases and the consequent destruction and threats to Okinawa's nature and everyday life. The exhibit especially focused on the ongoing struggle regarding the relocation of Camp Futenma in Henoko. There were mothers volunteering at the booth who had dedicated themselves to this issue, and showed up with their educational materials to many of the Bunko's functions and other Okinawa related events, especially those with themes relating to peace, anti-war, or the environment. They distributed leaflets, sold books, and explained to those who stopped by the overall situation and what could be done to help. On the table were small stuffed dugongs they made to sell as part of their fundraising, a reminder that it was not only the life of Henoko residents that was at stake: the dugong is a marine mammal whose natural habitat is threatened by the construction of helipads in Henoko, and thus became the symbol of the Henoko struggle. There was a bigger stuffed dugong for participants in the fundraising to have their picture taken with as a sign of support.

The “By the way, Okinawa Plaza” booth was not big and conspicuous compared to the Festival itself, and once one reached the Festival grounds and faced the stage, it somewhat disappeared into the background, behind the rows of shaded seating designated for performers, booths that sold Okinawan food and drinks, and numerous passers-by. But it was consciously located at the entrance of the Festival grounds, right across from Bunko’s booth, which sold the Festival brochure, books about Okinawa, and other Okinawan products from Kajimaya. The Festival was eight hours long, and spectators stood up and walked around to stretch themselves, grab food or drinks, and just look around. And some of them did peek into the booth. Although this was a meager number compared to the over ten thousand participants at the Festival, the booth was kept occupied by individuals of different ages and appearance, sometimes families, who walked by the images in the exhibition, read and contemplated, and watched the video.

Thus it was an effort to remind the participants of the past and present of Okinawa and Okinawans, in their homeland in Okinawa and in Osaka on the mainland, which was never just or fair in relation to either the Japanese state or mainstream Japanese society. And it was going on in parallel with the apparent celebration of Okinawan culture. In short, instead of stopping the Festival or excluding Japanese participants, they opted to directly address the problem to the wider audience who might gather simply to enjoy the entertaining *eisā* performance, and use it as an educational opportunity for those who were interested enough to stop and listen.

### **Keeping Gajimaru’s Okinawan Legacy Within and Out**

Another significant aspect that reveals Gajimaru’s current identity in relation to its initial identity as a collective is how Gajimaru defines its membership and how it selects and maintains alliances with other organizations. Gajimaru started as a club under the tenets “1) We Okinawan youth will unite; 2) We will protect the life and rights of Okinawan youth in collective and individual employment; 3) We will protect Okinawa’s natural environment, and enhance Okinawan culture” (Kakinohana 1981). After more than three decades, the Club existed under different circumstances in which members were not necessarily young, collective employment was no longer relevant, and Okinawan culture was not looked down upon any more.

Current Gajimaru members did not necessarily define in words what Gajimaru should be about. It was more often implicit than not in their decision-making, a reflection of the affairs

surrounding them, and the judgment of other organizations that Gajimaru decides to maintain their alliance with (or not). Although such ideas are sometimes questionable and seem inconsistent, for which they sometimes are criticized by outsiders, they reveal how current Gajimaru members wish to define Gajimaru as an authentically Okinawan group, thirty-some years after its birth.

### **“Okinawan-Only” Membership**

Since the 1990s, Gajimaru has experienced disillusionment about Japanese participation in the Club, which has caused significant conflict over its agenda and resulted in the split of the group. By the 2000s, Gajimaru had turned to a stronger emphasis on Okinawan ethnicity in its membership. At the time of my research, the Gajimaru Club officially limited its full membership to individuals who were *Okinawa no chi wo hiku* (literally, “individuals who inherited Okinawan blood from ancestors,” meaning genealogy traced back to Okinawan ancestry) and their spouses (regardless of their genealogy). If one was not related to Okinawans in any way, by blood or by marriage, one could join as an associate member.

This distinction is rather nominal, and did not have a practical effect. The Gajimaru Club continued to accept non-Okinawan members who wished to join. A few Japanese individuals came through the Bunko connection, such as Bunko’s sanshin club or other Bunko events. As the Gajimaru Club used Bunko as its office and helped with many Bunko functions during event preparation and after-hours socialization, there was not much point in distinguishing between Gajimaru members and Bunko members. Gajimaru members and Bunko members socialized together a lot, and some of them were interested in *eisā*, so they joined the Gajimaru Club. There were Japanese who joined through a personal connection with a member, or even by chance. There was a college student majoring in sociology who was researching the Taisho Festival for a project, who was allowed to join so that she could watch and learn closely. Kazunori also allowed me to join the Club, although I didn’t take the opportunity.

And even after they joined Gajimaru as associate members, there was no practical distinction between full membership and associate membership, except for the title itself. However, such a distinction was also symbolic. It reminded the existing members and candidates of Gajimaru’s priority: that it was not just an *eisā* group for the sake of *eisā*, but an advocate for diasporic Okinawans, the implicit condition that members seemed aware of, and that was



effectively, if not intentionally, reinforced through the decision making process. This was a condition that was not overtly discussed, unless this line was crossed by somebody and a conflict occurred.

Secondly, the qualifications to become the Club's representative suggested that Gajimaru took its adherence to Okinawanness even further than genealogy (or ethnicity) alone. To qualify as the Club's representative, one had to be a first-generation Okinawan, namely, an Okinawan who was born and grew up in Okinawa. It was so important that at the time of my research the position was empty for lack of qualified candidates, and Kazunori, the current leader of Gajimaru, was "filling in" by virtue of being a second generation Okinawan, as "the *acting* representative" (*kaicho dairi, kaicho daigu*).

Kazunori was born and raised in Taisho; he had been a Gajimaru member since the mid-1980s, for more than two decades. His wife, a former Japanese labor activist, joined Gajimaru upon marriage, and they have two daughters. The four of them were a fixture in Gajimaru, showing up for performances, fundraisings, and late-night socializations. Kazunori also maintained a well-rounded relationship with Okinawans outside of Gajimaru, with different backgrounds, including older, more established, conservative Okinawans. Kazunori was a ubiquitous presence at many non-Gajimaru music and dance events, especially big, formal, official performances sponsored by Okinawan prefectural associations, due to his connections through his mother, Mrs. Nakamura, a well known *ryūbū* master. To me it seemed that he, as Gajimaru's acting representative, smoothed out possible discord with other parties in Taisho that might have otherwise arisen. At the time, I couldn't think of any better candidate for Gajimaru's representative than Kazunori.

Thus I was surprised to learn that his position as "the acting representative" meant there was no official representative at the moment. Gajimaru maintained their first-generation Okinawan rule until the beginning of the 2000s, and when they did not have any candidate who met the qualification, Kazunori accepted the position under that condition – that he was a deputy. Although other members didn't specify why, they all seemed to agree to it.

Later I asked Kazunori himself: Didn't he deserve to become Gajimaru's leader, not only based on his contribution to the Club for more than two decades, but also based on his background? Having been Taisho-born and raised, he represented a part of Okinawan history that

Gajimaru held dear, part of the generation who had fought against prejudice and discrimination on the mainland. Shouldn't that legacy matter?

“No.” he firmly answered. “It's not important – at least not as important as somebody who embodies Okinawan culture – somebody who grew up breathing Okinawan culture, breathing in through his entire body, in its own soil (*dochi*).” He then talked about a former representative of Kazunori's age, who grew up in a poor fisherman's family in a remote village on Okinawa; he would fish, cook, and do things around the house from a young age, because he had to. For his family to survive extreme living conditions and poverty, everyone had to be able and versatile. When he was seven, he was responsible for cleaning and shining the glass lamps for the fishing boat. And when he broke one of them, his parents hung him upside down in a tree, not because they hated him but because the survival of the entire family depended on that lamp: he had to know what was at stake, and learn to be more careful and responsible.

Life in Okinawa was intense (*kyōretsu*), and if you grew up there, you would breathe it like air, and it leaves something ingrained in your body and mind. It cannot be taught. You just know. When it comes to Okinawa [like Gajimaru], we need someone like that who can tell you and teach you what Okinawa is all about. I don't have that.

There was a painful recognition on his part, which I witnessed in other second-generation Okinawans from Osaka over and over, that blood alone does not fully account for being Okinawan. Second-generation individuals were distinctly sensitive about this issue, as they grew up watching their parent's generation and acquired the discernment to be able to distinguish subtle differences in the sounds of music and language, movement in dance, mannerisms, and sentiments which they immediately recognized as Okinawan, but they themselves could not produce. Differences that were inculcated throughout life, and ingrained in the body.

It also revealed a strong working class consciousness: the life in Okinawa Kazunori gave as an example, with a primordial, almost mystical ring, was not just any life in Okinawa. It was the life of underprivileged Okinawans, of families in poverty, for whom life was harsh and intense (*kyōretsu*), and where one had to be tough, versatile and responsible to survive and support one's family even as a child. Such families likely sent their children to the mainland as laborers.

A couple of years later, Kazunori and his family moved to Nagoya for his job, and the next two representatives of Gajimaru were indeed elected from among the few first generation Okinawans.

There was criticism about these “Okinawan-only” and “first-generation Okinawan” policies, that they were too parochial (*semai*), exclusivist (*haitateki*) or even hypocritical. “They say one thing but do another” (in that they claim to be against prejudice and discrimination, but they appear to be discriminating against non-Okinawans). Kaoru mentioned it as a sort of “self-defense”: when two parties that were clearly disparate in their scale and power intermingled, for a smaller group to “stay open-minded” was as good as getting assimilated by the larger. Being closed and exclusivist could be the only way to keep their culture and way of thinking intact, whether they got blamed or not.

### **Alliances Within and Beyond Ethnicity**

Within Gajimaru there seemed to be a focus on authentic Okinawanness through genealogy, and even the embodiment of culture through lived experience. Outside the group, Gajimaru defines itself beyond its ethnic identity. Externally, the way Gajimaru has created and maintained relationships with other groups and individuals (performers, activists, journalists, and academics) reveals how they define themselves in relation to other Okinawans and non-Okinawans.

From the beginning and throughout its history, Gajimaru had maintained and expressed a strong affinity with underprivileged, working class Okinawans who survived economic hardships and discrimination with tenacity and hard work. In Taisho, Gajimaru visited and performed during *michijune* (street performances) at the houses and businesses of Okinawans, long time sponsors of the Festival, at their request. One destination was particularly reminiscent of the legacy of Taisho’s Okinawans: a metal recycling plant owned by an Okinawan family and long-time Taisho residents. During the 2007 *michijune* before the Festival, Gajimaru brought a guest *eisā* group from Okinawa, Ryukyu Kajimaya, and during Summer 2008, they performed themselves at a private party that the owner threw for his family, employees, many of them Okinawans, and their families, as well as the Gajimaru Club. My family, who was visiting Osaka at the time, were invited too.

At dusk, Gajimaru danced in the clearing of the plant, against the backdrop of heavy machinery and piles of scrap metal as grownups, workers, and families prepared barbecue and other food on one side of the plant, while children were running across the dirt ground for summer games such as scooping balloons from a tub full of water, and setting off small handheld

fireworks. A few Gajimaru members told me that they didn't perform for private occasions just because they were asked, but only for people with whom they have had relationships for years and who had been advocates.

Another destination they made sure to stop at was the public apartment complex in Taisho, where the majority of former Kubun-gwa residents moved when the slum clearance (*tachinoki*) occurred. In 2007, Gajimaru had two guest groups from Okinawa, Ryukyu Kajimaya and Meio Eisā, to perform *gāē*, or *orāsē* – a sort of music and dance battle, in which the two groups passed by or through the formation of the other group, singing and dancing at full force, each to its own tune played in discord with that of the other group (Nelson describes an *orāsē*: 2008, 208-209) The aural and visual impact is enormous, an incredible spectacle reserved for the climax of the Festival the next day. But Gajimaru brought the *gāē* here because the apartment building was representative of Kubun-gwa, with its aging Okinawan residents. Among Okinawan music and dance events that took place outside Taisho, the events they selected were occasions that honored early Okinawan immigrants in old Okinawan communities in Amagasaki and Takarazuka, such as the Takamatsu Nōryōsai (Cooling Festival), or the Toyota Friendship Festival mentioned earlier.

### **Alliances with Non-Okinawan Minority Groups**

Whereas Gajimaru members mostly perform on occasions of their own selection, primarily for older Okinawans with whom they could identify, they also build alliances beyond the boundary of Okinawans, or the boundary of ethnic difference, through the reciprocal exchange of labor and performance with carefully selected groups of minorities – people with disabilities, day laborers and the homeless, who are equally marginalized by the Japanese state and the entire society. In doing so, they seek to interpret Okinawan-Yamato (mainstream Japanese) relations and issues of discrimination in a broader sense of power, rather than just as a matter of ethnic difference.

There is a clear recognition that it is not just about ethnic difference, or being Japanese and Okinawan. Moreover, among themselves, they raise critical voices about many Okinawans in Taisho who seem to take comfort in being part of majority, and show prejudice against other underprivileged groups or individuals as if they have forgotten their past.

Among groups with which Gajimaru maintains long-term relationships, one example of significance is Gajimaru's long-time coalition with Nishinari-based activists, who support day laborers and homeless people (former day laborers who aged and weakened, and were left on the street, jobless) in Kamagasaki (fig. 9).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Kamagasaki has been the biggest day labor market, and it is now probably the only one still functioning. It is also the biggest slum area in Japan, located in the post-industrial mega-city of Osaka, only one subway stop or ten to fifteen minutes' walk from bustling business areas in Tennoji and peaceful residence areas nearby. During the post-war reconstruction period this place attracted young, single men from poor households in Southwestern Japan; this was where cheap *doya* hotels with three-*jō* rooms (about fifty square feet, just enough to give a man room to put down his tired body and meager belongings), diners and cheap bars accommodated them.

As the construction economy declined, and as these workers aged and grew weak, more and more men became unemployed, without any social security. Few had social networks of family or community to lean on, as they didn't have family in the first place or had become estranged from their families after decades of unstable employment away from home. Most of them ended up in shelters or on the streets of Kamagasaki. As the number of able workers who could pay for accommodations decreased, big *doya* hotels were renovated and transformed into clean hostels, equipped with modern amenities and internet access, to accommodate young international travelers and Japanese men on business trips at a cheap price, taking advantage of Kamagasaki's convenient location with several railway and subway lines intersecting and near the city center.

Even during the day, if one gets off at one of the stations in Kamagasaki and walks a couple of minutes southward just across the street, one starts to see dirty, poorly groomed men, appearing to be about in their fifties or sixties, who couldn't find a day's work or who just came back from a night's work, loitering, sitting, sleeping, or getting into fights in the street, often drunk. At night, they were joined for sleep by those who were fortunate enough to find a day's work but did not earn enough to pay for lodging. Some of the more experienced and resourceful slept in tents they built out of blue tarps, or in abandoned cars, or others in their "beds" – coffin-like boxes built out of used cardboard boxes, or even just on the street with nothing but layers of newspapers, cardboard, or dirty blankets to cover themselves. Depending on the season, from a

little less than a hundred to a couple of hundred men (the number went up in summer as shelters had no air conditioning and were hotter than outside) would spend their nights in various corners of Kamagasaki, in the parks, on the roadsides, in empty shopping arcades or along the walls around schools and shops that were closed for the night. Some men could find darker, warmer (or cooler in summer), more secluded spots. Others had to sleep in totally open spaces. It smelled like garbage and urine everywhere.

There are many formal and informal groups, charities, activists, and other non-profit groups that work all year round to support the lives of these people in various ways, such as providing food, medicine and blankets, patrolling at night for their safety and health, and finding jobs for them. However, it was not surprising that not everyone was happy about their presence, although all the trouble “ordinary” residents (that is, those who had homes or business here) or local authorities took to drive these homeless men out of public spaces, streets and parks, or from in front of their houses or businesses was somewhat astonishing.

I often heard from those outside Kamagasaki or Nishinari Ward that it was a dangerous, scary place where “normal, ordinary” (*futsū no*) people in their right mind wouldn’t venture. And they looked appalled when I told them that I occasionally passed through, or even worse, walked into Kama to participate in various events there. In addition to the event I describe here, I occasionally joined a Christian-based night patrol group who walked around the entire neighborhood weekly to provide rice rolls, blankets, and medicine, watching for signs of serious illnesses or hate crimes.

Kamagasaki’s “Group that fight for the rights of aged daily laborers and homeless,” colloquially abbreviated to the “Fighting Group” (*Kachitorukai*) and Gajimaru have maintained a mutually supportive relationship. Haru, an activist from the Fighting Group, based in an activist group for day laborers and homeless people in Kamagasaki, has been a ubiquitous presence at Gajimaru performances or at Bunko events, as long as they were held in the vicinity of Taisho and Nishinari. Whereas members of the Gaining Group have built the stage for the Taisho Festival every year, as most of them are seasoned construction workers, Gajimaru in turn, with the help of volunteers from the Bunko and Taisho neighborhoods, has supported two annual events in Kamagasaki. One is the “Winter Survival Campaign” (*ettō*), the New Year’s soup kitchen, or Okinawan noodle soup kitchen to be exact, which is accompanied by the Bunko

sanshin club's *min'yō* performance and Gajimaru's *eisā*.<sup>24</sup> The second one is the Summer Festival (Kamagasaki Natsu Matsuri), a three-day festival during the *obon* holidays, organized by Nishinari-based activist and charity groups.

As the soup kitchen requires food preparation, Gajimaru does fundraising in the Taisho neighborhood, receiving monetary or material donations (such as noodles and meat). In the preparation meetings members complained that fundraising for the winter soup kitchen was especially hard, as people in Taisho were much less willing to contribute to this event that apparently had little to do with Okinawans. Moreover, there seemed to be emotional resistance to helping Kamagasaki's day laborers and homeless; they said "Why do we need to give our hard-earned money to those who ended up on the street because of their own incompetence and laziness?" When members reported such responses at the meeting, their tone was critical about the fact that these Okinawans felt they were better than those in Kamagasaki, and believed they got where they were (more affluent and established than at the time of Kubun-gwa) because of their own diligence. Implicit in their mockery was the fact that Okinawans in Taisho and those in Kamagasaki were no different in the big picture. At different points in modern history, both were just expendables in the large, ruthless machinery of Japanese society, used and then thrown away. The only difference was that those who ended up in Taisho happened to have better life chances over time, maintained jobs, and had a social network of family, relatives and friends. The less lucky ended up on the street, without a secure job or family support. And in fact, members were sure that there were Okinawans who ended up on the street of Kamagasaki.

This indicates that Gajimaru recognized that the source of exclusion and prejudice against Okinawans went deeper than just ethnic difference, and that they therefore built affinity with other minority groups beyond ethnic boundaries based on the common, translatable experience of marginalization (class-based labor migration), marginalization by the state, and by the society at large.

The next section describes Kamagasaki's Summer Festival, in which Gajimaru participated. This Festival was held during the *bon* holiday, the great homecoming for dead and living alike, which celebrates the continuity of family and community. The Summer Festival is

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<sup>24</sup> There is a soup kitchen held every evening throughout the year by Nishinari-based activist groups and charity organizations. It is during the New Year's holidays (January 1st to 3rd) that these organizations take a break, and other non-Nishinari groups take part, one evening per group. Gajimaru, Bunko, and Okinawan supporters hold their soup kitchen every January 3rd.

for aging day laborers and aged homeless men, who do not have home or family to go back to and reunite with. As the ethnography will show, the Summer Festival constructs Kamagasaki as their home, its residents as their family, and those who lived and died in Kamagasaki before them as their ancestors.

In this sense, Gajimaru's *eisā* performance during the Summer Festival has a particular significance. *Eisā*, a dance that honors the souls of the dead, was once danced for the village – a community based on geography and consanguinity—and then expanded to the Okinawan “us” in the foreign land of Osaka, based on the common experiences of the diaspora. It has now gone beyond that ethnic boundary and has come to have a different (but related) meaning in a totally different setting chosen by Gajimaru, creating an “us” in a place there isn't supposed to be one, however transient and seemingly odd.

### **Kamagasaki Summer Festival**

The last day of the *bon* holidays, I learned that the Gajimaru Club and the Kansai Okinawa Bunko went to Kamagasaki to help out with the Kamagasaki Summer Festival. Among various groups that involved Okinawan music or dance, Gajimaru/Bunko was the only group who officially and regularly supported the people of Kamagasaki.

The peculiarity of Gajimaru/Bunko's attitude towards the people in Kama was noticeable at their preparation meetings, because they had a harder time gathering help and raising money from the Taisho neighborhood for this soup kitchen, unlike the other Okinawa-related events they hosted, including the Taisho *Eisā* Festival. Okinawans in Taisho were reluctant to donate their hard-earned money to help homeless and day laborers in Kamagasaki as they saw Kamagasaki's impoverished men were responsible for their own poverty, which they believed to result from these men's lazy and irresponsible lifestyle.

But Gajimaru members were critical of such view. In their mind, men in Kama were little different from early immigrants who ended up in Kubun-gwa (the Swamp), or the later collective employment youth who came from their impoverished background to this city to seek better life opportunities, and were instead used as cheap, expendable labor to keep factories running or build the infrastructure across the country, and were thrown out when they became weak and useless. If some had made their own fortune well enough to lead a stable life here, like the



Okinawans in Taisho who refused to help the men of Kama, they were just more fortunate to be able to do so, not more diligent or hard-working as they believed.

The Summer Festival was a joint event put on by Kama-based organizations and their supporters. Bunko's role was relatively minor compared to the New Year's "Winter Survival Campaign," during which Bunko had to prepare more than 500 Okinawan soba noodle bowls for one meal. This time they only had to set up a small vending booth to sell Okinawan food and drinks, and they performed *min'yō* songs and *eisā* as a part of the hours-long entertainment.

I headed for Kama at dusk on my bike. Near my destination I passed by the huge public cemetery that has been there since before the twentieth century, which sheltered Osaka's largest number of graves of the *muenbutsu*, dead with no ties who had nobody to claim their bodies after their death. Under a big overpass, the cemetery was dark day and night, which made it hard to see its depth; however, on that night of *obon*, lamps were lit everywhere and visitors were walking about, allowing me to realize for the first time how big and old this cemetery really was. On the other corner lay Tobita Shinchī, the biggest red-light district in Osaka, and probably in Japan, just across Kamagasaki. Men in fancy cars were driving in and out of the dimly lit alleys, to look at and pick up beautiful girls, who mostly looked under my age, and who were literally showcased in the shop fronts in thick makeup and suggestive clothing. Kawanami, the Buddhist monk who also runs a homeless shelter, once commented from his own experience that if there were an imaginary family with a brother and a sister, a very poor, dysfunctional one, the brother would end up in Kamagasaki, and the sister in Tobita.

Kamagasaki Summer Festival was being held at the Triangle Park (Sankaku koen), a small, triangle-shaped vacant lot rather than a "park" located in the heart of Kama, surrounded by low buildings housing cheap inns, homeless shelters, diners, pawn shops and so on. Along the wire fence that surrounded the park stood a line of old tents built out of metal pipe frames covered by canvas or wooden panels, commonly used for various outdoor events, but here used mostly as sheds to store wooden beams from construction sites for firewood and the other recyclables which the men had gathered from their worksites and dumpsters. It was the center of the social network of day laborers and homeless men. Every morning and night, men stood in a long line in front of a soup kitchen held in turn by different activist and charity groups. During the day, men who didn't have work or who came in from all-night work would hang around, circling bonfires when the weather was cold, smoking or sipping from a beer can or sake glass

they had bought from a nearby 100-yen store. At night, dozens of men slept at various spots in the park.

This evening, although still dirty and stinking, the Triangle Park was more lively and cheerful than ever. I never saw the park so crowded and bustling with people – mostly Kama’s *otchan* (meaning “pop” or “old man,” a somewhat endearing term for Kama’s homeless men and/or laborers, used to refer to themselves or by their advocates as opposed to *rojukusha*, a more impersonal term used for the homeless), activists, non-profit staff, homeless advocates, artists and entertainers who came to help hosting the Festival, and even residents of the neighborhood, children and housewives who usually wouldn’t venture into the park. The park was lit by round red, blue, and white paper lanterns hanging from lines crisscrossing overhead and from the top of the scaffold erected at the center for the *bon* dance. At the foot of the scaffold were calligraphy exhibits written by Kama’s *otchan* and posted on wooden panels. The calligraphy on exhibit read “photographs,” “peace,” “love,” “life,” “booze,” “sky,” “Chieko” (a woman's name), and so on. There were some exhibits written in Korean, such as “human” and “happiness.”

When I arrived, the memorial service had just started. Behind the podium where the service was held, there was an exhibit commemorating individuals who had passed away in Kamagasaki during the last half-century. Under calligraphy that read “Comrades of Kamagasaki, Rest in Peace” was a list of the names of the deceased. There were also some photos of the leaders of movements that had worked to promote people’s rights in Kamagasaki. On the panels next to it, there were photos that told the history of struggles in Kamagasaki. On the podium, Kawanami, the Buddhist monk, was chanting sutras in robes. Next to him, Father Honda, the Catholic priest famous around Kama for his lifelong devotion to the place, named and prayed for each person who had passed away in the shelters and streets of Kama during the last year. Then he prayed for those who had perished all over the world as victims of wars, hunger, and poverty, all victimized under the raging global neoliberalism on this “memorial day for defeat in the war” (V-J Day is officially called by mainstream Japanese “the memorial day for the end of the war”) as people stood around in silent tribute. It came to my mind that the service was truly fitting, as this “family” of Kamagasaki invited and served the souls who didn’t have actual families or were probably forgotten by their families, who they couldn’t go back to during the days of homecoming.

The festivities resumed full-scale once the memorial service was over. I poked around, sometimes lending a hand at Bunko's vending booth, where Orion Beer (an Okinawan Beer) and *awamori* (Okinawan rice wine) were the most popular items, peeking into the booths of other vendors while munching on grilled squid, a typical summer festival snack, sipping Orion beer, and greeting my acquaintances. There was a booth selling flowerpots for a few hundred yen. It was touching to see people selling and buying flowers here at the Triangle Park, which usually seems to have nothing to do with something pretty and fresh.

Finally the show started. The rapper Shingo Nishinari, a Nishinari native who sang about "the ghetto" of Kamagasaki and the hypocrisy of Japanese politicians, was the emcee of the show. He shouted to the audience "We will get what we need from those who have! For the Kamagasaki where we can live and work in security!" to which men under the stage cheered back.

After an enka singer in a kimono had a long performance, it was our turn. First the Bunko sanshin club sang *min'yō* songs to Mr. Shinzato's sanshin accompaniment. When we sang "The Spring of the Nineteen-Year-Old," a famous Okinawan love song, an old man jumped onto the stage out of excitement to sing and dance with us. Young, inexperienced performers (including myself) were startled, as the man's torso was covered with yakuza tattoos, but somebody coaxed him into stepping down off the stage.

For the last song, Mr. Shinzato sang "Macha to Amma" (Mother and Son), a popular song by the Okinawan folk singer Sadoyama Yutaka, arranged in *min'yō* style by Mr. Tamaki, the first leader of the Gajimaru Club. Sung entirely in Okinawan dialect, the song was comprised of a dialogue, verse by verse, between a son who is departing for Osaka to work and his mother. "Someday I'll come back and open a restaurant, and allow you to live in comfort," the young man in the song promises his mother. How many men here, I wondered, from Okinawa or not, had once made a similar promise to somebody and never got to keep it? Before the show, a couple of *otchan* stopped by the Okinawan food booth, saying things like "I'm *Uchinanchu*, too – although I haven't been back home for about forty years." Kaoru told me he meets men like them every year at the Kama Festival.

After that sentimental moment was Gajimaru's *eisā* performance. There were just about ten people on the small stage, but the drumbeat and *eisā* shouts excited the audience once again, and more and more people started standing up and dancing on their own. Right after the last *eisā*

dance, a Japanese *min'yō* song from the scaffold started, along with the climax of the Summer Festival, the *bon*-dance. The already excited crowd jumped right into the *bon-odori* circle around the scaffold, dancing in a circling procession. Gajimaru members in their costumes joined in too, and people greeted the dancers, especially the young women. Yoshiko leaned toward me and said, “Do you see that lady in the green shirt? She is a former Japanese Red Army warrior, now running a non-profit around here. You can peek at her when you are not sure about your *bon-odori* dance steps. There is not a song she can’t dance to.”<sup>25</sup> And then again, Yoshiko pointed at two women who were watching the dance. I had noticed too, a moment before, that something was odd about them, something in their posture or the way they dressed, although there were few who dressed “normally” in this place from the perspective of the ordinary, respectable citizens of Osaka outside of Kama. I had just realized that they were in fact cross-dressing men, when Yoshiko said, “I don’t think they are women, do you?”

The dancing circle was indeed made up of all sorts of oddities that were left out of mainstream society, or those who had joined them for one reason or another for this occasion. Day laborers who were getting too old for the work they were doing, homeless people, volunteers and activists who wanted to help them out, residents from the neighborhood who usually had ambivalent relationships with the homeless population, cross-dressers, and an anthropologist (and who know how many journalists or researchers like me were hanging around). For more than an hour, we kept on going around and around, dancing and laughing.

## Conclusion

The Gajimaru Club started Okinawan cultural activism for young, disenfranchised Okinawan workers who came to Osaka and the Kansai region through collective employment arrangements during Japan’s postwar high industrial growth period of the 1960s and 1970s. The Gajimaru Club mobilized *eisā* and *min'yō* as a means of self-empowerment and an assertion of Okinawan difference to fight dehumanizing working and living conditions such as exploitation,

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<sup>25</sup> The Japanese Red Army was a radical leftist organization that committed and attempted several terrorist acts, including hijackings, during the 1970s.

ethnic prejudice and discrimination, an internalized sense of inferiority, and isolation, circumstances which led many Okinawans to their symbolic (and sometimes literal) deaths.

By displaying their cultural difference in public, the Gajimaru Club tried to make themselves visible in opposition to the forced assimilation that erased and silenced their difference. Also, by adopting *eisā*, which was considered by elite Okinawans to be a low, shameful facet of Okinawan culture, they developed a collective identity as working class, diasporic Okinawans that connected them with underprivileged Okinawans from earlier periods of immigration.

The Gajimaru Club started the Taisho *Eisā* Festival for themselves and other diasporic Okinawans, and established an outreach station to educate the general public and to collaborate with other marginalized groups. The popularity of *eisā* and the Festival grew over time, partly due to their success in activism and the support of the community, and partly due to the influence of the Okinawa Boom starting in the 1990s. However, as appropriation by Japanese enthusiasts increased, Gajimaru's reaction turned from their initial welcome to ambivalence over the Yamatoization of their practice. They felt that Japanese appropriation undermined the Gajimaru Club's core principles, namely social justice for Okinawans and solidarity among Okinawan groups and communities, and deteriorated the authenticity of *eisā* and reduced it to mere entertainment, stripping it of its meaning as a dance for the ancestors and as the symbol of Okinawan identity and communality.

To counteract the negative effects of Japanese appropriation and retain the authenticity of their practice, the Gajimaru Club took up the following approaches in the 2000s: they became more exclusivist in membership and leadership, putting Okinawan descent and embodied culture at their core; they continued to educate Festival visitors about Okinawa's asymmetrical relationship with the Japanese state in the past and the present, while resisting the pressure of commercialization; they retained alliances with other ethnic and/or social minority groups, as one of these marginalized groups; and they reinterpreted the Okinawa-Japan relationship in the broader sense of the political economy of the Japanese state and society, beyond ethnic difference.

## CHAPTER IV

### Taisho Okinawan Children's Club

This chapter deals with the Taisho Okinawan Children's Club, often called "the Children's Club," which developed along with the Gajimaru Club as discussed in Chapter 3. Founded in 1978, the Taisho Okinawan Children's Club (Taisho Okinawa Kodomo Kai, hereafter TOCC) shared with the Gajimaru Club its pursuits of the promotion of ethnic identity and the empowerment of disadvantaged Okinawan youth, and its recourse to Okinawan folk art – *eisā* and *min'yō*. While the Gajimaru Club's goal was the protection of young, single migrant workers in their late teens and twenties hired from Okinawa in the 1960s and 1970s, the Children's Club targeted the offspring of the first-wave working class immigrants, school-aged children who were born and grew up in Taisho. In the 1970s discrimination against Okinawans was still at its height, and the stigmatization of Okinawan cultural expression, and its association with poverty and low social status, affected Okinawan children. Inspired by the Liberation Education Movement (LEM), the TOCC took a family and community-based approach to fighting discrimination and empowering diasporic Okinawans, children and grownups alike.

#### Poverty and Shame

I think in Japan [the difference in] education and real estate value are the two main mechanisms through which social inequality is reproduced.

(Toshio Mizuuchi, personal conversation 2008)

In Chapter 2, I discussed the mechanism by which ethnic and social stigma was conflated with class division and geographical segregation in the development of Osaka as a modern, industrial city. This in effect created the ghettoization of ethnic and cultural difference, contained and segregated from mainstream society. "Okinawan" became a stigma of undesirable, improper

members of society, which mainstream-aspiring Okinawans opted to eradicate or conceal, so that they could blend in and disappear into mainstream society. Okinawan children who were born and grew up in such communities consequently suffered from low self-esteem, or even self-hatred, and alienation from the older generation as well as from the mainstream population.

The following is the account of a young second-generation Okinawan, written in colloquial Osaka dialect, quoted by Mr. Nakamura Noboru, the co-founder of the TOCC:

I hated Okinawa since I was in elementary school. I felt like an “Anti-Okinawan” (*Okinawa hantai*) slogan was branded on my body when I was in elementary school. My father was a good man, and everyone knew, including himself, that he was darned hardworking. But drinking was the only hobby of that old man of mine. I remember I started running to buy cheap, unrefined sake for him when I was in second grade. Once drunk, the old man became troublesome. Besides he started wandering around at night. And my mother couldn’t stop him. Every night passed like that. My father was an iron-cast worker, but he was poor, and when bad things happened, he drank to forget them, so he brought over his Okinawan friends living nearby to our small shabby house, and drank till late at night. Neither I nor my little sister and brother could sleep. My old man and his friends drank like fish, yakked in Okinawan dialect, and then Okinawan *min’yō* started pouring out from their mouths. They didn’t care about neighbors in the middle of night, and didn’t even listen to my mom when she tried to warn them. That’s how “Anti-Okinawan” became my slogan. My sister and brother were like that, too, so my sister stormed out of the house as soon as they started singing Okinawan *min’yō*. Without knowing the reality of Okinawa, I simply hated Okinawa, and hated poverty at the same time. But I didn’t know what to hate and how. We had the same meal every day. No snack at all. It was an indescribable shame to go to school wearing rags and shoes with holes. (Nakamura c1984, 8)

Their antipathy to their ethnic origin – mainly their own family – was complicated by the fact that they did not understand the source of their antipathy – “what to hate and how,” as the young Okinawan confessed in his writing above. Their parents and grandparents usually did not teach children Okinawan customs and dialect in the hope that their children would become better assimilated into Japanese society, although they themselves couldn’t quite fit in. Thus children not only had a hard time understanding their parents’ behaviors and lifestyle, but also felt a sense of deficiency from not knowing enough – and not being Okinawan enough.

### **Inspiration from the Liberation Education Movement**

The TOCC was founded by two school teachers, Kaneshiro Yoshiaki, a Taisho-born and raised second-generation Okinawan in his forties, and Nakamura Noboru, a Nago-born first

generation in his twenties who had just arrived in Osaka after his college education to become a teacher. They met each other at an elementary school at Yata, a large Burakumin residence on the southern border of Osaka City. Yata was one of the Burakumin communities where the Buraku Liberation Movement was actively carried out, and the teachers' experience of the Liberation Education Movement in Yata was a very significant inspiration for both of them. Liberation Education, also known as Integration Education (*Dōwa kyōiku*)<sup>26</sup>, originated with and has been mainly associated with the Buraku Liberation Movement, but it was developed as education against any kind of discrimination, which came to include occupation, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability based prejudice and discrimination. In fact, the writing of the Okinawan child that appeared above was part of Nakamura's report in a compilation of non-Buraku Liberation Education Movement cases. For teachers at schools in underprivileged areas, it was often a more pressing matter to keep students in school until their graduation, rather than helping them move up into higher education. In 1972, a schoolteacher in the Kansai area wrote a report about the academic gap between Okinawan children and Japanese children in Osaka. And school teachers in Kansai who were from Okinawa or second and third generation Okinawans organized a teachers' group to discuss Okinawan children's academic achievement as well as to socialize with Okinawan teachers (Kishi 2003, 183).

Their initial concern was the low academic achievement of Okinawan children. At their workplace, they keenly felt many similarities between Burakumin and Okinawan communities in their socio-economic disadvantages, poor living conditions, and discrimination, and the resulting low school attainment and low self-esteem of children (Nakamura 1984). In Chapter 2, I discussed the fact that education was a crucial locus where low socio-economic status was reproduced over generations. The highly competitive school system effectively excluded from competition at an early age children with minority backgrounds, many of whom were from working-class or low-income families, like the Okinawan families in Taisho. With both parents working in low-paying blue collar jobs, many families could not oversee their children's school work, or pay for extra cram school education. Such a gap in parental ability to aid their children

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<sup>26</sup>Although *dōwa* (同和) is often translated as "assimilation" (Hawkins 1983; Shimahara 1984), the meaning of the term is closer to "harmonious relationship" than the assimilation of one party to another, thus a more accurate translation would be "integration education."



academically inevitably led to their lower academic achievements, and in many cases delinquency.

Not unlike Gajimaru's case, the agenda of the Liberation Education Movement was not uniformly shared by all diasporic Okinawans, but divided by social class. Among elite Okinawans who had achieved a high socio-economic status, some opposed the fact that the Liberation Education Movement publicly involved Okinawans. For example, in the early 1970s, Okinawa's various social and historical problems were discussed as an example of discrimination in Japan in the textbook *Ningen (Human)*, distributed in Osaka's elementary schools for education about human rights and integration education. Some of the Osaka Okinawan Prefectural Association members were opposed to this, as the description singled out and put Okinawans in a discriminated position similar to that of *zainichi* Koreans and Burakumin. As a result of their pressure, in the Osaka school districts where elite Okinawan influence was strong such as Taisho, the textbook was not used in class but only distributed to students. This incident, often called the *Ningen* Incident after the title of the textbook, was criticized by other members of the prefectural association and by Okinawan activists as Okinawan collusion with the system that discriminated against them, for concealing and thereby reinforcing the reality of Okinawan discrimination instead of revealing and fighting against it (Kishi 2003, 185). The *Ningen* Incident was compared to the Lifestyle Betterment Movement in the 1920s, or even the *Jinruikan* Incident of 1903, in which elite Okinawans were insulted by the fact that Okinawans were displayed with other "barbaric" people, rather than criticizing the act of displaying humans as if they were objects (Kinjo 2005).

From their experience in Yata, the two TOCC founders believed that education was a key to improve children's marginalization and their future. The Liberation Education Movement also emphasized the community's collective effort on behalf of children's healthy development, for which collaboration between teachers and parents was crucial. They also knew many Okinawan parents were not in a position to supervise and aid their children's study at home, so they decided to give Okinawan children help and advice that was not available from their parents. The two teachers started recruiting children and soliciting support in the Okinawan community in Taisho, under the following three conditions: that they would get involved with Okinawan children; provide assistance free of charge; and accept the children regardless of their generation, if at least one of their parents was Okinawan. Although the Club was open to any children with full or

partial Okinawan parentage, there was consideration shown for those from lower class families, as expressed in the second condition that their services were free. In April 1978, the TOCC started as an informal after-school activity group with fifteen Okinawan children at the house of an Okinawan neighbor (Nakamura 1984). Their initial goal was to provide children of poor working-class Okinawan parents with free classes to supplement their school education.

### **Seeking Pride as Okinawans**

The teachers soon realized that this academic aid was not effective given the low motivation and confidence of the children. The deep psychological gap between their parents and grandparents and themselves, and a sense of inferiority and estrangement from being Okinawan, while not knowing enough about their cultural heritage, were all contributing factors. The teachers changed their approach and attempted to address these issues by teaching Okinawan folk songs and sanshin. The idea of teaching sanshin to children was very unusual at the time. Nakamura believed that learning folk songs would allow the children to learn the Okinawan language, history, and culture featured in the lyrics, and thus would make it easier to understand their parents' behavior and ideas that had seemed weird and embarrassing. Such beliefs came from Nakamura's own experience in school, where he felt he was discouraged from using Okinawan dialect and participating in traditional Okinawan events in his town, as he was a "model student" and such activities were considered delinquent at school. Unlike most of his classmates with similarly good academic records, and despite his teachers' suggestions, Nakamura chose to go to the University of the Ryukyus, the most prestigious institution in Okinawa, instead of going to one on mainland Japan, and he joined the Okinawan Culture Study Group at his university. This was due to his defiance against the dominant atmosphere that equated Okinawan cultural heritage with some kind of defect (Nakamura 1996, 41-42).

Once he had decided to teach the Club's children Okinawan culture, Nakamura collected broken sanshins from neighborhood, fixed them, and let children play with them, plucking random tunes without teaching them how to play. He felt it was progress when the children were elated at producing something sounding like Okinawan tunes. Children were so highly motivated to learn sanshin and *min'yō* that they mastered four songs in only four months, and after a few months, they started giving performances at community events, for their families and neighbors.

Most parents and relatives were deeply moved by their children's effort to learn their culture and some of them cried at the performances. For the children's part, they were surprised and moved by the grown-ups' enthusiastic, and often tearful, response. Watching their parents and grandparents crying in joy and gratitude was a very powerful and connecting experience for the children, making them think about the meaning of Okinawan songs and the significance of their efforts.

For parents, this opened up the mixed feelings they had about being Okinawan, feelings that had built up over their whole life. Some parents confessed to the teachers their deep-seated anxiety and shame, that they were concerned that learning about Okinawan culture might thwart their upward social and socioeconomic mobility, for example they wondered if the children should be learning piano instead of learning sanshin and *min'yō* and they were just as ashamed of their Okinawan habits as their children were:

Hey, teacher, when I heard my kid singing in dialect, I was really – so happy. Tears came out of my eyes. But teacher, I have been trying to forget *Uchina* so long. I still feel more or less like that. I love Okinawa in my heart, only I didn't want to let Okinawa out [from me]. But teacher, my kid started doing more Okinawan things that I hadn't been able to do. What does that make me? (Nakamura 1984, c1984)

The children's performance was a chance for the repressed emotions of the adults about being (and hiding the fact that they were) Okinawan to emerge on the surface, and led them to deeper conversations between parents and teachers. Early TOCC and Gajimaru members humorously said that the two teachers – both renowned drinkers – were drinking every night with somebody's parents, TOCC organizers, Gajimaru members, or with all of them. A TOCC alumnus, who had had Nakamura as her homeroom teacher, recalled that her parents served him *awamori* in the early afternoon when he visited her house for an official teacher home-visit, which stretched until late at night.<sup>27</sup> These drinking parties were in effect like teacher-parent conferences for Okinawan parents, who could make time only at night because of their work, and in more personal settings they could more honestly and freely talk about being Okinawan and raising Okinawan children in Osaka, with teachers who were themselves Okinawans and other parents. Thus these performing events and the socializing that followed opened up opportunities for conversations and understanding within and between different generations, between children,

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<sup>27</sup> *Awamori* is Okinawan distilled rice wine.

parents, and teachers about living as Okinawans in Osaka, through which children started to view what had once been a source of humiliation and self-hatred as a source of pride and connectedness, transforming all the involved parties.

### **Deepening Self-Reflexivity**

It was not only children and their parents who found chances through the Club's activities to reflect on their Okinawan identity, but also those who had founded and ran the Club. The Club's organizers themselves, all Okinawans except for one, sent their own children to the Children's Club, which created intersecting relationships between teachers and students, parents and children, relatives and neighbors within the Club and within the Taisho community, resulting in deepening of self-reflexivity and transformation for all. Kaneshiro Munekazu's accounts of his life illustrate that his search for Okinawan identity had shaped his life and career choices as a Taisho-born, second-generation Okinawan.

In his essay, "As a second-generation Okinawan in Osaka" (1997b), Kaneshiro wrote that when he realized the common experience of marginalization experienced by his minority students, it led him to contemplate and rediscover his own Okinawan identity.

I came to think about my identity for the first time, after I became a high school teacher and faced my students. Facing students from Buraku communities, *zainichi* Korean students, delinquent students, students who refused to attend school, students who were bullies and students who were bullied...I thought that I didn't qualify as a teacher if I did not face them as living human beings, but only dealt with them in terms of knowledge. (28)

He felt he needed to know and face his own roots in order to understand the feelings of his minority students. He realized that knowledge about Okinawa, which he had downplayed, was a crucial key to the lives of people around him, especially his own parents, and consequently to his own life. The more he learned about the suffering and pain of Okinawans in Taisho, the better he could understand the anger of minorities. On the other hand, he couldn't help but feel that as an Okinawan he was still a "marginal man" (*majinaru man*, rendered in English), an imperfect human being. He joined the Children's Club with his four children, letting them learn other facets of Okinawan culture such as *ryūbu*. Later he registered in a master's course for working students, majoring in sociology, and published research articles on the history and

culture of Osaka's Okinawans based on his intensive research in Taisho (1992; 1997a). As he continued his study, he came to the conviction that diasporic Okinawans like himself were not "rootless grass" (*nenashigusa*) or "ones who had lost their home" (*kokyoōsōshitsusha*) as he had previously thought, but were living firmly rooted with Osaka as their second *shima*.

Now the current representative of the Children's Club, he runs a cram school (*juku*) in Hirao for his day job, and acts as a human rights lecturer, local historian, and activist for Taisho when his knowledge about the Taisho Okinawan community is needed.

### **Trips to Okinawa: Empowerment as Okinawans in Taisho**

In 1980, the TOCC took a step outside of their Taisho community and made their first trip to Okinawa. It was one of the biggest achievements, if not the biggest, of the Club and its supporting community, which everybody talks about with a great pride even today. That trip was also an event that marked a significant diaspora-home reversal between Okinawans in the Taisho community and Okinawans in Okinawa, which transformed the identity of Club members and their relationships with their families and neighbors in the Taisho Okinawan community. The foremost goal of the trip was to see the land their parents were from, but they also wanted to let people in Okinawa know about Okinawans in Osaka, their stories, along with the *sanshin* performance they had been practicing. In the summer of 1980, twenty three children from grade-schoolers to high school students, accompanied by fifteen adults, visited Okinawa for about a week. They performed *sanshin* and *min'yō* at various places such as town halls and local elementary schools, staying at places offered by their extended families or acquaintances. This trip was a remarkable event not only for the members of the Club or their supporters in Taisho, but also for those who lived in Okinawa. Newspapers in both Okinawa and Osaka reported the Club's journey in detail, under headlines such as "Way to go, second generation Okinawans" (*Okinawa Times* August 11, 1980); "Children visit the land of their parents, with *sanshins* in their hands," "23 *Naniwakko*, second-generation *Uchinā*, performed to search for the heart of Okinawa"<sup>28</sup> (*Ryukyū Shimpō* August); "Well done! Yamato-raised second generation children," "Osaka's Okinawan Children's Club perform *sanshin* – applauded at their hometown by elderly

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<sup>28</sup> *Naniwakko* is used for children of Naniwa (Osaka's old nickname)

in Nago”<sup>29</sup> (*Asahi Shimbun* August 11, 1980). The TOCC’s performance of sanshin and *min’yō* was especially shocking to school educators in Okinawa. It had been less than a decade since Okinawa was returned to Japan, and most educators had been trying hard to “catch up with the Japanese standard,” in language, behavior, and academic performance (Noiri 2011). As Nakamura recalled of his high school experience, in the process, learning Okinawan traditions was very much downplayed, or even considered as a deviance and a hindrance to students’ academic success. Okinawan educators’ focus on the cultural and academic assimilation of their students resulted in a somewhat ironic, reversed cultural exchange; second-generation children from Osaka played Okinawan folk music, while children in Okinawa stuck strictly to a Japanese repertoire (Kino 1984). The participants on this trip, or even those who supported the Club, still talked about it with an air of pride: “Our children beat them,” (Kaneshiro Yoshiaki, personal conversation); “When we played sanshin and *min’yō*, the children at the hosting schools sang songs from the Japanese Ministry of Education selection” (Miyamoto Kayoko, personal conversation). It was also said that this exchange led educators in Okinawa to reflect on their own education practice, and to start emphasizing Okinawan identity in their curriculum. Thus Kaneshiro Yoshiaki jokingly said at one of TOCC’s parties, “Our children beat them when we first went to Okinawa, but on the second trip [in 1988], to our regret, they beat us.”

In academic and lay perceptions, the cultural practice of diaspora is often regarded as imperfect, deteriorated, or in some way a defective imitation of the home culture, which is deemed more accurate and authentic. Some scholars of diaspora warn against such *honbashugi* (the-original-place-ism) (Terada 1999) as it fails to recognize the specificity, urgency, and originality of diasporic practices that inevitably differ from their home-society counterparts, but are no less authentic or truthful for those who practice. The TOCC’s 1980 Okinawan trip would be a case in point. This trip was a great achievement for the Club’s children and their families in transforming self-humiliation and estrangement into self-esteem and connectedness on the personal and family levels, and in terms of Okinawan identity, progressing from a sense of

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<sup>29</sup> Located at the entrance of Yambaru (a mountainous and under-populated area in Northern Okinawan), Nago and the surrounding area have socially and historically represented the northern part of Okinawa Island since the Ryukyu Kingdom period. Nago is also the hometown of the Nakamuras, and many of families of the Children’s Club (or the majority of Taisho residents, for that matter) happened to come from this area. So Nago was not only “the home” to many of the visitors, but it could have also been “the home” of the repertoire that the children performed in Okinawa, since most of the songs Mr. Nakamura taught the children, such as *Afabushi*, likely came from this area.

insufficiency toward an identity that could be as assertive as – or more than – their counterparts on their home island.

### **Empowerment as Children**

The trips to Okinawa highlighted another principle of the Club that both the organizers and members considered integral to their identity as the Children's Club: the autonomy of children. Nakamura writes about the central role that children played in the everyday operation of the Club and in special events such as concerts and trips. When planning trips to Okinawa, the children suggested and discussed their ideas, persuaded their parents, organized a study group to learn Okinawan history and geography, and raised funds by collecting recyclables from the neighborhood for the 1980 trip and organizing a fundraising concert for the 1988 trip.

Moreover, through the TOCC's activities, especially study groups, children came to expand their scope of interests in social issues beyond their school education and local community by learning, discussing, and participating in social issues. On their second trip to Okinawa in 1988, they engaged in four months of peace and anti-war study (most of all, the Battle of Okinawa, the A-bombings, and US bases in Okinawa) in preparation for their trip, visited Hiroshima, and marched in anti-war rallies along with Gajimaru members. Thus "being Okinawan" was not a source of shame, but rather became an entry point for children to understand problematic social issues such as the inequality, war, and colonialism that had led to their current experience.

Children's autonomy was respected in their everyday functions, too. In one of his introductions for the TOCC, Nakamura wrote about one episode, titled "All of us run this Club together," in which younger children had taken the initiative in solving a conflict between themselves, when an older boy hit younger children to keep order during study hours. After an extended and heated discussion without intervention by adults, the children finally reached an agreement in which both parties apologized and decided to change their behavior. Nakamura recalled how children as a group matured through this kind of experience, and how some children who initially showed signs of delinquency due to the lack of family supervision, eventually developed self-respect and responsibility through various Club activities, channeling

their strong personalities in a more positive and productive direction (Nakamura 1984, 12-13; Nakamura c1984).

Thus in the TOCC, children were not on the passive receiving end of adult care and support, but rather had an active agency and almost an equal part in efforts made for their own empowerment, not only as Okinawans in Taisho, Osaka, but also as children. And again, the autonomy of children, along with connectedness between generations and within the community, were two of the core values that the Liberation Education Movement promoted in order to overcome the social and economic disadvantages, external prejudice, and self-alienation that ailed minority individuals and groups. One booklet titled “Connecting to children and parents” published in the mid-1980s, introduced various attempts made in elementary school settings in Osaka, including the efforts of the TOCC, to involve children (and sometimes their parents, too) in collectively addressing issues that affected them at school such as ethnic prejudice, poverty, disabilities, and bullying.

### **The Gajimaru Club and the TOCC as Siblings**

The Gajimaru Club and the TOCC were the two earliest groups for Okinawan youth, formed three years apart with similar orientations and similar strategies. Both clubs targeted Okinawan youth, although the Gajimaru Club targeted young workers from Okinawa, and the TOCC targeted school children born and raised in Osaka, and they strived to improve their members’ children’s self-esteem and resolve their alienation in order to build or recover their sense of community. They also shared a common strategy which was novel compared to their predecessors, of using easily identifiable cultural practices such as *eisā* and music as a means to assert Okinawan cultural difference and to create solidarity among themselves.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Gajimaru Club identified themselves with Okinawans in Taisho, especially with those in Kubun-gwa, as their predecessors (*senpai*) and ancestors (*senzō*), based on their common experience – suffering – as diasporic Okinawans. They gradually engaged themselves with the lives of Taisho’s Okinawans and established themselves within the community, participating in the Kubun-gwa Festival in 1975 and hosting the Taisho Eisā Festival. Moreover, Gajimaru Club was involved with the TOCC. Starting in 1980, the TOCC performed at the Taisho Eisā Festival. The TOCC had a very close, friendly, and even familial, relationship with the Gajimaru Club from the beginning until at least the late 1980s. Earlier



members of both clubs told me that the Gajimaru Club was like an older sibling to the TOCC. Gajimaru members taught *eisā* to the TOCC children, and they often performed and socialized together at various club and community events, such as picnics and Okinawan celebrations. Kinjo Isamu, a second generation Okinawan who at the time was a TOCC organizer and parent member, expressed his hope that the Gajimaru Club and the TOCC would remain entities that bound the community together with their attachment (*kodawari*) to Okinawa.

I wish children at the TOCC would stay involved with the Club after graduating from high school, this time as instructors. Or, it would be great if they joined the Gajimaru Club and did their activities there. When they get married and have children, I wish they would send their children to the Children's Club. Maybe I getting ahead of myself, but unless we have more and more children attached to Okinawa and connected to the community like that, what we are doing at the Children's Club now won't have a lot of meaning. (1996, 93)

In his imaginings about family and kinship, the future of the Taisho Okinawan community was extended through these two groups that were tied by both symbolic and actual kin ties – the two clubs remained like siblings. The continuity and connection between the two clubs remained as Kinjo Isamu wished, in both form and content, until the 1990s. Some Gajimaru members sent their children to the TOCC, and some TOCC children “graduated” to the Gajimaru Club. Almost all of the children of TOCC organizers were TOCC members while they were growing up, and some Gajimaru members sent their children to TOCC, too. Some TOCC alums, joined Gajimaru during high school or after graduation.

TOCC's engagement with the whole community, in addition to their respect for children's autonomy, and the fact that they exposed children to larger social issues recapitulates the Liberation Education Movement's agenda, and had empowering and transformative effects on children. However, since the 1990s, the two groups have gradually drifted apart. This was partly due to external and straightforward changes such as the U-turn phenomenon of Okinawan collective employment workers and consequent reduction of Gajimaru, and the growth and high school graduation of core children members, namely TOCC organizers' children. However, there were also more profound reasons that reflected both macro-level changes, such as the changes in Taisho Okinawan community and in the mainland reception of Okinawan difference (i.e. the Okinawa Boom), and the micro-level changes of how core members of each group perceived and responded to larger changes, as will be discussed later.

## Changes in the Taisho Okinawan Community

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the Taisho Okinawan community went through various social changes over the three decades after Gajimaru and TOCC's inception, changes that affected both clubs significantly. First of all, living conditions in Taisho improved overall. The long-term land and road improvement projects that had been undertaken by Osaka City starting in the 1950s finally concluded in the early 1980s. Kubun-gwa, the notorious "Okinawan Slum," disappeared from the map, with a significant part of the former Kubun-gwa area now under the sea at the Taisho Port (fig. 5). Although Taisho Ward as a whole still maintains the largest Okinawan population on mainland Japan, approximately 20,000 Okinawans out of the ward's entire population of 80,000 as of the late 1990s (Kaneshiro 1997a), Okinawan families dispersed to larger areas within and outside of the Ward. Also, Okinawans became more integrated and assimilated into mainstream Japanese society, now that Japanese and Okinawan families were living next to each other. Although they are still mostly working class, Okinawan families became more affluent in general.

Among the younger generations, both negative stereotypes of Okinawans and overall self-awareness as Okinawans have faded. As discussed in the Introduction, the different terms individuals use to refer to Okinawan identity have different implications with regard to the source of Okinawan difference, and the duration (or persistence) of Okinawan consciousness over time. During my research in 2007 and 2008, I noticed that the perception of "being Okinawan" tended to be different with younger individuals of Okinawan descent than with older generations. Young people with Okinawan parents did not necessarily see Okinawan difference as an ethnic (*minzoku*) difference which would persist over generations. Statements like "I am not Okinawan, but my grandfather is from Okinawa" from teenagers and twenty-something were common. Even some parents at the Club referred to Okinawa as the "hometown" (*furusato*) of their parents, rather than saying they or their family were Okinawan. It was a matter-of-fact statement, not ironic or emotionally charged. It was different from the powerful negation, the "anti-Okinawa" (*Okinawa hantai*) sentiment of the Okinawan child from a poor Okinawan family introduced at the beginning of this chapter, who hated their poverty and Okinawan stigma.

This separation of identity by generation suggests that these young people tended to take Okinawan identity as more of a regional identity, similar to what is often called “prefectural identity” (*kenmin ishiki*) by people from prefectures other than Okinawa; one may have a strong, culturally distinctive identity based on one’s native region, but it could weaken over time once its holder left the region. It could and did fade away over generations. To these young people, their Okinawan-sounding family names or food preferences were not an integral part of their identity, but simple facts that derived from their family history. In comparison, what first or second generation Okinawans, adult members of the Gajimaru Club, or organizers of the Children’s Club had was closer to an ethnic, cultural, and/or racial identity (racial as in preserved in one’s biology, such as genes, phenotypic differences, or “blood”), which was passed on, at least partly, from generation to generation.

This not only suggests changes in self-awareness among young diasporic Okinawans, but also changes in the environment surrounding them, in which they were not noticed and marked out as Okinawans in most everyday interactions. Whereas until the 1960s and even in the 1970s marriages between Okinawans and Japanese were discouraged by both groups, and children from such unions were despised, such unions were no longer treated as different or unusual by either party.<sup>30</sup> Increased Okinawan-Japanese marriages further weakened self-awareness as Okinawans, and even more so in children. Unless their parents and extended families emphasized Okinawan heritage throughout their upbringing, like for example, TOCC organizers’ children, or Yumiko in the Gajimaru Club, a teenager who had learned sanshin at age seven, and had run a children’s *eisā* club with her mother, most children were fully assimilated linguistically and culturally, except probably their family names and food choices.

Moreover, as the popularity of the Okinawa Boom reached Taisho Ward, and reconfigured it as “the Little Okinawa you can visit on bike,” Okinawan differences were widely seen in a positive light.

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<sup>30</sup> One woman in her early sixties who was born in Kyoto with a Japanese father and an Okinawan mother moved to Taisho as a teenager after her father’s passing. She recalled how much she hated being called *mancha* (the Okinawan term for mixed-blood) by older Okinawans while growing up, and emphasized that she in fact understood Okinawan dialect better, was better at Okinawan dance and songs, than other Okinawans her age.

### **The Shift in Focus: From an Okinawan Children’s Club to an *Eisā* Club**

As shown in the previous section, the TOCC started as a youth club in an underprivileged Okinawan neighborhood; it had an all-encompassing approach to the promotion of Okinawan ethnic identity and the empowerment of Okinawan youth, based on the tight network of families and Okinawan community in Taisho. When I was first introduced to the Club in 2007, right before the 33rd Taisho *Eisā* Festival, the Club seemed very much alive and active with almost forty children (increasing up to fifty during my research) and their parents, and its long-time organizers and supporters, some of who had supported the Club since the beginning. However, not unlike the Gajimaru Club, it went through significant changes, influenced by changes in the living conditions of the Taisho Okinawan community, and by the reception of Okinawan difference on the mainland after the Okinawa Boom.

In fact the Club had a hiatus in its activities from 1995 to 2002. Many children, especially the children of the organizers, graduated from high school and left the neighborhood for college, or a job, or got married. But there was a more profound reason: the organizers at the time seem to have diverged over the orientation of the Club, and with their own children graduating from the Club, they didn’t have enough consensus or motivation to continue to lead the Club. Kaneshiro Munekazu, the current representative, thought that their initial approach was not as effective anymore in the late 1990s. He thought that the explicitly political aspect of the Club’s previous activities, for example, children’s participation in political events and rallies such as anti-discrimination and anti-US base protests, had reached their limit. He felt children were not acting on their own agenda, but on that of the grownups, which he felt was unfair. And the organizers, with increased demands in their personal and/or work lives as they aged, couldn’t keep up with the Club’s operation.

The Club was reorganized in 2002. Many informants, including the organizing staff themselves, attributed this “revival” to the Taisho Okinawan community’s wishes, especially those of the elderly *oji obā* (grandpas and grandmas) who “really missed children dancing *eisā* at the Festival.” In the reorganized Club, the biggest change was its focus. The official title of the Club changed slightly from the “Taisho Okinawan Children’s Club” to “Taisho Okinawa Children’s *Eisā* Club” (hereafter TOCEC),<sup>31</sup> but most staff, members, and Taisho neighbors

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<sup>31</sup> The Club periodically taught some children *sanshin* and *min’yō* upon their request, and used titles such as “Taisho Okinawa Children’s *Eisā* and *Min’yō* Club” or “Taisho Okinawa Children’s *Min’yō* Club” depending on

simply treated the TOCC and TOCEC as one, calling it “the Children’s Club” (Kodomokai), as they had been doing since the 1970s. However, for Munekazu the name change was a deliberate one; he wanted to draw a line between the identity and agenda of the new Club and those of the past. He changed the Club’s focus from specifically accommodating Okinawan children to *eisā* and sanshin activities, as indicated in its new name.

In the past, TOCC’s members recalled that their lives had revolved pretty much around the TOCC. Not only did they practice *eisā* and learn sanshin, but they also did homework for school and studied about Okinawa and other social issues, met friends, played and did sports together, and occasionally they ventured out of Taisho for picnic, field trips, and hiking. The TOCC’s schedule from a 1988 printed pamphlet shows the extensiveness of the TOCC’s weekly and annual program.

Time and Place

Sunday        10 am – noon (Hirao Okinawan Hall)  
Tuesday       7 – 8 pm (Kansai Okinawa Bunko)  
Thursday      6:30 – 8 pm (Kansai Okinawa Bunko)

Activities:

- \* *eisā*, sanshin, [Okinawan] children’s songs
- \* study on Okinawa
- \* supplementary study of school work
- \* anti-war, peace study
- \* sports, play

Last year’s main events

- \* February: Climbed Mt. Kongo
- \* May-August: Study on Okinawa, Anti-War, Peace Study
- \* August: Camping
- \* September: Taisho Eisā Matsuri
- \* November: Performed at the Zendōkyō assembly (Liberation Education related organization)
- \* December: Year-end party, Mochitsuki (rice cake pounding for New Year’s celebration) (1988,11)

The TOCC’s activities had not been focused on anything in particular, but rather, on what members – Okinawan children – did together. The new Club’s activities were largely confined to *eisā* – biweekly practice on Saturdays, which became weekly towards the Taisho Eisā Festival or other major performance occasions, and costume preparation meetings. Socializing occasions

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what they performed on a given stage, but their main activities revolved around *eisā*, and TOCEC was the most official name.

significantly decreased to the New Year's party, and reflection-and-celebration parties after major performances. Sanshin practice was held biweekly on the other weeks, too, but it took a lesser significance and was frequently cancelled. Other activities that former Children's Club members had done – studying Okinawan history and culture, trips to Okinawa, etc. – were discontinued. Now the Club's primary focus was on the performance at the annual Taisho Eisā Festival hosted by the Gajimaru Club, and its schedule, while they might make occasional guest appearances at community events such as the Taisho Ward Festival, a local disability-awareness event, or the presentation of a Taisho karate academy, when invited through the more or less personal network of the organizers.

### **Shift in Membership: Neither Okinawans nor Underprivileged**

This shift in focus from Okinawan children to *eisā* came from the major demographic change in the newly organized Club. One significant change was the decrease of Okinawan children in the Club. In the past, when Okinawan heritage was close to a stigma, the TOCC had been started specifically to help Okinawan children, and only Okinawan families would have been motivated to join, although the Club had not excluded non-Okinawan individuals. The membership was exclusively Okinawan, except for one family. The mother of the family was a Liberation Education minded school teacher, and was devoted to working with underprivileged children, not only Okinawans in Taisho, where she lived with her daughter, but also with children from impoverished families in the neighboring Nishinari Ward where she worked. In the beginning Nakamura recruited Okinawan children from the schools he taught at in Taisho; he identified Okinawan children in the student list by their names, and personally met and persuaded them to join the club.

This approach didn't work anymore, partly because the organizers were no longer working at elementary schools in Taisho (Kaneshiro Yoshiaki retired in the 1990s and moved out of Taisho, and Nakamura worked in a managerial position at a Nishinari school and retired in 2008). But even if they did, family names and ancestry were no longer a good indicator of Okinawan identity not only because of the generally weakened self-consciousness as Okinawans among younger generations, but also due to the increased mixed marriages between Okinawans and Japanese, in which women usually changed their family names upon marriage. Usually either the mother or the child decided to join the Club, while fathers were mostly absent with a

few exceptions; thus a child was more likely to join if the mother or both parents were Okinawans, and/or they were interested in *eisā*.

Families who chose to join the Club after 2002 did so not because they were Okinawans, but because they were interested in *eisā* (and in some cases, *sanshin* and *min'yō*). The organizers estimated that about half of the members were of Okinawan descent through either or both parents, but this estimate was somewhat ambiguous, because they relied on family names, or on their personal acquaintance with the member's family or relatives to tell whether a member was Okinawan or Japanese, neither of which was necessarily accurate in telling how much a child felt he or she was Okinawan. In one case, for example, I learned that a girl who the organizing staff referred to as "a third-generation *Uchinānchu*" didn't even know she had Okinawan ancestry because nobody told her so for a long time.

Moreover, most families in the TOCEC were not necessarily underprivileged. They were still mostly working class, rather than elite, white-collar families, working at family-owned Okinawan restaurants, small metal recycling factories, the Hirao arcade, and as a nurse. Some mothers were working part-time as cashiers at a local grocery or at side jobs, low-paying simple tasks that could be brought home and done during their free time. But they were not working any more at manual, grueling jobs such as scrap metal collection or wood delivery. More mothers could afford to stay home, at least long enough to take care of everyday home functions and supervise their children's study, behavior, and general well being.

Meanwhile, the age composition of the group had also changed significantly, affecting the relationship between organizers, parents, and children, and the way the Club was operated. Although or because the main organizing staff remained largely the same, they now were older. Except for the only young instructor who was thirty-one at the time of my fieldwork, the others were in their late fifties or early sixties. On the other hand, most lay adult members (parents and schoolteachers) were about a generation younger, from their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Moreover, the age of children members became significantly lower. Previously, the Club's main participants were upper-grade primary school students and junior high school students. Now the age of active children ranged from two to twelve, concentrated between six and eight years old. And once children graduated from primary school, they stopped coming to the Club, as their Saturday schedule was filled with extracurricular activities at school and school assignments, which followed the average pattern of middle class students.

Due to this age difference, young parents seemed to feel a sense of distance out of respect and/or from the generation gap, and remained somewhat passive when interacting with the staff. With the increased size of the Club (the membership more than tripled from fifteen or so in 1978 to nearly fifty in 2007), organizers did not know all of the members well personally, and members did not know each other very well except for a few other families. In the past they had all lived in a relatively confined neighborhood in Hirao or Kobayashi. Now families lived farther apart in Taisho and needed to take public transportation to the practice site at Hirao Elementary, and some came from outside Taisho.

The roles of the staff (*shidōin*; instructors/leaders) and the lay adult members became more strictly separated, as personal relationships between members and the staff became weaker. Interactions tended to be unidirectional from the staff to parents. Sometimes staff members did not know much about a family, as they hardly interacted with others during and after the practice after their initial registration. Members and staff were mostly acquainted only through weekly practice and events, but not much elsewhere. The number of Club social occasions at which all could freely exchange ideas and feelings significantly decreased, and while they casually exchanged small talk with other parents, and to a lesser degree, with the staff, parents hardly participated in or gave feedback regarding the Club's decision making, or discussed the decisions. Staffers also told me sometimes that they honestly were not sure what parents and children thought about or expected from the Club other than dancing.

These overall changes affected the way children – the main actors – participated in the Club, especially their autonomy. The increased number of younger children who lived farther away limited something as basic as coming to the weekly practice. Instead, it was parents, mostly mothers, who brought their children to the practice. Whether children wanted to join the club or not, it was up to their parents to decide whether to allow them to join. It became especially the case when the Club acquired an insurance policy in case of accidents during practice or on performance trips, and they needed parents' signatures on the policy. Moreover, for children too young to decide or express their opinions, such as toddlers and preschoolers, it was often their mothers who decided for them and brought them to the Club. They watched or participated in dance practice as a way of encouraging their children to dance, and they performed together on stage at most events, although except for the Taisho Eisā Festival the attendance of parents fluctuated depending on their availability. While parents became more passive in the Club, their



participation became paradoxically visible, as more parents came to practice and perform *eisā* along with their children.

### **Reduction of Political Agenda**

It is always the Taisho Okinawa Children's *Eisā* Club who get the biggest applause. It is not just because they look so adorable when they are dancing enthusiastically. It is in praise of their efforts to pass on the life and culture of the southern islands, which is the homeland of their *oji* (grandpas), *oba* (grandmas), fathers and mothers. (Ohta, *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 26, 2008)

As this news article suggests, on the surface level, the Club seemed to retain the generational continuity of this diasporic community as described above, which was the official reason for the Club's revival, "because *oji* and *oba* missed children's dance." However, children with Okinawan parentage (at least one parent was Okinawan) only made up about half of the entire membership, and whether Okinawan or not, most families were much closer to mainstream society, if not already a part of it. These changes in the composition of the Club brought about changes in the orientation of the Club, which were not obvious on the surface level and often seemed to escape the attention of outsiders, such as media journalists and academics who occasionally visited Taisho for a short time to cover popular Okinawan spots and groups.

The biggest change that accompanied the sole focus on *eisā* was that the Club visibly diminished the anti-discrimination agenda of Liberation Education. It was not that organizers had changed their stance regarding these issues. Not only Munekazu, the current representative who consciously diminished the new Club's political agenda, but the other organizing staff, were all known to have been active in the Liberation Education Movement and/or outspoken on Okinawa-related issues. When they were by themselves, they spoke openly about Japanese discrimination against Okinawans and other minorities and the differences between Japanese and Okinawans. They lamented the ignorance and indifference of the younger generation, Okinawans and Japanese alike, towards such inequality, and they were sometimes cynical about the Okinawa Boom – the naive and irresponsible Japanese infatuation with Okinawan music and dance, which likely attracted some of their members.

The Liberation Education connection was not totally lost, either, but it was implicit and almost unnoticeable. There were four young school teachers in their twenties and thirties, who were Nakamura's coworkers or knew about the Club through the teachers' Liberation Education network. Two of them were also members of Hibiki, a teachers' taiko performance club that was closely associated with, and inspired by, the taiko performing group in Yata, the same Buraku community that had inspired the co-founders of the TOCC three decades previously.<sup>32</sup>

However, organizers and these teacher members alike hardly talked about Liberation Education, Okinawan discrimination, or any other social issues in the Club setting. They seemed almost reluctant to show what they believed in to the Club's children and their parents. When the Club regrouped, Munekazu had made it clear that children should not be held hostage to the political aims of grownups and wanted to reduce the political overtones of the previous Club. However, it seemed to me the Club went entirely the other direction, and the staff seemed almost hesitant and reluctant to discuss those issues openly and officially in front of lay members, in fear of driving them out.

However, this was not a baseless concern. In my observation of activism and activists with different agendas in Japan, the reluctance to appear explicitly political goes beyond simply separating the political rhetoric from the group's activities; in Japan, there is a widespread, pervasive avoidance by the general public of any overtly political or activist agenda, progressive or reactionary, as being confrontational, radical, dangerous, or even cult-like, regardless of the type of agenda, ethnicity, sexuality, environment, and so on. It is a common response of Japanese mainstream individuals who have ordinary living conditions, not necessarily underprivileged or discriminated against, and who consider themselves to be moderate or ordinary, that they steer away from overtly political rhetoric, especially when it regards a minority group. They don't agree or disagree, but make excuses such as "I am not particularly interested in politics." The Buraku Liberation Movement is a typical example. Rather than being seen in terms of right or wrong, such overt activism tends to be seen as a source of unnecessary trouble; sayings like "leave a sleeping baby alone" (*neta ko ha sonomama*) are used to warn against getting involved in any way.

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<sup>32</sup> In the context of minority cultural activism, the taiko – Japanese drum – represents the cultural legacy of Buraku communities, especially that of tanners.

Thus, like Munekazu, certain activists who want to reach out to a broader public often make conscious efforts not to frame their movement in terms of a political agenda, even when their activities have significant political implications. Two non-Ainu linguists who advocate the revival of the Ainu language by teaching the language to Ainu individuals and by promoting Japanese and Ainu signs in buildings in Ainu-concentrated areas said that, although they were well aware of the political implications, they were careful that their activities did not appear political but rather academic, and more like community service. This was because they were afraid of losing wider support, especially from non-Ainu, once they were labeled as “political.” One of the speakers quoted another saying: “If you don’t touch a god, you won’t be cursed” (*sawaranu kami ni tatari nashi*) to express the common apathy and/or antipathy of the public towards overt activism (Izutsu 2005).

### **Dilemma of an Accommodating Activism: “Riding the Okinawa Boom”**

If one considers the overall avoidance of explicitly political expression among mainstream Japanese, the TOCEC’s muted treatment of their agenda can be taken as a strategy to reach out for new members, who unlike early TOCC members were more mainstream. Munekazu gave a lecture on the history of Taisho’s Okinawans and the TOCEC as part of the “Loop Line, Discrimination, and Human Rights” lecture series at the Osaka Human Rights Museum. I asked Munekazu what he thought of the current Okinawa Boom and increased Japanese participation in Okinawa-based groups, including TOCEC, and more specifically, how he thought such change was affecting on his own Club. He responded as follows:

It will become really problematic if groups and organizations of Okinawans cannot be continued because there are no more young Okinawans coming in. Then those groups will be filled with Japanese only, and the commercialized images of Okinawa will really take over [the reality of Okinawa]. In that sense, it is certainly a good change that children can feel pride in Okinawan traditions, and feel inclined to inherit them [due to the Okinawa Boom]. Thus, we will *ride that Okinawa Boom* – we will take advantage of those commercialized images of Okinawa, and strategically appeal to people to understand issues of Okinawa. (Kaneshiro 2008; my emphasis)

It was his hope that the Club could “ride the Okinawa Boom,” namely, reach out to more people who were interested in Okinawan culture and increase their chances to see beyond the superficial representations of Okinawa that the mainstream media had to offer. Not unlike Gajimaru members, Munekazu viewed the post-Okinawa Boom situation as a double-edged

opportunity, in which Okinawans' struggle for fuller recognition could penetrate the dominant discourse of multiculturalism that tended to bury minority voices while celebrating cultural difference. Activists have taken different approaches to deal with the Okinawa Boom, depending on the target audience and their main agenda; for example, they must decide whether to expose the contradiction of the current multiculturalist discourse or to keep their identity consciousness grounded in community life. Munekazu's comment above and the muted political voices inside the Club seemed to indicate that the Children's Club chose the latter. This attitude also seemed to come from the fact that the main members of the TOCC were children and parents, and the staff's main agenda for the club was to strengthen generational ties within Okinawan families, and ties within communities as well.

However, the idea of "riding the Okinawa Boom" seemed more feasible in the lecture room of the Human Rights Museum than in the everyday activities of the Children's Club that I was observing. The Club would successfully be "riding the Okinawa Boom" as Munekazu wished, if members simultaneously learned about persisting inequality between Okinawa and Japan and the underlying problems of the Okinawa Boom, while they were doing their favorite activities. However, I observed that what was unsaid by organizers also went unnoticed by children or parents. The reluctance of the staff to voice their political opinions went hand in hand with the lack of interest or knowledge on the part of children and parents regarding those issues, which made it hard to continue occasional attempts to go deeper than simply teaching how to dance *eisā*, play *sanshin*, or sing *min'yō*.

There were attempts to encourage children to go deeper than simple interest in *eisā* as a dance but also as part of Okinawan culture and history, which were not so successful. For example, a parent member once tried to read children's storybooks about *eisā* after weekly practices. He was a first-generation Okinawan, and was a reverend who ran a church in Hirao. He was very outspoken on Okinawa related issues such as war atrocities during the Pacific War and the US base issues. He supported the Kansai Okinawa Bunko's events as well, and was a member of a Christian-based activist group in Kamagasaki. He and his wife were active parent supporters of the Children's Club, and sent all three of their children to the Club.

The reverend wanted children to know the meanings of *eisā* in its original context, the history and culture of Okinawa, by reading history and stories about *eisā* and telling his own personal stories. Had it not been for his primary obligation to his church, he would always have

been willing to help more. This reading time was not obligatory, so only children who had extra time after their practice stayed. He couldn't continue this for more than a few weeks due to the fact that he already had too many church-related duties. Since there was no one to take over the role, or who strongly wanted the reading time to continue, it stopped there.

Also, in 2007, the TOCEC compiled a booklet titled "To children: The story of *eisā*" (Kakihana 2007). The booklet had been written by Kakihana, who was a founding member of Gajimaru. The Kakihanas, who were former parent supporters of the TOCC, continued their supporting role even after their daughters' graduation. The booklet includes the stories of *eisā*, of Okinawans in Osaka (immigrants from the early twentieth century and collective employment youth of the 1960s and 1970s), of the TOCC-TOCEC, and of "the heart of Okinawa." The booklets were sold at the Taisho *Eisā* Festival and the Kansai Okinawa Bunko, and distributed at Kaneshiro's human rights lectures on Okinawans in Osaka. All the Club's members received the booklet, but when I asked members, only very few of them answered that they had actually read it, or knew the anti-discrimination context of TOCC history. The staff already knew about the members' lack of understanding or interest in TOCC's development, but seemed too shy to encourage members to read the booklet and discuss the stories in the book within the Club.

The conflict between the desire to convey and reinforce their agenda about *eisā* to current members, and their reluctance to do so officially for fear of compromising the current operations that they were barely managing, once surfaced at a staff meeting that I attended. In preparation for an after-performance party, the idea came up that I could give a guest lecture about my findings on Okinawan performing arts in Osaka, and more importantly, my thoughts about the Children's Club. Knowing their reluctance to openly criticize the post-Okinawa Boom infatuation for *eisā*, which I suspected some members might have, I hesitantly told them, "But if I speak candidly, it might end up like one of those human rights lectures, you know, the history of discrimination and all that hard stuff." I was a little surprised that all of them agreed that it would be ok if I was critical of the current state of the Club, saying that "they needed to know that stuff."

In my talk, I gave brief history of Okinawans in Taisho Ward and of the Children's Club since its inception, while trying to balance mild criticism of the current members' relative inattention to the Club's own history and praise for newly achieved strength of the Club, which I will discuss later. I also presented the Club with my compilation of news, magazine articles, and

scholarly works on Okinawan immigrants and on the TOCC, in case someone wanted to know more. While I was worried that my talk was too preachy, the staff was quite satisfied with what I said. Though I am highly suspicious about how much my talk influenced the Club's atmosphere, I learned that the older staff who seemed to steer away from an outspoken political agenda had not given up on expressing critical thoughts, but as they were hesitant to deliver them themselves, they wanted the Club members to hear them from a third party, a distanced observer from academia.

### **The Young Successor's Uncertainty**

Ms. Nakamura, the only young TOCEC staffer and the Club's only *eisā* instructor, took the current situation very seriously. The oldest of Nakamura's three daughters and an alumnus of the TOCC, Ms. Nakamura was almost the same age as the Club. Considering the time and effort Nakamura put into the Club, the Children's Club was like his other child. Nakamura had made it his life's work to preserve the Okinawan identities of the diasporic Okinawan children of Taisho, including his own children. Each of the three Nakamura daughters came to succeed to their father's legacy in their own way. All of them learned *eisā*, *ryūbu* and *min'yō* while they grew up in Taisho, and two of them became accomplished *min'yō* singers. After high school graduation, they all went to Okinawa to continue their study: two of them went to colleges in Okinawa and joined *eisā* clubs, and the other became a disciple of a nationally renowned Okinawa *min'yō* master.

Among them, the eldest daughter turned out to be the only and most committed successor to the Children's Club. In fact, the reorganization of the Club in 2002 was possible only because Ms. Nakamura came back from Okinawa after college, and decided to help her father teach *eisā* and *sanshin* (the other staffers were not capable of either). She had put a full-hearted effort into reviving the Children's Club, using all the sources and connections available to her. As a core member of her college's *eisā* club, she was capable of teaching both *eisā* and *sanshin*. She dedicated every weekend to the Club's practice and more, which was a big time commitment for someone who was young and single with a full time job which often kept her busy into the night. She didn't miss practice even when she and her father were taking turns to take care of an ill family member. She also taught new *eisā* choreography that she had adapted from her college *eisā*, and using her personal network, invited her college *eisā* club and another popular college

*eisā* group to perform at the Taisho Eisā Festival, and also give special *eisā* lessons for the TOCEC's children.

However, as much as she was devoted to every aspect of the operation of the TOCEC, and cared for its children, she was uncertain and even skeptical about the effectiveness of her own efforts. When I asked Ms. Nakamura the same question that I had directed to Munekazu, about her opinion regarding changes in the Club after increased Japanese participation, her response was not as optimistic but instead she started confiding in me her worries about the present state of the Club.

She was determined to devote herself as much as possible to keeping the Club going. She said “You can't just let it go after you've seen how much your parents put into something.” But she was clearly aware of the current members' lack of passion and determination, even among Okinawan families, a lack that set them apart from the earlier generation of TOCC members and supporters. She was overwhelmed that now it seemed entirely up to her, and only her, to ensure that the Club would continue, and that once the older staff retired, or if she got married and had her own family to care for, there would be no one with enough devotion and drive to maintain the Club.<sup>33</sup>

She thought the change was inevitable to some extent, due to the generational change in the Taisho Okinawan population. “Now even the Club's parents were born here and grew up here. There is something in the first generations that we second or third generations just can't live up to, the strong feelings for their homeland.” She also felt a sense of resistance now that the Club seemed to be reduced to a hobby club. Like devoted individuals in the Gajimaru Club, Ms. Nakamura had a sense of inseparability, almost inevitability, between the reason they danced *eisā* and their being Okinawans, and a sense of incongruity that Japanese individuals were chasing around after the Okinawan performing arts. She didn't have problems with non-Okinawans dancing *eisā* in her Club, but couldn't understand their purpose. When her father or his friends said that it was acceptable even if the Club's children weren't Okinawans or didn't understand why they danced, she protested: “Why not hula dance, then? Why *eisā*, of all things?”

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<sup>33</sup> This situation eased a few years after my research, as two more TOCC alumni came back as instructors.

It is not that the older staff did not realize the problems that Ms. Nakamura discussed above. In fact, to some extent they seemed to focus on day-to-day affairs, averting their eyes from the problems, as they were already working up to their maximum capacity and couldn't afford to confront such issues without risking the possible loss of a significant number of current members. Even if they might be passive and interested in little other than *eisā* and *min'yō*, there were still a significant number of loyal families, who were on good terms with each other. The staff was hesitant to ruin such a familial atmosphere by asking them to go farther.

### **“The Children’s Club Has Lost its Purpose”**

TOCEC’s organizers moved away from ostensible LEM strategies and took a more accommodating approach for their members who were now not necessarily Okinawans or underprivileged, in an attempt to reach out to Japanese Okinawaphiles and guide them to see beyond the stereotypical representations of the Okinawa Boom. However, such attempts proved hard to realize. While the TOCEC appeared to retain its continuity as the Children’s Club, and might have offered a more familial ambience than before, with more, younger children dancing next to their parents, overall, the Children’s Club looked more like an extracurricular hobby club for middle-class families with the sole focus on the practice and performance of *eisā*, than a club with the activist agenda of promoting Okinawan identity and empowering children.

Some individuals who had engaged in or watched the TOCC-TOCEC’s path closely, felt some degree of resistance to such a change, thinking that this turn was too much of a concession, to the point of losing the Club’s purpose. The strongest resistance came from those who had been TOCC children members, who viewed the Club from a once-insider position, and had continued with their cultural activism, whereas those who had supported or watched the TOCC as grownups were somewhat lenient in their evaluation of the TOCEC.

There are TOCC alumni who are have now been members of Gajimaru Club since their adolescence. Rumi, in her late thirties, was one of the earliest members of the TOCC during the 1980s, and had seen and gone through all the obstacles with the Club. Manami and Keisuke, sister and brother who were in their mid- to late twenties, were members during the time TOCC had been established in Taisho, and when the Gajimaru Club and the TOCC had a strong alliance. They had a clear sense of pride about having been TOCC members, talked favorably of the TOCC staff who continued to organize the current TOCEC, and were nostalgic about their



TOCC activities. It became clear from their comments about the TOCEC, such as “*That* shouldn’t be called ‘the Children’s Club’” that they thought the current TOCEC was not living up to TOCC legacy that they were proud of – it was a deterioration and they didn’t want to be associated with it.

At a TOCEC staff meeting in 2008, staff were discussing a potential *eisā* instructor who could back up Ms. Nakamura, as everybody thought it was too big a burden for Ms. Nakamura to devote every single Saturday to the Club as the only instructor. Older staff considered Manami to be the best candidate, since Manami still lived in Hirao, and her daughter, age eight, attended the school where the weekly TOCEC practice was held. But Manami declined the invitation. I initially thought that it was because of her loyalty to the Gajimaru Club, and she simply couldn’t make an additional commitment. It was after the following exchange with Rumi and Manami that I started realizing there was more to Manami’s refusal. It was not as much that she wasn’t able to divide her attention, as that she didn’t want to be associated with the new Children’s Club. I realized that Manami did not want to go back, when she said, “I’m not going. That’s not the Children’s Club I knew any more. I wouldn’t even call that the Children’s Club,” and Rumi agreed, “You are right. That’s not the same Club we participated in.”

And I had a chance to witness how strongly they felt about it, and how big the gap between former TOCC members and current TOCEC members could be. It was the late afternoon on an August weekend. Five Gajimaru members, a parent member of the Children’s Club, a Buraku activist and old supporter/friend of Gajimaru, and I came back from Koshien after watching the semifinal of the national high school baseball league, in which an Okinawan team competed against a team from Shizuoka. It was a ritual the most passionate of diasporic Okinawans went through, whenever an Okinawan team made it into the Koshien league. Although the Okinawan team lost, we were all in festive mood, cheering, shouting, and drinking to our hearts’ content. The drinking and chatting continued after we went back to Taisho, and our second round had just started in a quiet, small Okinawan restaurant run by an old supporter of TOCC-TOCEC.

This mixed company of Gajimaru and TOCEC was rare, but Mr. Furukawa, a TOCEC parent member, was in fact the brother-in-law of two Gajimaru members, Rumi and her husband. Rumi and her sister grew up in Taisho, and were TOCC members as children. Rumi got married to an Okinawa-born and raised Gajimaru member, while her sister was married to Mr. Furukawa,

a Japanese man from southern Osaka prefecture. The F family lived in Suminoe, south of Taisho. I found it interesting that it was Mr. Furukawa, the Japanese father, who took their daughters to weekly practice, not his Okinawan wife. But he was a very devoted TOCEC member.

We were cheerful and festive, poking fun at each other, until Mr. Furukawa nonchalantly invited Rumi and Manami, TOCC alumni, to come to the Children's Club some time and instruct children. However, he was shocked when a terse reply instantly flew back from the two women: "NO, we don't want to come to that Club. Why don't YOU come to Gajimaru? We could use a big drum dancer." In a baffled voice, he asked what was wrong with the Children's Club. While Rumi and Manami, Children's Club alumni and also personally closer to Mr. Furukawa, were more straightforward and relentless, other Gajimaru members were more polite and indirect, nonetheless pointing out the same thing. It was the compromise that the Children's Club seemed to have made, and the price it had paid. The Club tried to accommodate a wider population outside Okinawans, and had shifted its focus to their liking, so much that the Club had lost its purpose.

Mr. Furukawa desperately tried to defend his Club, if not so effectively, since he couldn't grasp their point at first. "But how can spreading *eisā* be a bad idea? Don't you all love *eisā*? Isn't that why you guys have been here for so many years?"

Manami replied, "Yes we do love *eisā*, but because we do, we don't want it danced by just anybody just because they like it, when they don't know what they are doing."

Mr. Furukawa: "But we (the Children's Club) are trying so hard, and we've got a lot better, don't you see? Our *hēshi* are louder and more clear...you guys, don't you believe in *eisā*? Its power, that children with *futōkō* go back to school, that it heals damaged relationships..."<sup>34</sup>

At this, another Gajimaru member politely but firmly interjected, "Trying hard is all good. But what I think Manami and Rumi are trying to say is that you need to know what dancing *eisā* is all about, the purpose and meanings of it...And honestly, we are not so sure any more the members of the Children's Club understand that, or that the staff tell them those things."

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<sup>34</sup> *Hēshi* are rhythmic shouts in *eisā*. *Futōkō* literally means "school refusal" and refers to a pathologic state when a student refuses to go to school without any apparent reason. School refusal and *hikikomori* (acute social withdrawal) have increasingly been a social concern, and are considered the manifestations of pathology in the patient's social surroundings (school or family), or even of the problems of the postindustrial Japanese society.

Manami: “Right. If you do *just eisā* (*eisā dake*) without knowing anything else, eventually even ‘just dancing’ becomes not so great.”

The rest of us were trying to mediate the heated conversation between the three, but to no avail, as all parties were already quite drunk and emotional, and more importantly, what each party saw in the Children’s Club – what it was and should be about – was different in the first place. The conversation finally stopped when Mr. Furukawa ended up shedding tears out of frustration, and the others realized they had pushed him too far and changed the topic. A few days later, I learned from both parties that they had apologized to each other by phone or in text messages, with no hard feelings. Mr. Furukawa told me, “We all love *eisā* so much, no wonder we got so emotional. But I know they all meant well.”

Rumi and Manami’s primary discontent with the TOCEC was that the Club had shifted its focus solely to *eisā* lessons and performance. In their time, *eisā* practice was only one of the many activities they did as part of the Club. They also learned about and discussed Okinawan history, Okinawan *min’yō* and the traditions on which *min’yō* and *eisā* were based, and social and historical issues that involved Okinawa, such as US military bases, nuclear weapons in Okinawa, and the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For them, these were what provided children with all of the background for their dance. They learned why they were dancing *eisā*, and why they should dance it well, through other lessons and discussions about society and history that involved Okinawa. Missing them and learning only the dance, how would children learn to respect the dance? It would be just a dance, and they would just dance mindlessly simply because grownups told them to do so. This was in fact also the source of Ms. Nakamura’s discontent.

This goes along with the other problem Rumi and Manami took seriously: the lack of autonomy for the children. In the past, grownups – parents, teachers, and adult supporters in the neighborhood – had remained strictly off-stage. Although personal ties were tighter between members and staff, parents did not interfere with the Club’s management policy. Within the Club, grownups’ meetings and children’s meetings were held separately, and the staff entrusted children with all of the decision making about the contents of their activities. For example, when they learned about and discussed US military bases in Okinawa and the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, they decided to go there and see for themselves. Grownups only took care of things that couldn’t be done by children in the process, such as arranging trips, buying tickets, or

making reservations. Especially, on the two trips to Okinawa, which are considered most significant in the memory of the participants, children didn't ask their parents for the expenses – they earned them by collecting recyclables and selling them.

Children were also responsible for running daily activities and special events. Older children in middle school and upper-grade elementary school were treated as junior staff, and they were in charge of keeping order during discussions, practices, and study groups. Manami recalled that it was extremely hard to make decisions and take responsibility for everything they did, but it was greatly rewarding and she was proud of it. She didn't believe that children were too young to make those kind of decisions; TOCEC's children, or children these days in general, could not decide anything on their own because they never had a chance to develop this ability.

Like Manami and Rumi, Ms. Nakamura felt that the TOCC's holistic approach had been more effective. Even though it might have been more political and every child might not have understood everything at the time, it was a background that eventually gave them an understanding of why they had to dance *eisā*. Now it was just *eisā* and *min'yō*, and most children did not understand why they danced. It just looked cool to dance *eisā*, beating drums in cool outfits. Moreover, many of them were not Okinawan-affiliated in any way.

My observation was that TOCEC children lacked independence compared to those during the TOCC period, because at TOCEC children members were actually much younger. Most children were of preschool to elementary lower-grade ages, with only a few of them in the fourth or fifth grade, and once children went to middle school they hardly came to practices as the schedule conflicted with their club activities at school and later with their study for high school entrance exams – another indication that now children members had become more like middle-class children of their age. Manami and Rumi didn't directly consider such age differences, but even if they had, it might have confirmed their point. The fact that such young children made up the majority of the TOCEC was an indication that children had lost their autonomy, because it was more likely that those children did not choose to join the club on their own. In general, Gajimaru members were opposed to making children dance *eisā* against their will, including their own children. Although they occasionally accepted children in their group, they did not accept them when they saw that it was the parents who pushed their children to dance *eisā* against their will.

In contrast, Gajimaru members tended to take their children almost everywhere, for performance or for socializing. They did so even in times or places that may have struck many middle-class parents as somewhat inappropriate for children. Sometimes they would gather at the Bunko and drink past midnight, while children played next to them, with eight or nine year olds taking care of two or three year olds. They would play together and when they were tired, they would pull out pillows and blankets and go to sleep for themselves beside the drinking grownups. Even so, they never made their children dance *eisā* unless the children clearly wanted to.

It will require further investigation to confirm this, but I suspect that this difference in attitudes towards children, especially their capacity and autonomy, probably reflected class difference in parents, whether it came from the time difference between the TOCC period and present, or from the difference between Gajimaru members and TOCEC parents. Overall, in working class families, parents did not tend to their children's needs down to every single detail, and expected them to take more responsibility at an earlier stage. In the middle class, especially in Japan where children are put through academic competition from an early age in order to be successful in mainstream society, children are more likely to be under their mother's thorough, and sometimes micromanaging, care, which might mean more protection but also mean less autonomy. Thus this change in attitude towards children may have meant that the TOCEC parents did have more mainstream, middle-class attitudes compared to the TOCC parents and organizers of the past, or to current Gajimaru members who were parents.

In any case, to Manami and Rumi's eyes, the TOCEC children seemed to be dancing because their parents wanted them to, and the parents wanted them there because they looked cute dancing in costume. It may not be an entirely fair statement that children at such a young age would not know whether they wanted to dance *eisā* or not, or whether they enjoyed it or not. But from what Manami and Rumi said next, I suspected that it was probably not the children's hopes or abilities but rather about their parents' attitudes that they had issues with.

Manami and Rumi were critical of the fact that parents were dancing with children even though it was "the Children's Club" (*kodomo kai*), not a "family club" (*oyako kai*). And they wanted to dance with their children because they thought it would look good. And they did so because now being Okinawan was safe and cool.

When we first learned and danced *eisā*...it was not considered cool at all. When we had an *eisā* practice after school, we were not proud but ashamed as our costumes and drum stood out. And there were kids who made fools of us. “Hey, you wear such a weird dress... You look like a *chindon ’ya!*”<sup>35</sup> It was not fun to be teased like that. And there were Okinawan kids, who would just hide that they were Okinawans, too, when they saw us teased like that. They would just pass by, as if they were not Okinawans and they didn’t see us. And now *eisā* is popular and all that, those people suddenly get interested in learning Okinawan stuff and dancing *eisā*? I saw a couple of them standing with their kids [at the TOCEC performance]. It was not fun at all.

I sensed a deep-seated anger, stemming from her childhood experiences and emotions, when Rumi added this.

Rumi was probably mentioning only a couple of particular individuals who grew up together in the same neighborhood, not all of the TOCEC adult members. But to Rumi and Manami, it reflected the overall attitude of the TOCEC Okinawan parents that they found opportunistic. As children they had tried to hide in anonymity when being Okinawan meant being at a disadvantage; now they wore their ethnicity on their sleeve because it was trendy. It was upsetting to see these people as their successors when they seemed to lack the spirit (or guts?) of the past days, they had lost the earlier passion and tenacity and simply gone tepid, and yet they were treated as the same Children’s Club. And Rumi and Manami also felt it was partly the responsibility of the staff that the group had lost its spirit: in order to keep the spirit of the TOCC, the staff should have been more selective in accepting members (instead of letting anyone in just because they liked *eisā*), and should have made sure that members understood the meaning of dancing *eisā*.

### **Lack of Understanding and Purpose – Decline of Authenticity**

Significantly, this lack of understanding of the context of *eisā* was interpreted by extension as a decline in the authenticity of the Club or their *eisā*. As Manami said, “If you keep focusing only on the dance and ignoring other things, even *eisā* won’t improve.” To their eyes, it was no wonder the TOCEC’s dance was sloppy (*daradara*), as they didn’t know why they were dancing and didn’t care enough. And this was the price of their compromise.

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<sup>35</sup> *Chindon ’ya* are traditional street musicians clad in gaudy costumes, who play drums, gongs and other instruments for advertising cheap products – like performers who sell snake oil.

It was very common when evaluating the quality or authenticity of an *eisā* or *min'yō* performance, regardless of ethnicity, group, and political orientation, that criticism of the quality of a certain performance often ended up becoming criticism of the performer's spirit, and vice versa, as if the spirit, or "heart" (or lack thereof) of the performer manifested itself through their performance. Techniques may or may not have mattered; they mattered less if the performer was an amateur, such as in Gajimaru or the Children's Club. After all, they did not dance for the dance's sake. It was often said that even if one's techniques were excellent, one's performance fell short of sounding truthful and heartfelt when it lacked "heart" (*hāto*) or spirit or soul (*tamashii* or *souru*). This criticism was usually extended to non-Okinawan appropriators of Okinawan *min'yō* or *eisā*, that one may master the skills, but not the music or dance in its entirety. However, how can one measure "the heart" of the performer? It is not something one can objectively and accurately assess as people claim to be able to do, especially if somewhat objective standards like skills are taken out of the evaluation. In my observation, the evaluator seemed to rely on their knowledge and perception of the performer's background (Okinawan or not), training (from whom the performer had learned and for how long) and attitude (how the performer treated Okinawan difference). And being of Okinawan descent had a somewhat ambiguous value – it could be a facile criterion that many people turned to before anything else. At the same time it could also be a bigger source of criticism if the performer was somehow perceived to have "sold out," if they were careless, or deliberately taking advantage of being Okinawan, as in the case of the new Children's Club, and as in cases that will be shown in the next chapter.

Those who felt that the "Children's Club" lacked in spirit often pointed out that their dance had gotten sloppy (*daradara*), and would attribute this to its *eisā*-only approach, which they believed led to its lack of spirit. Interestingly, the critics of the Gajimaru Club – including some former Gajimaru members and older TOCC members, would apply the same criticism to the Gajimaru Club's dance, too.

### **Continuity of the Children's Club**

Either visible from the outside, or felt from the inside, there was a wide consensus between long-standing participants and observers of the TOCC-TOCEC on the price paid for the

Club becoming mainstream: that the club had lost its critical edge of addressing the reality of social and ethnic inequality; and while the Club's scale and popularity had increased, the participants' enthusiasm and solidarity had weakened. Some even questioned whether the organizers' good intentions had been taken advantage of, to merely serve the mindless fantasies and desires of the Okinawa Boom followers, whether they were Club members or spectators.

However, I argue that the Club's continuity with its past was carried on at another level. Volunteerism, spontaneity, fun and excitement, the love of art and music, and a focus on families and community are values that are continuously emphasized as "Okinawan" values, regardless of the ethnic identity of members, and this gives "being Okinawan" new meanings that go beyond ethnic or cultural distinctions.

### **New Meanings of "Being Okinawan"**

I argue that a closer look at the everyday practice and interactions between members and families reveal another aspect through which the Club's continuity with its past has been carried on, although it may not be apparent to those familiar with the overt antidiscrimination approach, like that of the Liberation Education Movement, which had been an effective strategy at the time the TOCC and Gajimaru started. What mattered to the current TOCEC participants may not seem significant, but only trivial, to older participants like Rumi and Manami, who had to struggle with obvious obstacles such as external and internalized prejudice, questions of self worth and ethnic identity, and disconnection between generations and within the community.

When I asked Nakamura, quoting some of the criticism mentioned above, whether the Club had not changed too much to remain an Okinawan children's club in a meaningful sense, he replied as follows: "Okinawan or not, it doesn't matter. Everybody who comes to the club looks to Okinawa because they are seeking something...whether they are Okinawan or not. And as long as they find it here, that's OK."

While the interests and concerns of current members of the Club changed over time, certain qualities in people, behaviors, attitudes, or ways of thinking, which had been emphasized from the Club's inception, were still emphasized. More significantly, these qualities were framed and promoted as "being Okinawan" regardless of the ethnicity of individuals who practiced them, giving "Okinawanness" new meanings that went beyond ethnic or cultural distinctions.



### **Volunteerism, or mutual support.**

As the Club's size increased and the staff aged, they were struggling to keep up while current members remained passive. Mrs. Chinen, once an ardent parent member, made an issue of other parents' passive attitudes, and demanded that the staff take extra measures to reinforce parents' participation in *eisā* practice and preparation for stage performances. Nobody would question that she took the TOCEC very seriously; she and all her three children (ages nine, five, and three) were regular participants in the weekly practice. She was also an eager dancer, who would often surprise first-time visitors (including myself) by dancing with her tantrum-throwing three-year-old in her arms. She would also constantly admonish children (her own and sometimes other children, too) to focus on practice and keep good posture.

As I observed their practice for months, she became increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that other parents didn't put as much attention or effort into the Club as she did, but simply let the Club babysit their children. She even thought that staff members were almost being taken advantage of by those less-than-responsible parents. She begrudged the fact that the staff's laid-back approach was inadvertently enabling the parents' lack of responsibility, which in turn increased, unequally and unnecessarily, the burden on more committed members like herself. "Are they aware that the Club is in crisis?" she complained a couple of times. "It will soon fall apart unless [the staff] does something about it to hold parents more accountable, making participation mandatory for all, for example. [The parents] can't just come and go at their convenience."

Among parents, she was the only one who voiced her concerns about the Club's future. I was somewhat surprised when her demands met an almost unanimous dismissal at the staff meeting, since her understanding of the Club's current condition seemed to overlap with the staff's overall concerns. As it turned out, the staff were already aware of her discontent, but didn't believe that more forceful measures (which, in fact, would be taken for granted in many other clubs that provide similar services, such as children's extracurricular activity clubs) were the way to solve the problem. Their rationale was that everyone was in a different situation, and there must be some parents who were not able to participate as fully as others even if they wished to do so due to their family or work conditions, just as most parents hadn't participated during the TOCC period when they couldn't afford the time to get personally involved with the Club's operation. The parents had entrusted their children's learning to the TOCC, helped

whenever they could, but it was strictly on a voluntary basis; the staff had never asked them to do more or be more responsible.

In Mrs. Chinen's defense, as I thought she voiced her concerns because she really cared about the Club, I asked whether she was not doing far more than other parents did, and feeling somewhat burdened by it. However, the staff's response was almost as firm as their first one.

"If she feels burdened by supporting the Club, doing too much, she can reduce her part to a manageable level, so that she can willingly participate without feeling burdened. But she doesn't have to, actually she can't, demand others do as much as she does."

"In the past, everyone used to do things voluntarily (*borantiā*) and if somebody couldn't help because of her own situation, we understood and took her place. That's what *being Okinawan* is about" (my emphasis).

There were nods of agreement, and then the discussion went on to how to reduce Mrs. Chinen's responsibility, not how to increase that of others. Later I learned that while most of the staff acknowledged and appreciated Mrs. Chinen's keen interest and devotion to the Club, they didn't think she understood the Club's spirit very well. In fact, her approach – an exacting equal distribution of responsibility and implementation – was implicitly associated with her not being Okinawan, as she is a Japanese married to a second-generation Okinawan.

Relying on the spontaneous will of members for their active support may seem a bit too ideal, and impractical, although it was probably effective when solidarity among the Club participants and supporters was tighter. And yet, their low-pressure approach was a legacy from such a past, and expressed their consideration of children, and of families who couldn't afford full participation or support, and their will to avoid excluding such individuals or families. And later it turned out there were indeed a few families in such conditions that prevented their full participation, although it was not conspicuous, and the staff chose an indirect approach rather than directly addressing issues like attendance or parents' participation, which might have singled them out.

Although it was not always put in these terms, the staff and older supporters still felt a connection to an earlier time when the situation for Okinawan families in Taisho had been more difficult, and families couldn't afford to give their time or full attention to their children, unlike a typical middle-class household with a stable income and clear gender division of labor, in which the mother could afford to be fully devoted to all-around care for her children. Such differences

in family situation further marginalized Okinawan children, and this was the exact reason why the TOCC had launched in the first place, to help out in this kind of situation. Thus even when the majority of the members were better-off and could afford to participate more or less as though they were middle-class, and therefore sometimes seemed to be taking advantage of the staff's leniency and creating another kind of friction (like Mrs. Chinen's claims), they felt it was a part of the Club's integrity that they would not compromise.

### **Fun and Spontaneity**

When it came to children's participation, there was an emphasis on fun and excitement, which was associated with children's spontaneous involvement.

For example, at a children's gathering, when a boy who was usually shy spoke and introduced himself in a clear, spirited voice, Mr. Nakamura complimented him by saying, "Of course, he is *Uchinānchu* (Okinawan)!" He didn't mean that Okinawans were more spirited or brave, as he gave each and every child a compliment for speaking up. Nor did he particularly favor Okinawan children over non-Okinawan children, as far as I observed for over a one-year period. Rather, he used it more as a casual encouragement, like "attaboy," and it was almost a habit, as he seemed to be using it without consciously thinking. But I wondered what influence such a compliment might have on a third-generation Okinawan boy, who unlike his predecessors, ordinarily wouldn't have had a clear awareness of himself as an Okinawan, or had many opportunities to be addressed or to identify himself as such. By associating positive, if simple and random, qualities with "Okinawan," Mr. Nakamura encouraged Okinawan children to have confidence and pride – as Okinawans.

Even in the early TOCC period, Mr. Nakamura recollected that he first let children "play" with sanshins, not even trying to teach them, until they became interested, tried random tunes on their own, and finally wanted to learn to play Okinawan tunes for themselves. He regarded such motivation, and a growing attachment to the sanshin, to be bigger achievements than their actually learning how to play the sanshin. The emphasis on children's enthusiasm and spontaneity was often expressed in terms of *genki* (energy, liveliness, spiritedness). Most staffers emphasized cheerfulness and liveliness in dancing as much, if not more, than the actual mastery of the choreographed routine.

For example, the Club was invited to make a guest appearance in a *ryūbu* academy's concert at the Osaka Welfare Pension Hall in June 2008. The master of the school was an old

friend of most of the staff's families and a long-time supporter of the TOCC/TOCEC, and not a few of the Club's children and parents – especially mothers – were or had been her students at some point or another. The academy had assisted with some of the Club's events by donating money or materials, or by lending a hand, such as at the Children's Club food stand at the annual Taisho Eisā Festival.

It was an unprecedentedly big stage opportunity for the Club, in which it had to perform at an officially paid-for event, at none other than the biggest concert hall in the Osaka-Kansai area. Almost all events, including the Taisho Eisā Festival at which the Children's Club performed, were public, free events, although the Club may have sometimes received gratitude money to cover their expenses, like transportation and lunch. In preparation for this particular performance, while Ms. Nakamura did express constant and keen attention to each child's mastery of the choreographies and skills, the Club as a whole emphasized liveliness and unison. Of all things, a special emphasis was given to *hēshi*, the rhythmical shouts between the *jikata* and dancers, and even from the audience, which enhances the dancers' coordination and cheers dancers and the audience alike. *Hēshi* had such an importance for all of the Club, staff or members, and they were so determined to give an exceptional performance that was worth watching. As a part of a paid-for concert, the Club even attempted to select onstage performers through auditions for the first time.

#### Qualifications of stage appearance

1. Being able to shout *hēshi* loud and clear: you need to memorize all the shouts, and be able to utter *hēshi* words in unison while dancing.
2. Being able to *dance by oneself*: you need to be able to dance the entire repertoire, without peeking at people next to you.
3. Being able to dance in a *lively manner*: you need to be in accord with everyone in dancing and *hēshi* shouts, and dance in a lively way.

The most important thing of children's *eisā* is liveliness (*genki*). It is only when all the performers can dance spiritedly and shout *hēshi* in unison that our dance is worth showing to others. Practices will get hard towards the concert, please try your best at each practice. (from the TOCEC leaflet, 1/20/2008, my emphasis)

These “qualifications of stage appearance” ended up as more of an idea to encourage children, rather than being actually carried out: the supposed “audition” kept being delayed, and in the end, all of the children ended up on stage to fill up the big space of the Osaka Welfare Pension Hall with their numbers, where they all managed to perform their best, to the grownup's pleasant surprise. However, the goals of shouting *hēshi* in unison, loud and clear, dancing by

oneself, and dancing spiritedly were repeatedly emphasized throughout, even after the successful performance at the Ueno concert and until the Taisho Eisā Festival, and often used as criteria to evaluate whether the children's dance had improved as a group.

In fact, technical mastery in dancing or sanshin playing had not been a major concern even during the TOCC period, when the priority was given to boosting their self-esteem as Okinawans on the mainland and as children from economically and socially disadvantaged households, and to strengthening generational bonds by promoting understanding between the generations. And considering most children's young age, it was not surprising that the staff did not expect too much technical mastery in dance. Instead, the Club pursued an approach that the staff deemed to be more age-appropriate and friendly to those who may have found issues like ethnic inequity and cultural assimilation too difficult and irrelevant to their own lives, in the hope that promoting the love of art and music at a young age would eventually extend to the love of Okinawan culture and people, regardless of the members' ethnicity. Earlier I mentioned the fact that practitioners of, and the audience for, *eisā* and *min'yō* tended to evaluate the quality of dance and music performance – and in extension the authenticity of performing groups and individuals – using various, but often subjective criteria such as spirit, attitude or heart, rather than technique. For the Children's Club, focusing on youthful qualities such as liveliness and spiritedness mattered more than whether they performed accurately, and it was seen as a legacy from the earlier period.

### **Empowering the Weak**

Although the emphasis on Okinawan identity had been weakened, self-esteem and stronger generational bonds (for either parents or children) through Club activities was still a significant factor, although it was promoted and experienced in a more personal manner than in a collective manner. The above-mentioned reverend and parental supporter of the Club emphasized that the Club was “like a family, but not quite,” after he observed an argument between members of a family who had all been deeply involved in the Club since the beginning. The argument occurred at a vigil for a family member who just passed, surrounded by many guests. Although the reverend was very close to the family in mourning, his family was a relatively recent addition to the Club, and most of the vigil guests were from the TOCC period. As their argument got heated, the guest jumped in, and the reverend was impressed to see how

each of them, former children members, organizers, and supporters, having known all of the family for such a long time, growing and aging together, and knowing the impact of the Club on each of their lives, could provide diverse views to help each family member to see the other's viewpoint.

“So you are saying the Children's Club is like a family, or village even?” When I asked this, he corrected me by saying that a real family or a real village can be exclusive and oppressive to some individuals because of its closed nature. The Children's Club, on the other hand, was intimate and yet open, and loosely knit with crisscrossing relationships between families, teachers, students, mentors and mentees, who were caring and attentive, not overbearing (like family), and thus could support individuals in a way their family couldn't.

He added that the Club's intimate and open structure could benefit young members who might otherwise feel powerless and bound to grownup's rules in family, school, or most other contexts as children. “Think about my youngest daughter, age eight, for example. She is surrounded by grownups and everybody older than her, always being told what to do. Or Hiroshi. I imagine they might often feel suffocated, at school or in other places. Once a week they can come here and take a big breath, I think that will do good for them.”

Hiroshi, nineteen at the time, had some kind of developmental disorder, and although he was physically fully-grown and functional, he behaved somewhat like a child, not fully communicative. In the Club he was like an honorary child member; he hung out with children about ten years younger than himself, like he was one of them, and grownups talked to him in an easy and simple way like they would do to a child. He had recently graduated from a special needs school and got a manual job near his house. He had been a member since he was ten or so, and organizers knew him and his family well personally. It was said that as a child, Okinawan music was one of the few sounds he responded to, and the family used it to encourage him to learn and socialize. He had a very keen sense of rhythm, and thus drum dance like *eisā* was a good fit for him. Now he was one of the three big drum dancers, the best of the three.

The reverend had it in mind that although these two were not necessarily marginalized on the grounds that they were Okinawans, due to their young age or disability, they had little space or breathing room in everyday life. Although the Club did not explicitly fight for the rights of children and the disabled as the Liberation Education Movements had done, it still provided them with a space of their own to express themselves through music and dance.

## **Strengthening Family Ties**

From its inception, the TOCC-TOCEC focused on the connection between generations, families, and the community. When social, economic, and cultural marginalization of Okinawan families had been more pronounced, the experiences of agony and alienation, and healing and transformation, were collective and shared. If the challenges that early TOCC members faced largely derived from their ethnic and/or socioeconomic status, now more diverse circumstances affected each family individually. And yet, they went through some sort of healing or bonding process through the Club's activities, and expressed their faith and gratitude for *eisā*, and the TOCEC. I will illustrate with a few examples in which families were able to strengthen their bonds in otherwise unfavorable conditions.

### **Mr. Furukawa's Faith in *Eisā* and Determination**

This is the story of Mr. Furukawa, who had had a heated conversation with his friends in Gajimaru. When I started my fieldwork, Mr. Furukawa had been the only father in the Club for quite a few years. A mild-mannered man with a carefree smile, he was a very devoted member, always bringing a couple or all of his three daughters, aged two, four, and seven, who all danced *eisā*. In particular, the oldest daughter was constantly smiling at and making eye contact with her father, whether they were dancing together or watching the others dancing, making people wonder what she might always be happy about. The affection they exchanged throughout practice was noticeable, and I could see that it was a bonding experience for the two of them.

It was only during the above-mentioned heated discussion with his friends, the Gajimaru members, that I understood his feelings about *eisā* were much stronger than I thought. It was clearly more than a family hobby. I wondered what he meant by "Don't you believe in *eisā*? Its power is that children who refuse to go to school do go back to school, that it heals damaged relationships..." Was he talking about actual incidents or just a romanticized or mystical idea about *eisā* that was going around between the so-called Okinawan enthusiasts?

Later, after I gave the previously mentioned talk on the TOCC/TOCEC's history, Mr. Furukawa came to me in private and briefly told me that it was his first daughter that had refused to go to school when she got into elementary school, and that was why they started to come to the TOCEC. "We just couldn't figure out the reason or find a solution, she just wouldn't talk. Finally I brought her here, I didn't expect something specific. I just wanted to do something

together with her.” And somehow it worked for him and her, he couldn’t explain exactly why, but not only did she return to school, she became a happy girl whose smile made others smile with her.

Earlier the reverend had described the TOCEC as a place similar to a family outside of a family, or a village outside a village, as actual family or village could sometimes be binding and oppressive. Probably Mr. Furukawa’s daughter found a safe place where she could breathe and bond with her father, some place like family, but outside of her own family. Here, people could build family-like relationships beyond their own families, which offset the confining effects of isolated families – not an easy opportunity to have in urban Japan. And it could provide a safe haven for the socially weak, such as children or people with disabilities.

Moreover, since the heated conversation with Gajimaru members, I had noticed changes in Mr. Furukawa’s attitude. Before he simply enjoyed dancing *eisā* with his girls, now he had another purpose: he wanted to prove to his in-laws and other friends in Gajimaru that he and TOCEC were not wasting their time. And he could do that by no means other than *eisā*. Since he was one of the three *ōdaikō* (the biggest, barrel-like drum) dancers, he felt more responsible for the performance of the entire group. He remained much more focused during practice, often with a serious look on his face, and took private lessons from Ms. Nakamura and Hiroshi, who had a great sense of rhythm in drumbeat in spite of his disability, during the break. He even visited Gajimaru Club practice to watch them; they were now more respectful and tried to give him a couple of tips while they were dancing together. And he tried hard with *hēshi* shouting, which seemed linguistically and musically hard for him compared to young children, who would tease his funny (Japanese) pronunciation.

Although these efforts did not totally transform the performance of the TOCEC on the Festival day – there was no dramatic difference in their performance, not much better or worse – or convince Gajimaru members to change their perception of the TOCEC, they meant a lot to Mr. Furukawa, and I had my own expectations. He told me “I hope they see my points – but it doesn’t matter. I did as much as I could, and that’s all that matters.”

I once heard similar stories from the Hibiscus Club (Deigo no Kai), a Nishinari-based children’s *eisā* group. Mrs. T and Yumiko, the indignant teenage Gajimaru girl who appeared in Chapter 3, were running this club for almost ten years, since Yumiko was seven. Mrs. T told me how she managed to help several teenage children, Okinawan or not, from disadvantaged



families, whose parents were divorced, disabled, or otherwise dealing with serious trouble. She kept them in her club, dancing *eisā* around their friends, some of whom had healthy family environments and could give positive support. “I’m doing this because family is important,” she said without further explanation, but it sounded as if she and her daughter Yumiko, who had been the leader of the Hibiscus Club for several years before she moved to Gajimaru, acted as a surrogate family to children when their own families couldn’t be there for them for various reasons.

### **Mrs. Tanaka and Mika**

Mrs. Tanaka was a single mother who was a nurse. The S family had no personal affiliation with Okinawans, not even by marriage, like Mr. Furukawa or Mrs. Chinen, but the mother and daughter had a strong attachment to Okinawa in the way usual Okinawan enthusiasts did.

Mika, a third-grader, had a great passion for *eisā*, so Mrs. Tanaka did some searching to find the TOCEC, and drove some thirty minutes to come to the weekly practice from east Osaka, where they lived. Mika was currently the only child in the Club who had completely mastered all the choreography with surprising accuracy and elegance, by her own efforts. In addition to participating in *eisā*, Mika was very eager to learn *sanshin*, occasionally taking private lessons from Ms. Nakamura for free, visiting the Nakamuras and hearing about Okinawa. When the college *eisā* club from Okinawa that Ms. Nakamura had invited visited the Children’s Club, Mrs. Tanaka video recorded every move and they practiced at home until Mika had mastered everything. Mrs. Tanaka saved money for her and made sure to visit Okinawa more than once every year, planning ahead for the events or places they were going to visit next time. Mrs. Tanaka’s work as a nurse seemed to take a physical toll on her body, as she sometimes suffered from injuries in her tendons from helping out her elderly patients and other difficult work. I presumed that it wasn’t easy for her, a single parent and nurse, to make ends meet with her salary, and to find time or money to pursue this hobby with her daughter. But I saw Mrs. Tanaka take great pleasure in watching Mika dancing at the Club. During breaks, the mother and daughter would be cuddling, whispering something into each other’s ears and laughing. They would be some of the last people who left practice, walking out with the Nakamuras, sometimes stopping by their house a five minutes’ walk away for tea, and listening to whatever Nakamura

or Ms. Nakamura had to tell them about Okinawa or *eisā*. Their time at the Club seemed like one of the few moments they could afford to be together and do something they both liked.

### **Mrs. Yamashita and Chihiro**

Mrs. Yamashita is a second-generation Okinawan who was born and grew up in the Taisho district. She and her youngest daughter, Chihiro, a fourth-grader, both had so-called Okinawan features in their looks: somewhat petite bodies; thick, curly hair; slightly darker skin; and thick-looking facial features such as multi-layered eyelids and thick eyebrows. Chihiro seemed like a shy girl at first but soon proved amiable and lively. She used to approach me when I was taking my notes, asking “What are you writing here?” while looking into my eyes, or touching my hair.

I had the idea that Mrs. Yamashita, soft-spoken and usually on the receiving end of any kind of initiative, had been dragged into the TOCEC by the ever-energetic, somewhat bossy Mrs. Chinen. Since Mrs. Chinen’s son and Chihiro were classmates, their mothers and children were especially close. However, whereas Mrs. Chinen always participated in dancing practice and tried to keep children (hers and others) in order, Mrs. Yamashita didn’t come to practice regularly for the first several months, and when she showed up, she would sit behind the dancing rows and quietly watch the dancing children. So when she started dancing after the spring was well past, I guessed that Mrs. Chinen had managed to talk her into dancing, too.

Mrs. Yamashita was one of the few names Nakamura would mention, along with the Tanaka family, when he said that the Club was still serving its purpose. I could clearly see that Chihiro genuinely loved *eisā*, more than just enjoying dancing; her eyes, always twinkling with curiosity or amusement, had such a earnest and absorbed look when she was practicing *eisā*, a look that was absorbing to those who watched her. But what could Mrs. Yamashita be thinking? I knew that she, unlike Mrs. Chinen, didn’t encourage Chihiro to join the Club, although she didn’t keep her from participating.

I approached Mrs. Yamashita while the TOCEC members were taking a rest in their seats after their turn on stage, where she and her daughter had danced side by side. I asked her about her impressions. She answered that she was certainly having fun, not just during their performance but during the whole day of the Festival and added,

“(sighs) You know, ‘Okinawa’ has been something that I wanted to avoid.”  
“What about it?”

“You know, Okinawans look different, having multi-layered eyelids and thick, connected eyebrows, just like me (pointing at her eyebrows). And [Okinawan] people are known to be louder and...”

Her uncle had moved from Okinawa and briefly attended an elementary school in Osaka during the evacuation of Okinawan civilians, especially children, to the mainland in the final days of the Pacific War. According to Mrs. Yamashita, he shared the same Okinawan facial features, and he had remembered his shock and fear when his Osaka classmates pointed their fingers at him and shouted, “You are an American, aren’t you!” Many years later, he told the children in his family that he was sure he was going to be killed at that moment. Being Okinawan was not good at all – looking different was something that could get you killed. And then it was worse when he moved to Osaka and lived among other Okinawans in Taisho.

She only told me that her family had sad experiences, but Nakamura told me on another occasion that Mrs. Yamashita’s parents had come to hold a deep sense of betrayal and hatred towards their Okinawan neighbors when their son became seriously ill, and they desperately needed money to cure him but nobody helped them. They were all friendly and good neighbors, drinking and singing together when times were good, and then turned their faces away when the family had a difficult time. For Mrs. Yamashita’s family, Okinawa was not only the source of shame, but also the source of bitterness. So they had cut their relationship with other Okinawans, and avoided anything Okinawan. Her family even took the trouble of physically leaving Taisho on the days of the Taisho Eisā Festival so that they didn’t have to see people or hear the noise from the Festival.

“So in fact this is the first year my family came to see the festival, only because they knew their granddaughter was going to dance. They didn’t know I was going to dance with her.”

“What did they say?”

“They just burst into laughter, pointing at me. ‘Hahaha! What are you doing dressing like that! Your dance is so clumsy!’ ‘Look at your unibrow!’”

So the generations of unresolved feelings about being and living with Okinawans in her family had been blown away with bursting laughter.

Mrs. Yamashita later added that Chihiro didn’t know she had Okinawan ancestry until recently, well past the time she had joined the Children’s Club and come to enjoy *eisā* so much,

when the Club staff referred to her as *Uchinānchu*. Even Mrs. Yamashita didn't realize that Chihiro didn't know, until she approached her mom and asked one day:

“Mom, is there any *Uchinānchu* in our family?”

Recalling this, she smiled with surprise, pausing for a moment as if telling me that she had been speechless at her daughter's innocent question. It had probably reminded her how long she had been denying Okinawa to her family and herself so that her daughter, dancing *eisā* and learning *sanshin* for more than a year, didn't even know she was somehow related to Okinawa. It was a surprise to me, too, that Chihiro didn't know, because I had been taking for granted that they were Okinawans, since the Club's staff counted them as Okinawans, Chihiro loved *eisā* and *sanshin* so much, far more than the other children, and they did have what were commonly considered to be Okinawan facial features, so it never occurred to me that Chihiro didn't know and that her mom had never told her.

“Why, yes. There is Okinawa in you. And in me.”

## Conclusion

When TOCC started in the late 1970s, Okinawan discrimination was still pronounced on the mainland, and diasporic children of Okinawan working-class families were suffering the stigmatization of Okinawan cultural expression, and its association with poverty and low social status affected Okinawan children who were born and grew up in Osaka. They developed a sense of inferiority, humiliation, and fear of exposure as Okinawans.

TOCC's cultural activism was originally aimed at promoting Okinawan identity and self-esteem for school age children of underprivileged, working class Okinawan immigrants by means of Okinawan music and dance, and by creating connections and mutual understanding across generations in their community. Their Liberation Education inspired approach was at the forefront of their efforts. However, as diasporic Okinawans became more socio-economically and culturally integrated, and Okinawan cultural difference became trendy in Japanese popular and media culture, the group moved away from its initial anti-discrimination approach to accommodate new members who were not necessarily Okinawans or marginalized. Instead, in order to keep their Okinawan legacy, the group organizers attempted to reinterpret the idea of “being Okinawan” and gave it new meanings that went beyond ethnic or cultural distinctions.

The families introduced above once had or were having difficulties which were not necessarily related to their ethnicity, and as in Mrs. Yamashita's case, which would not have been easily solved by the approach used during the TOCC period. These are more anecdotal, and personal stories than collective narratives, and the challenges current members face are more diverse and affect each family individually. However, their stories show that connectedness of family was given priority in the Club's operation, and that the staff respected and assisted families regardless of their agenda. And in this process, "being Okinawan" came to have new meanings beyond ethnic boundaries, including things such as spontaneity, volunteerism, and spiritedness, which helped underprivileged Okinawan children escape from shame and self-hatred and become firmly rooted in their family and community. As Nakamura said to me, pursuit of Okinawanness continued, and even if it took a different form it was still meaningful. "Everyone who comes to this club is seeking something...Okinawan or not, it's OK as long as they find it, and find something good about Okinawa, here in this Club."

## **PART II: THE OKINAWA BOOM AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

### **CHAPTER V**

#### **The Okinawa Boom and Okinawan Music**

In the first part of this dissertation I introduced two Okinawan cultural activist groups, the Gajimaru Club (in Chapter 3) and TOCC/TOCEC (in Chapter 4). These groups started using *eisā* and Okinawa *min'yo* as a way to assert their ethnic identity against discrimination and cultural assimilation, and empower socially marginalized Okinawan youth (the Gajimaru Club for young migrant workers and the Children's Club for second-generation children of Okinawan immigrants) in the 1970s and 1980s, and their struggle kept their legacy from being obliterated in the 1990s and 2000s when Okinawan differences became trendy and Japanese appropriation increased. In the following part of the dissertation, I will describe the second major way in which Okinawan music and dance are practiced in Osaka and the Kansai region: as cultural appropriation. I explore Okinawan music and dance practices that are performed by non-Okinawan (mainly Japanese) practitioners, largely in the context of hobby and entertainment activities, as opposed to practice done for the assertion or self-affirmation of ethnic identity. This is a relatively new phenomenon that developed from the 1990s onwards.

What is colloquially called the Okinawa Boom among Okinawans and Japanese is the Japanese celebration and appropriation of Okinawan difference. In this chapter, I will discuss the Okinawa Boom in a broader context, including analyses of media and popular texts (movies, drama, and the internet). I discuss the increased Japanese appropriation of Okinawan music and its effects, and Okinawans' criticisms of Japanese appropriation. In the Okinawa Boom, Okinawa is imagined as "the islands of comfort and healing" (*iyashi no shima*), where carefree, laid-back Okinawans live a happy life in a tropical paradise, devoid of hardship and conflict,

unconditional hospitality is extended to visitors, and Okinawan cultural and natural difference is accentuated and celebrated.

Very simply, cultural appropriation can be defined as “the taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Ziff and Rao 1997, 1). However, this doesn’t simply mean any kind of acculturation or cultural exchange, but presupposes certain conditions. First, it presupposes the existence of difference between at least two distinguishable cultural groups, even though the border between them might not be as clear-cut as imagined, but rather porous in reality: one which the appropriator belongs to, and the other which the object of appropriation belongs to. They are distinguishable at a certain level whether the axis of distinction is ethnicity, race, class, or gender. Second, it assumes an asymmetry of power between the two groups; the group the appropriator belongs to stands in the superior position, politically, economically, and/or socially, in relation to the group that is appropriated. In power dynamics, cultural appropriation is in opposition to cultural assimilation, where the cultural difference of the less powerful group is subsumed and/or erased by the dominant culture, as in the case of cultural assimilation, or the “Japanization” of Okinawans. There is also a symbolical asymmetry: the appropriated group is marked as “Other,” as different, whereas the appropriator’s own is unmarked. Third, cultural appropriation often involves consumption and aestheticization and therefore commodification of cultural difference, although it may not necessarily result in obvious profit-making (Root 1996; Ziff and Rao 1997).

With these characteristics in mind, I will explore the participation of Japanese individuals in Okinawan music and dance as a case of cultural appropriation.

Later, I will focus on the particular appeal of Okinawan music to Japanese appropriators. Okinawan music is central to Okinawan cultural identity, and also in the Japanese imagination as influenced by the Okinawa Boom. It is believed that Okinawan music, especially *min’yō*, has an organic, inseparable relationship with its culture, climate, and people, and thus epitomizes authentic life and selfhood and embodied historicity, as opposed to fossilized Japanese *min’yō* and to commercialized Japanese popular music. Like the tourist in MacCannell’s book (1976), Japanese appropriators pursue the accessible exotic and seek authentic life and selfhood at the same time, paradoxically hoping that the alienation and fatigue of the self in postindustrial

society can be remedied by consuming and performing someone else's (i.e. Okinawan) music. Japanese attraction to Okinawan music and dance (especially *eisā*) has resulted in the rise of facilities that provide Okinawan music (such as Okinawan music restaurants and bars, Okinawan *min'yō* classes, and coterie clubs) and Okinawan cultural events, both in Okinawa and on the mainland. While it means increased opportunities for Okinawan musicians, there are voices of concern that it undermines the autonomy of Okinawan musicians, drives out the less well-off Okinawan audience, and modifies Okinawan music to the extent that its authenticity is compromised.

### **The Okinawa Boom: Emergence of the “Islands of Comfort”**

First, I will discuss the emergence of the phenomenon commonly called the Okinawa Boom, the nationwide popularity of Okinawan cultural and natural difference, mainly in Japanese popular and media culture. The growth in the popularity of Okinawan images started to develop through several independent but interrelated paths.

The initial Okinawa Boom in Japanese popular music scenes started as early as the 1970s, which partly set the background for the second Okinawa Boom that is the main topic of this chapter.<sup>36</sup> The primary drive of the first Okinawa Boom in Japanese popular music came from Okinawan musicians who expressed a strong ethnic, historical and cultural consciousness in their music at the time of Okinawa's reversion to Japan. Before the reversion occurred, Okinawans had imagined it as liberation from oppression by the US military government, manifested as the overwhelming presence of US military bases, and the government's and military personnel's blatant disregard of the human rights of Okinawans. In their self-imposed cultural assimilation into Japan, Okinawans had desired to become Japanese citizens who would be treated like those in the rest of Japan, instead of remaining as a US colony. However, the actual reversion was a huge disappointment to Okinawans: the US and Japanese governments came up with an arrangement to leave most of the US military bases, at the expense of

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<sup>36</sup> Both are called “the Okinawa Boom” by Japanese and Okinawans so there is no way to distinguish them by name, but the first Okinawa Boom refers to the high, but relatively limited popularity of Okinawan popular music in the Japanese music scene, and the second Okinawa Boom, which is the main topic of this chapter, is the nationwide success of popular and media culture and tourism, including movies and dramas, popular and traditional music, dance, food, drinks, and so on, in which any kind of Okinawan difference was celebrated.



Okinawans' economic independence and peaceful life. Japanese developers rushed in to make a profit through the development of resorts for Japanese tourists, resulting in environmental destruction across the islands (Asato 2003).

Okinawan cultural nationalism emerged in response to Okinawan disappointment in the reality of the reversion, and Okinawan intellectuals, activists, artists, and musicians stood at the forefront of this movement. In addition to its own distinctive musical tradition that had been influenced by premodern Chinese and Japanese culture, Okinawa had developed a rich repertoire of cultural elements drawn from various cultures, often characterized as *champurū* (hybrid, mixture), due to its modern history of colonial subjugation to Japan and the US, and its diasporic connections with Hawaii, the US mainland, and Latin American countries. Okinawan popular musicians had brought these diverse elements into play in their expression of cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis Japan, and this had played a significant role in identity construction among Okinawans (Roberson 2001, 2006; Kumada 1996, 1998; Takahashi 2006).

In particular, musicians such as Kina Shokichi, Teruya Rinke, and China Sadao, who are the sons of renowned *min'yō* musicians, did various musical experimentation incorporating traditional Okinawan musical elements (the use of sanshin, Okinawan musical scale and rhythm, dialect refrains or off-beat shouts originating from *min'yō* or *eisā*) with more contemporary genres, such as rock, funk, and other popular music styles. Thus the objectification of Okinawan culture during the Okinawa Boom was not imposed by Japanese, but initiated by Okinawans themselves in the context of cultural nationalism (cf. the case of Quebec in Handler 1988; the case of Zimbabwe in Turino 2000).

This musical expression of Okinawan difference found a niche in the Japanese market as a new wave. There were impassioned Japanese supporters such as the late reporter Takenaka Rō, who introduced influential Okinawan musicians of traditional and contemporary genres through record production and his own writing, and Sakamoto Ryuichi, the world-renowned Japanese musician who incorporated Okinawan musical elements into his music to create a primordial, pan-Asian ambience (Takahashi 2006). Coinciding with the increasing interest in Third-World and Asian others (within and outside of Japan) in the media and popular culture, Okinawan music was not only introduced into the Japanese market but also to the international world music market by the 1980s. Iwabuchi characterizes Japan's popular pan-Asianism as evincing an

“Orientalist trope of nostalgia,” in which an “idealized ‘backward’ Asia” was constructed to embody the “purity, energy, and dreams” that the Japanese had lost (2002, 173-177).

The drive of musical and artistic self-expression backed by post-reversion Okinawan cultural nationalism and Japanese fascination with Okinawan music was propelled by the economically motivated exoticization and self-exoticization of Okinawan images in tourism and media representations, both by Japanese and Okinawans themselves. Since the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, Okinawa Prefecture has heavily relied on the tourist industry to support its relatively weak industrial sector, which is partly due to the disproportionate concentration of US bases (McCormack 2003).<sup>37</sup> The leisure market in Japan grew a great deal in range and volume, including sports, hobbies, pastimes, and tourism from 1980s to the 1990s, creating a number of “booms” in Japanese consumerism, including the “theme park boom” (Raz 1999; Hendry 2005) and the “gay boom” (McLelland 2000). In the process of attracting Japanese tourists, a representation of Okinawan culture for Japanese consumption was created and marketed (Tada 2004). In short, the Okinawa Boom could be characterized as a product of the interplay between the pursuit of distinctive social and cultural identities through popular culture, the postcolonial desire of mainstream Japanese for their Asian others, the economic motivation of tourism, and Okinawa’s economic dependence on mainland Japan as a source due to Okinawan economic marginalization.

These developments in the 1970s and 1980s set the background for the cultural phenomenon that most of my informants (non-specialists in Okinawan or Japanese popular music) colloquially and generically called the Okinawa Boom, the overall popularity of Okinawan difference in the media and popular culture in the 1990s, during which Okinawa came to have an appeal to the general public (who are not particularly fans of Okinawan music) as “the islands of comfort” (*iyashi no shima*). The Okinawa Boom owed much to the success of Okinawan popular music, but had spread beyond the popular music scene. Many cultural and media products that featured Okinawan cultural difference hit the national market, such as the dramatic – and controversial – success of the famous rock group THE BOOM’s single album

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<sup>37</sup> Before and for a several decades after the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, US military bases occupied more than thirty per cent of Okinawa Island, the main island of Okinawa Prefecture. Even now, they occupy twenty per cent including a large part of the central area of this long and narrow island of about 160 square miles. This significantly hinders industrial and commercial development, as well as creating numerous social problems such as crimes by US military personnel (Asato 2003).

*Shimauta* in 1993 (Takahashi 2006; Kumada 1998; Roberson 2003, 2006), *eisā* (Kumada 1996; Okinawa Zentō Eisā Matsuri Jikkō Iinkai 1998), and books, films, and television shows, most notably *Nabbie's Love* (1999), the NHK television drama *Churasan 1-4* (2001-2007), and NTV's *Ruri's Island* (2005-2006).<sup>38</sup> As Tada (2004) points out, the representation of Okinawa in popular culture can be summarized by three core images: ocean, subtropical climate, and cultural difference. Okinawan cultural difference was described in positive terms, dramatically different from the terms used in the past: from “lazy and loose” to “easygoing and optimistic,” from “primitive” to “living in harmony with Nature,” and from “superstitious” to “having strong ties with the ancestors and the supernatural.”

Along with this trend, mainstream Japanese who became fascinated by Okinawa started coining several terms to describe themselves, such as *Okinawazuki* (Okinwaphiles), often dubbing their infatuation with Okinawa as a near pathology, such as *Okinawabyō* (Okinawa disease), *Okinawa chūdoku* (Okinawa addiction), *Okinawa mania* (Okinawa mania), and *Okinawa furiiku* (Okinawa freaks). Often they were not satisfied with individually consuming Okinawan cultural products or visiting Okinawa, but formed groups or networks to share information and activities, such as scuba diving, learning Okinawan music, or taking trips to hidden spots. There are numerous online networks of this kind in social network services such as Mixi, with titles such as “I love Okinawa!,” “Kansai Okinawa Lovers' Club,” “I wish I were a *Shimanchu* (Okinawan),” and “*Uchinānchu* and *Naicha*” (Okinawans and mainlanders).<sup>39</sup> The following is the testimony of one self-proclaimed “Okinawa Disease patient” who ran one such online network for about 3000 *Okinawazuki*.

Okinawa Disease!!!!

What is Okinawa Disease?

It is a terrifying infectious disease that is said to attack *naichā* (Japanese mainlanders).

1) The early stage: Once contracted, you start to think “I want to come back...” when you visit Okinawa. You will become sensitive to the word “Okinawa.”

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<sup>38</sup> This movie and drama making trend finally reached Taisho, when NHK made and aired the drama *Jun and Ai*, set in Taisho in Osaka, from 2012 to 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Terms like *Shimanchu* (island people/person, namely, Okinawan), *Uchinānchu* (Okinawan), *Naicha* (people/person from *naichi*, mainland Japan) are all Okinawan dialect, proudly indicating that they are acculturated in Okinawan language and culture. But these are only the few Okinawan “keywords,” as their critics sarcastically put it, that these Okinawa lovers can understand, due to their overuse in tourism and media context, while they in fact hardly understand, or bother to understand, full-blown Okinawan dialect that has almost gone to extinction due to the forcible linguistic assimilation of the Japanese state in the early and mid-twentieth century.

2) The intermediate stage: The patient starts listening to Okinawan *min'yō*. You will start learning *kachāshi*, drinking *awamori*, and loving Okinawan cuisine.<sup>40</sup> In full merriment, you will be surprised at your involuntary exclamation of “*iyasasaaa!*”<sup>41</sup> You will desire a *sanshin*, and want to speak Okinawan dialect. You won't be satisfied with occasional visits to Okinawa, so you will go several times a year.

3) The final stage: The patient will not be satisfied with several visits a year to Okinawa. You will purchase a *sanshin*, and increase your performing repertoire one by one. You are no longer interested in mere sightseeing, but rather start helping sugarcane harvesting or doing gardening work for free. No longer satisfied with “tourism,” you would rather “dwell” during your stay in Okinawa. Nothing but Okinawa is on your mind, 24/7, and even in Okinawa, you will plan the next visit when the time of return to *naichi* (mainland) approaches. “I will settle in Okinawa...” becomes your favorite phrase.

So, this is the story. Now, all Okinawa Disease patients across Japan, tell your story with passion!!!! (uminchu, 2010)

In this post, the attraction to Okinawa is articulated as being an addiction-like attraction.

It is significant that many of the “symptoms” involved Okinawan music, especially Okinawan music and dance, such as *kachāshi*, *min'yō*, *sanshin*, and the “*iyasasaa*” shout. And paradoxically, the final stage of Okinawa disease is the desire to assimilate into Okinawan culture, which has been under pressure to assimilate to Japanese culture, imposed and/or voluntary.

Such Japanese enthusiasts' knowledge and notions of Okinawa tend to be limited and simplistic, due to the source of their knowledge, and is often expressed in the form of keywords. For example, more than 230 comments were added to this posting, ranging from proud confessions of contraction of the “disease,” boasts about the commenter's recent Okinawan trips, discontent about having to delay the next visit, and their desire to settle in Okinawa. Similarly, in a mock survey done by the same person asking “What about Okinawa do you like most?” (uminchu 2006), the 170 responses listed the ocean, people, nature, culture, food, *iyashi* (comfort), *kūki* (“air”, atmosphere), dialect, lifestyle, marine sports, and “everything” or “for whatever reasons.” Again, the overall image of Okinawa created through these *Okinawazuki* communications is the stereotypical characterization as *iyashi no shima* (the islands of comfort, islands of healing), utopia-like islands surrounded by beautiful, sub-tropical nature and exotic culture, where life-loving Okinawan people live harmoniously in a subtropical paradise

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<sup>40</sup> *Kachāshi* is an up-tempo, impromptu dance usually danced at the end of festive occasions simultaneously by all participants. *Awamori* is a distilled Okinawan beverage made from rice.

<sup>41</sup> An Okinawan exclamation of merriment and excitement, often used in singing and dancing.

surrounded by the beautiful ocean, and extend inexhaustible hospitality to anyone, so that one cannot help but be tempted to visit and eventually settle there.

Although there is more than one utopia-like subtropical destination among possible Japanese tourist destinations, in the case of Okinawa, easy access – geographical proximity and common language – is an added bonus, avoiding the troubles one might face in travelling to foreign countries.

It wouldn't have mattered much to me, if it was not Okinawan. I wanted to do something different [than Japanese]. Plus I like the sound of Chinese music. But it's much harder to find a Chinese music class, while Okinawan music classes are everywhere. Okinawan music sounds a lot like Chinese, doesn't it?<sup>42</sup> So I just decided to go with Okinawan music. I was ambitious at first and tried sanshin, *kokyū* and even *gekkin*, but my fingers got confused trying different instruments at once – so I eventually settled down with the sanshin.<sup>43</sup>

(A special education teacher in her forties, on learning Okinawa *min'yō* and sanshin)  
When I asked Japanese enthusiasts of Okinawa how they became interested in Okinawa in the first place, the most common answer was “Okinawa is not Japan, although it is Japan and you don't need a passport, and people speak Japanese.” Although many Okinawaphiles said that Okinawa had a unique appeal, most of them admitted that they couldn't have enjoyed the feeling (whether false or not) that they had somehow reached the heart of that uniqueness – the essence of Okinawan culture – if they had to deal with a language barrier or the insecurity as foreign tourists they would have faced in their other favorite Asian tourist destinations, such as Korea, Taiwan, or Vietnam. Thus Okinawa was the convenient, accessible, and affordable exotic for them. Some attributed such accessibility to their learning Okinawan *min'yō* in the first place.

### **Okinawan Music in Popular Media**

Media outlets such as movies and television shows have been more influential than books in propagating this type of image, due to their audio-visual nature. They are the most easily

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<sup>42</sup> Ryukyuan court music (*koten*) was deeply influenced by Chinese court music, and many Okinawan musical instruments and *min'yō* songs derived from it, so comparatively speaking, Okinawan music does sound more like Chinese music than Japanese music.

<sup>43</sup> These are all Okinawan string instruments that originated in China, and somewhat similar to their Chinese equivalents in timbre.

accessible forms of Okinawan product for the masses that have shaped the mass imagination of Okinawa, Okinawa culture, and Okinawan people.

There have been cinematic representations of Okinawa both by Japanese and Okinawan moviemakers that have taken various positions regarding the question of the place of Okinawa and Okinawans in Japan. In his review of contemporary films that depict Okinawa, Gerow observes that there have been two major patterns in cinematic representations of Okinawa by Japanese moviemakers since the 1930s, one nationalistic and the other touristic, and the two are often intertwined. The tropes of these movies ultimately validate a Japanese identity in which Okinawan otherness is contained and domesticated to complement national imagery. However, the films show different and even contradictory aspects of Okinawa, such as the war sacrifices by Okinawans shown in *The Tower of Lilies* (Imai 1953), the critique or satire of Japanese mainland society or politics as in *The Profound Desire of Gods* (Imamura 1968), or the idealization of Okinawan difference, whether its natural, pristine beauty or its exotic life, as appearing in *The Legacy of the Sea, Sky, and Reef* (Shiina 1991). On the other hand, in recent movies there have been alternative attempts to contest the myth of Japan's homogeneity or disclose its emptiness, such as Sai Yōichi's *Pig's Revenge (Buta no mukui)* (1999) or Kitano Takeshi's *Sonatine* (1993). Okinawan moviemakers, such as Takamine Go, have been articulating Okinawan historical and cultural memories through movies since the 1970s, without essentializing difference and thereby becoming subsumed under the simple dichotomy of sameness and otherness, or "us" and "them" between Japan and Okinawa, but rather showing the complex and shifting political positions occupied by Okinawans.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on movies that were produced in the context of the Okinawa Boom, which significantly influenced the way Okinawaphiles viewed Okinawa and Okinawans, especially in terms of tourism. Such films followed the tourist trope that "portrays Okinawa as a consumable spectacle of difference" (Gerow 2003, 278). These movies depict Okinawan differences in a positive, romanticized way, and with a heartwarming tone. They also include scenes that feature some sort of Okinawan music, regardless of genre. Some showcase various Okinawan music performed by actual Okinawan musicians who also played characters in the movie. It is significant that Okinawan musicians performed music and acted as characters in these influential movies instead of just providing music as a background behind the scene, as the imagined "Okinawan personality" is embodied, visually and aurally, through the

acting and musical performance of these “real live persons” of Okinawans, and signify the ubiquity of music in Okinawan life.

The movie *Nabbie no Koi* (*Nabbie's Love*) (Nakae 1999) and the television drama series *Churasan* (*Ms. Beautiful*) (2001-2007) are good examples of this genre. Both are so-called heart-warming (*honobono*) movies made by Japanese filmmakers, and they deal with friendship, romantic love, and familial love between Okinawan and Yamato characters. Both are filled with humor and have happy endings, and all of the characters are depicted as fundamentally good people, although some individuals may look quirky, cantankerous, or prone to trouble at first. Especially the heroines, who are all Okinawan females, are spirited characters who initially seem naive or immature, but who realize their dreams (in love or work) in the end through their tenacity and optimism, and inspire the people around them.

Of these two media products, *Churasan* was probably more influential in terms of scale, as the show was nationally broadcast by the public television channel NHK over seven years and through four seasons, as compared to a single movie that was shown in theaters for a limited, although nationwide, audience. However, I'll discuss *Nabbie's Love* here in detail, because the role that Okinawan music plays in the movie and its influence on Japanese participation in Okinawan music and dance is more revealing.

*Nabbie's Love* was written and directed by Nakae Yuji, a Kyoto-born filmmaker who has spent his life since college in Okinawa and made more than seven movies that all feature Okinawan differences. *Nabbie's Love* depicts the love stories of two women on a small, fictive island in Okinawa. Nabbie, the heroine of the movie, is a typical Okinawan *obā* in her seventies with strong vitality and love for her family. She is distraught when she finds out that her first love has come back to the island after sixty years' exile, and feels torn between him and her loving and caring husband who has been her lifelong companion. On the other hand, her granddaughter Nanako falls into a similar dilemma between her newly found love from Yamato and her longstanding friendship and obligation with her arranged fiancé. However, it is Keitatsu, Nabbie's husband and Nanako's grandfather, who understands and implicitly encourages the two women to pursue their true emotions, and knowingly lets his wife – the love of his life – elope with her lover while pretending ignorance. Nanako sees off her grandmother leaving in a beautiful Ryukyu costume with her lover in a small boat, declaring “We are leaving for ‘I-love-

you' land.”<sup>44</sup> Inspired by her grandmother's passion, Nanako chooses her true love. At her traditional Okinawan-style wedding, everyone in the village – even her ex-fiancé and relatives who had initially tried to force her into the arranged marriage – congratulate the bride and groom, and everyone sings and dances in happiness to the grandfather's sanshin accompaniment.

*Nabbie's Love* romanticizes Okinawan differences in many ways. The unusual story line of an elderly person eloping, dotted with openly sexual jokes, accentuates the longevity, openness, vitality, and especially the passion for love (and life) of the elderly of Okinawa. The movie depicts everyday life in Okinawa including ethnographic details through the meticulous arrangement of the settings, props, the use of subtitled dialect, and through casting local celebrities and ordinary people.

However, the movie was even more influential for the way it presented Okinawan music. A passionate advocate of Okinawan music throughout his career, Nakae Yuji paid special attention to the music in his movie. Nakae cast for both title roles and cameos many famous Okinawan performing artists – musicians, dancers, and actors of traditional Okinawan genres like *min'yō*, *ryūbu*, and Okinawa *shibai*, as well as contemporary, Western genres like jazz, blues, and opera.<sup>45</sup> He included so many singing and dancing scenes that the movie was called a “de facto musical.” Moreover, the internationally acclaimed British composer Michael Nyman worked on the original soundtrack in collaboration with Okinawan musicians, especially with Noborikawa Seijin, using Irish and Okinawan music in combination to convey the sentiments of far-away islands. All of these efforts paid off, as *Nabbie's Love* turned out to be a national hit, critically and commercially successful across Japan. The movie was well received in Okinawa, generating an audience of 180,000, meaning that one out of ten Okinawans saw the movie. This movie received several awards in international movie festivals, and was selected for showing in the official celebratory event for the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in 2000.

Moreover, this movie affected national publicity for two Okinawan performing artists. Taira Tomi, an Okinawa *shibai* actress since the age of thirteen, performed in the movie's title role. She also appeared in *Churasan*, and these two roles solidified her image as the

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<sup>44</sup> *Aishiteru rando*, a mispronunciation of Ireland.

<sup>45</sup> *Shibai* is traditional theater that combines drama, music, and dance. Because of the presence of the US military bases and consequent influence of American popular music, not only Okinawan traditional music but also certain American popular music genres, such as rock, or jazz, are considered more authentic when performed by Okinawan musicians than by Japanese, and those genres are considered part of Okinawan music (Roberson 2006).



quintessential Okinawan *obā* (granny), and she appeared in similar roles in other Nakae Yuji movies, such as *Hotel Hibiscus* (2003) and *Koishikute (Cause You Were So Lovely)* (2007), all set in Okinawa.

Noborikawa Seijin (1933-2013), who played Nabbie's husband Keitatsu, came to be known to the mainland audience through this movie and through Nakae's other movies, including a television documentary that he starred in, *Singing the Soul of Ryukyu* (2000). Noborikawa was primarily a *min'yō* figure, and since the 1950s he had performed on countless stages as a *min'yō* singer or a sanshin accompanist for Okinawan drama, written many hit *min'yō* songs, and taught many top-level *min'yō* singers. He was appointed to important positions in Okinawa *min'yō* associations, such as being the sixth president of the Ryukyu Min'yo Association in 1984, the honorary president starting in 1997, as well as founding his own *min'yō* association, the Noborikawa-style Min'yo Conservation Association, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Other than Okinawan *min'yō*, Noborikawa also mastered different musical styles, including Okinawan classical music and even American popular music he had learned at US bases when he had worked as a house boy in his teens, all of which he incorporated into his distinctive musical style. Known as "Okinawa's Jimi Hendrix" for his fast sanshin playing, Noborikawa also invented the *rokushin*, a six-stringed version of the sanshin. He was designated by Okinawa Prefecture as a Holder of Intangible Cultural Properties.

Noborikawa's status in the Okinawan music world has been unquestionable since the 1950s, but it was only after he appeared in *Nabbie's Love* that he and his music (and *min'yō*) became known to the Yamato audience, which eventually contributed to the spread of the *min'yō*/sanshin trend on mainland Japan as well, according to his son and manager (Noborikawa Hitoshi, personal communication). He played somewhat quirky but lovable *ojī* (grandpa) characters, such as Nabbie's caring husband or Kijimuna Tanme in *Hotel Hibiscus*, a mysterious old man who lives under a big banyan tree and evokes Kijimuna, the tree's spirit, at night by playing sanshin and singing *min'yō*. In these films, this small old man, with a childlike smile on his wrinkled face, does not appear particularly hard-working or competent as he is always lounging with a sanshin in his hand, nor does he look authoritative or mature when he teaches a bawdy courtship song to his grandson-in-law-to-be, or argues with a child over a trivial matter, but in the end he turns out to have a big, loving heart.



**Figure 12. Noborikawa Seijin in *Nabbie's Love* (Yes Visions and Office Shirous,1999)**

Other than Taira and Noborikawa, a number of Okinawan performing artists, especially musicians, repeatedly appeared in movies and dramas set in Okinawa, in which they acted, sang and danced. These included the *min'yō* musicians Kadekaru Rinsho, Oshiro Misako, Yamasato Yukichi, Teruya Masao, Kuniyoshi Kenji, as well as musicians of Western or contemporary genres, such as Kaneshima Reiko (opera), Yoseyama Sumiko (jazz), and the band Begin (Okinawan pop).

Through their media appearances, the musicians visually and aurally personified “Okinawan characters,” namely, good-natured, carefree, mischievous at times but unthreatening, playful, laid-back, artless, optimistic, and so on. They also reinforced the widespread gender stereotypes of Okinawans, of the hardworking woman full of vitality, and her laid-back, almost lazy-looking, sanshin-playing husband. These stereotypes are quite commonly accepted among Okinawans as well, especially when they refer to elderly people. This division of labor is repeated in many other media representations, such as in *Churasan* and *Hotel Hibiscus*. In *Churasan*, Mr. Kohagura, the heroine’s father (played by a Japanese actor), is a taxi driver with little ambition or economic competence, but a loving father and husband with a heart of gold. It is obvious from the beginning that he has no talent for singing and sanshin, and yet he always

carries a sanshin in the front seat of his cab or at home, and always plays and sings, whether he is sad or happy, in spite of his family's complaints. On the other hand, in *Hotel Hibiscus*, the father of the Nakasones and manager of the shabby, family-owned Hotel Hibiscus (played by a professional *min'yō* singer) seems to be idling all day, singing and teaching bawdy Okinawan *min'yō* to a hotel guest from Yamato, while his wife practically runs the hotel and moonlights as a bar hostess at night.

These stereotypes have not been simply imposed on Okinawans by Japanese spectators but were mutually constructed by both parties. Popular texts that are for Okinawan consumption (or for consumption by both Okinawans and Japanese) also rely on playful and self-effacing stereotypes of Okinawans, especially of the Okinawan elderly, *ojī* and *obā*, and mischievous *ūmakū* (brat) (Nakasone 2003; Okinawa obaa kenkyukai 2000).

### **Okinawa as the Islands of Songs**

So far I have illustrated the fact that Okinawan music has been central to the Japanese fascination with Okinawan difference, as much as it is a crucial element that constitutes Okinawan identity. Whereas movies and dramas reached a more general audience and propagated the image of “the islands of songs” by the extensive casting of Okinawan musicians, books for more impassioned Okinawan music fans laid out the same ideas in more explicit terms.

Publications on Okinawan music for non-professional readers, including contemporary and traditional genres, have become their own genre. Titles include *Uchinā Pop: Okinawa Culture Book* (Tenkū Kikaku 1992), *Okinawan Music Guide for Beginners* (Isoda and Kurokawa 1995), *An Introduction to Okinawan Music* (Kaneshiro 2006), *A Trip to the World of Okinawan Songs* (Aoki 2000), *Okinawa Shimauta Reader* (Okinawa nandemo chosatai 2003),<sup>46</sup> *The Power of Sound: Okinawa 1, 2 and 3* (DeMusik Inter. 1998a, 1998b, 2006) and *Your First Sanshin: Play Min'yō Songs of Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama* (Urushibata 2000). These books include beginner and expert-level information on a variety of Okinawan music, including Okinawan classical music, *min'yō*, rock, hip-hop, and reggae, as well as commentaries on Okinawan culture by various Okinawan and Yamato experts, and interviews with famous musicians. There are also

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<sup>46</sup> This publisher's name is “A research group for whatever Okinawan,” resonating with the Japanese fascination with Okinawan difference.

book and visual tutorials for the self-study of sanshin and *min'yō*, which include *kunkunshi* scores and lyrics.<sup>47</sup> Also, the previously mentioned famous television drama and movie that were influential in spreading the Okinawa Boom to the Japanese general public, namely *Churasan* and *Nabbie's Love*, had companion books published. *Nabbie's Love: The Eternal "I Love You" Land, Okinawa* (1999) and *Churasan Fanbook* (2004) give a significant amount of space to information about Okinawan music and musicians who appeared in the movies, as well as information about "must-go" Okinawan music bars and restaurants in Okinawa and major Japanese cities, and so on. Similar information is provided by magazines that feature Okinawan popular culture and tourism such as *Okinawa Information*, *Coral Way*, *Uruma*, and *Karabisa*. The readership of these publications are largely Yamato Okinawan music fans, although they are not exclusively targeted for non-Okinawan readers and contain a significant amount of in-depth knowledge useful to Okinawan readers, too.

In these publications, the idea that Okinawan music, regardless of its genre, embodies Okinawa's historicity (Fujita 2000) – more than any other music does with its culture – is a prevalent one that has been repeated over and over. Even contemporary, foreign-sounding genres such as rock, Latin music, hip-hop or reggae are regarded to have legitimate places as distinctively Okinawan music, due to Okinawa's modern history of overseas immigration (especially to Hawaii and South America) and US military occupation. *Uchinā* pop, Okinawan contemporary popular music with its diverse mixture of Western music, Japanese pop, and Okinawan traditional music (especially *min'yō*), and lyrics that address the diverse and complex history, cultural legacy, and reality of Okinawans, articulates the experiences and sentiments of Okinawans (Roberson 2002, 2006).

While diverse genres of Okinawan music are regarded to embody Okinawan historicity and identity in one way or another, Okinawan *min'yō*, also called *shimauta*, occupies a particular position due to its "folk" quality as orally transmitted non-elite music that represents the sentiments of the Okinawan people.<sup>48</sup> The following quote from *A Reader: Okinawa Shimauta*

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<sup>47</sup> *Kunkunshi* is the distinctive notation system for traditional Okinawan music in which musical notes are represented by Chinese ideograms in squared paper. One first has to learn to read *kunkunshi* to be able to play sanshin.

<sup>48</sup> *Shimauta* literally meaning "island songs," and it primarily refers to Okinawan *min'yō*, or more broadly, Okinawan vocal music in general.

summarizes well a common idea that is shared by music specialists as well as lay people, and by Yamato Okinawa enthusiasts as well as Okinawans themselves.

In Okinawa, music is inseparable from life and climate. Lyrics of *shimauta* (I mean Okinawan *min'yō*, not that hit number of the BOOM) depict emotions of daily life, and people sing impromptu based on everyday happenings.

What? Did you think it's no wonder because they are *min'yō*?

Of course they are, but in Okinawa *min'yō* are alive for sure. Even in this modern life they continue to be sung, and new songs continue to be created.

How about *min'yō* on the mainland? Think about it.

The [min'yo songs in other areas] are preserved by determined locals and can be heard in shows like *Nodojiman*, or are only used in ceremonies about once a year.<sup>49</sup> But don't you think they are a bit short of being alive that way? Besides young people dislike them for no obvious reasons, calling them lame, despite the fact that there are tons of wonderful songs on the mainland...

I think it was the words of Mr. Ara Yukito, the up-and-coming singer from Ishigaki Island, that *min'yō* are long-standing hits that have been sung and passed on by numerous people for a long period of time.<sup>50</sup> Every word of it is true, indeed. However, we have come to alienate ourselves from such treasures without realizing, don't you think?

In my opinion, Okinawan music is a "LIVE" (written in English) music, true to its meaning. Regardless of whether it is *shimauta*, rock or jazz, it feels as if the sounds are dancing and twirling spiritedly. Maybe it's just my imagination, but, how do you put it, I believe that one can encounter sounds that have vital power [in Okinawa].

(Isoda 1995, 12-13, original emphasis)

As seen in the quote, Okinawan *min'yō* is regarded particularly "alive," not because it is simply an old genre, like Okinawan classical music, but because it is being constantly modified and recreated through exchanges with other musical genres. Thus Okinawan *min'yō* has been regarded as historically manifesting the tradition as well as the creativity of ordinary Okinawans. On the other hand, it is worth noting that Japanese *min'yō* is largely shunned as "lame" (*dasai*) and "old-fashioned" (*furukusai*) music, fossilized as a "traditional art" which is a mere object of preservation rather than a medium of expression.

In this text, the idea that Okinawan music, especially *min'yō*, has an organic and inseparable relationship with Okinawan culture, climate, and people is discussed primarily in contrast to two other forms of music: Japanese *min'yō* and Japanese popular music. There are

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<sup>49</sup> *Nodojiman* ("Proud of my voice") is a long-running, popular song contest for amateurs broadcast nationally on television and radio by NHK. Each contest is held in a different city in Japan on a weekly basis in which local contestants participate, and many winners of the contest have debuted as professional singers.

<sup>50</sup> Ishigaki Island is the biggest and most populated island of the Yaeyama Islands.

several sets of implicit dichotomies between Okinawan *min'yō* and either Japanese *min'yō* or mass-mediated Japanese popular music that practitioners and fans of Okinawan *min'yō* repeatedly emphasize. These include alive (Okinawan *min'yō*) vs. fossilized (Japanese *min'yō*), rooted in life (Okinawan *min'yō*) vs. detached (Japanese *min'yō*) or superficial (Japanese popular music), creative (Okinawan *min'yō*) vs. mechanical (Japanese *min'yō*), communal (Okinawan *min'yō*) vs. individual, atomized (Japanese popular music), and spontaneous (Okinawan *min'yō*) vs. artificial and commodified (Japanese popular music). Although not as prominent as Okinawa *min'yō*, Okinawan popular music and *eisā* receive similar exaltations as being “alive” and “rooted in people’s lives.”

### **Okinawan Folklore and Authentic Japanese Culture**

The idealization of Okinawan music, especially *min'yō*, strongly resonates with the romanticized notion of the “folk” that has been developed in the nativist movement and in folklore studies since the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the early twentieth century folklorists who established Japanese native folklore studies (*minzokugaku*), as opposed to imported Western anthropology (*jinruigaku*), searched for primordial Japanese culture that was not tainted by modernization and industrialization or by foreign influence. They idealized Japanese folk (*jōmin*, *heimin*) as the source of this untainted Japanese culture, a concept which formed the basis for Japanese national identity not only for their contemporaries but throughout the century and even today (Harootunian 1990; Tomiyama 1997). For example, Yanagita Kunio, known as the founding figure of folklore studies, defined *min'yō* as “songs that ordinary people (*heimin*) made by themselves and sing for themselves” and “songs whose creators cannot be found even if searched for,” as opposed to contemporary, popular songs (*zokuyō*, *kayō*, *ryūkōka*) of his time which he despised, as he believed the latter were artificially created to attract an audience with profit in mind, to give them cheap satisfaction (Takahashi 2002).

It is also significant that leading folklorists believed in the prehistorical cultural link between Japan and Okinawa. For example, Yanagita hypothesized that the origin of primordial Japanese culture traced back to the “Southern Islands” (*nantō*) (Oguma 2002, 180-195; Beillevaire 1999). Origuchi Shinobu, another leading figure of Japanese folklore studies, was similarly convinced that the remote antiquity of ancient Japan was preserved in Okinawa, and could be accessed by his contemporaries as a living experience beyond historical time. Although

both Yanagita and Origuchi emphasized the authenticity of folk in Okinawan folklore deriving from its long history, the notion of time was not tied to the particularity of history, but rather considered in terms of an essentialized, dehistoricized time in which a timeless Japan existed “always, already there” (Harootunian 1990, 101-117). The notion of the cultural convergence of Okinawa and Japan was picked up and pursued by other scholars, most notably Ifa Fuyu, the founder of Okinawan Studies (*Okinawagaku*), in which he tried to prove that Ryukyuan/Okinawan culture was indeed the root of Japanese culture (Murai 1995, 184-196).

Isoda’s formulation of Okinawan *min’yō* as always alive, rooted in people’s lives, and reflecting the depth of time, overlapped with the place Okinawa occupied in the folklorists’ notions, as an example of living Japanese culture as it had been in antiquity. There is a sense of the imagined (and idealized) past of Okinawan traditional villages, where music spontaneously emerged from the everyday lives and emotions of the village people, and was taught from youth to youth. The key qualities of Okinawan *min’yō* lie not only in its tradition, but also in its constant creativity. This abstract, idealized image of a primordial Okinawa, based on no specific locality or historic time, is similar with what ethnomusicologist Kumada calls “imagined nativism” in his study of Okinawan popular music (1998). This primordial, spontaneous, communal music is posed against the idea of the modernization, mass-production, circulation, and commodification of Japanese contemporary popular music.

From the above account and other similar stories I heard, what makes Okinawan *min’yō* a “live” genre as opposed to other Japanese *min’yō* (and for that matter, most other Japanese traditional arts that are practiced as hobby activities) is that the Okinawan *min’yō* is open to spontaneous and creative modifications even in the current time. In contrast, Japanese *min’yō* tends to be considered “dead,” “fossilized” in past forms and detached from daily life contexts. However, it is not just any kind of creativity/spontaneity that is deemed a proper addition to existing *min’yō*. It is the spontaneity that emerges from an extensive knowledge of Okinawan cultural traditions, not just of music, that the performers and the audience acquire from their life experiences immersed in the Okinawan arts. Thus “creativity” and “tradition” have an organic relationship to each other. Although the above commenter specifically mentioned Okinawan folklore and classics, the cultural knowledge at stake is not limited to that of the past. It also includes the knowledge of more contemporary affairs – issues like domestic and overseas immigration, experiences of the Battle of Okinawa, war camps, and life under the US military

government and after the reversion. Those are all legitimate sources from which one can draw inspiration for creative revision. And what is implied is that only those who have lived through all of these circumstances have access to those sources.

Some Japanese seem to share the idea that Japanese traditional arts have become more formalized and fossilized, and less interesting, which makes them more attracted to Okinawan *min'yō*. When I asked three Japanese Okinawan *min'yō* students why they chose to learn Okinawan *min'yō*, they gave their answer together, adding to each other's comments, which seems to suggest that they had a similar idea.

I can't tell exactly why I learn Okinawan *min'yō*, but I can say this. Compared to other Japanese *naraigoto* (hobbies that involve lessons), Okinawan *min'yō* is less boring... For example Japanese *min'yō*, traditional dance, ikebana (flower arrangement), calligraphy, that sort of thing... There are all these big-name sensei's schools and what you will learn and perform is already determined, not much new or different. It's all about paying your fees for lessons, and paying for concerts or exhibitions to get some kind of certificate and go up to the next level...

The idea that Okinawan music and dance classes were easier to enter, that they kept their doors open, while Japanese traditional arts of any kind as a hobby tended to be more expensive, more demanding, too formalized, and required payment for any step of advancement – someone even said it was more like business than art. This comment implies that these individuals feel that institutionalized Japanese traditional culture practices that have become popular hobbies have become more formalized and mechanical, and thus less creative and less exciting. And in the case of Japanese traditional music, the more institutionalized any given cultural authority, the less emotionally accessible it has become. In terms of accessibility, Okinawan *min'yō* was contrasted with Japanese traditional music, too. An ethnomusicologist gave an outright criticism of Japanese traditional music for its failure to accommodate wider Japanese learners, relative to Okinawan music, because of the arrogance of Japanese traditional music practitioners.

Shamisen or other Japanese traditional instruments are, first of all, too expensive to learn. For example, if you want to learn *tanso*, *taegum*, or *changu*,<sup>51</sup> they are something you can buy, at as cheap as around 1,000 yen – even plastic ones. If you go with a Japanese instrument, you'll pay at least 100,000 to 500,000 yen. Plus learning one is so difficult. Instructors will always point out what's wrong about students, not just about music but about postures and even attitudes. “The way you hold your *bachī* (plectrum) is wrong!” “The way you sit is wrong!” or even “The way you direct your gaze is wrong!” I think they are walking down the path to their own extinction. No wonder people are too scared to learn shamisen. They make Japanese traditional music inaccessible. But I don't think

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<sup>51</sup> All Korean traditional instruments.



people will meet such criticism when they learn sanshin, so it would be easier. They need to learn from those who teach sanshin.  
(Fujita, ethnomusicologist, personal communication)

### **Is Okinawan *Min'yō* “Folk?”**

However, this construction of Okinawan *min'yō* is ideological, and the dichotomies above in the comparison between Okinawan *min'yō*, Japanese *min'yō*, and contemporary music are imagined rather than real, although they may have some empirical ground. For instance, although there are no *min'yō* or folk music styles on mainland Japan that have been given constant attention, revision, and renewal as much as Okinawan *min'yō* has, there have been various attempts at creative modification to revive traditional, folk music into more popular, contemporary styles, such as *tsugaru shamisen*, taikō drum music and dance, and *chindon'ya* music (de Ferranti 2000).

More significantly, as briefly discussed in Introduction, Okinawan *min'yō* as it is known is not a genuine folk music that survived modern corruption, such as mass-mediation, commodification, and authorship. It is rather a mixture of orally transmitted traditional music and contemporary popular music, which is also going through institutionalization such as the formation of *min'yō* associations and the license system.

Mass-mediation of Okinawan *min'yō* started in the 1920s in Osaka. During the same period that the Lifestyle Betterment Movement discouraged Okinawans from listening to and performing *min'yō* in public, ironically, Okinawan *min'yō* thrived, was mass-produced, and developed into a new popular genre called “new folk songs” (*shin min'yō*). Marufuku Records, the first Okinawan label, was founded in Osaka in 1927 by the twenty-four year old Okinawan *min'yō* singer, sanshin performer, composer, producer, and entrepreneur Fukuhara Choki, who came to be known as *Chikonki Fukubaru* (Gramophone Fukubaru) and as the Giant of Okinawan *Min'yō* (*Min'yō no kyojin*).<sup>52</sup> He produced recordings of various genres of Okinawan music, from classic to *ryūbu* music to *min'yō*, and distributed this music through the Okinawan networks on mainland Japan, in Okinawa, and overseas. Moreover, he produced “new folk songs,” songs in the *min'yō* style that were newly composed, or old tunes that were modified and given new lyrics by contemporary composers or songwriters, including Fukuhara himself, as

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<sup>52</sup> Fukuhara is the Japanese rendering of the Okinawan name Fukubaru, and he went by both.

opposed to traditional *min'yō* songs that had been passed down for generations without knowledge of the songwriters (Takahashi 2006; Nakama 2007; Higashi 2003).

Although it is not common knowledge among many Okinawans and Okinawan *min'yō* enthusiasts, a number of *min'yō* songs that are known at present were made during this period. This gap between the historical fact of the mass-mediation of Okinawan *min'yō*, and the widespread belief, shared by Okinawans and Japanese, that current Okinawan *min'yō* is a genuine “folk” genre, orally transmitted from an unknown past and thus reflecting authentic Okinawan sentiment, is sometimes conveniently ignored. Although I will not discuss it in detail in this chapter, *eisā* went through a similar transformation from locally rooted folk dance to a mass-produced, urban-style popular performing art both in Okinawa and on the mainland (Okamoto 1998). In the cases of both *min'yō* and *eisā*, the notion of “folk” is still in play, and it is often associated with the notion of the authenticity of modern practitioners of these two genres, and creates minor tensions when the question of authenticity arises.

Moreover, Okinawan *min'yō* went through significant institutionalization, much like various Japanese cultural practices that are deemed significant traditions such as Japanese traditional music or dance (classic or folk), the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, and so on. First of all, there were a number of *min'yō* associations that started forming after the Pacific War. Initially these were established by renowned Okinawan *min'yō* singers, and the number of *min'yō* associations has been increasing due to the division of existing associations (in 2008, there were more than a dozen associations and increasing). Although varying in scale and reputation, associations are hierarchical systems that consist of master (*shihan*)-level musicians who often have master-disciple relations among themselves, and lay members who are students of these musicians at one of association-endorsed *min'yō* classes, somewhat resembling *iemoto* systems of the Japanese mainland.

One of the most significant functions of *min'yō* associations is licensing association-approved *min'yō* professionals through regular qualifications. Although usually called a *min'yō* concurs (*koukūru*), it is not usually a competition between students but rather a pass-fail test in which the contestant's singing and sanshin-playing skills, the accuracy of lyrics and adherence to the musical style of the association are judged by master-level judges. It is not obligatory, but students may choose to take tests when they wish. In their contests, all *min'yō* associations adopt

a three-tier system in their concours: the new singers' awards (*shinjinshō*); awards for excellence (*yūshūshō*); and the awards for the best singers (*saikōshō*).

It is known that with any *min'yō* association, it is very easy to receive a new singer awards in a relatively short period of time, within months or in a couple of years depending on the performer's musical talent and diligence. It is also nominal, and does not prove the awardee's musical prowess. It is considered more or less as a token for participating, and its purpose is to promote participation. The awards for excellence may take several years of diligent learning and practice, and although it is an honor within the association, it has no practical significance.

The significance of the award and license system is in the award for the best singers (*saikōshō*), which works as a license for the awardee to become a master (*shihan*) on his or her own. *Saikōshō* awardees become *kyōshi* (teacher) licensed to give lessons to students in place of a licensed *shihan*, at a *min'yō* school that belongs to the association, usually where he or she was a student. And given his or her own master's recommendation, the awardee can become a licensed master (*shihan*) to open and run his or her own *min'yō* school under the association's name and charge for classes. Thus a real material interest can be and is at stake at this level.

The effect of *min'yō* associations and the award and license system is the standardization of musical style within a given association. Except for the few, old, large *min'yō* associations that include a number of *min'yō* masters with diverse styles, new associations tend to be established around a famous *min'yō* master and (usually) his disciples who are also at the master level. Students of a certain association are expected to follow the musical styles, lyrics, and variations of the same song that are those of the association's master. Moreover, the award and license system inevitably brings about significant standardization of *min'yō* and reduces individual variations. Those who are critical of this system point out that while objective, tangible criteria are adopted to ensure fair evaluation, the form, accuracy of lyrics and melody, and so on, as well as other more subtle differences such as voice inflection, or Okinawan phonemic difference are not judged as strictly. Another problem is the competition and diversion of associations leads to a drop in the rigor of contests, as an association that is eager to increase its membership tends to lower their evaluation criteria, and lay members may choose to move to a school in another association (professional, master-level members risk permanent exclusion from their original association if they move to or form another association).

Because of this, not a few *min'yō* practitioners, even those with high rank inside the association system, often express skepticism about the efficacy of the award and license system, and lament that the musical quality of Okinawan *min'yō* has declined since the start of this system, and has been musically and linguistically “Japanized” as more Japanese students participate, advance to higher-level awards, and even get master titles and teach classes of their own.

There is room for debate about the benefits and disservice of *min'yō* associations and the license and awards system, but what is clear is that as *min'yō* becomes institutionalized, the notion of oral tradition, spontaneity and creativity, the organic relationship between music, people and life in *min'yō* becomes more of an ideal than a reflection of the reality of *min'yō* practice.

### **Okinawan Music as a Means to an Authentic Life and Personhood**

For some, especially the Okinawan cultural activists whom I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the notion of an organic relationship between Okinawan music and Okinawan people is what makes only certain types of Okinawan *min'yō* practice authentic, which is what distinguishes Okinawan *min'yō* as practiced in Okinawa by Okinawans from that which has been appropriated by Japanese individuals. In particular, diasporic Okinawans, such as second generation Okinawans, often expressed an almost romanticized version of this concept. A second generation Okinawan who often expressed his own sense of the insurmountability of being a full Okinawan, told me what *min'yō* was like in Okinawa. Sometimes a mild criticism that was given of Japanese appropriators of Okinawan *min'yō* and/or *eisā* was that Japanese individuals just didn't get it, however hard they tried, because Okinawan music and dance was not just about techniques or knowledge.

Let's say you go to Okinawa, and visit a local bar or something. There would be a group of old men drinking and making noise. When a *min'yō* singer performs at a place like that, it's often the case that someone from the audience challenges him, just for entertainment, by throwing a less-known verse at the performer. It could be a totally unknown one because he just made it up.

And as you know, *min'yō* basically came from Okinawan oral traditions, and many songs were drawn from folk stories or Okinawan classic literature. Although not all Okinawans have read the Okinawan classics, most of them know the stories, because they were told those stories since they were children, or saw them in Okinawa *shibai*, or heard them in songs. So let's say, this man throws a verse about a certain story or poem – or he

could totally make up a verse out of that story. It could be an extension of the lyrics the performer has been singing. It is fine as far as the lyrics musically make sense, and the audience knows what he is singing about. Then the performer has to respond to that verse. It could be an existing verse or he could make something up, likewise. Anyhow, the responding verse should address the verse that has been thrown out – something that goes in pair with it; it could be the latter half of the story in the challenging verse, etc. The accuracy doesn't matter much – if the challenger and the audience recognize the story and it is musically well done, they will accept it.

In order to do that you need a vast knowledge of Okinawan culture, including the Okinawan classics. But do you think *Yamatonchu* singers can do that just because they have mastered all the techniques, passed the competition, and earned the title of “master” (*shihan*)? I don't think so. They only know how to sing the songs in the textbook in the way they are taught – they can't improvise. So let's say, a *Yamatonchu min'yō* singer with a “master” title sings at a place like that and gets challenged – he won't be able to respond to it with what he has. What a shame would it be? That's why techniques are not all there is to *min'yō*. (Nakamura Kazufumi, personal conversation)

In this story, there are qualities that the imagined *Yamatonchu min'yō* performer lacks: spontaneity or creativity (the ability to improvise) and the knowledge of Okinawan cultural traditions, classics as well as folklore, from which the performer can draw his improvisation. The *min'yō* license system not only fails to equip its candidates with adequate knowledge, but it also hinders them from developing spontaneity and creativity by requiring them to stick to the given set of standards.

This romanticized version of Okinawan *min'yō* is shared by Japanese Okinawan *min'yō* enthusiasts as well. The idea of Okinawan music as organically attached to the life of Okinawans is not only conveyed by the Okinawa Boom texts, such as movies, dramas, or books, but also reinforced by first-hand experience during their Okinawa visits, even if short and touristic. Often they depict ordinary Okinawans who are always holding a *sanshin*, or singing, or dancing with others, highlighting the ubiquity of music in Okinawan life. Whether this portrait is accurate or not, the image of an ordinary-looking Okinawan who always keeps music at hand seems to have a strong appeal to the Japanese audience, and several middle-aged men told me that indeed this image, fictional or real life, led them to learn *sanshin*.

I had been travelling to Okinawa for years but didn't think about learning *sanshin* myself until about seven or eight years ago, when I was eating lunch at a very small diner in Ishigaki Island. A young man was eating there, probably taking a break from work. Nothing special about him – dyed hair, soiled construction worker's clothes – just some twenty-something you can come across in any place in Japan. But when he was done eating, he had a smoke, reached for a *sanshin* that hung on the wall, and started singing a slow tune. I don't know what it was, but it sounded so good. When he finished the song, he hung the *sanshin* back, up paid for his lunch, nodded goodbye to the diner's pop, and

walked out without saying anything. Oh, he looked so cool! I thought, “I wish I could play and sing like that.” It’s not that he was particularly talented or something. An ordinary man could use music in such ordinary moments of life like that – that was so nice.

(In another conversation) I’m not as interested in whether somebody sings well or not as in whether someone’s personality is alive in his music. For example, I went to this shabby bar, and a middle-aged pop (*ossan*) was singing karaoke, a song about the miso soup his mom used to make him. Oh, that man sang terribly, but you know what? His emotions were so real, his love for his mother, the taste of the miso soup...so I felt I almost could taste it, even though he was off-pitch and his voice was terrible. I like that kind of music. If deep emotions like that are missing, it’s not interesting to hear even if it’s sung by a skilled singer. (A Japanese man in his mid-forties)

This Japanese man’s fascination with the ordinary man’s music shares a common thread with Isoda’s idea that “Okinawan music is alive.” There is an ideal notion that might be called authentic musical experience, in which one’s feelings, thoughts, and music exist inseparably, and through which one probably can tap into one’s authentic personhood. Okinawan *min’yō*, or maybe the idea of *min’yō*, seems particularly attractive, as it is believed that *min’yō* songs were born spontaneously from ordinary people’s everyday lives and passed on, unlike contemporary popular songs that are manufactured and sugarcoated by the culture industry to meet the instant, cheap taste of the masses. However, this is not necessarily the case with most Okinawa *min’yō* songs that are known to Japanese people, and a closer look at Okinawa *min’yō* reveals that such a dichotomy itself is a constructed notion. The prevalence of the stereotype that every Okinawan knows how to play sanshin and knows *min’yō* is illustrated by the story of my encounter with a young Okinawan who only came to learn *min’yō* and sanshin for the first time after he came to Osaka for work. He had no prior knowledge about *min’yō* or sanshin, but felt awkward as everybody who learned that he was from Okinawa had asked him if he could play sanshin, and so he finally decided to learn. From the responses of those around him when he told the story, I could see this was not an entirely rare case.

In the meantime, the straight answer to “Why listen to or learn Okinawan music” (as opposed to “Why not listen to or learn something else”) was much harder to get at. Sometimes my question was dismissed as ridiculous, because why on earth would anybody dislike Okinawan music? It was just obvious to them, although they couldn’t explain why it was obvious. But some informants mentioned the words “comfort, healing” repeatedly, without further articulation. For example, a conversation like the following was common.

At the concert of an Okinawan *min'yō* singer who is known for her clear, soaring voice, a Japanese Yaeyama *min'yō* enthusiast from Takarazuka exclaimed, “Aah, what a voice she has! She indeed has *a voice that heals (iyasu koe)*, don’t you think?” This man was an impassioned Okinawan *min'yō* enthusiast. He frequented two different sanshin and *min'yō* clubs to learn different Okinawan *min'yō* styles, from Okinawa and Yaeyama, and he let his son learn *eisā* at a Takarazuka-based *eisā* club. And he participated in the annual marathon on Tokashiki Island in the Okinawan Islands. But when I asked why he thought Okinawan *min'yō* was so popular among Japanese later at the concert, he couldn’t think of more specific reason than this:

“I don’t know, it is just beautiful ... it’s just good music. How can one not love good music?”

“But Okinawan *min'yō* became so popular only in the last decade, why do you think it’s the case?”

“Well, Japanese people *became tired (tsukarete kita)* that much since then, I guess.”

This might be an overstretch and I need more evidence to confirm this, but I suspect that by “becoming tired,” he did not mean just physical fatigue, but a sense of separation and alienation from authentic life and selfhood. Since the 1990s, Japan as a society had been going through economic recession, which made the future uncertain for many Japanese, and looking back they realized that they had taken their apparent affluence for granted. Even for middle class Japanese, who could afford hobbies and leisure like he did, there was not an obvious, secure path ahead. Thus they might have been turning to voices that healed, hoping it could remedy their sense of alienation and fatigue caused by the uncertainty of this postindustrial society, even if only temporarily.

However, this is where a fundamental paradox of Japanese people looking to Okinawan music in pursuit of authentic experience seems to lie: that is, turning to something that is not one’s own (hence exotic) to find a connected feeling between one’s life and music. This is probably the reason that Japanese Okinawa enthusiasts are not simply satisfied as members of the audience but want to perform Okinawan music and dance themselves. Furthermore, they often pursue it through acquaintance with actual Okinawan people, especially Okinawan musicians. Thus there seems to be a vicarious quality in Okinawa enthusiasts’ pursuit of Okinawan music and dance, which becomes concretized and personal through their relationship with Okinawan individuals who appear to possess authenticity. And there is often mutual

reliance, an almost symbiotic relationship between Okinawa enthusiasts and their Okinawan hosts, as will be shown in the ethnographic case of *min'yō* in the next chapter.

### **Okinawans' Ambivalence towards Okinawaphiles**

Roberson (2003, 2006) and Shirota (2002) discuss the beneficial effects of the circulation of Okinawan popular music and *eisā* as a means of positively constructing and disseminating Okinawan identity. I agree with this argument to some extent, and to many Okinawans this appears to be evidence of a long-overdue recognition of the excellence of Okinawan culture by Japanese society. As illustrated in the first part of the dissertation, the Okinawa Boom affected the lives of Okinawans in Taisho Ward in a significant way. As Taisho came known as “the Little Okinawa you can visit on a bike,” an accessible, shortcut source of so-called authentic Okinawan culture, largely in consumable forms, it increased the means of livelihood for many Okinawans. Beyond material gain, Okinawans also had the chance to reevaluate their cultural legacy in a more positive light, and for some individuals, it has given them an opportunity for partial empowerment – a chance to reposition themselves in relation to other Okinawans and to Japanese. In the next chapter I will discuss how an Okinawan musician and entrepreneur attempts to reposition himself as a *min'yō* master, utilizing a number of resources.

However, while such positive characterization might seem like an improvement when compared to earlier derogative representation, it still essentializes Okinawan difference and puts Okinawa/Okinawans in the position of an exotic Other, as distinguished from the unmarked Japan/Japanese. And there are effects that such essentialist representations may carry, especially regarding the reception of these representations by the mainland Japanese audience, and the influence they may have on the practice of Okinawan culture (music and dance, to be specific) when these Yamato fans participate (as performers as well as audience) in large numbers, which creates ambivalence among Okinawans.

One problem with describing Okinawa in a simple positive light is that it erases the historical and social context within which the Okinawan people have been situated as a minority. In the idealized “islands of comfort,” the recognition of Okinawa’s social, economic, and historical marginalization in relation to Japan is absent. The disproportionate sacrifice of Okinawan civilians in the Pacific War (especially, collective suicides coerced by Japanese



forces, the settlement of which is still a pending issue between those involved as of 2008, as shown in the Oe-Iwanami court case), postwar occupation by the US military government, the continued presence of the US bases, and continued economic insecurity, have led concerned intellectuals to refer to Okinawa as the “islands of discontent” (Hein and Seldon 2003). Also absent in the Okinawan enthusiasts’ imagination are real Okinawans, who struggle with real life problems such as the highest unemployment rate, the largest occupation by US and Japanese military bases, the most crimes perpetrated by US military personnel, and the third-highest suicide rate in Japan. Such problems are suppressed in the idealized description of Okinawa, or only expressed in very vague terms to be shown as generic hardship, or to accentuate Okinawan cultural differences even more.

This idealized representation could be interpreted as an extension of Japan’s colonial imaginary in which the “coevalness” (Fabian 2002) of Okinawans as fellow nationals or humans is denied. A Tokyo-born, second generation Okinawan sociologist harshly criticizes “Okinawan disease” as another pathology of “unconscious colonialism” by mainstream Japanese; he equally criticizes the collusion of Okinawans who cater to the voyeuristic desires of mainstream Japanese by voluntarily becoming an object for the Japanese gaze, and thereby completing the policy of “Japanese rule in the name of love” (Nomura 2005). Even if one does not go back to history or social ramifications to bring out the irony of Okinawa disease, there is sarcasm towards Okinawa enthusiasts, especially those who dream about living in Okinawa, who are seen as escapist who cannot face the difficulties of their own lives, as expressed by the term *sotokomori*.

*Sotokomori* is a neologism that derived from the term *hikikomori* (extreme social withdrawal). *Hikikomori* is an existing psychological and/or social condition in which an individual withdraws from society, including withdrawing from their school or job, sometimes literally isolating and confining themselves in their house or room. On the other hand, *sotokomori* (literally “outward-confinement”) refers to young Japanese long-term visitors who stay in cheap hostels in Okinawan cities and wander about without specific jobs, while young Okinawans are busy making a living, or even have to move to the mainland searching for a job because of Okinawa’s chronic unemployment. It is implied that these Yamato youngsters are maladjusted in Japanese society, and escape “out” (rather than escape “in” like *hikikomori*) to Okinawa to become a somewhat parasitic presence (Kishi, personal conversation, 2008).

I would witness this kind of sarcasm from Gajimaru and TOCC members too. Once middle-aged Gajimaru females were talking about one woman's recent trip to Okinawa. Her mother-in-law in Okinawa was bedridden and had been suffering from dementia for years, and her husband was deeply saddened by it, so it was an emotionally and physically taxing trip for them. When the woman came back from Okinawa, she said "My fatigue hasn't gone since I came back from Okinawa." The other woman made an exaggerated expression of pretentious surprise, saying "What? Aren't you supposed to be 'comforted' when you go to Okinawa?" The first woman grumpily scoffed, "Ha! As if *Uchinānchu* are supposed to be comforted in Okinawa?!" at which the second woman laughed and replied, "Needless to say."

In Taisho, I encountered a range of responses from Okinawans to the heightened popularity of Okinawan culture and to the Japanese "wannabe Okinawans." Their response varied from heartfelt welcome to silence or smiles (which can mean different things, including approval or disapproval), to layered ambivalence (half-hearted welcome in public and skepticism, sarcasm, or cynicism in private), to outright criticism and mockery. Among those whom I met in Taisho, while sincere welcome and pride were common, I encountered many cases of ambivalence that were often tacit, non-verbal, and only articulated among like-minded Okinawans.

A few Okinawans revealed in private their discomfort about enthusiastic responses from Japanese like "You are lucky to have such a nice place as your hometown!" contrasted to their vast ignorance (and often indifference, too) about the hardships (or inequality and injustice) Okinawans have gone through in modern history, in both Okinawa and on the mainland. One may explain it as the innocent ignorance or naiveté of the Japanese, which is indeed a common defense from accused individuals that I have heard numerous times since I started studying Japanese society. But it is important to note that such asymmetric perception is not individual or neutral but collective and political, and it is a symptom and also an apparatus of the existing power asymmetry, not just in Japan, but in the society in general. Such asymmetric understanding is constantly and systematically cultivated throughout the socialization process, especially by school education and media representation, and such naiveté is usually something that only those in the social mainstream can afford, as the struggle of Okinawan youth in Chapters 3 and 4 attest. And it is probably this gap between naive, well meaning Japanese and disillusioned Okinawans that creates *iwakan* (a sense of incongruity), or ambivalence in many

Okinawan individuals. It is not that they are inaccurate – after all, these are positive remarks that celebrate Okinawan difference. These descriptors of Okinawan people and culture are not only endorsed by Okinawans themselves, but also actively used in their self-description. Thus, it is often the question of who announces it (to whom) rather than what is announced about something Okinawan.

### **Okinawan Keywords**

There are certain phrases – perhaps key words or clichés – that commonly create such ambivalence among Okinawans. One important element in such ambivalence is the feeling that “Okinawanness” – especially Okinawan personality or attitude towards life – has been removed from its social and historical contexts, and put into Japanese use as caricatures. Such misrepresentation and misuse usually serves the expectations of Japanese people, not Okinawans.

One example is the Okinawan phrase *nankuru naisa*, which roughly translates as “things will work out eventually,” or “it will be ok.” It is an Okinawan version of “don’t worry, be happy.” Many Japanese – and Okinawans themselves too – said and believed that the phrase epitomized Okinawan character, that is, easygoing, laid-back, optimistic, and carefree. This phrase can be found in the names of Okinawan restaurants, bars, and on souvenirs. Also it often appears in books (Yoshimoto Banana’s *Nankurunakunai*), the lyrics of Okinawan songs, it is one of the favorite lines that Okinawan characters utter in movies or television shows about Okinawa, and so on. I think its use in bars, restaurants, and Okinawan festivals seems to mark out-of-everyday-life places or occasions for entertainment and relaxing.

Although it is not frequent, there are people who show almost allergic responses to the Japanese use of *nankuru naisa*. To critiques of the expression, as expressed in the song of an Okinawan folk singer,<sup>53</sup> *nankuru naisa* implies ungrounded optimism or irresponsible escapism, regardless of who uses it. It expresses a lack of courage or determination or the refusal to wake

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<sup>53</sup> Tamaki Masayuki, in his concert in Osaka hosted by Kansai Okinawa Bunko (the activist front of the Gajimaru Club introduced in Chapter 3), addressed his apprehension about the overuse of *nankuru naisa* and the escapism it implies, before he delivered his song “Chimufugan” (Heavy heart).” The lyrics of the song are entirely written in Okinawan dialect, and its refrain goes as follows:

*Chimufugan nankuru naibiran* (My heart is heavy, things won’t just work out)

*Nairu naran ’ya wanduyaru* (It’s up to me whether things will work out or not)

*Nairu naran ’ya unjuyamishēn* (It’s up to you whether things will work out or not)

up, confront reality, and deal with their problems, instead waiting for the problems to disappear or to dissolve by themselves (in other words, the idea that things will work out by themselves eventually). On the other hand, there is an alternative, positive take on this expression, that it signifies the unwavering optimism and will to live that has helped Okinawans going through the harsh reality of Okinawan marginalization in relation to the Japanese state, a situation which has created more than its fair share of suffering throughout history. However, when it is uttered by Japanese, it seems especially bad because Japanese are the very people who have caused all these problems – discrimination, war sacrifices, and US base issues. They are the people who should take responsibility, or be ashamed and humble in front of Okinawans. And yet they are oblivious or unaware of this fact, and now seek comfort from Okinawa(n people/culture). They treat Okinawa as if it's simply an object of pleasure in the service of Japanese. They do not know or even care about the original meaning or historical context of Okinawan cultural forms, and simply use them for entertainment. And even worse, now they expect Okinawans to feel, think, and act according to their expectations – in a harmless, non-demanding way. A college student from Okinawa gave me a diatribe against *nakuru naisa* as used by intrusive Japanese and gutless Okinawans on the first day of my ethnographic research in Taisho, even though I didn't mention the phrase myself. He seemed irritated by my presence, as he probably assumed that I was just another pushy researcher or journalist (likely Japanese) who wandered about in Taisho to pick up something exotic.

On another occasion, I heard from an Okinawan activist – a particularly steadfast one – that he had broken off with a Japanese photographer, a long-time supporter of the Taisho Okinawan community, over this phrase. In the middle of an argument about the activist's media policy, the photographer had quoted *nankuru naisa* as having reportedly been uttered by an *obā* (granny) from Taisho, and told the activist that he should take a more relaxed approach. He said that it was unforgivable that a Japanese told him to act like an Okinawan, as if he knew what it was like being Okinawan (*shitta youna koto wo iu*). I presume that if some plain “wannabe” had said it, it would have been considered ignorant and irritating, and the reaction could have stopped with scorn or mockery. But it became intolerable and scandalous to him when it was someone who was a self-declared liberal or supporter of minorities, “who should know better,” who made such remarks. To this activist, it was way out of line and another indication of Japanese shamelessness.

This kind of immediate reaction with outright denunciation or sarcasm, such as the pointed responses of the college student and the activist, are rather an exception, and most responses are more subtle or diplomatic ones, such as gentle ignoring or half-hearted agreement. They usually go unnoticed by their Japanese counterparts, as they generally have no clue that their remarks were offensive. They tend to get perplexed – even shocked – when they occasionally meet less-than-pleased responses and do not understand why their good intentions are met with hostility.

### **Showing What Japanese Want to See**

Two middle-aged Gajimaru members, after a sanshin lesson at the Kansai Okinawa Bunko, were talking about a confusion in the lyrics of a famous Yaeyama *min'yō*:

Gajimaru member: I got these lyrics from the internet...the first verse goes like this here, “the beauty of the moon tops on the thirteenth night, the beauty of a girl tops at seventeen...” This is probably accurate, because it seems to be transcribed by a Yamato scholar, although it’s annoying (meaning that Yamato people are more meticulous than Okinawans in those matters so they are likely more accurate).

Sumi: Oh, I know that song...I heard it in the movie *Nabbie's Love*.

G: Oh, I hate that movie, although I haven't seen it.

Sumi: You hate it? Why?

G : I don't know...it's like, movies like that only show what Japanese want to see, and I don't like it.

For critics, the source of their discomfort is not that the depiction of Okinawans or Okinawan lifestyle is inaccurate or distorted. For example, Nakae, the director of *Nabbie's Love* and other movies, has a great familiarity with Okinawan life from his long residence in Okinawa of almost three decades, and he holds a high respect for Okinawans and Okinawan culture. He intended Okinawans to be his primary target audience, and went to a great deal of trouble to accurately describe the Okinawan landscape and people down to minute details with the meticulousness of a Yamato man. And indeed, he succeeded in a realistic representation of Okinawan life that was well received by the Okinawan audience. Moreover, he made it explicit that he depicted Okinawa as free of conflict, highlighting only the bright side although he was well aware of Okinawa's tragic history and hardships, because he did not want to depict Okinawa as the perpetual victim of Japanese history, but rather as a happy land that is an inspiration for those who see his movies. (Nakae et al. 2000)

However, in spite of Nakae's good intentions, his movies do not contribute much to challenging or subverting the prevalent stereotypes of Okinawa among the majority of the Japanese audience who are ignorant of or indifferent to Okinawans' predicament, and thereby all these efforts may as well serve as a "surface realism which tends to disguise fantasy" (Powdermaker 1950, 13). Shohat and Stam (1994) point out that racially (or ethnically) correct casting does not necessarily guarantee symmetrical participation in the moviemaking process, but sometimes can aggravate the asymmetry when those in more empowered positions like directors, producers, and scriptwriters are occupied by individuals from the socially dominant group (i.e. Yamato) while "the natives" only perform the roles given to them. Almost all movies and television shows mentioned in this chapter seem to fit this profile. And it was almost a satire of this asymmetrical media representation of Okinawa when the poster and pamphlet for the movie *Ryukyu Cowboys are Doing Well* (2008) advertised the movie as being an "all Okinawan product" (*Okinawa kensanpin*), explicitly stating that the movie was made by an all Okinawan staff, from the directors to the screenwriters to the performers to the minor crew. *Ryukyu Cowboys* is an omnibus movie that consists of three short pieces directed by three young Okinawan directors. At first glance, *Ryukyu Cowboys* is not drastically different in its extensive use of humor, mixture of realism and fantasy, topics based on distinctively Okinawan happenings, and the casting of many famous Okinawan musicians as main characters (this time mostly from contemporary genres). However, each film has a twist, a somewhat unexpected ending. Between each part of the film, mock Okinawa *shibai* scenes are inserted, in which two old female actresses, known for their clownish acts, comment on the movie itself in subtitled Okinawan dialect. In that commentary, I found the following dialogue particularly telling:

"Can you believe that idiots like *Uchinanchu* could make a movie on their own?"

"What a surprise! *Uchinanchu* have become fairly smart these days!"

In 2008, two decades after the Okinawa Boom, Okinawans became smart enough to talk back in a movie they made "on their own," after so many movie representations of Okinawa had been made by Japanese for Japanese.

Another reason that Japanese participation in *eisā* and *min'yō* triggers visceral reactions from some Okinawans is related to what Harrison calls "identity piracy" (1999) the appropriation by a privileged or dominant group of the dominated group's cultural artifacts or practices, which they consider to be crucial in their identity construction. This frustration seems particularly

pronounced in a diasporic setting like Osaka, and with second or later generation individuals who want to be recognized as Okinawans, since music and dance are a few of the already scarce sources of Okinawan identity for those who have been assimilated in many other aspects and not necessarily distinguishable from the Yamato people around them. Indeed, one sanshin and *min'yō* learner complained that “*Uchinānchu* in Kansai are mean.” Somehow he felt much less welcomed among diasporic Okinawans in Taisho, and they were much pickier and more parochial about how Okinawan music should be done right, whereas Okinawans in Okinawa had genuinely appreciated his love of Okinawan music and were more generous about minute errors in lyrics or vocalization, focusing on his effort to learn. His sanshin instructor and friend, a second-generation singer and sanshin player who had been criticized in many places for his unconventional performing style, commented that, “Maybe *Uchinānchu* here cannot afford a generous attitude like that.”

### **Okinawan Music Events for Japanese Appropriators**

Takahashi (2006) divides Okinawan popular music into two styles according to the targeted audience. The “inward-oriented” style refers to making music for Okinawan ethnic communities (those who share language, culture, and lifestyle as Okinawans) in Okinawa, on mainland Japan, and overseas, whereas the “outward-oriented style” is music making for non-Okinawans, who do not have deep knowledge of Okinawan language, culture, history, or everyday experience, and are attracted to Okinawan music not as a source of familiarity but of difference (exoticism). As in the case of the female vocal group Nenes (produced by China Sadao), inspired by and specifically targeted for the world music boom, outward-oriented style music is made in a way that increases its accessibility for a non-Okinawan audience by using Japanese lyrics, and presenting J-pop, Okinawan-pop, or foreign popular songs rather than sticking to traditional *min'yō* style, while still keeping the “taste” of Okinawan difference through the use of *min'yō* vocalization, Okinawan instruments, or the insertion of some Okinawan words (usually easy ones that are known to non-Okinawan audiences) as signatures.

In reality the boundaries between these two styles of music are not so clear-cut and there are always overlaps, as both Okinawan musicians and audiences (especially younger generations) have been linguistically assimilated and are familiar with diverse music styles, Okinawan, Japanese, and foreign. More and more Okinawan musicians experiment with different

music styles along with Okinawan style, and the Okinawan audience does not exclusively consume “inward-oriented” music. And as in the case of avid Yamato fans of Okinawan *min’yō*, there are people who pursue the authenticity of Okinawan music that is supposedly made for Okinawan people in spite of (or because of) its limited accessibility. However, these divisions between two different styles provide an important key to understanding the intentions and behavior of those who make and distribute music, and also the discontent of those who feel Okinawan music has been distorted – “sold” and not Okinawan’s own any more.

The Ryukyu Festival has been an “outward-oriented” music event since its inception, in the sense that it was first organized with the purpose of introducing Okinawan music and musicians to mainland audiences in the 1970s when Okinawa was returned to Japan. The Ryukyu Festival was first organized and held in 1974 and 1975 by Takanaka Rō.<sup>54</sup> The event was revived in 1995 by China Sadao at the height of the Okinawa Boom, and since then it has been held in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Sapporo, and Okinawa City, and especially in Tokyo and Osaka annually.<sup>55</sup> Currently the Ryukyu Festival, or the Ryufes as its fans often call it, is the biggest, most showbiz-type Okinawan music event, managed by H.I.P., a major entertainment management company, and it showcases diverse genres of Okinawan popular music, from *min’yō* to Okinawan pop (it excludes traditional genres other than *min’yō* and *eisā* that are not widely popular among non-Okinawans). It presents veteran Okinawan musicians with decades of popularity as well as rising new faces in the Okinawan or the national music scenes. For example, the thirteenth Ryukyu Festival in 2007 was held at the Kyosera Dome, the biggest baseball stadium in Osaka (the third largest in Japan), located near the Taisho train station, it presented more than two hundred performers (eighty-seven group or individual Okinawan musicians, *eisā* groups, and comedians) and lasted for six and a half hours. With its theme of “Drink, Sing, Dance, and Play,” there were dozens of vending booths at the concert that sold typical Okinawan snacks and drinks, including Okinawan drinks like Orion beer and *awamori*,

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<sup>54</sup> The late reporter Takenaka, as mentioned earlier, had a great interest in and attachment to Okinawa and devoted himself to introducing Okinawan music to mainland audiences. The Ryukyu Festival was one of his efforts.

<sup>55</sup> China, a *min’yō* singer, songwriter, and producer, is probably the most influential figure in the Okinawa popular music scene (both *min’yō* and contemporary popular music) who has been devoted to introducing and popularizing Okinawan music to outside audiences, in Japan and overseas, for his lifetime. China was born and grew up in Kansai. One of Noborikawa Seijin’s top disciples, China debuted at age twelve, and was known as a *min’yō* prodigy. He got into the national music market in the late 1970s, part of Takenaka’s effort to introduce prominent *min’yō* musicians.



CDs or other goods from the performing musicians, and other Okinawan-themed goods such as T-shirts, accessories, and the pamphlets for the event.

The Ryukyu Festival attracts both Okinawans in Osaka as well as Yamato Okinawa enthusiasts, and all of the Yamato Okinawa enthusiasts (who are not in an activist circle) that I personally met in Osaka had at least considered going to the event. I attended both the 2007 and the 2008 Ryufes, with a young Miyako-born Okinawan *izakaya* (pub-restaurant) owner and his Fukuoka-born wife who had met him in the course of her Okinawa enthusiasm in 2007. They kept bumping into their acquaintances – their customers, business acquaintances, and families and friends. Some of them joined us and soon our company became a circle of around a dozen excited people, Okinawans and Okinawa enthusiasts. The following year I went with a group of students from a *min'yō* school, who themselves had appeared in the opening stage of the 2007 Ryufes in the *sanshin* and *min'yō* chorus (two Noborikawa Kansai schools went onstage – Irei's and Miyazato's) and had also helped with Kariyushi's food booth. There were multi-generational families as well as groups and singles in the waiting line, and I recognized so many faces, as I had encountered them on more than one occasion at other Okinawa-themed events or music pubs, although I didn't know them personally. For some fans it seemed like a hard-to-miss opportunity that they could enjoy so many Okinawan music performers at one occasion in a festive ambience at a decent or almost bargain price (5,500 to 6,000 yen).

For Okinawans who participated in the production of the event, the popularity of the Festival is an indication of the long-overdue recognition of the excellence of Okinawan music. There was an attempt to emulate the Ryufes, another large music concert called the Sakishima Festival, that presented famous musicians from the Yaeyama and Miyako Islands, which was sponsored by local governments and businesses from the area. Certainly Okinawa shows no lack of great musicians, as this event also presented dozens of performers over more than seven hours. Thus it was probably not lip service but a genuine appreciation when China kowtowed to the audience in full dress at the beginning of the 2007 Ryufes, and thanked them for the success of the Ryukyu Festival as illustrated in Introduction.

For others, however, the event was such a hodgepodge that serious music fans couldn't properly listen to the music, because of the noise and commotion that the excited – and drunken – people were making. Even Yamato Okinawa music fans felt that the event had become too profit-oriented to properly serve serious Okinawan music fans. H.I.P. the production company,

for example, put too many and too diverse performers in one show so they needed to wait an unnecessarily long time to listen to their favorite musicians, often having to bear with the uninteresting, mediocre musicians that the management had inserted between the big musicians. I left with my company both times long before the show ended, although we knew we were missing some of the most famous performers who were going to perform at the end, as “we had had enough” – enough of music, enough of drinking, and enough of noise. An even worse complaint was that the producers had contracted with big-time musicians who had higher guarantees, such as Begin, only for the more profitable stages such as Tokyo, keeping them from events in other cities where the company didn’t expect to make much of a profit.

Criticism from those in Okinawan activist circles, like the Gajimaru Club and the Children’s Club, were harsher. They often chose not to go to the event, even though the event would feature some of their favorite musicians. The main criticism was that the event was too commercialized and only served to accommodate the taste of Yamato Okinawa enthusiasts. Comments like “It’s not something for *Uchinānchu*” and nodding in agreement were common when the event was mentioned in conversations. The Gajimaru Club had been involved in the organization of the Ryufes and had danced for the first three years. During that period, the Gajimaru Club was approached by the Ryufes organizers and asked for advice about the format of the festival, because of their rich experience organizing the Taisho Eisā Festival and their network within the Okinawan circle. For example, it was said that it was Kaoru’s idea to insert *eisā* performances in between other performances to increase the festive mood and excite the audience, which is now a very common practice for most Okinawan cultural festivals (and even small-scale concerts).

However, tension between the two parties increased over time as the Gajimaru Club demanded that the concert reflect Okinawans’ musical taste more, and that it also address prominent ongoing social issues regarding Okinawans in Osaka and Okinawa. They finally broke up and now the Ryufes organizers seek cooperation from other *eisā* groups that are “less picky.” And the Gajimaru Club (to be exact, the Kansai Okinawa Bunko) even organized an “anti-Ryufes Festival” (the actual title of the event was *Chura Jima Churara shimagukuru* [Beautiful Islands, Beautiful Island Hearts]). The concert was staged according to the Bunko organizer’s imagination of what the Ryufes would have been like if the Festival had not been so commercialized and geared towards the tastes of Okinawa enthusiasts to the extent that it almost

ignored and alienated the Okinawan audience. However, it was only a one-time effort due to the lack of funds.

Thus even though the popularity of many Okinawan music events means increased opportunities for Okinawan musicians, there are voices of concern that it undermines the autonomy of Okinawan musicians, drives out a less well-off Okinawan audience, and modifies Okinawan music to the extent that its authenticity is compromised.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the Okinawa Boom – the Japanese celebration and appropriation of Okinawan difference in a broader context. In the Okinawa Boom, Okinawa was imagined as “the islands of comfort/healing,” where carefree, laid-back Okinawans lived a happy life in a tropical paradise, devoid of hardship and conflict, extended hospitality to visitors, and its cultural and natural difference was accentuated and celebrated. For self-proclaimed Okinawa lovers, their interest in Okinawa is articulated in pathological terms, as an addiction-like attraction. Okinawan responses to Japanese appropriators are ambivalent, ranging from welcome and pride, to unease and open indignation. They criticize the Okinawa Boom as a form of cultural exploitation, the “unconscious colonialism” (Nomura 2005) which essentializes Okinawan difference, covers up the history and reality of Okinawan marginalization, and serves the voyeuristic and escapist desires of Japanese.

Within the general fascination for Okinawan cultural difference, Okinawan music makes a particular appeal to Japanese appropriators. Okinawan music is central to Okinawan cultural identity, and also central in the Japanese imagination. It is imagined, by both Okinawans and Japanese appropriators, that Okinawan music, especially *min'yō*, has an organic, inseparable relationship with its culture, climate, and people, and thus epitomizes authentic life and selfhood, and embodied historicity, as opposed to fossilized Japanese *min'yō* and commercialized Japanese popular music. Just as the tourist (MacCannell 1976), Japanese appropriators pursue accessible exoticism and seek to experience authentic life and selfhood, where the separation and alienation of the self in postindustrial society could be remedied. Japanese attraction to Okinawan music and dance resulted in the rise of facilities that provide Okinawan music (such as Okinawan music restaurant-bars, Okinawa *min'yō* classes and coterie clubs) and in Okinawan cultural events, both in Okinawa and on the mainland. Such increased participation of Japanese creates ambivalent

effects on Okinawan music practice, regarding opportunities for Okinawan musicians, the autonomy of Okinawan musicians, accessibility of Okinawan audience to Okinawan music, and modification of Okinawan music. In the next chapter, I will examine ethnographic examples to discuss how the Okinawa Boom influenced the dynamics between Okinawans and Japanese through the medium of Okinawan *min'yō*.

## CHAPTER VI

### Okinawaphiles and their Okinawan Hosts

In this chapter, I ethnographically explore the example of the Japanese appropriation of Okinawa *min'yō* in the context of hobby and entertainment activities, looking at an Okinawa *min'yō* class and Okinawan restaurant-bar in Taisho. As the Okinawa Boom arose, Taisho Ward became an accessible, shortcut source of Okinawan culture, largely in consumable forms. Known as “the little Okinawa you can visit on a bicycle,” Okinawan restaurants, workshops for Okinawan dance, music, and martial arts, and Okinawan shopping drew many Japanese Okinawa lovers.

This popularity provided its Okinawan residents with a means of livelihood, and opportunities to reevaluate their culture and identity, and to reposition themselves in relation to Japanese as well as other Okinawans. I will discuss one such case in which an Okinawan entrepreneur has attempted to gain authority and respect by teaching Okinawan *min'yō*, while running an Okinawan restaurant and music bar. His *min'yō* students are mostly Japanese Okinawa enthusiasts, impassioned, in-depth hobbyists. More invested in their pursuit, they try to distinguish themselves from the general public. They pursue the experience of difference through their bodily engagement (learning to perform *min'yō* and *sanshin*) and interpersonal engagement with an Okinawan host (their *min'yō* teacher).

In this setting, Japanese students pursue further authentic Okinawan experiences, and try to distinguish themselves from generic, superficial Okinawa fans. They attempt “Okinawan Play” (cf. “Indian Play,” Deloria 1998), by emulating their Okinawan hosts, and also blurring the borders between Okinawan and Japanese. Some individuals attempt to tap further into the authentic experience by getting more deeply (or intrusively) engaged with the Okinawan host, or his Okinawan sponsor (*min'yō* master), which can create tension even among Japanese students,

let alone being criticized by Okinawan activists. To understand Japanese *min'yō* students' behavior, I draw on Deloria's work on "Indian Play," in which white Americans have appropriated Indian (Native American) practice and assumed Indian identities at different historical moments, as a way of pursuing an authentic personhood and an authentic American identity, when they felt that certain social changes were threatening the authenticity of their lives. In their attempts to learn and perform Okinawan music, and their desire to become involved in Okinawan life, Japanese *min'yō* students are similar to what Deloria calls "people hobbyists" who try intercultural contact and boundary crossing (1998, 135), trying to perform native rituals, music, dance, and even impersonate native Americans. For these Japanese, authentic value lies with actual living Okinawans, so they seek to intermingle with Okinawan individuals and try to replicate them.

### **Japanese Participation in Okinawan Music and Dance in Osaka**

Kuriyama's research (2008) on the current condition of Okinawan music (both classic and *min'yō*) in the Osaka-Kansai area shows an interesting division of labor in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age in *min'yō* classes, which matches both my observations in Okinawan *min'yō* classes and interviews with instructors, students, and fans of *min'yō*. The majority (about eighty per cent) of instructors are first generation Okinawan males who came to the mainland during the 1960s and 1970s, when collective employment was at its peak. *Min'yō* instructors who have their own schools usually had working class backgrounds, and invariably still had another job in order to make a living while teaching *min'yō*. These were usually working class jobs, which in the case of the Taisho district included the dockyards and metal recycling factories that Okinawan migrant laborers have worked at for decades (although they are now, with experience and seniority, in managing positions rather than manual workers), truck drivers, and jobs at Okinawan restaurants/*min'yō* bars that have become popular among Yamato visitors since the Okinawa Boom.

On the other hand, more than half and up to seventy or eighty per cent of students are Japanese, and among students, females and males are about the same ratio. While students of Okinawan descent tend to be older, over fifty, Japanese students are in their thirties and forties. There are other tendencies I noticed among Japanese students: that men tend to be older (in their forties to early sixties) and married; females tend to be younger (in their thirties and early forties)

and single; and that both genders tend to be office workers or freelancing professionals, or run their own businesses. People in this age range and with these types of professions have surplus income and leisure time to pursue their interests or hobbies. Also, economically independent single females are relatively free from family obligations, which explains why there are more single females in the class. In other words, if one considers the students from their socio-economic status (income, education, and occupation) alone, they tend to be in higher positions than those of their instructors, and may not have had any reason to show respect to the instructors if they had not been in this teaching-learning relationship through Okinawa *min'yō*.

For example, Kuriyama reports that the membership of the Ryukyu Min'yō Association's Kansai branch increased from about 100 in 1991 to 400 in 2007, and the number of classes increased from nineteen to twenty-five during the same period (during this period, the number of participants in Okinawan classical music, which had been more than that of *min'yō* students until the 1980s, decreased).<sup>56</sup> Although there is no statistical data, the number of participants in Japanese *min'yō* seem to have decreased, from what I heard at the Ryukyu Min'yō Association's concert and from a colleague from Osaka City University who is also a licensed Japanese *min'yō shihan*.

## Shimagukuru

Shimagukuru is a small, homey Okinawan *min'yō sakaba* (restaurant-bar where *min'yō* shows are performed) in Sangen'ya, at the northern entrance of Taisho Ward when coming from midtown Osaka. It is hidden on a quiet back street, and not easy for first-timers to find, unless they are guided by somebody who knows the place, have a local map, or have a *gurunavi* – a cell phone “gourmet navigation” application showing nearby restaurants. With its thick, dull white walls and two small opaque doors, one serving as the main entrance and the other as the back door, the back part of an air conditioner sticking out, and potted plants and a trashcan sitting in front, the small two-storied building might look like just another residence building in that neighborhood except for the sign carrying somewhat outmoded, stereotypic depictions of

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<sup>56</sup> The Ryukyu Min'yō Association is the oldest and the biggest among Okinawan *min'yō* associations. The Kansai branch was established in early 1970s.

hibiscus flowers and the roof of the Shuri Castle (the royal palace of the Ryukyu Kingdom), and words like “Okinawan dishes, Okinawa Soba,” “*min’yō* shows” along with the restaurant’s name, Shimagukuru, which means “The Heart of Shima (Okinawa)” in Okinawan dialect.

After walking through a narrow entrance beside a small kitchen-and-cashier’s counter, visitors can take off their shoes and climb up into the dining room, where eight low tables in two rows could seat about thirty guests, and that features a small stage in the corner where two or three people could stand touching elbows. On the wall of the stage, various sanshins hang – unusual ones, such as one with six strings, a gigantic one, and one covered with parachute fabric instead of the usual snakeskin (real or synthetic). Also adorning the wall are other instruments for *min’yō* performance, such as drums, a guitar, and a banjo, hanging haphazardly between a flower-shaped hat for *hanagasa* dance,<sup>57</sup> and a gigantic fan that is probably a souvenir from Okinawa.

The walls of Shimagukuru are covered with the green and yellow imitation *bingata* fabric that is typical in Okinawa-themed goods and spaces.<sup>58</sup> High up near the ceiling hangs a series of framed licenses and letters of appreciation, with grand titles like “Noborikawa-style study and preservation association” and “Tamaki-style Kōno branch,” revealing that the owners of this mom-and-pop restaurant-bar are in fact licensed *min’yō*/sanshin and licensed *ryūbu* instructors, too. This combination of a rather humble setting and somewhat big titles seemed unbecoming, but it was common for most of the Okinawa *min’yō* classes I visited as most *min’yō*/sanshin instructors, even those with high ranks in prestigious associations, almost invariably had other, more regular jobs to make their living. An informant in Taisho who had been involved in Okinawan traditional music and dance scenes for decades told me that was because most teachers (*shishō*) had come here as migrant workers. I heard tales about an

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<sup>57</sup> A kind of *ryūbu* dance.

<sup>58</sup> *Bingata* is a traditional Okinawan fabric dyed with elaborate patterns depicting nature printed on a background of yellow or other solid colors of fabric, all in bright and contrasting colors. It is most well known as used in Okinawan-style kimonos, especially costumes for certain Ryukyu court dance pieces such as *yotsutake*. Originals are expensive, hand-made crafts using stencil, resist dyeing and other elaborate and time-consuming techniques on delicate fabrics such as silk or linen, but now cheap, factory-printed cotton and synthetic imitations are widely available, and used in various Okinawan products, from Shimagukuru wear (Okinawan equivalent of aloha shirts) to the wrappings of Okinawan sweets, let alone decorations of numerous Okinawa-themed restaurants or souvenir stores. Due to its ubiquity in Okinawa tourism and cultural products, the color scheme and patterns of *bingata* are immediately recognizable by even those who are not particularly interested in Okinawan arts. I saw at many Okinawa related events, especially concerts and festivals, imitation *bingata* fabric improvised as wallpapers, backdrops, and tablecloths to create an instant visual effect of Okinawa.



Okinawan classic master in Taisho who had his finger cut by a press machine while working, but didn't lose his musical prowess a bit.

Under the licenses the walls were densely covered with menus, posters of Noborikawa's new *min'yō* releases, and notices for upcoming *min'yō* or *ryūbu* performances that were either related to the owners themselves or to the Noborikawa school with which Taira is affiliated. There were photos, too – of Taira performing or posing with big-name Okinawan musicians that fans of Okinawa *min'yō* can easily recognize, such as Noborikawa Seijin, Teruya Rinsuke, Oshiro Misako, China Sadao and Hirayasu Takashi, and pictures of his students at performances or memorable occasions, such as those of a female student running and playing sanshin at the finish line of a triathlon race held on Miyako Island (in comparison, the presence of the wife's *ryūbu* class was much less visible except for her licenses and a few photos). On the partition between the kitchen and dining room, the panels were covered with signatures and notes of praise from various celebrities, most of them Okinawans, who had visited this place.

While the dining room could squeeze in more than fifty people for insiders' parties on various occasions, such as after-concert, end-of-the year, or New Year's parties, I hardly saw more than fifteen (non-student) guests at one time. Live *min'yō* shows were held on Saturday nights on the small stage by Taira and his former-student assistant. Other nights he would simply play *min'yō* CDs on the stereo. A narrow staircase behind the stage led to the second floor that was the Taira's residence, where again sanshin cases and *ryūbu* props were stacked here and there between furniture and household goods.

Taira is a master instructor (*shihan*) of the Noborikawa Min'yō Association, and taught *min'yō* and sanshin classes four days a week, while Mrs. Taira who is a licensed *ryūbu* instructor (*kyōshi*), taught her classes three days a week. Most *min'yō*/sanshin and *ryūbu* lessons were held in the empty restaurant before the restaurant-bar opened; it was open from 5:00 p.m. to midnight except for on Thursdays. Although there were rough distinctions between beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels in the class schedule, it was up to students' discretion, and students would often switch class hours depending on their schedule. During business hours, the couple both cooked and served various Okinawan dishes for guests, and when the restaurant was busy or when Mrs. Taira was not around, Taira would go to the kitchen and cook, even in the middle of his class, letting his students practice by themselves.

In addition to the classes held at his restaurant, Taira had his own branch class in Nagoya, where he went every Thursday to teach at an Okinawan restaurant-bar owned by one of his Nagoya students; he slept at the restaurant, and came back the next day. He had another branch class in Kawachinagano (east of Osaka City) until recently, but he broke off with his deputy instructor, who now runs the class. There were about thirty regular students in Shimagukuru and about fifteen in the Nagoya class. Among these forty-something students, there were about five or six Okinawans, and the rest were Japanese students.

### **Shimagukuru's Tuesday Class**

The only class held during business hours was Taira's Tuesday night class for advanced students. It was held at night from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. to accommodate those who participated after work. Sometimes Taira would hold his Tuesday class in his home on the second floor when the restaurant was unusually full. Otherwise, the class would take up half of the dining room, providing guests with live music to listen to while they were dining and drinking, and there were students who first came to dine and became interested in *min'yō* that way.

One of the terms that describes Shimagukuru's atmosphere would be casualness. Often, the line between sanshin class and bar was blurred, and the drinking started for Taira himself even before the class began. He would put a glass of *awamori* on the table and sip it from time to time during the class. And the class would end abruptly even before 9:00 when Taira didn't feel like teaching. Sometimes he wasn't there from the beginning of class, but even then students didn't seem to mind particularly, or they would sigh somewhat humorously, saying "our *sensei* (teacher) escaped again," and go on to *jishū* (self-study) until he showed up later, often mildly drunk.

It was partly possible because most of the students were high-level, with an average of three to four years of experience. There were students with more than ten years of experience, and some had started only a couple of years ago, but had caught up quickly so that they could follow Tuesday's lesson without big problems. All of them had on-stage performance experience, aiding Taira, and several had received awards at the concours held by the Noborikawa Association. Typically, they did not spend the class learning new songs, but rather honing their skills on songs they had already learned. They moved from one song to another, and

sometimes a student would ask fellow students to sing or play a certain part of the song he or she was not confident about.

Even when he was around, Taira was not the kind of instructor who would explain things point by point. Class time would consist of continuous playing and singing together, without specific instructions, dotted with his Okinawa or *min'yō* themed tales. He randomly moved from one song to another without saying which song it was, and the students would recognize it by its introductory notes, and hurriedly look up the *kunkunshi* score or just follow if he or she had memorized it. Recognizing the interlude and following the sanshin was easier, one student told me, as he had learned most tunes by heart after about two years, but it was much harder to memorize lyrics and deliver the song with the accurate voice inflections called *fushimawashi*. It is repeatedly emphasized that it is the song that matters in *min'yō*, not the sanshin. Sanshin exists only to accompany the song, and one should play sanshin to the song one is singing, not the other way around, but most students seemed more comfortable with playing the instrument than with singing, and it was a common problem that singing became secondary to sanshin playing.

Taira taught by showing examples rather than by talking. When he wasn't satisfied with how students were playing, he would stop them and demonstrate by singing or playing the passage himself, often without detailed instructions. Sometimes he gave somewhat abstract instructions, such as relating what his own master instructor, Noborikawa, had said: "Don't force the music to come out, but let the sanshin do the talking" (*sanshin ni mono wo iwasero*). Two common mistakes, though, were repeatedly pointed out. The first mistake was with vocalization – Okinawa *min'yō* is known for its distinctive vocalization. The second problem that Taira was particularly irritated about was when students kept making mistakes pronouncing words in lyrics. He would quote Okinawan *senpai* (predecessors): "Sing [clearly] as if you bite off each word"; or "The song is language, and the lyrics won't make sense if you stick every word together like that." This seems straightforward enough, but for most non-Okinawan students (and even for Okinawans who don't speak dialect), it was not an easy task. It was hard to know where a word ended and the next word started, so they would pause at the wrong places or sing in liaison where there should be a pause.<sup>59</sup> Most songs taught in Shimagukuru were in Okinawan dialect,

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<sup>59</sup> It was particularly tricky because Japanese (and Okinawan) written texts do not put spaces between words like English or Korean. So when one doesn't understand the meaning of words in a sentence, as sometimes happens with *min'yō* lyrics, one could end up reading a string of syllables that makes no sense at worst. Usually Chinese

and unless an individual grew up either in Okinawa or with a family member who spoke the dialect every day, it was very hard to understand what the lyrics exactly meant.<sup>60</sup> One could have a general idea what the song was about from the title and from words that sounded similar to their Japanese counterparts, and could even get a Japanese translation with some research, but it was hardly the case that they understood what each word meant, and always pronounced it accurately or with a proper emotion or stress. The subtle phonemic difference between Japanese and Okinawan added to the challenge, as there are certain syllables that are very hard for Yamato students to pronounce however hard they try, which leads Okinawan-speaking listeners to feel that “something is wrong,” although there are always individuals who can fool the audience.

### **Drinking Parties**

After-class drinking and chatting was part of the routine, and few students left right away unless they had errands to run. Sometimes students would show up late even if they missed most of the lesson, just to join the drinking crowd, or students from other class hours or former students would come and sit at the next table, drinking and watching the class, waiting until the class would be over when the drinking and chatting started full-scale. Many students would jokingly confess that their real pursuit was drinking parties, rather than improving their sanshin and singing, as they were too lazy or fun-seeking. Often the boundary between the class and after-class drinking and socializing would be blurred, and students shifted between the roles of students, guests, and sometimes even servers for non-student guests, when the owners were out or needed extra hands. It was not uncommon for a couple of students to help out by taking orders and serving drinks, although they didn't cook food. When the after-hours drinking was over, students would voluntarily bring empty plates and glasses to the kitchen, pay for what they drank and ate (sometimes Mrs. Taira brought some free dishes), while someone good at figures would calculate the receipts. Usually long-time students were good at this, but new students, especially eager ones, would learn the routine quickly. Drinking often lasted until the last train.

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ideograms are inserted to help in understanding the meaning, but one could still make mistakes in pausing and connecting sounds, or accentuating different spots.

<sup>60</sup> The difficulty of lyrics varies song from song, ranging from completely Okinawan dialect to a mixture of Okinawan dialect and Japanese to Japanese. There are many *shinmin 'yō* songs written in Japanese after start of the twentieth century as compared to orally transmitted *min 'yō* songs and *koten* songs with dialect lyrics, but language difference in lyrics is not entirely chronological, as many – or even more – contemporary *shinmin 'yō* and popular songs have been purposefully written using partially or entirely Okinawan dialect.

Shimagukuru's proximity to the Taisho station allowed students from other areas to drink until the last minute, as most students could go back home by train so long as they caught the last train out of Taisho. Such an advantageous location was another reason why this particular sanshin school became popular among non-Okinawan students outside of Taisho. Most other sanshin classes and Okinawan restaurant-bars in the Taisho district were located down in Kobayashi, Hirao, and Minamiokajima, where more Okinawans lived, a ten to twenty-five minute bus ride from the station, and most of last buses stopped there at around 10:30, which made commuting from outside Taisho, let alone from outside Osaka, very inconvenient. But at Shimagukuru, sometimes drinking would continue even after midnight when there were students who lived nearby and who could go home by foot or bicycle, or who didn't mind paying a somewhat expensive taxi fare for an extra few hours of chatting and drinking.

### **Cultural Difference Enthusiasts and People Hobbyists**

Topics of chatting varied day by day, including daily happenings, recent events at Shimagukuru, some Okinawa-related performance someone had attended, or somebody's future travelling plans (usually to Okinawa but sometimes to different domestic or foreign destinations, too). Among the various topics, two things stood out. When he was not teaching, Taira turned into a playful, even mischievous *oyaji* (middle-aged man), oftentimes making nonsensical or lecherous jokes. But students, even young females, didn't mind much, but rather seemed to think it was part of his charm.

Of the two favorite topics, one was, not surprisingly, Okinawa. One of their favorite activities during and after class was listening to Taira's tales of Okinawa. However, soon I noticed that while there were some ardent Okinawa lovers – those who were interested in every aspect of Okinawa – not all students were single-heartedly interested in Okinawa, or in Okinawan music, but rather interested in experiencing cultural difference in general. Thus their other favorite topic was some kind of difference between peoples and regions – differences in preparing New Year's soup in various locales in Kansai, or different terms for “idiot” between Kanto and Kansai, or table manners in different countries. The topics were endless and I was often called upon to speak about the places I had lived before: Korea, the US, or eastern Japan.

They were not only interested in talking about different cultures and experiences but took great pleasure in having hands-on experiences. There was a loosely formed group of friends

(mostly students in the Tuesday class) who often met outside the class to have outings to various places. During the several months of our acquaintance they ventured on numerous outings, including: dining at an “authentic” Korean restaurant in Amagasaki; going to a traditional Japanese *min’yō* and *tsugaru-shamisen* music bar/restaurant;<sup>61</sup> a trip to a nearby island known for its scenic beauty, delicious seafood, and good sake; a visit to Betty’s Mayonnaise Club, a famous nightclub that presents burlesque shows by “new-halves” (post-op transsexuals); dining at a famous sushi restaurant and snacking at a *takoyaki* stand; the Ryukyu Festival; dining at a fancy Japanese restaurant; visiting a newly opened fancy Okinawan restaurant, and dining and watching a concert by an Okinawan group; and visiting an Osaka-born connoisseur of Okinawa music and sanshin, who had published his own book and runs a blog about learning sanshin, and seeing his collection and chatting with him on various topics about Okinawan music

These were not limited to Okinawan or foreign themes. Sometimes it was about tasting a real taste of Osaka. But in any case, they incorporated some kind of unusual element, something that was not known to just anybody but had to be discovered. And they greatly enjoyed talking with someone as much as they enjoyed trying new foods and drinks, be it a Japanese *min’yō* master, a transsexual burlesque dancer, an Okinawa *min’yō* connoisseur or a foreign tourist. It occurred to me that they were hobbyists – culture and people hobbyists.

If one considers that they were coming to *min’yō* class and then meeting again elsewhere on another day almost every week, they spent a significant amount of their time experiencing “something different.” Most of the students were over thirty (men in their forties to fifties and single women in their thirties and early forties), independent, and had professional jobs, ran their own businesses or were otherwise economically secure, and it seemed to allow them the money and time to afford such experiences. Learning Okinawan music at Shimagukuru seemed to serve their interests well, as it incorporated all their favorite elements – hands-on experiences, food, drink, and talking – and listening to anything concerning difference.

Not all *min’yō* classes are at *min’yō* bar restaurants, or as fun-oriented as Shimagukuru. Other classes I visited were more lesson-oriented. For example, at Shō in Hirao, deep in the Okinawan neighborhood, the instructor Naka had a strict no-alcohol policy although he ran a

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<sup>61</sup> *Tsugaru-shamisen* is a type of shamisen, the three-stringed instrument in Japanese traditional music. It is known that the Okinawan sanshin was developed from the Chinese sanxian, and then exported to mainland Japan where it was modified and developed into the Japanese shamisen. All three names indicate that they are three-stringed instruments, although there are significant variations in size, materials, and playing styles.

*min'yō* bar-restaurant just like Shimagukuru. He held his classes in his residence above the restaurant, and except for the time he was unexpectedly short of a performer and needed help from his students, he didn't even want his students to go down to the restaurant, so his students confessed that they had to gather at another *min'yō* bar-restaurant nearby (run by one of Naka's students) for after-class socializing. However, even with those more strict *min'yō* classes, there would be occasions when they could perform and listen to Okinawan music while drinking Okinawan alcohol, eating Okinawan food, and chatting with their friends at least several times a year, such as at seasonal celebrations like the New Year's party, cherry-blossom watching picnics, and end-of-the year parties, as well as at the celebration for their class concert.

### **Tales of Okinawa**

Okinawan hosts accommodate their students by offering them experiences full of the tangible cultural difference between Okinawa and Japan (e.g. tales of Okinawa, Okinawan food and drink, Okinawan hospitality), backed up by the fame of certain Okinawan musical figures made available by the Okinawa Boom. Okinawan hosts rely on and reinforce the Japanese stereotypical view of Okinawa, and avoid invoking charged memories of Okinawan marginalization, by omission or neutralization (Japanese responsibility is made invisible).

Tales that accentuate Okinawan difference vis-à-vis Japan are told on occasions of performing or teaching Okinawa *min'yō*, as if this is some kind of treat, sometimes with actual Okinawan foods and drinks. Often the personal touch adds authentic value to these tales, and even when the factual value of the tales is suspicious, such exaggeration is taken to indicate the Okinawan personality of the storyteller.

Taira's various tales mainly included his younger days in Okinawa before he came to Kansai as a migrant worker in the 1970s. He was from the central area of Okinawa Island neighboring Okinawa City. The site of his home village is now occupied by Kadena Air Base, the second-largest base in the US Air Force, and the first one built in Okinawa even before the end of the Battle of Okinawa in 1945. His memories of Okinawa were mostly associated with US bases, and poverty during the post-war US occupation period of his childhood and youth. His humorously put stories were mostly about how things were lacking, and how Okinawans, including himself, were doing eccentric or daring things out of young foolishness – something that usual people (Japanese) of the twenty-first century couldn't even imagine doing.

So we, about ten men, are left with a one-*sho* (about a half-gallon) bottle of *awamori* (Okinawan rice liquor) and no glass – so a man picks up an empty Coca-Cola bottle, winds a wire around its middle and rubs it hard for a while. Then that part of the bottle gets hot from the friction, right? Then he puts the bottle in the sea, and the bottle breaks into two clean pieces without shattering. . . Then he picks up the bottom and grinds its sharp edge off with a rock and voila, we have a glass now. But we are still ten men with only one glass, so we have to take turns using the glass and passing it to another. But as we're getting drunk, we forget the order or the one who is holding that glass won't let go of it but just keeps drinking, or talking with the glass in his hand. And the one waiting for his turn grows more and more impatient, glaring at the glass, and in the end, he yells [imitating slurred speech] "Hey! Pass that glass!" and sometimes it becomes a fight between drunkards. . .

Or he told stories about his culture shock or the funny mistakes he made when he had first moved to Kansai as a migrant worker because of language and cultural difference (he had first gone to and worked in Takarazuka, and then came to Osaka in the 1980s). Lapsing between Osaka and Okinawa dialect, he described how things so obvious and taken for granted by Osaka or Kansai locals – like the students themselves – had been so confusing to him.

I couldn't even understand what people said at the store or in the street. Take "arahen."<sup>62</sup> You say either "aru" (it's here) or "nai" (it's not here). What kind of speech is this? You Kansai people sure talk weird (students laugh). And I couldn't even order if I went to a restaurant. What kind of food is this? Say, I look at the menu and see *buta-tama* but would read it *buta-mu* because of the handwriting, and tell the lady, "Hey, give me one *buta-mushiyaki*" (translates to "steamed and grilled pork"), and the lady would reply, "Oh, you mean *buta-tama*?" Looking at me like I'm an idiot. . .<sup>63</sup>

It was somewhat similar in other *min'yō*/sanshin classes or clubs that I observed as well. Not all *min'yō* and sanshin teachers would take up a significant portion of class time telling stories, but even when it was the case, students didn't seem to complain or consider it a waste of learning time. Rather, they were as interested in those tales as they were in learning music.

Tales could be about the music students were learning at the moment, but often they were not music-related, but rather about how things were different in Okinawa, or how different Okinawans were from Japanese. Usually based on first-hand experience or the storyteller's family or friends, the stories were set in Osaka as well as in Okinawa, or sometimes in other

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<sup>62</sup> "It's not here" in Kansai dialect. Grammatically broken down, it may sound something like "It's here. . .not."

<sup>63</sup> *Okonomiyaki* is a Japanese savory pancake made with meat, seafood, eggs and vegetables and said to have originated in Osaka. It is indeed an extremely common dish in Osaka, and on local menus these pancakes are usually listed by names like *buta* (pork) *tama*, or *ika* (squid) *tama* rather than as *okonomiyaki*, and the Chinese ideograph for *tama* (玉) can look like *mu* (ム) in hiragana depending on handwriting styles.



well-known immigration destinations of the Okinawan diaspora, such as Hawaii or South America. The added personal touch of the teller was also very significant. Themes differed depending on the teller's background. For example, Naka of Shō is from Izena Island, where the founder of the Shō dynasty of the Ryukyu Kingdom came from, and he is very proud of that fact. Just like Taira included a lot of stories of his experiences with the US military bases, Naka's tales were often about the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom, from the Battle of Nakijin Castle between Ryukyu and Satsuma soldiers during Satsuma's seventeenth century invasion, to the recent placement of the remains of the last princess of Ryukyu in Ise Shrine that he had attended. For example, Naka started his tales of Okinawa with his favorite phrase, "Okinawans are all fools":

When Satsuma's soldiers first arrived at the Nakijin Castle across the sea after days of sailing, they were almost dying of exhaustion, hunger and seasickness. They could've been defeated with ease. But fools as we Okinawans are, they didn't know any better... so when the Satsuma soldiers started climbing up the castle, Nakijin soldiers first tried to throw rocks taken from the walls and realized it would only lower the walls to make it easy for the enemy. So they thought, aha! We will chase them off with something hot... They thought they were clever, but they would have used oil if they were really smart. But what did they use? They poured hot porridge over the enemy – and they ate that porridge and recovered, and climbed up the walls and defeated Nakijin's army. That's how Japan invaded Ryukyu successfully. And that's how dumb Okinawans are.

Sometimes the stories were too exaggerated or farcical to be believable, but people found them amusing and didn't mind much about their truthfulness, and such exaggeration or dramatization was perceived as showing the teller's personality – an Okinawan personality. Whatever the tales were about, they seemed to accentuate Okinawan differences – how things were or are different in Okinawa, or how Okinawan people were or are different in comparison to Yamato or Yamato people, or to modern society in general. Such Okinawan differences oftentimes included seemingly negative qualities such as being haphazard, daring (or foolish), spontaneous, unpunctual, sloppy, and laid-back. But those self-mockeries were told less with a sense of inferiority or cynicism, than with a sense of complacency. There was almost a ring of pride when statements like "That's why *Uchinānchu* can't beat *Yamatonchu*" were made.

### **Noborikawa Connection**

Famous *min'yō* musicians were often addressed in both Taira and Naka's stories about Okinawa, often with nicknames or intimate designations such as *nēnē* (sister). Both had personal

relationships with various *min'yō* musicians, which was not surprising considering their jobs, but also it was because a number of top-level *min'yō* musicians such as Noborikawa Seijin, Teruya Rinsuke, China Sadao and Oshiro Misako were from diasporic communities in Kansai. Taira's younger sister was once a member of a famous female vocal group that is known for their Okinawan *min'yō* style adaptations of different contemporary music genres.

Among those musicians, Noborikawa, who became famous through a number of Okinawa Boom movies as discussed in Chapter 5, played a central role in Taira's *min'yō* class. Taira's father was a talented sanshin player and *min'yō* singer in his hometown, and thus he had long been familiar with Okinawan music and dance. In the 1980s, he choreographed and taught for a well-known *eisā* group in Osaka, although he later split with the club. Thus it was obvious that he had never lacked talent in Okinawan music or dance, and nobody I met questioned his talent. But he did not have official titles for teaching Okinawan *min'yō* until recently, and in spite of his repeated tales of Seigwa (Noborikawa's nickname) with an emphasis on their friendship, it was relatively recently that he had become affiliated with the Noborikawa Association.<sup>64</sup> He achieved a *kyōshi* (instructor) license in 1998, and became a *shihan* (master-instructor) in 2002.<sup>65</sup> He had taught *min'yō* and sanshin for some years, but he had only entered into the Noborikawa Association about seven years ago, and he did so in a somewhat unconventional way. Instead of learning from Noborikawa in person, Taira had mastered his style by himself listening to his tapes, and the story has it that Noborikawa couldn't help but recognize Taira once he had listened to him. He somehow managed to bypass the *min'yō* license system and became an instructor of the prestigious Noborikawa school.

He also repeatedly emphasized his personal relation with Noborikawa. Many of his tales of Okinawa included Noborikawa, calling him by his nickname Seigwa and emphasizing how close they were. Among many other Okinawan *min'yō* masters, there could be no better figure than Noborikawa when it came to publicity among Japanese. Noborikawa was a musician with unquestionable musical prowess and had been known as such among Okinawans for decades, but to most Japanese, he was known for his characters in the Okinawa Boom movies. Diasporic

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<sup>64</sup> "Seigwa" (little Sei) came from Noborikawa's first name, Seijin, with the Okinawan diminutive "-gwa," as in Kubun-gwa.

<sup>65</sup> A *kyōshi* can officially teach students in class under the name of a *min'yō* association but cannot have his or her own school under the name of the *min'yō* association of his or her association. A *shihan*, on the other hand, can run a school under his or her name.

Okinawans in Taisho who learn Okinawa *min'yō* usually had their own preferences, from a wide range of *min'yō* musicians and styles that they had been listening to for many years. But Japanese students usually had limited experience with Okinawan *min'yō*, and usually turned to those who had been most publicized, or those recommended by their instructors or Okinawan acquaintances. Thus in this case Noborikawa was an undeniably effective figure for Taira to align himself with.

Dependence on the Okinawa Boom publicity was not limited to Okinawan entrepreneurs and hosts, but Okinawan cultural activists also relied on the fame of Okinawan musicians who were well known on the mainland in order to promote their causes and functions. For example, Kansai Okinawa Bunko invited a master of Yaeyama *min'yō* to perform live shows and teach special classes. The language used in advertising the event exalts the fame of the musician in a mystic tone:

Yaeyamanu Takara (Yaeyama's treasure) -  
Miyara Kosei's Min'yō Live Show and Sanshin Class

After a long waiting, here comes another Miyara Kosei live event in Kansai.

That beautiful, sweet voice is still alive and kicking. While many [*min'yō*] singers find their voices grainier as they age, Miyara Kōsei's voice never declines, but mysteriously keeps its high and smooth quality. If you listen to his Yaeyama *min'yō* in person, you can't help but feel, all the more so if you close your eyes, the sense of life and the deep history of the people of the Yaeyama Islands, which has an infinitely rich and beautiful nature. This time the live show is limited to only fifty people due to its limited space, even though we might be reproached by those who can not make it. This is a rare opportunity in Kansai. We recommend that you reserve a seat as soon as possible.

(additional contact information)

In addition, on [December] 2nd, *as the advisor of the Kansai Okinawa Bunko Sanshin Club*, he will have a sanshin class [at the Bunko]. This event is open to public, so those of you who like, cherish, and practice sanshin, *the Miyara Kōsei* will give YOU basic lessons of sanshin as your instructor. It may sound *like a dream*, but it is for real. It has come true. We are just grateful.

The members of the Bunko Sanshin Club are given priority for the class, but the leftover seats will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. So if you are interested, make a reservation as soon as possible.

(2007 Moromizato, from a Kansai Okinawa Bunko leaflet, emphases in italic are mine, those in uppercase are original)

### **Notes on Min'yō Associations and the Award/License System**

*Min'yō* association somewhat sounds like an oxymoron, considering the spontaneous and anonymous nature of *min'yō* (at least ideally), but Okinawan *min'yō* has been in the process of

formalization following the model of Japanese traditional arts for several decades. One does not have to hold a license issued by a *min'yō* association to perform *min'yō* or informally teach, and there are numerous amateurs and semi-professionals who teach Okinawan *min'yō* in various settings, including many amateur coterie groups. However, one needs a license and affiliation with a *min'yō* association to formally teach students, and gather fees, under the name of the association. Qualification is a three-tiered system consisting of *shinjinshō* (beginner's prize), *yūshūshō* (excellence prize), and *saikōshō* (top prize). In order to achieve a license, one needs to go through a series of *min'yō* concours (contests) that are hosted by the association until achieving the top prize, and then finally be recommended by one's *shihan* (*min'yō* master) and recognized by the association.

This system is similar to that of many other Japanese traditional arts (such as ikebana, tea, calligraphy, shamisen, etc). In a sense Okinawa *min'yō* has been undergoing a certain kind of standardization. However, unlike the systems of many Japanese traditional arts in which such standardization has been established, and whose authority few people officially question (in spite of numerous rumors that “it’s all about money and politics”), the standardization (or systemization) process of Okinawan *min'yō* is in a great deal of dispute internally and externally, and the authority of a certain “licensed” master or of a certain association (except for a few established ones) is often questioned or derided. It is often said that it is much easier and takes less money to get awards or a teaching license in Okinawan *min'yō* than in other Japanese arts, whether one likes the fact or not.

What complicates and somewhat undermines the authority of associations and the license system is the constant division between *min'yō* associations. The first *min'yō* association, the Ryukyu Min'yō Association, was established in 1957, but since that time new associations have continued to form, mostly by dividing off from existing associations, and currently there are as many as thirteen Okinawan *min'yō* organizations of different sizes. Rivalry and feuds between associations is common, and that was why I decided to learn *min'yō* and sanshin in an amateur coterie club in the first place rather than going to one of many *min'yō* schools that could be easily found, because I thought that if I were affiliated with one class, it would be harder to visit and interview in other classes.<sup>66</sup> It partly confirmed my concern that people, especially

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<sup>66</sup> I attended sanshin classes offered by the Kansai Okinawa Bunko taught by a Gajimaru member and a free-lancing Okinawan musician in turn.

instructors, asked what class I was attending when they saw I was able to play sanshin and knew a few *min'yō* songs. When I humbly answered “at some amateur club” or “here and there” with an air of modesty, I was answered with a lament like “what a shame (or waste)! You could easily make a beginner’s award if you were in our class.” Such rivalries or disputes, as well as friendship between instructors or classes (within an association and between associations) were common, so I learned over the months whether or not to mention somebody’s name in front of others.

Almost all the individuals I interviewed, including four *min'yō shihan* (master instructors) with high ranks in their respective associations, seemed to agree that the division and new formation of *min'yō* associations was hardly about musical differences or performing styles but rather about internal politics. The usual scenario was that someone who had considerable talent and influence, and a high but not top position in an existing organization, would quit and start a new organization with his followers, thereby becoming “the top” of the new organization. Such division did more harm than good to the general quality of the music, as each association would seek to maintain or increase their influence by enlarging their size, which came from membership, and thus they made receiving awards and licenses as easy as possible. An ethnomusicology graduate student, who is also a student of Okinawan *koten* music and conducted research on Okinawan performing arts in Osaka, dismissed the issue of dividing organizations as “lame, not worthy of any academic study or discussion.”

The increased number of Yamato participants affected Okinawa *min'yō* in various ways. One *min'yō* master instructor thought that the quality of *min'yō* had generally declined since the influx of Japanese participants. He thought that it was extremely hard for Japanese singers to reproduce the quality of Okinawan *min'yō*, because of linguistic differences and subtle differences in vocalization, and yet they achieved licenses if they kept on trying, as the associations could not totally shun them, and eventually they got to teach others their incorrect singing style.

Another master instructor put the influence of increased Yamato participants in different terms. He said that associations lowered their standards so that they could issue awards and licenses to more (but less qualified) Okinawans, otherwise “everything would be taken by *Yamatonchu*” because they were persistent and meticulous, unlike Okinawans, and would eventually manage to imitate the Okinawan style, although this did not necessarily mean their

singing was the same as Okinawan singing. Here again the difference in disposition between Okinawans and Japanese, sometimes put humorously and self-effacingly and sometimes cynically, can be seen.

### Symbiotic Relationship

A common pattern that I observed in groups where a majority of Japanese Okinawaphiles revolved around a small number of Okinawans, including Shimagukuru, is that Japanese Okinawaphiles and Okinawan hosts were often in a symbiotic relationship, in which the Okinawan hosts endorsed the authenticity of the practice of Japanese students, and Japanese students provided their hosts with the recognition, respect, and authority that they might have lacked among their fellow Okinawans, thus empowering them to a certain extent.

In fact, Taira's reputation was not as high or secure among Okinawans as among *Yamatonchu* students. His position as a *min'yō* master instructor was not as highly regarded as other *min'yō* master instructors in Taisho by Okinawans or by those in the Noborikawa Association in Okinawa, from what I heard, because of the way he had achieved his license.

One example of this gap was how he was referred to among his students and outside of his *min'yō* class, especially by Okinawans in the Taisho neighborhood. While he was referred to as "Taira sensei" by his own students, he was invariably called "Taira-san" among Okinawans.<sup>67</sup> It was not unusual for those outside of *min'yō* learning to call a *min'yō* instructor "-san" instead of "-sensei," but in Taira's case it sometimes included a cynical comment like "Since when he is a *sensei*?" Despite this, few people questioned his talent as a *min'yō* singer and sanshin player. An Okinawan who held favorable feelings for Taira while acknowledging his shortcomings told me that the main reason Taira couldn't get along with, and finally broke away from, the *eisā* group he had been teaching, and why he often had disputes with people (especially Okinawans), was his desire to be treated as larger-than-life. He thought that Taira let himself be surrounded by *Yamatonchu* because it was easier to be treated as significant (like being called *sensei*), when not

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<sup>67</sup> *Sensei*, meaning "teacher, instructor, or master," is a title used for a person in a teaching or instructing position, ranging from kindergarten and school teachers to professors, and masters in some kind of arts or profound knowledge (not just technical skills), may be called *sensei*. In most cases, this title implies a certain degree of esteem for the addressee, compared to a more neutral title like *-san* (equivalent to "Mr." "Ms." Or "Miss.")

many Okinawans would agree on his authority as much as he would wish. But at the same time he thought that Taira's desire made him vulnerable and easily taken advantage of by *Yamatonchu* who approached him to exploit his connection with Noborikawa. The recent breakup of the Kawachinagano class was a case in point; a Japanese musician had approached him, wishing to learn Okinawa *min'yō*. He sang Taira's praises and acted loyal to him until he rose up to a position in which he had gained some independence and made connections with others in the association, he then he broke off their connection.

Although Taira himself was very proud of his class becoming a branch of a prestigious *min'yō* association, and emphasized that fact every chance he got, there was a significant amount of conflict between him and other masters of the same association (who had learned the top master's style in the proper way), or between him and those outside of the license system (who sees him as only acting on desire for personal gain), or even among his students (between those who wanted to "simply learn and enjoy Okinawan *min'yō*" and those ambitious individuals who wanted to share in the prestige of their class or the association, by getting personal recognition from the teacher or by getting licenses).

There are two Noborikawa branches currently in Kansai, and Taira, who originally brought the Noborikawa Association into his business, was maintaining a somewhat precarious alliance with his friend and business partner Shinjo, another Noborikawa-style master instructor and also successful businessman, who was quite notorious in the Okinawan circle for his entrepreneurship. The Noborikawa Association was a young association, and I got the impression that it relied a great deal on the personal charisma of Noborikawa himself, who was especially well known among Japanese due to his media publicity. And in turn, Taira and Shinjo seemed to compensate for their less-than-secure reputations as *min'yō* musicians by depending on Noborikawa's influence.

As a first generation Okinawan who spent his youth in Okinawa and worked in Kansai as a migrant worker, and as a talented *min'yō* musician, Taira holds a certain degree of authenticity, especially in front of Yamato students. But at the same time, that kind of authority (as a *sensei*) is maintained only when there are not people around with a similar or greater claim to authority, such as having been born and having grown up in Okinawa in that period. Thus the more Taira kept emphasizing his personal connection with Noborikawa, I suspected it paradoxically revealed his insecurity in the *min'yō* world and also in the Okinawan community in Taisho.

However, these entrepreneurs were not naively taken advantage of by Japanese, or simply driven by material gain, but acted with their own agency and perspective. Taira was clearly aware of the reality of discrimination. He himself had come to Kansai in his twenties in the 1970s, when collective employment was at its height. Although he had worked with cultural activists in the past (or probably because of that experience), he was dismissive, or skeptical, of the efficacy of cultural activism. At first he spoke so badly about Okinawan cultural activists, that I kept the fact that I was spending time with them a secret until much later (the feeling seemed mutual except for a few individuals who were favorable to Taira). But after a few months, when he realized the scope of my research and knew I was meeting with cultural activists as well, he calmly gave me the reason he was skeptical about Okinawan cultural activism.

For him, discrimination was a universal condition that happened across time and place between a stronger party and a weaker party, regardless of who they were. At the time Okinawans happened to be at the bottom, he and other Okinawans suffered, but it was nothing personal. Thus he thought that the anti-discrimination movement was naive, and would not achieve any meaningful results. Moreover, he was weary of the rhetoric of victimhood. He thought that the language of anti-discrimination fixed Okinawans in the place of victims, or losers, and he didn't want to remain a loser. Also, he thought that politicizing music and dance ruined the art of music and dance. He referred to musicians, like Noborikawa himself and other pupils of Noborikawa's, as *geinin* (entertainer, artistic person), individuals who seemed to hold a different place than ordinary people. It was not necessarily higher than others, but the world of *geinin* revolved around different rules, as if being a musician at all times, and being ready to serve and entertain people was their full-time duty, even if, for example, one's own parents passed away. Thus he lamented that Koja Misako, a former member of Nenes and very famous *min'yō* musician on her own, was so deep into the liberation movement (she increasingly steered away from the usual entertainment stages and geared toward performances with a political agenda, often performing with amateur singers from other underprivileged minorities). He lamented that her voice was as beautiful as it had always been, but now nobody listened to her because she had disappeared from the popular stage and secluded herself.

From this, it seemed apparent that the reason he was opposed to cultural activism was not because he was only interested in material gain through business. Teaching Okinawan *min'yō*



provided him with opportunities to have his vision heard and sometimes realized, as well as opportunities to be respected and recognized as a *sensei* when otherwise he wouldn't be.

However, this reciprocal relationship is a precarious one, as Japanese fans can move on and find a more accommodating host, or even go independent, which confirms the criticism of Okinawan cultural activists that cultural appropriation can and does reinforce the exploitative relationship between Japanese and Okinawans. I heard several stories about some of his former Japanese students, often professional musicians, who initially had been respectful and loyal. But once they moved up in the *min'yō* license system with the help of Taira, and got into a position that allowed them to open their own classes, they simply broke with him and went independent, or sometimes even took over a branch class that Taira had entrusted them with.

### **Tension between Old and New Students**

The heavy reliance on the fame of Noborikawa and his association not only created tensions between Taira himself and his ambitious former students, but also between his older students from before he joined the Noborikawa Association, and his relatively new students from after the participation of the Noborikawa Association. This was because the former felt the latter were more interested in gaining access to Noborikawa himself, with a tourist-like interest, than in learning and enjoying *min'yō* as it was.

Once a new student, on his trip to Okinawa, visited Noborikawa's house and videotaped his visit and conversation with Noborikawa. Noborikawa was known to be a very amicable, artless, chatty man and the visitor was welcomed without any hesitation. He made a copy of the video recording and gave it to Taira.

One Tuesday night during the class, Taira showed the video recording of Noborikawa that the student had taken. Taped at Noborikawa's house, it was filled with Noborikawa's *yuntaku* (chatter, casual talk) for three hours on various topics in dialect which was hardly comprehensible except to Taira, who was interpreting or making comments on whatever Seigwa was saying on the screen. At the end, Noborikawa added a short message in Okinawan-accented Japanese for "everyone at Taira's class."

As usual, Taira was very pleased and proud, saying that Noborikawa was such a generous and easygoing man to even accept Taira's students, and encouraged those in the class to pay him a visit when they had a chance to go to Okinawa. An old student politely responded with a smile,

and slight sarcasm that Taira didn't seem to notice, "Oh, no, I wouldn't possibly dare to go and visit him like that." I knew that his sarcasm was rather directed toward the new student, who had been a student at Shimagukuru for less than one year with beginner-level ability, and had the audacity to rush into the grand master's house, take up his time as though they were friends, and put a video camera in front of him for the entire visit.

After leaving the class, two old students (including the abovementioned one) accompanied me to a nearby restaurant and complained about that new student and the other new students like him. These two men had started learning from Taira eleven or twelve years earlier, four to five years before Taira became a Noborikawa school *shihan* and Shimagukuru became a Noborikawa-style school. One of them, a *zainichi* Korean, had even married a Japanese woman whom he met at Shimagukuru three years previously. Both of them were respected by others as experienced, advanced sanshin players, and personally attached to Taira. They also actively participated in, supported, or organized various events and activities outside, such as annual parties in Shimagukuru or guest performances that were arranged through the Noborikawa connection, without expressing criticism or discontent. However, between the two of them, their tone turned sarcastic.

In general they thought that all this "Noborikawa business" had ruined Shimagukuru's original atmosphere, when everyone had been there for the love of music and had enjoyed it, and that was all. To them, it was understandable that Taira-sensei made such a big deal about Noborikawa, and his desire for fame and recognition was, along with his temper, one of his character weaknesses he just couldn't help; but they thought that he, and the class, would have been better off if Taira wasn't so obsessed with Noborikawa, as his music had been good before he had anything to do with Noborikawa. I heard that it was Taira's early students who had suggested that he get a *shihan* license when they learned their sanshin teacher was not widely respected within the Okinawan circle because he didn't have an official qualification, and thought getting a license from a prestigious association would fix this. These two students might have been part of it but it seemed to me that now they were having second thoughts.

Thus not only Okinawan cultural activists, but also some Japanese (and Korean) appropriators were aware of this precarious relationship in which Taira was dependent on his students, not the other way around. He was dependent on them just as much as he was dependent on the fame of the well-publicized Okinawan *min'yō* musician and association.

## Cultural Appropriation in the Activist Context

In Chapters 4 and 5, I mainly discussed Japanese cultural appropriation of Okinawan music and dance in the context of entertainment and leisure. The use of Okinawan music and dance in entertainment and leisure in apparently depoliticized forms is the most prominent aspect of the Okinawa Boom, the aspect which Okinawan cultural activists problematize the most, and contrast to their own Okinawan music and dance practice. However, cultural appropriation occurs in the context of activism with various agendas, pertaining to issues such as human rights, peace, or the environment. Moreover, as revealed in Chapters 2 and 3, even in Okinawan-led activist groups, such as the Gajimaru Club, the TOCC, and Kansai Okinawa Bunko, the distinctions between Okinawans and non-Okinawans, and political practice (namely affirmation of identity and challenge to the myth of ethnic and cultural homogeneity) and leisure and fun-seeking behaviors are not necessarily clear-cut. Thus such distinctions are ideological to some extent, rather than accurately reflecting reality. And yet, there are types of activism that rely heavily on cultural appropriation in the sense that the main participants are predominantly Japanese and their agenda is of service more for the general Japanese public than for the particular interests of Okinawans (in Okinawa and diaspora), or they even operate at the expense of Okinawan interests, and they tend to reinforce the asymmetry between Okinawans and Japanese. Okinawan cultural activists criticize such cases as another example of the Japanese exploitation of Okinawan culture. For example, Gajimaru members mentioned that while collaborating with other activist groups, some Japanese activist groups learned *sanshin* or *eisā* from Gajimaru and then started to perform at rallies or other events with activist causes. What upset Gajimaru members was less that non-Okinawans were appropriating *eisā* or *min'yō* for their cases, but their seeming lack of respect, that they didn't find their appropriation problematic, or that they claimed their cause justified their appropriation; but Gajimaru members found them just as intrusive and exploitative as apolitical hobbyists.

Sometimes entrepreneurial and ambitious Okinawans may take the initiative and lead activism in Japanese-dominant settings. In this section I will briefly discuss one such case, a controversial *eisā* and Okinawan *min'yō* group that is successful and popular among Japanese audiences, but is criticized by not a few Okinawan cultural activists and even usually apolitical

Okinawan music connoisseurs, not only for its politics (or lack thereof), but for its lack of authenticity – in its purpose and in the quality of its musical performance. This case stood out because this individual and his performance groups, business, and organization were exceptionally successful despite the large amount of criticism that fell on him and his activities, and he seemed to enjoy a somewhat unquestionable charisma among his mostly Japanese followers.

It is not my position to judge the authenticity of the group, but the criticism against the group, or the grounds for the criticism, reveals how the authenticity and authority of a practice and its participants is constructed and contested. For the purpose of this chapter, such discussion will illuminate the symbiotic relationship between Okinawan hosts and Japanese Okinawaphiles.

Satoshi is a musician, activist, and entrepreneur who leads the Satoshi Band, a Pan-Asian style music band with a leaning towards Okinawan style, Uminchu Udui (Dance of the Sea People), an *eisā* group, and Urizun (Early Summer), a non-profit organization that promotes peace and environmentalism. He and his band perform live on stage at more entertainment and commercially oriented occasions, such as at an annual Okinawan music concert that is sponsored by the Japanese Travel Bureau, and they hold their own concerts. But they also appear at or organize events with peace, human rights, and environmental themes, sometimes on their own, and sometimes in collaboration with other NPOs, or by the invitation of local governments such as city or ward offices. With the help of his staff and family, he runs several businesses, such as an Okinawan music restaurant-bar, a music producing and management office, a hostel and tour guide service in Osaka and his hometown in Okinawa, and he participates in an environmental recovery project in Central Asia. Satoshi and his groups declare that they promote peace and protect the environment through music and dance. Part of the profit from the concerts, events, and sales from the booths outside of the concert was said to help the project Urizun had been involved in for the last couple of years, planting trees in desertified areas in Central Asia.

The fact that Satoshi had an Okinawan background combined with this particular agenda is not totally coincidental. In activism in Japan, the conflation between certain political agendas and certain ethnic/social groups is common, which makes each ethnic or social group an emblem of such political agendas; for example, Burakumin are closely associated with human rights (to be exact, anti-discrimination) issues to the point that many people in Osaka, when they hear the term “human rights,” almost automatically assume that the issue is somehow related to

Burakumin. Koreans are often associated with discrimination and forceful cultural assimilation, but there is also a strong association with the Japanese state's wartime atrocities such as the forced drafting of Korean workers and the notorious sex slavery of young Korean women, euphemistically called the "comfort women." Environmentalist and antiwar/peace agendas have become associated with Okinawa, a place that has had a unique appeal to the public due to the stark contrast between its beautiful, sub-tropical nature and its traumatic war-related experiences with the Japanese and US forces in the past (the Battle of Okinawa and forced collective suicide) and through to the present (the presence of US bases and various social problems that they have created). Such ready-made associations between certain ethnicities and certain agendas tend to give individuals a privileged position to speak on a particular issue with more authority and with a ring of authenticity.

Satoshi started his career in Osaka as a sanshin instructor in the Kansai Okinawa Bunko sanshin class in the late 1990s, but later he broke off from the Bunko, taking his followers – all Japanese – with him. From the scale and diversity of his operation, he and his groups are very successful and popular, especially considering his relatively young age; he was in his early thirties when I met him in 2008. Where he might have lacked in musical prowess, as some claim, he compensated for this with his personal charm, showmanship, and charisma on stage. At first glance, it seems like a happy marriage between entertainment and activism, as he performs Okinawan-style music and dance to promote good causes. And yet, his practice was criticized or dismissed by those who had worked with him or observed him in Okinawan activist circles, and also by some Okinawan *min'yō* connoisseurs.

The criticism of him was twofold: one was about the quality of his music. At his performances, he performs both traditional Okinawan *min'yō* and original songs he has written and composed that he plays on his sanshin. He also teaches sanshin and *min'yō* at his NPO office space. In the circle of professional Okinawa *min'yō* he is either unknown or, among those who know him, he is not taken seriously, due to his sheer lack of basic training and skills in *min'yō*. One Japanese connoisseur who was trained in Okinawa, wrote a book about Okinawa *min'yō* and sanshin, and sometimes collaborated with professional Okinawan *min'yō* and classic musicians – bona fide musicians who had titles from Okinawan *min'yō* associations – noted from his observation of Satoshi's singing that Satoshi seemed to sing Okinawan *min'yō* as he pleased, and didn't seem to care about sticking to accuracy in vocalization, rhythm, and lyrics. However,

when I visited Satoshi's sanshin class, he acted with an authority that he attributed to his background – his upbringing on his native island in Okinawa, and the local tradition that was passed from his ancestors to himself in natural terms. And his Japanese students respectfully followed his instruction. According to the connoisseur, there was once an older man in his sixties from the same island who had pointed out mistakes and inaccuracy in Satoshi's *min'yō* singing, and Satoshi had dismissed the older man on the grounds that it was his own elders who had taught him its music, and he refused to be judged by such conventional standards.

From the criticism of those knowledgeable in Okinawan *min'yō* and from my own observation, it was Satoshi's strategy to avoid the scrutiny of other Okinawans who were capable of evaluating or questioning his *min'yō* or sanshin skills, based on their established knowledge of Okinawan traditional music. At the same time he derived his authority for his *min'yō* and sanshin teaching and on stage from being an Okinawan who was born and grew up in a village surrounded by relatively untainted nature and tradition. In order to follow this strategy, he kept few Okinawan individuals around him who could criticize him over the accuracy or authenticity of his music and dance, and he mainly performed for Japanese audiences. In my observation, it seemed like a case of symbiosis between the Okinawan host and Japanese Okinawaphiles, in which the Okinawan host whose cultural authority was not uniformly secure among his fellow Okinawans sought out Japanese followers, among whom he could claim the authenticity of his practice as Okinawan.

The second criticism of Satoshi from other Okinawan activists pertained to his activism. Apparently his music and dance events, sometimes combined with charity or other hands-on activities, were organized to promote peace and environmental preservation, among other things. He was criticized by activists who had worked with him in the past for his lack of sincerity – according to them, he was selling his agenda simply to please his Japanese audience and make a profit, or to achieve fame and respect that he wouldn't otherwise attain, instead of making a difference. So what made his critics think that his activism was less genuine than it could have possibly been?

I attended two of his peace and eco-themed concerts and watched recordings of other performance occasions. He certainly had an impressive talent to excite and emotionally move the audience through his well-crafted narratives, accompanied by his sanshin and songs, and his showmanship. Like the other Okinawan *min'yō* instructors I discussed earlier in this chapter and

many other verbally skilled Okinawan musicians, he provided his own tales of Okinawa, which were repeated from performance to performance, about his village and its surrounding nature as he was growing up, and about how they were transformed or destroyed by development – construction for resorts. One particular tale was about a sea turtle that came back to the beach near his village to lay eggs. The story, predictably, had a sad ending: the beach was destroyed by construction to build a resort, the turtle’s nest site was filled with concrete, and the turtle was never to come back. He delivered the story of the turtle with such detail and emotion that by the end of his story, I could hear sniffing and see some of audience wiping their tears. The lesson of his tale was that human greed had destroyed the lives of beautiful creatures he had grown up with, and his childhood memories, and he was determined that he would protect nature, human, and the earth, by “planting trees on earth and in people’s hearts.” However, the ambience of the concert didn’t remain melancholy for long, as he performed several songs of his own composition towards the end that were bright and upbeat, with simple, repetitive, and hopeful lyrics with tropical themes, like “Mango Dance,” for which he encouraged the audience of diverse ages – from children to the elderly – to clap, shout, and dance together. As he turned the entire event to a festive mood, he urged his audience to participate in recycling, carrying their own portable chopsticks rather than using disposable ones at restaurants, and buying eco-friendly goods. His skills to move the audience were truly remarkable.

At his concerts, as the main performer and emcee of the events, he assumed the role of a mediator between the audience, modern humans who had lost touch with nature in their greed and desire for modern convenient life, and the nature that had been victimized by indiscriminate development that was a result of human greed. Judging from his narrative, Satoshi was apparently drawing his authority to do so from his Okinawan background, having witnessed the destruction of nature first-hand at his home. Similarly, at his concert that had been organized by Naniwa Ward office human rights department as the Ward’s official human-rights and peace-themed event, he again assumed the role of messenger of peace, by virtue of coming from Okinawa – the place that had suffered during the war worse than anywhere else in Japan, and experienced many sacrifices, which granted him a privileged position to promote peace.

Curiously, however, devoid in his narratives of peace and the environment were the details of who was responsible for such destruction and war. As detailed and emotional as his description of ecological destruction and wartime sacrifice, they lacked the particularities of

when, how, and why those tragedies had occurred and who had caused them, but instead expressed himself in generic and abstract terms, such as nature, development, greed, war, life, human, and peace. This was a crucial difference from the activism that surrounded the social and historical problems that involved Okinawa and Okinawans, because both war and environmental problems are considered to be the consequences of power asymmetry between mainland Japan and Okinawa, which also involved the US Forces. For example, wartime destruction and atrocities on Okinawa and towards Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa were perpetrated by both the Japanese military and the US military, while ecological destruction had been created by both the US military bases and by the unsustainable resort development fueled by mainland capital. Part of the efforts by activists who engaged in peace and/or environmental issues in Okinawa was devoted to making Japanese citizens aware of their own complicity (if unwitting and unintended) and responsibility in these issues as part of the larger Japanese society, who were the implicit beneficiaries of such unfair arrangements, but also were the ones who could pressure the government to make necessary changes. While appealing to the conscience of Japanese citizens to participate is considered a necessary part, it often creates a backlash – the resistance of Japanese who feel criticized for things that they are not personally responsible for, and such messages of Japanese complicity create feelings of guilt.

What Satoshi's rhetoric does is remove the guilt and discomfort of being part of the problem from the predominantly Japanese audience by framing environmental destruction and suffering from war in generalized, abstract terms. Such removal of Okinawan particularity was especially suggestive in that Satoshi's peace concert was held in the same week as the Osaka District's dismissal of the lawsuit against Ōe Kenzaburō, the Nobel Prize-winning author, and his publisher Iwanami, for Ōe's depiction of Okinawan civilian deaths forced by the Japanese military during the Battle of Okinawa (Rabson 2008). As discussed in the Introduction, the Ōe-Iwanami court case was one of the incidents that marked the divergence of Okinawan memories from the dominant Japanese nationalist narrative regarding the Pacific War, a divergence which is not only historical but also still ongoing. As the court case had been going on at the Osaka District Court since 2005, Okinawans in Okinawa and Osaka had closely monitored the development of the case, and had responded vigorously with mass protests, writings, and media, while it seemed to go largely unnoticed by ordinary citizens of Osaka. The Gajimaru Club and Kansai Okinawa Bunko were among the most devoted in following the case while hearings were



being held – they distributed leaflets on the street, accommodated Okinawan journalists and intellectuals from Okinawa who visited to attend the hearings, and gathered at the District Court on hearing days in the hope that they would get many raffle tickets for admission to the hearing so they themselves could attend, or handed the winning tickets to Okinawan journalists or writers. Although not everyone was as keen as Gajimaru and Bunko, many Okinawans in Taisho were keenly interested in the court case, and when the District Court dismissed the case, the joy of victory and achievement – for social and historical justice – swept the circle of Okinawan activists.

On the other hand, although Satoshi's peace concert was held soon after the court case, there was no mention of group suicide or the court case at all, but Okinawa was presented rather as a symbolic place, "the island of peace," in his narration and his songs. And his audience, taking his lead, all became pacifists who sang and danced together for peace. Like his other concerts I had attended, the concert was filled with emotions, and I heard individuals commenting that the performance had been very moving as they exited the hall.

The problem with the kind of activism Satoshi presents, which was criticized by activists who had been engaged in the same issues, seemed to lie in this presentation of Okinawa as an abstraction and the removal of particularity. This not only removed the agency of real life Okinawans, but of Okinawa's suffering, a significant part of which had been caused and perpetuated by the Japanese state and society, and allowed it to become Japanese suffering in a very generalized sense, in which the Japanese audience could align themselves with the victims, rather than considering themselves to be the perpetrators or accomplices. And the audience reached a certain kind of moral catharsis or transcendence through Satoshi's performance, during which he proved to be very talented in bringing out emotions and excitement from the audience through his music and narratives. However, such emotional impressions remained only at a superficial level and did not lead the audience to a deeper contemplation of the complex, structural social reality (especially asymmetrical power relations between social groups and between the powerful and the powerless) or the recognition of their own participation (and by extension their responsibility) in the existing dynamics. For that reason, there were activists who thought that this kind of activism was actually worse and more disingenuous than using Okinawan music and dance by Japanese for pure profit. As one activist put it, probably what both Satoshi and his audience wanted was *moriage* (excite the audience): instead of pursuing the

issues rigorously, just excite the audience a lot and touch on the addressed issues a little bit, so that the audience could go back home feeling like they had actually pursued the issues. By having vicarious experiences through participating in such mildly, safely political events, they became exempt from responsibility (and from the guilt of turning their faces away).

When I asked Satoshi why he broke off from Okinawan activists such as Kansai Okinawa Bunko, where he used to teach sanshin, he said that he did not like “anti-something” type of activism which he felt was full of criticism and outdated, and what he did in his environmental movement was more positive, fun, and easy to follow. This again reflected the overall avoidance and resistance of the Japanese public to minority activism as radical and confrontational, as discussed in Chapter 4. It also reflected the power asymmetry between Okinawans and Japanese that manifested as the systematic ignorance of and indifference towards the historical and social reality of Okinawans by Japanese, their ready acceptance of Okinawan’s cultural difference, and the tamed, sanitized version of social and cultural activism that didn’t require serious self-reflection on the part of Japanese on their role in the structural and historical marginalization of Okinawa. Satoshi’s activism cleverly played on that gap between cultural domain and socio-political domain in the perception of the Japanese public, and thus gained a wider popularity than that of other Okinawan activists (or minority activists in general) who explicitly voiced the thorny reality of the continuing social and political exclusion of minorities in Japanese society and urged the Japanese public to take part in social change. Such power asymmetry in the cultural and socio-political domains in a multicultural society, namely, wider acceptance or even celebration of minority cultural difference and continuing reluctance or resistance against recognition of the social and political rights of minorities, is observed across societies that ostensibly accept minority populations and/or promote multiculturalism (Povinelli 2002; Deloria 1998; Askew 2002).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I ethnographically explored examples of Japanese appropriation in the contexts of hobby and entertainment activities, and also in activism. As the Okinawa Boom arose, Taisho Ward became an accessible, shortcut source of so-called Okinawan culture, which

provided its Okinawan residents with means of livelihood, reevaluation of their culture and identity, and repositioned them in relation to Japanese as well as other Okinawans.

At Shimagukuru, Japanese *min'yō* students are impassioned, in-depth Okinawaphile hobbyists who pursue the experience of difference through their bodily engagement, such as learning to perform *min'yō* and sanshin, and interpersonal engagement with Okinawan hosts (their *min'yō* teachers). Okinawan hosts accommodate them, by offering them experiences full of the tangible cultural differences between Okinawa and Japan (e.g. tales of Okinawa, Okinawan food and drink, Okinawan hospitality) backed up by the fame of certain Okinawan music figures made available by the Okinawa Boom. Okinawan hosts rely on and reinforce the Japanese stereotypical view of Okinawa, and avoid invoking charged memories of Okinawan marginalization, by omission or neutralization (Japanese responsibility made invisible). These entrepreneurs are not naively taken advantage of by Japanese, nor simply driven by material gain, but act with their own agency and perspective.

In this setting, Japanese students pursue further authentic Okinawan experiences, and try to distinguish themselves from generic, superficial Okinawa fans. They attempt to emulate their Okinawan hosts, and also blur the borders between Okinawan and Japanese, and hosts and guests. Some individuals attempt to tap further into authentic experience by getting more deeply (or intrusively) engaged with the Okinawan host, or his Okinawan sponsor (*min'yō* master), which can create tension even among Japanese students, let alone being criticized by Okinawan activists.

Japanese students and Okinawan hosts are in a symbiotic relationship, in which the Okinawan hosts endorse the authenticity of the practice of Japanese students, and Japanese students provide their hosts with the recognition, respect, and authority that they might lack among their fellow Okinawans, thus empowering them to a certain extent. However, this reciprocal relationship is a precarious one, as Japanese fans can move on and find a more accommodating host, or even go independent, which confirms the criticism of Okinawan cultural activists that cultural appropriation can and does reinforce the exploitative relationship between Japanese and Okinawans.

Such symbiotic relationships between Okinawan hosts and Japanese appropriators can be present in activist settings, too, as shown in the case of Satoshi's performing groups and NPO. At first glance, Satoshi's non-confrontational activism that emphasizes music and entertainment

gains more popularity, and thus may seem more effective. However, by removing the particularities of historical and social circumstances, it reduces Okinawa into an abstraction, a “culture” that is a mere symbol, from which the agency and actuality of Okinawans are largely absent. Despite the Okinawan host’s apparent success and fame, it plays on the stereotypical notions of Okinawa that the majority of Japanese hold without giving them a chance to see the deeper, structural problems of which the Japanese followers may themselves be part, and thus reinforces the reality that it claims to change.

These examples of cultural appropriation, along with the cases of cultural activism discussed in previous chapters, illustrate that the distinctions in Okinawan music and dance practices between Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan (Japanese), pre- vs. post-Okinawa Boom, activist approach vs. hobbyist approach, and identity assertion-confirmation vs. entertainment are not always clear cut, but are intertwined, although there are repeating patterns that can be clearly observed. In any group I observed there was a mixture of Okinawans and Japanese, cultural activist groups and groups of cultural appropriators (who usually included Okinawan hosts), and the element of fun and leisure was important in cultural activism as much as in cultural appropriation. Often it is a matter of degree, rather than an either/or situation, and the result of any given practice, regardless of its intention, is not always predictable. In the next chapter I will discuss an exceptional case that will highlight such complexities even more.

## CHAPTER VII

### Tingāra: Gay Men's *Eisā*

In this chapter, I explore Tingāra, a gay men's *eisā* group, and discuss another dimension of the politics of difference, namely the expression of sexual difference and emergent gay subjectivity.<sup>68</sup> Tingāra is an *eisā* group made up predominantly of Japanese gay males, who may or may not be Okinawaphiles or *eisā* enthusiasts.<sup>69</sup> Their primary motivation in participation in Tingāra is socializing with other gay men, and their major activities revolve around Japan's LGBTQ scene, apart from as regular performers of, and audience for, Okinawan music and dance.

As it will become clear as this chapter unfolds, my encounter with Tingāra was accidental. The major concerns of my study were how politics of difference and inequality in Japan have been shaped and perceived by variables such as ethnicity and class, from the beginning until well into my field research, more exactly, until I encountered Tingāra. And although connected to Japan's major LGBTQ movements, Tingāra is a somewhat isolated case in its scale, activities, and network, and thus it does not necessarily represent the history or current state of sexuality politics in Japan. In other words, my encounter with Tingāra was too short and its scope too limited to provide enough empirical data or analytical insights to gain a general sense of sexuality politics and LGBTQ movements in Japan in their entirety.

However, Tingāra's appropriation of *eisā* in their emerging cultural activism provides

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<sup>68</sup> Tingāra is a pseudonym. I borrowed this pseudonym from the study by Hideki Sunagawa (2010) who studied the Tokyo Branch of the same group. *Tingāra* means the Milky Way in Okinawan dialect (in Japanese it would be read *tengawara*), and the word has been widely appropriated since the Okinawa Boom for the name of restaurants, Okinawan brands, Okinawan music and dance coterie clubs, and so on.

<sup>69</sup> "Gay" in this context refers to male same-sex interest, in sexual practice and/or in sexual identity. It was the predominant interest Tingāra as a group expressed, regardless of individual preference members may have had, for example strict homosexuality or bisexuality.

significant insights when considering the dichotomies created in my study that derived primarily from my informants, and sometimes from myself: Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan; pre- vs. post-Okinawa Boom; activist approach vs. hobbyist approach; and identity assertion-confirmation vs. entertainment. Tingāra complicates the dichotomy of cultural activism (by Okinawans) and cultural appropriation (by Japanese). For with Tingāra, *eisā* is appropriated by Japanese hobbyists who happen to be gay, and is used in the context of LGBTQ activism. This challenge will be discussed as I explore Tingāra's practice of *eisā*, and other activities. Thus I will present the case of Tingāra, mainly focusing on my ethnographic data, as an example that challenges and complicates, but sometimes complements, the analyses I made about the politics of difference, visibility and invisibility, and authenticity in previous chapters.

### **Aki, the Unexpected Gatekeeper**

First, I would like to start with how I encountered Tingāra, through the reluctant introduction of a member whom I had unknowingly befriended from the very beginning of my research. This near-chance encounter indicates several things. Although my research focus for years has been ethnic relations in Japan, it partly indicates my blind spot as a heterosexual person, because I had taken the seeming absence of people with non-conventional gender expression or sexuality for granted until that moment. The omission of sexuality in the scope of my research was not a personal problem as an academic, but rather a general tendency in academia by which studies of LGBTQ, or non-normative gender and sexual practices, tend to be segregated from studies of other topics. However, more importantly, Tingāra's near invisibility until the end of my research paradoxically reveals how strong the implicit heteronormative pressure on sexual minorities is in Japan, because it was not that I had plainly passed up what was obviously in my sight, but instead it was due to the active efforts of the individual who had access to the group, the "gatekeeper," to hide it from me, that caused me to almost miss this research opportunity. And the fact that he tried hard to keep the club, and his sexuality, concealed from me conversely reveals how strong the heteronormative pressure is on ordinary individuals in Japanese society, if implicit, despite the lack of both legal regulations and obvious oppression of non-conforming sexualities and gender, and the abundance and seeming freedom of non-normative sexual and gender expressions in Japanese entertainment and media.

I met Aki at one of the sanshin and *min'yō* coterie clubs I frequented. A Kobe-based divorcé in his mid-forties and a sanshin enthusiast, he had a wide connection with a variety of groups and individuals who were involved in Okinawan music, whether Japanese or Okinawans, activists or hobbyists, amateurs or professionals. He was one of the first individuals I met in the very beginning of my research, and he remained a close friend until I left Osaka. Aki was in general an intuitive, articulate, and savvy man with a keen sense of humor. Although Aki had clear preferences regarding people, things, ideas, and tastes, and didn't hesitate to articulate them around like-minded people, according to himself, he "knew how to act like a grown up," that is, he hardly caused tension even with those who he disagreed with.<sup>70</sup> For example, he offered to help out at events organized by Okinawan cultural activists, and remained mostly respectful and cooperative, but once outside, he was also very straightforward and opinionated about his skepticism, especially towards what he perceived as their arrogance and exclusivist attitudes.

I often hung out with Aki to explore the non-activist, leisure-oriented activities of Okinawan culture consumption, such as watching movies on Okinawa, going to music concerts, cheering Okinawan musicians – our sanshin instructor and/or friends – at their live sessions in Okinawan music bars, and drinking with them afterwards. Such activities could have been frowned upon by cultural activists such as Gajimaru and Bunko members if they knew that *I*, who was expected to know better, was participating in the Japanese appropriation of Okinawan music. Thus I initially kept them from knowing, until they understood that I took part in *any* kind of Okinawan music and dance activities regardless of my personal stance. Thus Aki was one of the earliest people who knew the full scope of my research.

Aki had been helping me throughout my research, offering many insights and introducing me to various research opportunities and informants. Except for Tingāra. Had it not been for his slip, the existence of the group would have easily escaped my attention through the end of my research, as there were no other informants who were aware of this group. In the early stages of

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<sup>70</sup> I think this equation of "acting like a grown up" with avoiding overt confrontation is a widespread idea in Japan, and a part of becoming a *shakaijin* (social person) which an individual has to reach in order to be accepted as a full worthy person (regarding *shakaijin*, see McLelland 2005, 98-100). On the other hand, I think that the negative equation between outspoken expressions of discontent and direct confrontations with "(social) immaturity" plays a role in implicitly silencing, rather than actively oppressing minority politics of any kind that appear to the mainstream society to deviate from "common sense" (Lunsing 2005, 83). "An allergy towards 'political activism'" (Summerhawk et al. 1998, 14), which is a very prevalent attitude towards overt minority politics, not just within LGBTQ politics, can be understood in the same context.

my research, Aki mentioned in passing that he “helped out” the *eisā* group of a sexual minority as a *jikata*, and said that he had almost been mistaken for “moho” (slang for “homo”). I asked a bit about it, but as I was mostly occupied with the Okinawan-Japanese dynamics at that moment, I didn’t pursue it further until a year later when I was wrapping up my research. I casually asked him to introduce me to the group, as I was trying to visit as many *min’yō* or *eisā* groups as possible that I hadn’t visited before, for a comparative perspective.

It was then that he, usually quite open and straightforward with me about almost any issue, including very personal ones like family, marriage, or intimacy, became suddenly elusive and equivocating, and my curiosity went up proportionally to his elusiveness. Although I told him I was not homophobic and would be very discreet about privacy issues, he remained unsure about the idea of introducing me to the group. He made excuses such as the fact that many members, if not all, were wary of social prejudice and the disclosure of their personal identities so they might be offended if he brought a stranger like me, and that some gay men tended to hate women, so I might not be welcomed, although he said, “I, for one, don’t have any prejudice [against sexual minorities], and I totally trust you.” After I begged him persistently, he reluctantly agreed to at least ask the group whether I could visit.

Coincidentally, I talked on the phone with an old friend I knew from when I studied at Tokyo University a decade ago. Sunagawa Hideki, an anthropologist, gay activist, and Okinawan, was doing his PhD research on gay bars in Shinjuku, Tokyo’s famous entertainment district. When I mentioned my difficulty accessing the group, it turned out that he had a close connection with the group. Sunagawa had started the Tokyo Lesbian/Gay Parade in 2000, and between 2005 and 2006 he had acted as the representative of Tokyo Pride (previously known as Shinjuku Rainbow Festival). Tingāra had derived from the Shinjuku Rainbow Festival. He promised he would talk to the leader of the Osaka branch on my behalf.<sup>71</sup>

Soon, I received messages from Aki, Sunagawa, and the leader of the Osaka branch, that I was finally allowed to visit their weekly practice. After being almost intimidated by Aki about the group’s possible suspicion or hostility towards me, I was nervous as I headed to the practice. My anxiety, however, soon turned into somewhat baffled happiness when my appearance was met with an immediate, and for some, almost enthusiastic welcome. Some individuals stood

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<sup>71</sup> Shortly after my research he started ethnographic research on Tokyo Tingāra on his own (Sunagawa 2010).



behind and did not talk to me, but they did not seem wary or hostile but rather shy or indifferent. Members started by introducing themselves by their nicknames, and although I introduced myself using my name and academic affiliation, somebody instantly gave me the nickname “Angela,” after my resemblance to the Japanese popular singer-pianist, and I was called Angela thereafter.<sup>72</sup>

According to them, it was the first time a “real woman” (*riaru josei*) had showed up. The fact that I am a foreigner seemed somehow less important than the fact I was a woman. After the practice, I was invited to their socializing at a restaurant and then a gay bar, and one member insisted that I join the group and go onstage (as I was able to play *sanshin*) from the next performance, and invited me to a gay-only club party they were going to, which turned out to be a joke that other members found hilarious.

I came home, still a bit confused about the gap between the initial difficulty in getting to meet them and the unexpected welcome that I had received. I accessed the group’s webpage on Mixi and was surprised to see there was already one friend request from a member.<sup>73</sup> I started browsing the pages of communities and personal profiles linked to the men I had met that day. The next moment, I fell into further confusion, when I came across a familiar profile.

Although his profile picture only showed a photo of his back, I could instantly recognize Aki, who seemed to go by “Ahiru” (duckling) in this world. I also recognized his hobbies such as *sanshin* playing, travelling to Okinawa, and his favorite musicians. However, more than half of his self-introduction was given to the description of his appearance (mostly hairstyle and body shape), and his preferred body type and sexual preference – for men. Having seen personal ads seeking romantic and/or sexual partners in Japanese gay magazines, I knew what such a self-introduction meant, and became further perplexed. Was Aki gay? He had always said that he was “helping out” his gay friends, and that he didn’t have any prejudice against “them,” as if he wasn’t one of them. Furthermore, I knew that he was divorced and had a son, and when talking about intimacy, he always referred to “girls,” so I didn’t have any reason to assume he was not

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<sup>72</sup> As will be explained later, members used their nicknames throughout their interaction. The primary purpose of this practice seemed to be the protection of personal identity of those who wanted to avoid outing. However, even openly gay individuals who fully disclosed their personal information still used their nicknames. It rather worked like a gay code.

<sup>73</sup> Mixi is a major SNS in Japan

straight.<sup>74</sup> Still in confusion, I sent the profile's owner a friend request, hoping a further communication between us would clear up my confusion. However, I didn't receive any response from the profile's owner, or from Aki, who usually sent me text messages pretty often, until the next Tingāra practice two weeks later when I saw him again, by which time I already had a few more Tingāra members as Mixi friends.

“Hey, Mr. Ahiru! Why aren't you responding to my friend request?”

He was stuck silent for a moment, and made excuses similar to the ones he had made when he was trying to deflect me from contacting Tingāra: many of his Mixi friends were gay men, and he didn't know what they might think if they saw he had a “real woman” friend, so he needed some time to think about it. During the practice that day, I overheard other Tingāra members humorously talking about Aki in his absence. “Is he still pretending he is ‘just helping us out’?” “It seems that way.”

After practice that night on our way to dinner, I asked him when we were left alone.

“Aki, are you a totally straight man?”

After a moment, he replied.

“Well, not necessarily.” And he added, “of course I'm totally fine with girls.”

Aki accepted my friend request after that night.

Aki's reluctance might have been an indication of his uncertainty about his own sexual identity. Later he told me that he realized his own same-sex desire only a few years ago, after he was already married for years and had a son. But when he was with Tingāra members, he was comfortable and confident about being a gay man. Later in his Mixi posting that doubled as a farewell to me as I left Japan, he humorously described his efforts when he had deliberately tried to deflect me, which had ended up being in vain due to my persistence, and he had “got caught” as being gay (*gei*), or to be exact, bi (*bai*), which he hadn't told me because “it didn't matter,” but once I knew, things had all gotten better.<sup>75</sup> After the Kansai Rainbow Parade, he told me that the mutual acceptance between Tingāra members and me had made him very happy, as if it was his personal business (*jibun no koto no yōni ureshii*). Thus I presume that it had not been his uncertainty about his own sexual identity, but rather about my stance regarding homosexuality,

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<sup>74</sup> In fact, talking about “her” instead of “him” when referring to intimate relationships is one of the strategies that gay men use to go unnoticed in everyday conversations (Summerhawk et al. 1998, 11).

<sup>75</sup> From his mixi account. I will not disclose the URL to protect his privacy.

and Tingāra members' response to a non-gay stranger. And his uncertainty and fear were not groundless, as I will discuss in the next section.

### **Heteronormative Pressure in Japan**

The abundant, if not excessive, representations of overtly sexual material in popular media, depicting or alluding to a diverse range of gender and sexual expressions, including the popularity of the all female revue Takarazuka (Robertson 1998), the constant presence of drag queens, transgender, or gay celebrities such as Miwa Akihiro, Peter, Pico, and IKKO, the popularity of *yaoi* cartoons,<sup>76</sup> and the pervasiveness of the sex industry, gives an impression that Japan is a sexually “open” society with a higher tolerance towards different gender and sexual identities and expressions. And in fact, Japan has “one of the most enduring and best-documented traditions of same-sex eroticism in the world” (McLelland and Suganuma 2010, 196).

However, Aki's year-long effort to keep Tingāra off my radar, or as will be examined later in this chapter, the diverse strategies and code-switching that Tingāra members use to pass as straight in public, and their covert means of communicating among themselves, conversely suggest that the heteronormative pressure these men face on a daily basis is not a trivial matter.

Unlike in the US or many European countries, where historically ingrained Christian beliefs define deviation from heterosexuality as a sin against nature or God's will, in Japan no legal, social, or cultural apparatus are established to penalize those who are engaged in non-heterosexual practices. In contrast, assigned to the private realm of hobby (*shumi*) and play (*asobi*), a variety of heterosexual and non-heterosexual practices such as same-sex and transgender expressions were condoned in premodern times, and in fact during the Tokugawa era, the male-male sexual relationships between samurai individuals were considered to have a higher moral ground than heterosexual relationships (McLelland 2000).

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<sup>76</sup> *Yaoi* is a genre of Japanese comics specifically targeted to heterosexual young female readers. It describes romance or eroticism between beautiful gay men. There are analyses that Japanese women fantasize about romantic love through the imaginary gay men's relationships depicted in *yaoi* cartoons, safely distanced from themselves, because these cartoons lack female protagonists who might be subject to patriarchal domination within heterosexual relationships, not unlike the readers themselves. On the other hand, there are criticisms that such media romanticization creates stereotypes about gay men, far from the reality of real-life, ordinary gay men, and encourages heterosexual women's intrusive interest in the gay circle (McLelland 2000).

It was since the beginning of the Meiji Era that same-sex relationships started being actively discouraged. In fact, the primary source of heteronormativity in Japan can be found elsewhere: in the patriarchal family with an emphasis on social reproduction, which became legally and socially established by the end of the nineteenth century through the Meiji Civil Code (1898) and the Family Registration System (1871), when the modern Japanese state was constituted as a family state based on the “unbroken” Imperial line from ancient times and all imperial subjects were seen as its children (Ronald and Alexy 2011). The main function of this patriarchally defined family was reproduction and the sustenance of generational continuity, especially of the male line, and the romantic and/or sexual intimacy between the married couple was relatively insignificant. It was only through marriage and reproduction, that is, having children, that a person achieved full personhood in society. In such a society, one risked exclusion if they deviated from their role within the family structure, such as the man as the head of the family or the wife as the submissive homemaker.

Even though young people are increasingly delaying marriage or deciding to remain single, due to recent social and economic changes (Nakano 2011), “the failure to [get married] carries the severe implication of immaturity and lack of moral responsibility” (Edwards 1989, 124). There is still a persistent tendency for families, friends, and coworkers around single individuals (often including the single individuals themselves) to consider being single as immature, irresponsible, and being less than a full person, or even pathologizing singleness, as evidenced in the popularized term “parasite single” (Akida 1999).<sup>77</sup>

In a society where marriage is a family obligation and prerequisite to social personhood, individuals choose to marry out of practicality, regardless of their sexual orientation. In the meantime, although the importance of romantic love and sexual intimacy between the married couple may be more important than it was in the Meiji Era, it is not crucial, and pursuing sexual interest for men is considered to be in the realm of hobby and play, and is allowed or even encouraged to occur outside the obligation-based family. The implicit pressure of common sense (*seken*) rather than direct punishment is the mechanism to keep individuals in line, and it will tolerate or turn a blind eye to sexual aberration, as long as it does not threaten the production and reproduction of society based on nuclear, heterosexual families, but remains in the private

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<sup>77</sup> “Parasite singles” refers to adult children who stay with their parents after education and employment, and exploit them for their living expenses.

domain, in other words, in the closet (Lunsing 2001).

Thus as long as a man is married, has children, and supports his family, there is a relative freedom for him to pursue his sexual desires, heterosexual or not, in the abundant sexual industry in Japan to the extent that such activities do not threaten the stability of his family. It would be harder for a married woman to do so, as she would have far less freedom and social and financial resources to pursue such interests, in the predominantly patriarchal family and social structure. But she still needs to be in a heterosexual marriage to be protected and supported. Thus being married is a norm for both men and women, and sexuality is rather irrelevant. A heterosexual relationship can be a cover and/or means to social access, rather than reflecting actual sexual interest in both sexes. Men who do not get married past a certain age can face disadvantages in job promotion; in gendered job inequality, women who don't get married may face economic difficulties as they age.

Thus there have been cases of personal ads in gay magazines by gays and lesbians, or by heterosexual females, seeking marriage partners; although they are not interested in a romantic and/or sexual union with a person of the opposite sex, they have sought marriage based on mutual agreement, a practical means to avoid social pressure and achieve social personhood (McLelland 2000; Lunsing 2001).

Moreover, there is a strong tendency in the media and popular culture, as well as in public perception, to conflate male homosexuality with transgenderism (McLelland 2000). Such conflation of male homosexuality and transgenderism is manifested in the most common term for either or both, *okama*. Originally meaning "deep pot" (or bottom, which alludes to male same-sex intercourse), it is a pejorative term that generally refers to homosexual males, male cross-dressers, and MtF transgender individuals without differentiating each category. The word implies that such individuals are perverted, and there is a widespread assumption among the general public that these categories are the same. The prominence in the popular media of cross-dressing, transgender, or gay celebrities in flamboyant clothing and displaying showy *okama* mannerisms reinforces the unusual, bizarre, perverted (*hentai*) stereotypes of non-heterosexual individuals, and renders them as lacking masculinity, while *yaoi* cartoons present an overly idealized and romanticized depiction of beautiful gay men. These representations leave little room for the majority of gay males who do not stand out in everyday life, and give them little incentive to identify themselves with such media depictions.

The centuries-long convention of designating sexual practice outside of family reproduction as belonging in the domain of pleasure and play has resulted in the segregation of non-heteronormative gender and sexual expressions as well. While the public is generally tolerant towards cross-dressing, transgender, or gay celebrities in entertainment and popular culture, such expressions by ordinary individuals in everyday life, such as in the workplace, school, and neighborhood are treated with contempt and gossip (McLelland 2000; Lunsing 2001).

Being exposed as gay can bring about more substantial consequences than merely bad rumors or isolation. I had a chance to learn that such fear about outing is not just in their imagination. Once I accompanied two Tingāra members to a restaurant they frequented. It was a seemingly ordinary *yakiniku* (grilled meat) restaurant that served local customers. The only difference was, it turned out, that the owner was a gay man who was a friend to my company, and he regularly let Tingāra members use an empty building he owned for practice when the weather didn't allow outdoor practice. We sat in a corner like any other guests, without any explanation about my presence, only greeting each other through eye contact. The owner treated us casually at first, but he became increasingly restless, coming to take orders and serve us by himself, instead of sending the server in charge, and watching me and listening to our conversation attentively. Finally he asked me if I was some sort of writer or journalist. I explained that I was a researcher while the other two made a gesture that I was "safe." Then he specifically asked me not to disclose any details about his restaurant, such as its name and location, and added that he had almost gone out of business once because his business partner, who was also gay, had outed him to his customers when the partner had quit the restaurant as well as his gay lifestyle. "I lost almost all my regulars – one even spit at me when we ran into each other on the street. And the rumor got around, so I had to start over from almost nothing."

In Japan, the lack of outright legal and/or religious oppression, and the partial tolerance of non-normative gender and sexual expressions in private and in the entertainment business (as far as they do not directly contest the institutions of marriage and family) created an environment in which non-heterosexual behaviors did not lead to the formation of non-heterosexual identities, and it was hard for a right-based anti-discrimination movement to develop. Lesbian or gay rights activism did not emerge until the 1970s, and even in the 1990s, gay activist organizations, such as OCCUR, did not gain popularity except for among a small number of intellectuals, as the

majority of gay individuals were indifferent or rather resistant to political activism for LGBTQ rights (McLelland 2003). For individuals, it was safer to remain silent and invisible, and to enjoy their relative freedom in privacy without their everyday existence being threatened.

The fact that heteronormativity is reinforced implicitly through silencing rather than through ostentatious persecution also explains the relative lack and only recent development of LGBTQ activism in Japan. LGBTQ activists often admit the difficulty of promoting their agenda within the LGBTQ population, because many people don't think they are persecuted. Even in Tingāra, which emerged in part out of the Rainbow movement in Japan, not all members agree on the club's activist cause. They gather because they enjoy each other's company, and their favorite activities at the same time. Even the decision about whether to disclose or hide one's sexuality is often considered by these men as a matter of personal choice and lifestyle.

This right vs. personal choice (or lifestyle) distinction was present in one conversation I had with two Tokyo Tingāra members: one man said he didn't disclose his sexuality at his workplace, without saying the reason. When the second man said that the first man should be able to tell that he is gay at his workplace (meaning that his workplace should accept him no matter what), the first man responded, "You are a righteous person. But it's my personal business whom I date, and people at my workplace don't need to know." However, I suspected that whether or not the first man, an elementary school teacher, had made such a decision based purely on his personal preference, as he had presented, there may have been negative repercussions regarding his job security should his sexuality be known to teachers, the principal, and parents. Japanese LGBTQ activists point out that the personal choice approach in fact obscures the oppressive reality in the pretense of individual freedom.

McLelland, who studied media representations and the social reality of male homosexuality in Japan mainly in the 1990s, viewed the possibility of a Japanese gay identity with skepticism. In 2008 when I met Tingāra, the overall social atmosphere surrounding LGBTQ issues were largely unchanged, and Tingāra members used various strategies to remain invisible in public and to protect their privacy. At the same time, Tingāra's emergence in the context of LGBTQ activism suggests that both LGBTQ activism and gay identity in Japan have grown stronger since McLelland's study. I will discuss details in the following sections.

## Tingāra – Gay Men’s *Eisā*

Tingāra is an *eisā* group, in fact, the only *eisā* group of a sexual minority (mostly gay males) that is currently publicly known in Japan. Tingāra was first formed in 2005 in Tokyo with its main purpose to perform at the Tokyo Rainbow Festival at Shinjuku Ni-chōme.<sup>78</sup> It since has extended its scope to other LGBTQ events with an activist agenda, such as the annual Kansai Rainbow Parade and Plus+ (the HIV/AIDS awareness promotion event) in Osaka, the Sapporo Rainbow March in Hokkaido, as well as more private, entertaining occasions like nightclub events specifically geared towards gay men. In the years following its inception, Kansai and Okinawa branches formed, in 2006 and 2008 respectively, and they often performed together at the Rainbow events in different cities. During my research, I mostly observed and interacted with the Osaka branch members, except for the day of the Kansai Rainbow Festival when the Tokyo Branch came to participate.

The club officially introduces itself as an *eisā* group of a sexual minority, and in principle, accepts individuals of all sexualities (including straight) on the condition that “they have an understanding of sexual minorities” (namely, that they are not homophobic). However, all active members in the three branches were males between their twenties and forties, and although I did not take a survey on their individual sexual preferences, in the club’s setting, they only expressed a same-sex sexual orientation. There were several terms with which they referred to themselves, and the conflation between homosexuality, gender nonconformism, and transgenderism was evident in these terms as well: *okama* (a blanket term for homosexual, drag queen, or MtF transgender, which has pejorative or self-effacing nuance such as “homo” or “fag”); *homo*; *onē* (sister, sissy); *fujinkai* (wives’ or ladies’ club); and *nūnū* (a neologism that refers to an individual between *nīnī* – big brother, young man – and *nēnē* – big sister, young woman, using the vowel “u” that comes between the vowels “i” and “e” in Japanese). Except for a few drag queens, whose mannerisms somewhat stood out in usual interactions even without drag, they would not strike anyone as being sexually different or lacking masculinity in public.

In terms of ethnicity, Tingāra members are predominantly Japanese individuals, except

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<sup>78</sup> Shinjuku as a whole, especially the eastern half, is famous for a variety of entertainment businesses with sexual overtones. But Shinjuku Ni-chōme is especially known for its gay bars, and known as the “gay men’s Mecca” (McLelland 2000; Sunagawa 2010).



for the Okinawa branch members (at the time of the 2008 Kansai Rainbow Parade, there was only one Okinawan, Tingāra's founder and the Tokyo branch leader, out of more than thirty participants from the Kansai and Tokyo branches). And the profile of members fit that of Japanese hobbyists. It was founded by gay men who had been previously active in other prestigious *eisā* clubs, and they had recruited members in existing *eisā* clubs through personal networks. Thus these men were Okinawaphiles, or *eisā* enthusiasts even before they joined Tingāra.

However, not all members had been interested in *eisā* or Okinawa in the first place, but their primary intention had been to meet and socialize with other gay men. Except for gay bars and clubs, there were usually not many opportunities for gay men to socialize on a regular basis, and unlike in such bars and clubs, where the primary goal was to find a partner for a romantic or sexual relationship, in Tingāra, they could pursue a common interest together that was not strictly related to their sexuality. Fun from dancing *eisā* was rather an afterthought or an added bonus.

Some members mentioned that the masculine spectacle of *eisā* – vigorously performed by a group of young, athletic males – is likely to have a particular sensual appeal to a gay audience, although not all gay men are erotically attracted to such a muscular, stalwart type, but they rather have individual preferences for different body types. As shown in the other chapters, the visual and aural effects of *eisā* have attracted spectators of various backgrounds regardless of their ethnicity, age, gender, and sexuality, and Tingāra members (who have experienced performing in different settings) said that performing in front of gay men was distinctively interesting as it entailed such sensual gaze.

### **Hobbyists Who Happen to be Gay**

In terms of demographics, their knowledge and understanding of *eisā* and Okinawan culture, and their performing style, Tingāra members are hardly different from most mainstream Japanese. After all, many of them are Japanese hobbyists who happen to be gay. With a few exceptions, members have somewhat stereotypical notions of Okinawan differences, not unlike students of Kariyushi or customers of other Okinawan restaurants and music bars (Chapter 6), since media and tourism are the main source of their knowledge, or lack thereof. And as single men, they put time and money into their pursuit of leisure and hobbies, probably more than their heterosexual counterparts who have families to support can afford to do. After their practices

and stage performances, they go to gay clubs, do favorite hobby activities together, and travel together to Okinawa, or elsewhere.

My first overall impression about Tingāra's dance was that they looked somewhat amateurish. Although most members memorized the routines, individual moves tended to lack precision, coordination, and perfection overall, compared to what I had seen in other *eisā* groups, especially those who had direct Okinawan affiliations. And understandably so, considering the sheer lack of *eisā* experience of most members, and their ages. The ages of the majority of members ranged from over thirty up to their mid-forties, an age range that was quite old, or traditionally considered too old, to dance *eisā*. *Eisā* is a dance for youth, in their teens and early twenties. For older individuals, it would be difficult to master new, complex bodily movements like those in *eisā* unless one was exceptionally talented and/or had been practicing similar movements (i.e. dance); except for the few leading members who had been dancing *eisā* in other groups before Tingāra was formed, most members had only a couple years at most, often less than a year, of experience learning and dancing *eisā*.

Many *eisā* moves, especially in drum dancing, are physically challenging – almost acrobatic – and hard to produce with accuracy. Unless one has started young, in their teens or earlier, as was usually the case with Okinawan village *eisā*, had some background or exceptional talent in dancing, or had the flexibility, agility, and strong muscles to support difficult moves and practiced constantly, it would be hard to produce each move with precision and vigor, looking complete as an individual and coordinated as a group. The resulting dance would look somewhat sloppy and amateurish. Also, not unlike many non-Okinawan hobbyist groups, or temporarily organized groups for events in grade schools, Tingāra's choreography seemed like a combination of generic *eisā*, lacking distinctive *eisā* style moves.

What I noticed after several months in my research was that although mostly implicit, the notions of originality and intellectual property were very unevenly distributed across practitioners of *eisā*, and this discrepancy tended to separate Japanese *eisā* practitioners and fans from their Okinawan counterparts, especially those who had extensively experienced *eisā* in Okinawa as performers and audience members. Although it is not necessarily understood in terms of modern copyright and intellectual property, in Okinawa, especially on the Okinawan main island, *eisā* fans are aware of the stylistic differences of famous locally based *eisā* groups, and often have preferences for a certain style, usually that of their home group. Especially in *eisā*

groups with longer history and more prestige, it is a taboo for a group to adopt the styles of another group, and it would be noticed and frowned upon by fans as well as members. However, Japanese participants in *eisā* – at least those whom I met – tended to lack the discernment of stylistic variety to such specificity, and lacked concern about the originality or ownership of choreography. And this sometimes created friction between them and some Okinawans, sometimes openly and other times implicitly.

However, this was not a big deal for many of Osaka’s Japanese hobbyist groups. Most of Tingāra’s repertoire was not different in selection and choreography from other hobbyist groups. It followed generic *eisā* moves for the most common Okinawan *min’yō* songs, rather than creating a distinctive style. When its instructor comes from a renowned *eisā* group in Okinawa, even a Japanese hobbyist *eisā* group may have a distinctive style, although the members may not be aware of it or its significance. The Kansai Tingāra’s leader and main choreographer was active in the Miyako branch of Ryukyukoku Matsuri Taiko, a contemporary *eisā* group that emphasized the visuals more than traditional, locally based *eisā* groups did. In fact, he copied the whole choreography for some numbers in their repertoire from Matsuri Taiko’s originals without modification, and used them until a member and avid fan of *eisā* saw that another group was adopting exactly the same choreography, presumably learned from another Matsuri Taiko member, and pointed this out to him.

### **Nirai Kanai: A Gay Twist**

Thus when I first watched Tingāra’s practice at the park, I was more or less unimpressed – that was until they started to dance to a J-Pop song, “Nirai Kanai.” “Nirai Kanai” is a song by MAX, the famous female vocal and dancing group. Although all the MAX members were from Okinawa, there was nothing audibly or visibly Okinawan in their music and dance. Even in this song, which was meant to commemorate the members’ Okinawan roots, Okinawan elements seemed rather nominal: the song was basically based on Eurobeat style, up-tempo electronic music, which had been particularly popular in the Japanese dance club scene for more than two decades. The few lines in the lyrics that were in Okinawan dialect were not necessarily noticeable, and the only obvious Okinawan elements were the title “Nirai Kanai,” the name of a utopian island that appears in various Okinawan lore, and the sound of the sanshin in the intro.

While the *jikata* were simply adding in sanshin to the recorded music, the dancers started

to beat their drums repetitively. And two dancers in construction workers' jumpsuits and bandanas, who had been lying down on the grass and watching the *eisā* dancers so far, jumped up. These two men stood in front of the troupe and started a *parapara* dance sequence, which includes simple and repetitive hand moves in standing position, popular in the Japanese dance club scenes for years. Now the *eisā* and *sanshin* almost seemed like the background, as if to highlight the *parapara* dance.

Later I learned that the Kansai leader had created – almost improvised – this choreography, when they were invited to perform at a gay club for its annual event. But it also reflected one of Tingāra's favorite leisure activities – clubbing, and since then, the piece came to be regularly presented at other LGBTQ events as well. Although this dance would seem far from “authentic” *eisā* as an ethnic art form from the viewpoint of many conventional *eisā* connoisseurs (Japanese or Okinawan) on many levels, I took this dance as a creative reinterpretation of *eisā* that was made suitable for their queer settings, and it was not unlike when the Gajimaru Club added a diasporic twist to their repertoire and costumes, and to the meanings they gave to the dance.

But was it “Okinawan”? In fact what struck me as different from all the other groups and individuals whom I had met, Okinawans or Japanese, activists or hobbyists, so far was that I had never seen such a blatant disregard for “*eisā*-ness” in *eisā*, so to speak: Okinawan or not, amateurish or not, there was always, even as a pretense, a concern about “how it should be done like *eisā*” or “as Okinawans do,” which was fascinatingly absent in this case. Tingāra's indifference towards authentic Okinawanness, and their unabashed modification of *eisā*, paradoxically illuminates what is at stake in the practice of Okinawan music and dance for Okinawan cultural activists and for Japanese appropriators. For Okinawan cultural activists and Japanese appropriators, especially those who are more invested and impassioned, questions of what adaptations can/should be regarded as acceptable, and who qualifies to modify, are always contentious ones. And the distinction between Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan (i.e. Japanese) becomes sharper, although in everyday practice, in a diasporic setting, it is very hard to draw this line.

## Lack of Authenticity, Lack of Hierarchy

Tingāra's focus on the expression of sexual identity and connectedness through *eisā*, rather than pursuit of Okinawanness, seems to contribute to a distinctive characteristic of Tingāra's organization. Compared to other groups I visited, I was struck by its relatively egalitarian attitudes on the club's operation as well as *eisā*. In other *eisā* clubs or *min'yō* classes, and coterie clubs, whether they are activism-oriented or leisure-oriented, there were usually individuals who had somewhat exclusive authority – usually those in instructing or organizing positions – and others rather depended on these individuals for their knowledge or decision making. It was especially the case for teaching, learning, and performing music and dance. Usually the authority (or authenticity) was established around certain individuals (usually Okinawans, or Japanese individuals who had exclusive access to a source of such knowledge), and it was somewhat unthinkable to question or challenge such individuals, even in otherwise friendly and relatively egalitarian relationships. If such questioning or challenge happened, it invariably led to a significant conflict, which sometimes resulted in break ups between individuals, or even in the division of the group, as shown in previous chapters.

In Tingāra, there was the leader/representative of the club, and distinctions between the more experienced members and the novices. However, different members (one or two persons for an event) other than the leader were entrusted with the preparation for a certain event. The ongoing process of preparation was reported on before or after practice, and other members would freely ask questions or make suggestions. Such egalitarian attitudes stood out even more in *eisā* learning and performance. While the leader stood in front of the group in practice to show how each move was done, more experienced members stood next to less experienced members to give guidance during the practice and the break. Moreover, members constantly tried out, and discussed between themselves, how minute details in moves could be done, asked the leader questions, and even suggested modifications in moves or dancing formations so that they would be easier or more visually effective to perform, suggestions which the leader often accepted and modified the moves accordingly.

Such discussion among members regarding *eisā* performance and operation extended to socializing, and informal discussions on how they ran their community website, and so on. I presume that such egalitarian attitude partly came from the fact that all members were adult

males between their twenties and forties, and each member's *eisā* experience did not correspond with their age. The relationships between members were on a semi-anonymous basis. Members all used their nicknames in regular interactions, and their real names or other personal information – age, occupation, and address – were not disclosed or only partially shared between those who were personally close to each other, and thus not very relevant. In other words, they left their various positionalities – age, occupation, education, and so on – in their ordinary, non-gay realm when they temporarily entered the realm of Tingāra, in which the only relevant fact was that they were all adult gay men, thus there was relatively little room for hierarchy based on socioeconomic status, education, or age.

Moreover, unlike most other *min'yō* or *eisā* clubs or schools, hardly anybody, even those who clearly had more experience in learning *eisā* or *min'yō*, seemed to claim to have exclusive, “authentic” Okinawan knowledge about how *eisā* should be performed, *min'yō* be sung, and *sanshin* be played, and such authoritative knowledge was not sought or privileged as much as in other *min'yō* or *sanshin* groups I observed. The fact that the Kansai branch leader, who was originally from Kansai, had acquired his experience and knowledge of *eisā* from Ryukyukoku Matsuri Taiko on Miyako Island added to the lack of adherence to authentic or traditional Okinawan forms: geographically far apart from the Okinawa Islands, Miyako Island had never had a tradition of *eisā* until it became popular throughout Okinawa Prefecture and mainland Japan. Matsuri Taiko is a contemporary *eisā* group, which had expanded to traditionally non-*eisā* areas in Okinawa as well as mainland Japan and overseas, along with the heightened popularity of *eisā* during the Okinawa Boom. Thus Miyako people in Matsuri Taiko, according to the Kansai leader, were no different than Japanese people on the mainland in that they were new to *eisā* and were not finicky about the correct ways *eisā* should be performed. Even the leader himself admitted, “Maybe it was an *eisā*-like dance rather than *eisā* that we did.”

Almost all members are Japanese, and the group's top priority is having opportunities to dance together with gay men. There is far less emphasis on reproducing *eisā* in an authentically Okinawan way, while there is a great emphasis (and overall agreement) on presenting a more satisfactory performance. They have a different audience as well. Unlike most Okinawa related music and dance events that are advertised at other Okinawan-themed events, the information on Tingāra's performance is almost exclusively circulated within the LGBTQ network. Those avid *eisā* fans who closely follow various Okinawa related events are far less likely to be aware of

Tingāra’s existence or show up at LGBTQ events to just watch Tingāra’s *eisā* unless they are also interested in LGBTQ issues, and there are few people on such occasions, if any, who would judge its authentic Okinawan expression.

In other *eisā* and/or *min’yō* institutions – whether activism or leisure oriented – an “authentic” Okinawan knowledge or identity is a scarce source that is asymmetrically distributed along social divisions, primarily ethnicity and generation, or sometimes licenses, and usually “owned” by a limited number of individuals who have more authority to say how the music or dance should be done properly in Okinawan ways. Such individuals were absent in Tingāra due to its demographics and main purpose, and this seemed to be another source of the egalitarian attitudes members held towards one another.

### **Multiple Layers of In/visibility: Space and Code-Switching**

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the heteronormative pressure of Japanese society and the motivation of gay individuals to remain invisible to protect themselves. Like with ethnic minority individuals who chose to pass as Japanese, gay males are the “discreditable” rather than the “discredited,” namely their stigma is not noticeable at first glance, and it is up to them how to manage their “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963). I noticed that Tingāra members navigated domains of visibility and invisibility, by utilizing spatial distinctions and code-switching, in order to create a safe, communal space without the fear of outing. In doing so they effectively stayed hidden in plain sight – invisible to heteronormative mainstream society but visible to other gay males. I will discuss several strategies that are used to manage in/visibility.

In my reflection on my long lack of awareness of Tingāra, and my observation of the club’s practice and after-event socializing, as well as online and offline conversations with individual members, it struck me that they were visible and invisible at the same time, on many levels, as if they were hidden in plain sight. Although there were occasions only accessible by members and their trusted company and otherwise kept secret, such as at gay bars, a secret practice place, and closed banquets, even when they were present and active in public places, for example in a public park, they were still only “visible” as sexually different to those who knew what to look for. And there were various markers, such as geography, clothing, and verbal and non-verbal behaviors that were like secret codes, which members constantly switched on and off,

and which did not stand out but had special meanings to those who knew how to read them.

### **Parks, Restaurants, and Gay Bars: Physical Geography**

First of all, Tingāra's visibility to the general public was fairly limited due to their overall absence in the Okinawa music and dance scene, as the group largely limited their performance opportunities to LGBTQ events, where there was little participation by non-LGBTQ individuals. Outdoor practice and performances at LGBTQ events were good advertising and recruiting opportunities for Tingāra, in addition to one-on-one recruitment or online advertisement. But even their ordinary practice site is strategically located to ensure their in/visibility.

Weather permitting, Tingāra's biweekly practice was held at a corner of a public park not far from Umeda. This corner of this particular park, in fact, is beside the path between one of the park's entrances and the train station, and that specific entrance leads to the streets where gay bars are concentrated. It is not only convenient for members to socialize in gay bars after practice, but also individuals who frequent gay bars are bound to pass by the club's open practice on the way to or from the clubs. As with outdoor activities of any kind, their practice draws attention from passers-by, gay or not. And among them, there are likely those who might find their acquaintances among practicing members.

And then there are more clues – they may notice members' subtle mannerisms or gestures in interactions, which will be discussed in detail later, or recognize certain hairstyles or clothing styles that are in fashion within the gay circle. I first noticed distinctive patterns in some men's haircut, facial hair, and clothing, and asked them about it, and they were amused by my curiosity and told me they were established styles in the gay circle. Thus personal appearance, such as hairstyle, facial hair, body type, and clothing, although they look completely acceptable among a sexually-unspecified (assumedly heterosexual) crowd, and thus would not explicitly give out information about their sexuality, serve as clues, as many gay males groom themselves following certain trends and are therefore easily noticed by other gay males as such.

Thus all the information is hidden in plain sight, which can be accessed only by those who know what to look for and how to read it. And indeed the group's practice regularly draws attention from gay men, although it can be approached and watched by any passers-by. After I left Japan, I heard a straight female joined the club, by watching their practice, without knowing the nature of the club initially. Sometimes they get even unsolicited attention – there was an



incident with a man who had been quietly watching the practice sitting on a nearby bench during my visit. After a while a few members realized that the man was exposing himself to the group, although the group ignored him. It is somewhat unthinkable that a male flasher would expose himself to males, which might incite a violent response from observers, so the man very likely knew the sexual orientation of Tingāra's men and was expressing his same-sex interest to them.

There is an interesting parallel between the early Gajimaru practice in Osaka Castle Park and Tingāra's practice at the park. Both places were chosen primarily for convenience, and transportation, since members came from all over the Kansai area (in case of Tingāra some members came from as far as Kochi, on Shikoku, by ferry). But Gajimaru members chose to be seen and heard, to assert their difference, in a place that has a historical significance in relation to Japan's domination of Okinawa, namely, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Castle. Tingāra chooses to be seen and unseen at the same time. They are seen but not particularly noticed, because these days *eisā* has become so commonplace that Tingāra appears like just another *eisā* club. Unless an observer notices a few men he encountered at one of the gay bars he visited, the distinctive – although not drastically different from straight males – clothing or hairstyles, that were the trend in gay magazines, or the subtle mannerisms that most people may miss unless they look closely and know what they mean.

After practice, they went to restaurants to eat, and often visited gay bars afterwards. While on the move, they were constantly readjusting their behavior to varying degrees, depending on where they were, or to be exact, the proximity of the general crowd to them. At the subway station or the entrance to a restaurant, for example, where other people could see and hear them closely, they suppressed their mannerisms and topics about homosexuality, with their postures slightly more masculine-looking, until they got into a more enclosed space, such as a banquet room or restaurant booth, where they would go back to their previous state. In fact there is a term that refers to acting and talking with such gay-like mannerisms with little or no inhibition, *hogeru*, and sometimes there were notices going around about whether it was safe to *hogeru*, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

The two gay bars I visited with them were not conspicuous, although Tingāra members presumably chose to take me to more inconspicuous bars instead of ostentatious ones, both for my comfort and for the privacy of other customers. In fact, when they took me to those bars, they took the precaution of calling ahead to the bar to tell them they had “mixed company,” and they

made sure the bar was empty or the existing guests wouldn't mind my presence. The first bar was empty when we got there, and the second bar was already filled with mixed company, as there was an after-Rainbow Parade party going on: so my presence was not a problem in either case. The reason they called ahead was to avoid giving a surprise to existing guests, if any, as they might find my non-gay, non-male presence intrusive, or worse, worry about the possibility that I would out them. I often found myself "visible" among them in this way, as I was a female, because if I had been a male my presence wouldn't have been noticeable regardless of my sexual orientation.

At the gay bars I visited none of the activities – drinking, chatting with the bartender, and singing to karaoke tunes – would strike an ordinary Japanese person as unusual, except for the topics we talked about, as we openly discussed their homosexuality, casually and sometimes seriously. The interior design and decoration of the bars did not stand out either – until I went to the bathroom and found ads and brochures for other gay clubs and shows, which indicated that their customers were exclusively gay men. There are other gay bars that cater to gay interests more explicitly, and where customers seek and express intimacy more openly.

### **Online Network: Navigating Virtual Geography**

The Internet has significantly affected the development of gay consciousness in Japan since the early 1990s. This is because the Internet

not only gives access to an unlimited amount of information about the gay world but, equally as important, allows individuals to voice (or, alternatively, construct) their own identities. On the internet, young men are able to encounter the gay world and begin to communicate with others as gay men while still in their teens – something that was almost impossible previously. (McLelland 2005, 105)

Indeed, online networking is one very significant means of Tingāra recruitment, communication, and socialization between members, more than any other *eisā* and *min'yō* clubs I encountered. I attribute this prominence of online networking to the particular conditions faced by sexual minority individuals. Unlike most other minority groups, whose minority conditions are shared collectively by their communities, or at least by their families, sexual minority individuals tend to be geographically dispersed and individually isolated in their personal surroundings, even within their own families (Lunsing 2001; RIOJI and Sunagawa 2007). Networking opportunities among sexual minorities are rare or unavailable unless they live in a

big city, are old enough to have some social and economic independence, and have the right information to reach out (which place to go, whom to meet). In addition to the access of a wide range of information that is not easily achieved offline, I would like to add another significant aspect of online communication that seems to hold significance especially in the case of sexual minorities: invisibility.

Even for individuals in big cities with access and resources, it is not easy to openly pursue relationships with people with shared sexual orientation without risking exposure. As mentioned above, fear of outing is a major concern for many. Under such circumstances, for those who seek information and a means of networking with other gay men, but are not totally certain about disclosing their personal identity (or their sexual orientation in a non-gay environment), the Internet not only allows a gay man to have access to a vast amount of information on the topic and opportunities for networking, but also allows him to do so while he can remain anonymous, or invisible to certain people and can control his degree of disclosure. In off-line contacts such as gay bars where up-close and personal encounters occur, the risk of unwanted outing may increase as he widens his circle of contact. For example, one may use an alias in a gay bar and keep his personal information (name, occupation, address, and so on) from those who he encounters, but his face will be still be seen and known, and some day he might be spotted and exposed outside of his gay domain where he doesn't want to disclose his sexuality. On the other hand, online communication, if used cautiously, allows more control and leeway in which an individual can remain faceless while he assesses the situation and/or gains confidence.

Other than means of individual communication such as cell phones, Mixi was Tingāra's social network service of choice, through which Tingāra members and supporters mainly communicated individually and collectively. On Mixi, all the three Tingāra branches form a Mixi community, and there is another community of a committee working to launch a Sapporo branch. They make announcements about Tingāra's schedule and other LGBTQ events, and remain in contact with other gay or knowing supportive friends on a daily basis. One thing I was struck by while I was navigating the networks of Tingāra members was the fact that they participated in numerous communities for hobbies or common interests that were designed for "gay only" or "gay mix."<sup>79</sup> Some such communities had obvious gay interest such as "voice fetish," "Kansai

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<sup>79</sup> Both gay and straight individuals can participate but they acknowledge and accept the presence of gay members among themselves.

gay men,” “men who prefer the bear type,” and “gays who probably outed themselves [despite their efforts to pass].” However, some of the interests had nothing to do with homosexuality, such as Okinawan music fans, a runners’ club, fans of certain celebrities, cooking, and so on.

This seemed odd to me at first, but over time, as I watched their constant adjustment of behavior in public places so that they would not stand out, I came to understand the significance of communal space (virtual or physical): a space where they could pursue their favorite activities, without constantly conforming to (or worrying about) the prevalent heteronormative pressure in the public sphere that polices their everyday behavior and expects them to act like normal (i.e. heterosexual) masculine males (McLelland 2005). This space of communality was necessary independent of gay clubs and gay bars, where the participant’s main pursuit was romantic or sexual intimacy. “Gay only” or “Gay Mix” hobby groups, including Tingāra, can offer more relaxed, loosely organized continuing relationships.

Even online, some gay individuals made complex arrangements to keep themselves selectively visible and invisible. In order to maintain their virtual network while keeping it separate from their other networks in which they had not come out, these men used certain features of Mixi. First, the fact that Mixi users conventionally operate their accounts under their nickname (and can change it frequently), use photos or graphics other than their own photos as their profile pictures, and can set the degree of exposure of their personal information, makes their efforts to control privacy easier than off-line networking. Gay men can create their gay personas and network completely separately online, while not drawing too much attention for being secretive. Second, there is a “footprint” feature, which shows users who visited their personal pages and lets them trace back to the visitors’ pages. It makes finding your acquaintances easier, but also users are aware if they are receiving suspicious or unwanted attention and can readjust their private settings accordingly.

Unless an individual is open about his sexuality in all his social circles, which is rare, he manages his online account in a way that doesn’t give out his personal information or limits access by those who might know his real-life identity. Some members hold two separate accounts, one for their “real” (closeted) identity which they use to network with friends and acquaintances from their hometown, school, and job, and the other for their gay identity which they use to network with those who are in their sexual minority circles, so that their two social circles remain separated and not known to each other. It was often the case that on the profile

page, which a viewer has to go through to see postings by the account holder, there was a warning that said “I am a gay. If you are not a gay or a lesbian [or if you are a woman, or if you don’t have understanding for sexual minorities], please leave this page.” The Kansai Tingāra top page includes a similar statement: “This is an *eisā* group for sexual minorities, please join us if you have an understanding of that.”

On the other hand, gay men have extensive online networks among their *gay mymiku* (“my Mixi,” equivalent to “friends” on Facebook), which is, again, seemingly much broader and stronger than my other, non-gay informants. Postings (especially diary entries) quickly receive ten to dozens of comments in a matter of minutes and hours, ranging from insider jokes, cheers, to heartfelt sympathies and grieving. In fact those numerous and lengthy comments are not simply responding to the posting itself, but also responding to each other’s comments, exchanging links to their postings that are written in conversation with the initial entry. These entries and comments collectively create common understandings and shared emotions on the given event or topic. It was especially the case when the entry touched on a uniquely gay experience, some enjoyable and others poignant, such as participating in an LGBTQ event or gathering, or the death of a lover or common gay friend.

For example, there was a tragic incident that happened shortly after I left Osaka, one that shook the online network of gay males in which many Tingāra men participated. A close friend of many Tingāra members unexpectedly passed away. A healthy young man in his mid-twenties, happy in his relationship with his lover with whom he lived, went to bed as usual and didn’t wake up the next morning, presumably due to an undiagnosed heart problem. The first wave of comments that hit my informants’ SNS postings were those of shock and disbelief, as would happen when such a young, well-loved person who was so full of life suddenly and unexpectedly passed away. But as days passed and his funeral approached, his lover and friends came to face a rather atypical difficulty for people who grieve the loss of their loved ones. The man had never come out to his family or his other social circle, and without having known of the existence of his gay lover or friends, his family didn’t know how to deal with this unfamiliar crowd of grieving “friends,” whose relationships with the deceased clearly seemed different. It was an awkward and uncomfortable moment for both sides, to the extent that it disrupted the grieving itself; for example, the family became visibly perplexed by the presence of these men, and they were not invited to give a public eulogy, and they were not able to explain their relationships

with the deceased for fear of the reactions of people at the funeral. After the funeral many men participated in the online conversation with a renewed sense of sadness, so much so that they couldn't even grieve their friend's death properly. One Tingāra member added, "We are like common-law wives" (*naien no tsuma*). This Japanese expression, which is often delivered with a nuance of illegitimacy and moral derogation when it is used, illustrates their feelings about their exclusion from, and lack of recognition by, mainstream society.

Such online communication and collective exchanges on distinctively gay experiences indicate that, despite the long separation between the prevalence of non-heteronormative sexual practice and gender expressions and the formation of collective gay consciousness, some kind of gay identity, if not right-based like LGBTQ communities in other societies, was in the making, based on common experience and sentiments they shared via online networks. Further studies will be needed to assess the implications of online-based sexual identity, and its connection with offline practice and identity formation.

### **Code Switching and "Homo Stuff": In/visibility and Communitality**

I discussed the fact that Tingāra members control the degree of their visibility and invisibility by constantly readjusting their behavior as they move in and out of public/private domains and/or safer/less safe domains. In settings in which they feel safe, they can exhibit a full-blown, exaggerated gay persona, which is a playful appropriation or parody of the (often erroneous) representations of male homosexuality. Talking about "homo stuff" (*homoneta*) and "acting like a homo" (*hogeru*) are behavioral and communication strategies that build and strengthen ties among gay men themselves, and sometimes outside of the gay circle, with supportive *nonke* (straight) individuals.

The first occasion when I noticed such behavior was the first day I visited Tingāra during their practice at the park. It was a relaxed moment, a break between more focused, intense group exercise sessions, where some individuals were refining their moves and getting feedback, others were chatting or resting, all still in *eisā* formation. The leader, while standing in front of the formation where he showed the group *eisā* moves, suddenly made a distinctive gesture: he twisted his body a little bit, thrusting his hip sideways and stretching and waving his drumstick-holding arm, striking an effeminate pose as if he was standing onstage as a drag queen. A few men noticed his pose and started chuckling, and one of them, Honey, pointed his finger at the

leader and shouted in a high-pitched voice like a little child, “Moooommy! There’s a *hen’na* man here!” (*hen’na* means strange or weird, but it also implies pervert). The leader looked back at Honey and said, “Wow, coming from YOU, of all people,” at which the others laughed even louder.

Although the leader did not usually strike me as a macho type with his delicate-looking face, medium build, and a mild demeanor, he did not lack any conventional masculinity, and when dancing, his smooth, accurate and athletic drum dance moves (which are supposed to emphasize masculine energy and beauty) visually stood out from among the rest of the group, who looked rather amateurish compared to him. It was obviously a joke when he posed in an effeminate manner like that. On the other hand, Honey *was* a drag queen, and although he was usually not in drag except for at club events, he was usually adorned with many strikingly pink accessories, such as pink ribbon shoe laces, a huge pink tote, a shiny pink purse, a pink cell-phone strap, and pink stationery – someone had warned me, “Don’t even say ‘pink’ in front of him.” He often mixed in a girlish tone and gestures when he was talking, which created an amusing imbalance with his rather large build and thick beard. Thus when he cried “pervert” at the leader’s posture, he was also making fun of himself.

Soon I noticed that during Tingāra gatherings there were constant exchanges of suggestive *homoneta* (homo stuff) jokes, self-mockery, poking fun at each other, or exaggerated flirting flying back and forth between members, in addition to serious conversations on personal issues regarding their sexuality that they confided to close friends within the group. Sexually explicit gestures and jokes alluded to male homosexuality, and to the lack of conventional masculinity. Exaggerated, stereotypical “homo-like” expressions included mocking a posture or utterance somebody had just made, intentionally or unintentionally, someone’s recent love life, someone’s close escape from an accidental self-outing to his unsuspecting coworkers, comments on attractive men, or blatant references to male genitalia or homosexual intercourse. It even included obviously inappropriate touching that would usually be considered sexual harassment, such as pinching a member’s nipples through their clothing. This constant flow of *homoneta* hardly went unnoticed or uncommented, but it usually incited laughter and even more *homoneta* jokes. It was as if everyone was acting like a pervert and enjoying it.

Insider jokes are a common phenomenon in all other *eisā* and *min’yō* groups, activists and hobbyists alike, and serve similar purposes, primarily building and reinforcing ties between

the members, and also their individual and collective identity. However, I was struck by the fact that *homoneta* was used incessantly, almost excessively, that is, even when there was no intention of flirting involved, and that they invariably triggered even more jokes and good laughs among members. The use of *homoneta* seemed to have a larger significance than insider jokes did in other groups.

Although those jokes were mostly sexual, implicitly or explicitly, they seemed to serve social functions more than sexual ones, building homosocial alliances based on their homosexual masculinity. In *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (1994), Allison discusses the “homosocial confirmation of heterosexual identity,” that is, confirmation among corporate male workers expressed through actions like openly fondling or making obscene jokes about the bodies of female hostesses – paid companions – to reinforce their alliance based on their (supposedly) common heterosexual masculinity, rather than for the purpose of fulfilling their sexual desire. Similarly, *homoneta* could be called a “homosocial confirmation of homosexual identity,” in the sense that it is about confirming their shared “differentness” (Goffman 1963) in contrast to their *nonke* (straight) counterparts. Whether romantic and/or sexual emotions were involved or not, those were moments when they revealed and affirmed themselves and each other as gay men, outside their everyday circle where they needed to disguise or suppress themselves in order to act “normal” – heterosexual. Thus, the almost excessive *homoneta* joking probably had a cathartic effect, while tying them together with a shared sexual identity as “homo” – a different sexuality. And although members were aware from their own experiences that same-sex interest, gender non-conformism, and transgenderism are not one and the same thing, they still drew playfully on the mainstream conflation of homosexuality, cross-dressing, and “perverted” sexual desire in their campy expressions of *okama*-ness, as a kind of self-mockery.

### **Building Alliances Beyond Different Sexualities**

Moreover, such connecting through *homoneta* jokes did not occur exclusively among gay men, but sometimes involved knowing, supportive outsiders, namely *nonke* individuals in a safe setting. This was separate from “coming out”: some individuals had come out as gay men to their friends or co-workers, but even in those cases, they were likely to restrain any expressions of their gay lifestyle in everyday interactions with straight people, so that their sexual difference did



not cause discomfort to others.

Openly talking about and expressing (homo)sexually specific issues, referred to as *hogeru* among gay men, required a context in which they could feel safe and comfortable, without fear of being outed or encountering homophobic reactions, and the group switched constantly in and out of the *hogeru* mode in relation to where they were, as shown in their code-switching in different places, or by whom they could be seen. Before having mixed company (i.e. straight males or females), there would be a notice regarding whether it was safe to *hogeru*. Since I was introduced through both Aki and Sunagawa, a safe sign was given even before I arrived, and thus I got to observe *hogeru* behavior even before I watched their complex code-switching.

When I was in their company, I sometimes became part of a joke as either audience or as a topic, in which my difference as a heterosexual and/or a woman was highlighted. They didn't necessarily direct such jokes at me as they did to each other, but they involved me by sometimes turning to me checking whether I got a joke that had just been told. Once they made a joke alluding to anal sex, and although I eventually got it, it took me a couple of seconds longer after others already started laughing, and they found it very amusing when they saw an uncomprehending look in my face for a moment. They started telling each other things like "Why don't you tell her what it means exactly?" "A detailed anatomical illustration would help." "Hey, if we go that hard-core she'll flip and run away." A couple of times they ostentatiously invited me to gay-only club parties, only to see and become amused by my baffled reactions. When I unsuspectingly asked if a woman could join such a party, they responded by laughing while the one who had invited me replied with a straight face, "Well, you could pass if you flattened those boobs with a bandage or something."

Sometimes a straight individual actively participated in *homoneta* jokes. Another *nonke* individual who was dragged into *hogeru* settings was the male owner of a small Okinawan restaurant-bar where Tingāra had held their after-Parade parties for two years in a row. The owner was a friend of Aki and mine. I was told that the first year Aki did not disclose the exact nature of the gathering, and although the group was initially advised to "act normal," they had ended up *hogeru*-ing out of excitement and intoxication, and Aki had received a good amount of teasing by the owner and our common friends afterwards, based on the "suspicion of being homo" (*moho giwaku*). The second year the group went with full disclosure, because after all, the

group had rented out the entire restaurant so they didn't have to worry about the other guests.

During the after-Parade Party at his restaurant/music bar, the owner had entertained Tingāra members with his Okinawan *min'yō* singing and sanshin playing, as he usually did for his customers. When he finished a song, a member would pour him a glass of *awamori*, a well-established convention at Okinawan music events for performers to “soak their throat” in between their performances. Then the owner, in pretentious fear, had shouted “Oh no, what are you guys scheming to do to me after getting me drunk?!” at which the entire audience roared with laughter.

In both cases, the supposed gap of knowledge or experience between them and me (such as my ignorance about homosexual intimacy) incited more laughter, thereby building emotional alliances. While those jokes highlighted the difference between our different sexes, gender and sexualities (e.g. emphasizing my difference as a heterosexual woman and my ignorance of their world), at the same time, they underscored the unusual and mutual willingness to open up, to learn about and share each others' differences. This sharing of mutual difference is contrasted to situations where there was unknowing or uncomprehending mixed company, in which they would inhibit such expressions and “act normal” in order not to let their sexual difference stand out.

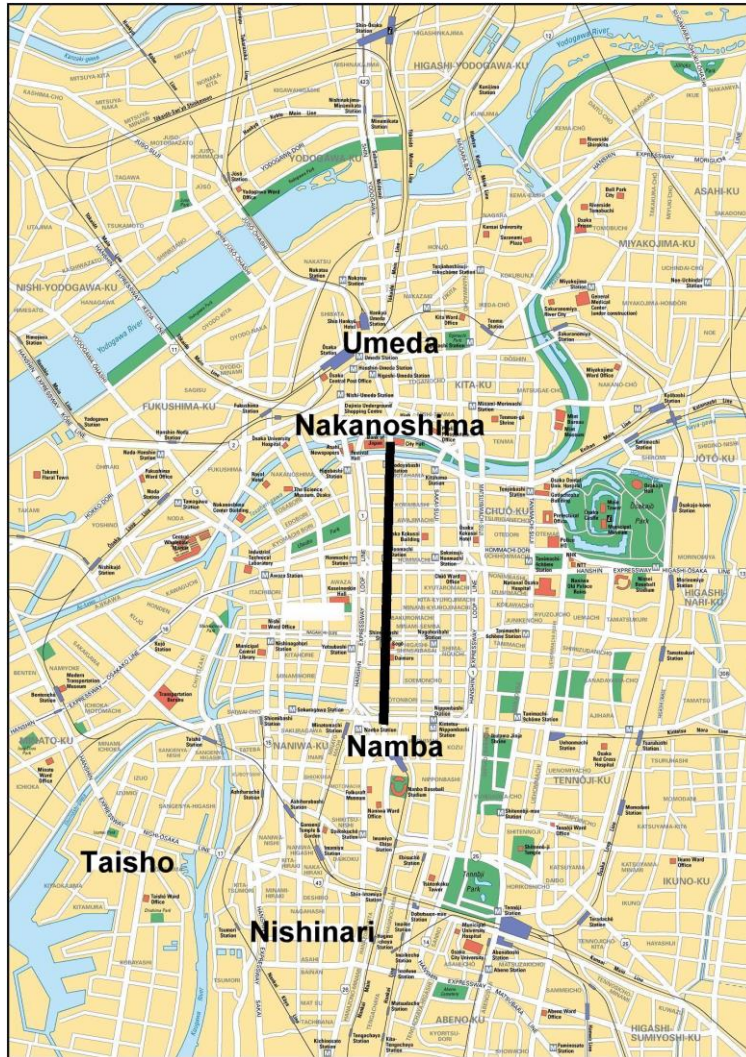
### **Kansai Rainbow Parade: Coming Out Halfway**

So far I discussed the strategies of Tingāra members to remain visible and invisible in any given situation so that they could ensure a certain degree of safety and privacy while reaching out to other gay men (and supportive straight individuals) and make connections. However, there were times when Tingāra as a group had to move out of their comfort zone into a relentlessly public space, into an uncertain territory of being seen, namely at LGBTQ events for the general public, which were the primary context of the formation of Tingāra. Parades, by definition, are meant to be seen by the public. The ostentatious and public nature of the Parade seemed to underscore the diverse, multi-layered/ambivalent nature of each member's comfort level regarding the disclosure of their sexual identities.

Joining Tingāra presupposes exposing one's sexuality to a certain degree, initially to its members, and eventually to its audience. The degree of exposure varies between performance

occasions. In gay clubs, where the audience are gays who share the same concerns about exposure, their sexual identity is likely kept within the club. For other semi-open LGBTQ events such as PLUS+ (an HIV/AIDS awareness promotion event), which are open to the public in principle, the possibility of unwanted exposure is higher, but the circulation of the event information is somewhat limited and visitors are likely to be LGBTQ themselves or their supporters, and the audience still has shared concerns and/or understanding of their need for identity protection. In contrast, the Rainbow Festival and Parades in Tokyo, Osaka, and Sapporo are held to promote LGBTQ awareness, by letting their presence be known to the general public, by being visible.

In the Kansai Rainbow Parade, the procession walked for more than two hours on Midōsuji Street, the busiest street that runs through the center of Osaka City from north to south, surrounded by high-rising office buildings, department stores, high-end boutique shops, movie theaters, and amusement facilities, to be seen and heard by thousands, or maybe tens of thousands of weekend pedestrians, and where there was a high possibility of coming across someone one knew, whether friends, coworkers, neighbors, or family. In an era of omnipresent cell phone cameras and online networking, the risk of being seen – and known – multiplied and included those who were not physically present on the site at the moment. Moreover, there were media people with cameras and video cameras, from television and the newspapers, to cover the Parade, and their faces could be easily printed or broadcast in the local or national media.



**Figure 13. Kansai Rainbow Parade Procession**  
 (adapted from <http://www.yourcitymaps.com/en/asia/japan/osaka-map.htm>)

On a fine Sunday in October 2008, the participants and spectators of the Kansai Rainbow Parade gathered at Nakanoshima Park, on a small sandbank of the same name along the Kyū-Yodo River that runs south of Umeda. The park was surrounded by the government facilities, museums, and office buildings that lie in the heart of Osaka City. Balloons in rainbow colors decorated every corner. The place was filled with a colorful mix of people – drag queens, nearly naked men in bondage outfits, *kosupure* (costume play) artists, brass band performers with instruments and wearing matching T-shirts, and curious foreign spectators with cameras. Although not as conspicuous, the majority of the crowd were “normal-looking” people, who did not stand out in any sense, and you could not make assumptions about their sexualities solely on

the basis of their being there, as a number of straight participants were present to support the cause and walk together, willingly risking being mistaken for members of a sexual minority.

The parade was organized to promote awareness of sexual diversity and LGBTQ rights to the general public, under the slogan “Let’s color Midōsuji Street in a rainbow” (*Midōsuji wo niji'iro ni*). Another famous slogan went “once you walk, you will change” (*arukeba kawaru*), indicating that the other major objective of the Parade was to empower individual members of the sexual minority, by bringing them out of isolation and affirming their existence not only to the public but also to themselves, giving them a sense of community by walking together out in the open.

As I approached Tingāra, I noticed the crowd surrounding it consisted entirely of men, performers, spectators, and photographers alike, with the only exception being me. Feeling a bit self-conscious, I said to a member, “Wow, I am really the only girl here.” “Don’t worry,” he replied, winking at me, “we are all sissies (*onē*) at heart.”

This day, about forty men from the Tokyo and Osaka branches had gathered in *eisā* costumes in black, white, and gold, and in purple headgear. After the opening ceremony, they walked down Midōsuji Street, the busiest street in Osaka City, from north to south, for about two hours, through blocks of high office buildings, department stores, movie theaters, and so on, bustling with weekend visitors. As three accompanists played sanshin and sang to the pre-recorded Okinawan folk songs, Tingāra men started dancing gallantly, drum dancers beating big or small Okinawan drums, and bare-hand dancers making energetic moves that resembled karate, all making the rhythmical shouts that are distinctive in this Okinawan dance.

After the opening ceremony to celebrate the Parade, the crowd moved out of the park and headed to Midōsuji Street. Along with two other groups, Tingāra led the procession at the head. The first in the procession was Brass Mix, the famous brass band that consisted of LGBTQ individuals and straight supporters of LGBTQ (hence the name “Mix”). Tingāra followed Brass Mix, and the next group was a mixture of people in costumes, scantily clad performers in their erotic cabaret or bondage-style costumes, drag queens, and *kosupure* (costume play) artists, who marched to upbeat dance music, holding rainbow balloons and various LGBTQ cause banners such as ones advocating Gay Pride and HIV/AIDS awareness. Following them were individuals in ordinary clothes, LGBTQ individuals and their straight supporters, who were indistinguishable by their appearance. There was a designated “camera-free zone” in the procession where taking

pictures was not allowed, thereby ensuring a certain degree of anonymity; some individuals took the extra precaution of wearing hats and masks.

Although Tingāra walked brazenly visible and audible, its members' self-confidence in their sexuality, degree of disclosure, and comfort level of being recognized as such was by no means uniform. Very few members were openly gay in all of the social circles they were a part of: their friends, coworkers, and family. Most others were partially open or closeted to varying degrees. Some passed as straight outside Tingāra. Some had only come out to close friends or family members. Walking as a part of a procession could be risky business for many of them. Some members who came to practice didn't walk in the procession, but instead were walking or standing outside of the parade like ordinary spectators, exchanging knowing smiles with the procession when it passed by, which the dancing members returned with smiles or by waving. Even for those who had decided to perform on the street, their confidence was not uniform. Honey, the PR person for the event, had made an arrangement with the camera crew for the media coverage. Like the camera-free zone in the entire procession, the dancing formation had been set up in such a way that only those who wouldn't mind media publicity danced in front; Honey stood in the middle, and warned the camera crew not to shoot the faces of the dancers behind him. I heard that a member of one branch might go to perform at the events in areas other than his own locale, as it was too risky to perform at his local (*jimoto*) without being noticed by his acquaintances. It was especially so for the Okinawa branch, ironically, since Okinawa is a "small world" where anonymity is hard to keep, and people are thought to be less tolerant of sexual differences.

Such complex, and sometimes even contradictory arrangements in the Parade procession illustrate that coming out is not a clear-cut, either-or practice but rather a gradual, multi-layered one within which there are multiple mini-borders of visibility/invisibility, and that individuals constantly cross over those borders on a daily basis while readjusting their behaviors accordingly. For each individual, deciding to come out in another layer/space and feeling comfortable, which differentiates "coming out" from "being outed," takes significant soul-searching and mental effort, and the resulting confidence. It's a conscious process of each individual, which not everyone reaches at the same rate.

Such fear, in turn, reveals the everyday pressures and precariousness of these men's lives, the anxiety of coming out half-way, of being out to the point of walking in the Rainbow

procession in the center of Osaka City on one hand, while being closeted in other aspects of their lives, worried about one world leaking into the other. I imagine that when I first showed interest in Tingāra, I must have been perceived by Aki as some kind of breach between his two separate worlds, and to him, judging by how he tried to distance himself from other gay men by presenting himself as a “helper,” rather than one of “them,” I presume that the perceived threat was not an insignificant one. Later he told me in private, after he had seen that I got along really well with Tingāra members at practices, the parade, and at the after-parade party, that he was really glad to see that Tingāra members had accepted me so well, and he was happy as if it was not about me, but about him. I wondered if his uncertainty was in fact about me accepting him as a gay man, after one year’s friendship.

But then, taking risks and overcoming the fear of exposure can be in and of itself a transformative experience. As the Parade’s slogan said, “once you walk, you will change”; as their experience in Rainbow events accumulated, members had more confidence about going public, and also about their sexual identities. The Kansai leader expressed it as “peeling off one’s skins one by one” (*zurumuke*), revealing one’s true self a bit more each time, as he had felt since he had started facing his own sexual orientation seven years earlier. In that sense, the experience of walking in the Parade is an important apparatus in the making of Japanese gay identity (and likely LGBTQ identity as a collective sexual minority).

### **The Price of a Gay Lifestyle**

Earlier I mentioned that these single men tended to put more time and money into their pursuit of leisure and hobbies than their married heterosexual counterparts, as they were relatively free from various family obligations, and could keep much more of their budget to themselves to spend on dating, clubbing, tours, and other hobby activities, instead of using or saving it to support their families. However, such apparent freedom came with a price, in a society that emphasized and only acknowledged social reproduction through legally married, heterosexual unions.

During their conversations with me, some men showed genuine curiosity and also envy at times on learning that I was married and a mother, telling me that they had wished to have an ordinary family like I did until they had finally come to accept that they were gay, and how lucky I was to have a family of my own. I told them that there are different ways to have a family of

one's own, in Japan as well as elsewhere, giving the examples of adoption by same-sex couples in the US, or Yoshiya Nobuko's case of legally adopting her lover to ensure her protection (Robertson 2005). But I knew that what they meant was something different – it was an ordinary life in which one didn't have to question, challenge, struggle, and negotiate with society's assumptions (and often their own, too) to deal with the banal issues of everyday life and relationships. Among them there were a few couples in stable, long-term relationships that were referred to and recognized in the gay circle as husband and wife (*fūfu*), often referring to their partners as “husband” (*danna*).

There are periodic wedding events among gay men, part of a well-known gay performer's concerts where couples have wedding ceremonies. As of 2013 Tokyo Disneyland started hosting same-sex weddings (Tabuchi 2013). Having a wedding at such events is considered within gay circles as official as a gay union can get, short of a legal union. While this can provide part of the support and stability that a conventional, legally recognized couple or family does, there are clear limits – both material and non-material – in a union that lacks both legal and social acceptance.

The gloomy vision of being left alone in old age without a safety net for physical, financial, and mental support manifested itself from time to time. At the after-Parade party, a young *jikata* in his mid-twenties, when given a chance to toast, shouted “To our nursing home security!” at which everyone burst into laughter.<sup>80</sup> Later I read a Mixi posting by a member in his mid-forties, about a birthday party of a friend who was in his fifties, also attended by other older friends in their forties and fifties, members of the “ladies' club” (*fujinkai*). In an overall lighthearted description of the party, with humorous photos of people thoroughly enjoying the moment, the writer mentioned, in a passing manner, how the party was such a precious moment for all of them, since the older they got, the harder it became for them to have or keep meaningful relationships, whether romantic, friendship, or family.

Although the toast at the after-Parade party and the Mixi posting were presented in a lighthearted, witty manner, they suggested the poignancy and bittersweet emotions shared by these men, about their uncertain old age and their precarious fate, the possibility that they would probably not be able to have a “normal” family, and would not be accepted as a “normal” family

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<sup>80</sup> Later I learned that the idea came from the movie *Le Maison de Himiko* (2005), which describes an imaginary nursing home for gay men.



by their relatives and neighbors, as the young gay man's sudden passing had painfully reminded them. Without "normal" families of their own, who would take care of them when they were old, they might end up tieless and homeless. Such a vision might be too unbearable for some, and some friends, who were sitting next to them now, might someday renounce this way of life and leave for a "normal" life, cutting all connections and friendships. Or worse, some may try blackmailing or outing them, like the former partner of the gay restaurant owner had done, and had almost bankrupted him. It was this gloomy future that these young, attractive men were laughing over, and it was in a stark contrast with their current, seemingly exuberant, hedonistic, present-oriented lifestyle as extended singles.

Goffman notes that the information management of the discreditable person comes with a cost (1963, 73-104). Even compartmentalizing between their gay and non-gay identities, such as using double accounts when networking online, seemed to come with a mental cost. Monkey, a young, outgoing Tingāra member who had managed two Mixi accounts, had once entirely pulled away from his online networking after suffering from a psychosomatic condition. His doctor and Monkey himself had suspected that it was caused by his fragmented self. Before it happened, he once mentioned on his Mixi posting that he had narrowly escaped from visiting his high school friend's Mixi profile while using his gay account, which could have exposed him, because of Mixi's "footprint" function. Although eventually he came back to Mixi under a new name after a few months' silence, I suspect that such constant tension and anxiety affects not a few individuals. Similar cases of psychological problems of passing minority individuals have been reported in De Vos and Wagamatsu's study on Burakumin (1966) and Murphy-Shigematsu's report on his counseling with passing Korean and Burakumin college students (1999). There seems to exist a common threat – the toll that passing takes on these invisible minority individuals.

### **Dancing for the Souls of the Dead: Gay Community as a New "Us"**

Considering the perceived and real risks gay men face in their lives, and the sense of isolation and alienation resulting from such risks, the pressing need for gay men to create a space to belong becomes apparent, even if the language around it is less obviously political and revolves more around pleasure and fun seeking. But then, the political importance of expression that is not so obviously political is what made Gajimaru's nascent cultural activism so powerful

three decades ago, because it was about pleasure and communality as much as it was a political statement. Having a “life group,” where those isolated Okinawan youth could be their Okinawan selves, be communal and have a means of collective expression, and have fun together, was more political than any slogans and protests could have been.

Although Tingāra was operating in a whole different dimension in that it was revolving around a different kind of difference, namely sexual difference instead of ethnic and cultural difference, Tingāra’s members were seemingly less desperate in their socio-economic status and their lifestyles, and they were less determined to fight discrimination than Okinawan collective employment youth had been thirty some years earlier, there are certain similarities running through these two groups. After all, their politics were expressed through their body and feelings, more than political slogans and rallies.

It was at first intuitive before it was analytical – I simply saw how much fun Tingāra members were having among themselves, uninhibited, and enjoying dancing *eisā* outside of performance occasions. When we were drinking at an Okinawan restaurant, when an *eisā* tune was played, a couple of them spontaneously started moving their arms and shoulders to dance to the tune, while sitting down, often intoxicated, with their eyes closed, in merriment, while others were humming the tune or quietly singing. That was a familiar scene that I had witnessed over and over when I was around Gajimaru. When Gajimaru members were eating and drinking in an Okinawan restaurant, somebody would pick up a sanshin, and people would start singing or dancing, just using whatever was around like paper plates and chopsticks, as makeshift drums. It reminds me of the recollections of an early Gajimaru member of when Okinawan youth had first gathered in the park to practice *eisā*: “Our faces started radiating with delight and excitement when we danced together. For the first time, I realized that we were in fact much brighter and carefree people than we thought, even those who usually seemed lonely and withdrawn” (Kinjo, interview, c1996). Isolation and alienation were serious problems that ailed members of both clubs, and finding and creating communality can be a political act in the face of the forces of erasure and silencing, and the forces of death, as I discussed in relation to the Gajimaru Club.

I discussed the fact that in the context of Okinawan cultural activism, *eisā* became a significant means of us-making due to its genre characteristics – collective drum dance – as well as its original context as a dance for the souls of the ancestors. Although it originally developed in Okinawan villages where land, shared history, and kin ties bound its inhabitants multiple

times, once detached from its original context, it was used to create ties where there weren't any: in Gajimaru and TOCC's *eisā* for diasporic Okinawans, and in Gajimaru's *eisā* at the Kamagasaki Summer Festival for day laborers and homeless men. This act of communality – us-making – was accomplished once again with Tingāra's *eisā*, in ordinary practice but especially on the day of the Kansai Rainbow Parade, as it was a special occasion for LGBTQ individuals as a collective.

In SNS accounts posted by Tingāra members after the Parade, excitement and enthusiasm mixed with their usually repressed sadness. At the Parade, one member experienced powerful emotions as he remembered the heart-breaking memories he had as a gay man, such as facing people's contempt, betrayal by friends and lovers, extortion, and the loss of friends to AIDS or suicide. Another member similarly saw an opportunity to mourn for and honor anonymous gay men. Instead of dancing *eisā* as he usually did, he walked with Tingāra holding a huge red banner in a white *chōran* overcoat, with a partner in a red coat and carrying a white banner; as a pair, they promoted HIV/AIDS awareness.<sup>81</sup> He ended up dancing *eisā* in that costume. He wrote how emotional and tearful he was throughout.

If Tingāra's men had been more knowledgeable about Okinawan cultural tradition and the history of *eisā*, as Gajimaru and TOCC members were, they might have made an explicit connection between their *eisā* performance at the Parade and the meaning of *eisā*. But even without such explicit connection, they commemorated individuals who had killed themselves, died from AIDS, or lived miserably due to their negation by society and their self-alienation by performing this festive dance at the Parade. Like the homeless men and aging day laborers in Kamagasaki, the affinity between Tingāra men was constructed beyond blood lines, ethnicity, or local ties, and was based on their shared experience as gay men. Despite individual uncertainties and ambivalence, such experience of the collective performance of *eisā* and their interpretations of it were transformative for them, towards their collective gay identity in the making.

In that sense, Tingāra's case provides significant insight when considering the dichotomies made by the other informants in previous chapters and also by me: Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan; pre- vs. post-Okinawa Boom; activist approach vs. hobbyist approach; and identity assertion-confirmation vs. entertainment. Tingāra complicates the dichotomy of cultural

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<sup>81</sup> *Chōran* is a male cheerleader's costume in sports derived from school and military uniforms of the Meiji period.

activism (by Okinawans) and cultural appropriation (by Japanese), as in this case *eisā* has been appropriated by Japanese hobbyists, who happen to be gay, and used in the context of LGBTQ activism. This became possible because *eisā* had become decontextualized, and therefore available to non-Okinawans, as the result of the Okinawa Boom, which was the main criticism from Okinawa Boom critics who saw this as cultural exploitation.

### **The *Jikata* Incident: An Attempt to Find Connection**

So far I have illustrated the fact that Tingāra members and the rest of the Okinawan/Japanese participants in Okinawan dance and music revolved around different axes of difference: sexual difference and ethnic difference. Accordingly, they maintained separate domains in which they were engaged in Okinawan dance and music, contemplated their differences, and interpreted their practice. This segregation was contributed to by both parties. Except for a couple of members in Tingāra, one of them Korean, most men did not express any interest in the issue of ethnic discrimination; in the discussions of social and ethnic inequality I experienced regarding Okinawan, Buraku, day laborers and the homeless, and Korean issues in and around the minority crescent, issues of sexuality were never raised.

Was it possible for either party to see beyond their ethnic or sexual boundaries, and build a mutual understanding or an alliance? Although I didn't come close to finding an answer or seeing such an alliance realized, I had an opportunity to inquire about such a possibility.

At Tingāra's practice, I sometimes played sanshin along with Aki. By then I had been learning and playing sanshin for a year, and knew most *min'yō* songs used in *eisā*, if only their melodies. So I sometimes picked up an idle sanshin and played some tunes next to Aki and Tsune, Tingāra's *jikata*. Such an attempt would have been risky in other settings, but I did that without worrying about offending anybody in Tingāra because I knew Tingāra members wouldn't care, and I knew Aki very well. This was what Aki and I used to do at another sanshin club, where we had first met, or at Okinawan bars where we used to hang out. The leader saw this, and on one occasion he invited me to join the Parade as one of the *jikata*, "if you don't mind walking in the Parade with us, that is," he added. And a few members told me that it would be fun if I walked with them, because they had no female in the group. The more, the merrier. The act of walking the Parade entailed the risk of being mistaken for "one of them," namely, a sexual minority, and the leader was unsure whether I was willing to take that risk.

I had no problem with that. My concern was something else. What if somebody from Taisho saw me playing the sanshin in front of the Japanese *eisā* dancers, brazenly assuming the role of *jikata*? I was worried about it, more than the possibility that I could be mistaken for a lesbian or bisexual.

For Okinawan-based *eisā* groups, such as the Gajimaru Club and the TOCC, the *jikata*, the sanshin accompanist, is a highly respected position. Being able to play sanshin well and sing well is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. The role of *jikata* comes from a hierarchy based on seniority, not necessarily of age but of time spent in *eisā* and accumulated experience. This distinction is more an idealized notion than a real one, especially in Osaka, and there were individual differences about how strictly to stick to this distinction.

I learned the importance of this distinction from an awkward incident at Gajimaru Club's practice in the early phase of my research. Shinzato-san, a first generation Okinawan and a founding member of Gajimaru, occasionally taught *min'yō* and sanshin at Bunko's sanshin class, which I participated in with Yumiko, a sanshin prodigy and a new Gajimaru member. I knew Shinzato-san wanted to train Yumiko to be Gajimaru's *jikata*, so the next day when the Gajimaru practice was held I brought my sanshin, in the hope that I could watch the two of them and also learn some *eisā* tunes. When I showed up, other Gajimaru members greeted me nonchalantly, and casually asked me "So you are going to help us out?" when they noticed my sanshin. However, Shinzato-san was not pleased at all to see my sanshin. At the sanshin class at Bunko, he would exuberantly give me compliments or encouragement, often appreciating my effort and commitment to learn Okinawan culture. This was not the case at the Gajimaru practice. Although he didn't say anything directly to me, he almost ignored my presence with a stern face while he was teaching Yumiko new songs.

When the practice was over he turned to me and told me quietly but firmly, "Sumi-san, this is not a sanshin class. So you can leave your sanshin at home next time." And he asked a female member to teach me *teodori* (hand-dance for female dancers) in the future. Although I didn't join *teodori* lesson later, I heeded Shinzato-san's advice about not bringing my sanshin to Gajimaru's *eisā* practice again. Shinzato-san was known to be overly particular that way and he was often criticized outside of Gajimaru for being an Okinawan exclusivist. I knew that my attempt to learn *jikata*'s sanshin didn't matter to other Gajimaru members, but to Shinzato-san, while it was acceptable for me to try to learn sanshin as a respectful outsider, I was out of my

place when I tried to learn the *jikata*'s way of playing, although the same music was taught in sanshin class. *Jikata* was more of a prestigious position given to someone with cultural knowledge and experience accumulated over time, on top of having musical prowess, or even when the musical talent fell a little short.

Whether their feelings were justified or not, I knew there were people who took offense when somebody who they didn't think deserved it assumed a *jikata* position, and especially when that someone was not Okinawan, and it could be considered as showing disrespect for *eisā*. That was the same kind of offense they often took from clueless Japanese appropriators, who claimed to love Okinawa and Okinawans, and were usually unaware that their "love" might feel offensive to Okinawans, or Japanese who tried to earn an Okinawa *min'yō* license and teach classes, just because they could sing. Or Japanese activists who used Okinawan songs as a symbol of peace and the environment, just because they worked for good causes. People who did not know their place.

But in Tingāra, almost nobody was aware of such distinctions, and they did not care about them. The leader was certainly not aware of it when he asked me to join. Aki was probably the only one who was aware of it, but that was exactly why Aki had issues with those Okinawans who constant preached about Okinawan discrimination and then displayed favoritism towards Okinawans, which he implied to be hypocrisy. And playing *jikata*, that is, getting everyone to dance to his sanshin, was the biggest joy he had as a part of Tingāra. When the leader suggested that I join them in the Parade, I immediately wanted to participate, because many Tingāra members were so kind and friendly to me, and we were having fun together. But at the same time I remembered Shinzato-san's reaction.

Until then I hadn't told anyone about Tingāra because I wasn't sure about their reaction. How would devoted Okinawan activists, who were usually critical about Japanese hobbyists' haphazard and sloppy attempt to imitate what they had been struggling so hard to build and maintain, respond to Tingāra's *eisā*, which was totally out of the Okinawan context and also quite amateurish? And how might they take my participation in Tingāra, especially after I had joined in their mockery of Japanese appropriators' sloppy efforts at the Toyota Eisā Festival, only two months earlier. I wasn't just a clueless *Okinawazuki* who they just thought was a nuisance. By this time I was expected to know, and to act, better. Otherwise I could ruin the trust I had been building with them for over a year, and fall into the other category of outsider activists,

journalists, and scholars who “acted like they knew better but really didn’t.”

I had no obligation to tell anybody, and I could have gone ahead without saying anything: it was just a research opportunity like any other, and I didn’t need anybody’s permission. But what if I didn’t tell anyone and somebody saw me? Midōsuji Street ran near the Taisho district, and since the whole purpose of the Parade was being visible to as many people as possible, it wouldn’t be surprising if I came across one or two informants of mine from Taisho. Although my risk was much less significant (as it mattered only to me and my conscience) compared to that which Tingāra members had to take, I might have tasted a slightly similar fear of exposure. It felt like a dilemma, where I could have disappointed and thereby undermined my rapport with one, by supporting the other, while in fact I highly respected the agenda and efforts of both.

I wasn’t sure whether the fact that these men were gay would somehow alleviate or aggravate the situation. While I had had plenty of chances to hear about other minority issues, such as Koreans, Burakumin, day laborers and the homeless, and people with disabilities, during the course of my fieldwork over the year, issues regarding sexual minorities had never come up in conversations, and I honestly had no clue about the ideas of my informants, and my friends, in Taisho. Especially those of the Gajimaru Club members. And in fact I was afraid to find out, in case they turned out to be homophobic. I would be disappointed if I saw that what Aki talked about was probably true – that they did indeed hold prejudices against somebody else while crying out about discrimination. Probably it mattered more to *me*, than to anybody else.

When I told Aki and Honey about my concern that I might upset my other informants in Taisho if I accepted the leader’s invitation, they told me that I didn’t have to participate if I didn’t feel comfortable. No pressure, it was not a big deal for them whether I walked with them or not, and it wouldn’t disappoint him either. But as much as I was afraid, I wanted to know what people in Gajimaru might think about Tingāra, their use of *eisā*, and my possible participation. I wondered whether their sense of Okinawan authenticity would somewhat mechanically apply the Okinawan/non-Okinawan distinction even in this case, or would go beyond it. They had already embraced other minority groups on the condition of shared marginality, exclusion from mainstream Japanese society and the Japanese state. And I wanted to know whether they could see the similarity between Tingāra and themselves, or if it was only visible to me. The connection between them had only occurred to me when I had a chance to observe both of them closely, on and off-stage.

Would it be any different with Tingāra, because these men were not Okinawans and their dance was all wrong, and they were dancing at the wrong occasion? I was wondering if some, if not all, Gajimaru members might be able to see the connection, rather than jumping into the usual *Okinawazuki* criticism. So I asked a few of them in person. But first I carefully selected people who I thought could see beyond the simple Okinawan/non-Okinawan division, from my past experience with them. First I stopped by the house of a Japanese husband-Okinawan wife couple who had been Gajimaru members since the 1980s. Although they were always liked and respected in the Club for their contribution and personalities, I could imagine what might have happened if the husband, an accomplished sanshin player and *min'yō* singer, had gone beyond the humble, secondary position that he usually took and demanded more. Although the husband kept quiet about the topic, the wife had once or twice reported with a humorous, mildly sarcastic tone, and with a pride for her husband, how other Okinawans were unhappy, or even jealous, when her husband had started learning sanshin when the couple joined the Club in the 1980s, and it turned out that he was actually good at it.

The couple instantly grasped my dilemma. First they expressed curiosity that such a group existed, and that I, who had been in Osaka only about a year, was able to find it. When I told them about Tingāra's invitation and my hesitation about playing a *jikata*, the wife told me right away that she didn't see a problem, while the husband paused a little bit before he told me a story. "When we were working with other organizations, there was this political activist group, all Japanese. Once they started using *eisā* in rallies to promote the anti-military agenda. They took it for granted, because they thought they were using it for a good cause, but I wasn't sure, you know... But I think it's fine that you help them." As usual, the husband was more cautious, while critical of Japanese attempts to appropriate Okinawan music or dance, and more importantly, their sense of entitlement that justified their means. I think it was this humility of his, knowing his place in Gajimaru as a non-Okinawan, that kept him from conflicts in the Gajimaru Club over two decades and through so many tensions and break-ups.

The next person I talked to had been a Gajimaru member since its inception and had been the organizer of Kansai Okinawa Bunko. He was a steadfast activist, not very forgiving when it came to Japanese appropriation and sense of entitlement, and he was often criticized as being too rigid and ideological. But he was also a contemplative man, who had struggled for decades to comprehend the difficult place that the offspring of the Okinawan diaspora (including himself)



were in, as not-Japanese-but-not-quite-Okinawan, and I expected him to be able to see beyond a simplistic division between ethnicities.

“I think it’s OK,” he told me when I explained the situation. “If they need *eisā* to have their voice heard, I don’t see why they shouldn’t go ahead and use it.” His face was gentle, unlike the indignant expression when he talked about some other Japanese activists who used Okinawan dances and music, and performed them incorrectly, as if they were entitled to do so as long as they were supporting the right cause. Maybe it was the fact that gay men are an under-recognized minority, like Okinawans had been three decades ago, compared to those privileged Japanese activists, or the fact that I took the trouble to ask his opinion when I didn’t have an obligation to do so that made the difference. “I heard from them that it’s harder for Tingāra to run their group in Okinawa, that they are not liked there. Maybe people are more conservative on those issues over there?” “I wouldn’t think so – I think it’s probably that Okinawans are more particular and choosy about *eisā* itself? Because it’s *jimoto* (“local”, meaning it’s the native place of *eisā*), people have clear preferences and favorite *eisā* styles, favorite groups, it’s harder for a contemporary *eisā* to establish itself in Okinawa, unlike here. People tend to be particular.” Although I didn’t have the nerve to ask Shinzato-san, the conversations with those three people gave me enough confidence to join the parade as a *jikata*.

On the Parade day, my dilemma itself was solved, almost ridiculously easily, by a simple technicality. Tingāra had plenty of *jikata*, four of them, but it was short of camera crew. Aki asked me if I could videotape the procession with his camera, and I happily obliged. And in between I took pictures of members with their cameras while they were dancing. I shared my photos and the video clips I took as my data, which a member came in person to pick up, and they were very happy that they got so many photos, because they couldn’t take pictures of themselves while they were dancing. In fact, on the same day as the Parade, Gajimaru was having their little celebration/reflection party going on for the success of the 33th Taisho Eisā Festival. They invited me to join, but I couldn’t miss the Parade, so I took a taxi to stop by Bunko before Tingāra’s after-Parade party started. Everyone was pretty intoxicated, and chatting. Kazuyuki, Gajimaru’s representative, greeted me.

“Cho-san, we missed you!”

“I’m sorry – actually I went to this event, a Parade for sexual minorities. There is an *eisā* group of sexual minorities, did you know that?”

“Oh, you met them? Yeah, I saw that group on Mixi, and was curious about them.”

“Oh you know them? I didn’t know. I didn’t think anybody knew about the group.”

“Not much. I just knew such a group existed because I saw it among Mixi communities – I was wondering what *eisā* is for them.”

“They want to show their existence in the Parade by dancing *eisā*. They don’t seem to contact other *eisā* groups, because they are not sure how others might react.”

Then I was surprised by this astute observation from Kazuyuki.

“I see. I can see how they would want to be recognized...because not many people care about them. Come to think about it – not even us. It’s not that [Gajimaru] means to exclude such people, but we are all about families.” He looked at his daughters and continued. “We are all married couples and kids here, and we also have singles, but we take family for granted, so we always ask them, like ‘When you are going to get married?’ But that kind of question might make those people uncomfortable, I guess...”

“So I get *that*. But what I still don’t get is...What is *eisā* for them? I mean, we are *Uchinānchu*, *eisā* is not something we can sever from ourselves. We don’t have a choice...but it’s not the case for them. It doesn’t have to be *eisā*. So why is it *eisā* that they dance?”

He was not angry, but genuinely curious. I was struck by this sense of inseparability, which overlapped with something that had been said by Chinami, the TOCEC instructor and a second generation Okinawan. She had once asked a loaded question about Japanese dancing *eisā* in her Club: “Why should it be *eisā*, of all things? Why not hula dance?” To Kazuyuki, a second generation Okinawan and a *ryūbu* master’s son, *eisā* was natural like air – or inseparable. But I felt as if I had caught a glimpse of the complex emotions those Okinawans had about their music and dance. It was probably even more complex for second generation Okinawans, than for the first generation Okinawans, because they knew it didn’t come so naturally – it seemed like a given but it was actually not.

I honestly couldn’t answer his question, so I asked him instead. “Would you like to meet them in person and ask them? I am going back to them and I can give them your message”

“Sure. Tell them they can contact me if they are interested, or need any help.”

I went back to Tingāra’s party, and relayed Kazuyuki’s message to Aki and the leader.

They told me that it would be nice to meet Gajimaru, but honestly they were so intoxicated that night with their own success it probably slipped their mind. And considering the

extreme caution Aki had taken with me, I doubted they actually were going to meet any time soon. And soon after this, I left Osaka. Although a meeting between the groups was not realized, I had deeper conversations with members of both groups, which had illuminated for me the different positionalities of the two groups (i.e. their different interpretation of *eisā*, and what was at stake for both of them in performing *eisā*). Also I had learned that some individuals in Gajimaru indeed saw beyond the simple ethnic division and sympathized with Tingāra, and showed their endorsement of Tingāra's use of *eisā* as their means of expression, compared to their usual criticism of other Japanese hobbyists' use of Okinawan music and dance.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored Tingara, a gay men's *eisā* group, and discussed another dimension of the politics of difference, namely that of sexual difference and emergent gay identity. This group's nearly total invisibility until the end of my research paradoxically revealed how strong the implicit heteronormative pressure on sexual minorities was.

Tingara's men, predominantly Japanese individuals, participated in the club's activities primarily to socialize with other gay men. With code-switching of various degrees, Tingāra members navigated across domains of visibility and invisibility in physical (public and private) spaces and virtual (Internet) spaces, to find and secure communal spaces of their own, while rendering themselves invisible to (and thus protected from) mainstream society, hidden in plain sight.

Tingara's case provides significant insights when considering the dichotomies created by the other informants in previous chapters: Okinawan vs. non-Okinawan; pre- vs. post-Okinawa Boom; activist approach vs. hobbyist approach; and identity assertion-confirmation vs. entertainment. It complicates the dichotomy of cultural activism (by Okinawans) and cultural appropriation (by Japanese), as in this case *eisā* is appropriated by Japanese hobbyists who happen to be gay, and used in the context of LGBTQ activism; this was possible only because *eisā* had become decontextualized, and therefore available to non-Okinawans as the result of the Okinawa Boom. Tingāra's use of *eisā* is similar with that of early Gajimaru members, as they use *eisā* as a means of bodily expression of communality with fellow gay men, having fun together.

The Kansai Rainbow Parade reveals the complexity and uncertainty of individual

members' attitudes regarding their emerging gay/homosexual identity, and the precarious position they are in by coming out halfway. The original meaning of *eisā* as a dance for the dead/ancestors, which has created a new "us" in diasporic settings for cultural activist groups, is unexpectedly reenacted when members find an opportunity in the Parade to mourn for and honor anonymous gay men who suffered negation by society and self-alienation. I argue that despite individual uncertainties and ambivalence, such experience of collective performance of *eisā* and their interpretations of it is transformative for them, towards their collective gay identity in the making.

This once again illuminated the complexity of the practice of Okinawan music and dance, that doesn't fit neatly into the dichotomies of Okinawan vs. Japanese, of cultural resistance vs. cultural appropriation, and of subverting vs. reinforcing the status quo.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Conclusion

In this study, I examined the different ways in which Okinawan music and dance, especially *min'yō* and *eisā*, were practiced and received by different actors in Osaka at different historical moments, and the meanings produced by these different actors. I also explored the ramifications of such practice in the politics of difference in Japan. For me, all the questions I have asked and tried to answer in my dissertation ultimately boil down to the question of difference and equality. Can a society treat its members equally while accepting their difference? What are the ways in which difference is defined to single out a certain portion of the entire population and justify differential treatment of them? What does it mean to be equal but not the same? How does equality or inequality in one domain, such as social, legal, or cultural, translate into another?

From my personal experience as the daughter of a first-generation *zainichi* Korean, and later from my academic training, I learned that one of the distinctive characteristics of the mechanism of social inclusion and exclusion in Japan was the premise of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. And another distinctive feature that supported such a mechanism, by maintaining the illusion of sameness, was that until the 1980s, most of the minority population was East Asian. Although ethnic difference was imagined in essentialized and racialized terms, most markers people used to identify someone as ethnically different were cultural, as opposed to being something that an individual was born with, like skin color, facial structure, physique, or hair type, but instead things acquired through socialization. And unlike those physical differences, cultural difference was something one could put on or take off with relative ease (not that it was easy), which was exactly what many minority individuals did to blend in regardless of

the source of their exclusion, through voluntary assimilation and passing, which reinforced the structure that oppressed them.

Thus when I explored Okinawan music and dance practice in Osaka, by Okinawans and Japanese, I primarily approached Okinawan dance and music as expressions of cultural difference. I focused on them as they are not inherently embedded in people's bodies, but wearable and detachable, as opposed to phenotypic differences such as skin color or facial structure, and yet embodied (and embedded) to varying degrees over time, through sensory and bodily practice. I looked at how actors and their interpretations of Okinawan music and dance practice have changed along with the overall attitudes towards ethnic and cultural diversity. The reason that my research centered on Okinawan music and dance was because the reception of Okinawan music and dance, and Okinawa cultural difference in general, has changed almost 180 degrees over the past century, more so than with the culture of any other minority groups in Japan, from largely negative to positive. I tried to examine whether the apparent recognition and celebration of Okinawan difference could enhance equity for Okinawans, or on the contrary, reinforce the existing cultural hierarchy in subtle manners.

During the preparation for my research, the main dimension of politics of difference that I expected to see based on my preliminary research and literature review was that of ethnic and cultural difference. In a society where the hegemony of homogeneity has been at the core of the national identity, and has silenced and erased the existing social and ethnic diversity, I expected that open expression of ethnic and cultural difference itself would have subversive effects. At the same time, from the studies of other multicultural societies, I expected that the appropriation of minority cultural difference by mainstream society would have contradictory effects on the minority's struggle for recognition: it can partially empower minorities by endorsing their difference, and celebrating cultural diversity; but it can also undermine the claims of minorities by reducing their difference into the object of entertainment and commodification.

In my research, two prominent aspects emerged from Okinawan music and dance practice in Osaka, namely, cultural activism and cultural appropriation. Cultural activism was started in the mid-1970s by diasporic Okinawans, as the means to contest the dominant ideology of Japanese homogeneity by displaying Okinawan difference in public, and to build communality and affinity through collective participation in music and dance as performer and audience. Groups of Okinawan cultural activists mobilized Okinawan music and dance,

especially *min'yō* and *eisā*, as their means of expressing their Okinawan difference. Putting their ethnic and cultural difference on public display through practice of Okinawan music and dance had subversive effects, which were resisted by assimilation-oriented Okinawans. In the Okinawan cultural activism of the Gajimaru Club and TOCC, folk genres of *eisā* and *min'yō* were deliberately chosen as opposed to other Okinawan music and dance of aristocratic origin that were considered high culture. Instead, with the dance and music that were particularly tied to the rural tradition of Okinawan culture, they honored not only their Okinawan roots, but also their non-elite working class backgrounds. Moreover, in their reinterpretation of *eisā*, a dance for the souls of ancestors, they expanded their sense of communality and affinity, creating a sense of a new “us” beyond immediate family or kin ties or narrowly defined local ties, to construct a collective identity as diasporic Okinawans tied to their new locale in Osaka, namely in Taisho Ward.

On the other hand, cultural appropriation by Japanese enthusiasts of Okinawan music and dance has occurred on a large scale since the 1990s, when Okinawan music and dance became popular nationwide. Through active participation in Okinawan music and dance practice, Japanese Okinawaphiles not only pursued the pleasure of exoticism but also authentic personhood. In the 1990s, the Okinawa Boom and multiculturalist trends brought about changes in Okinawan music and dance. While the increased popularity of Okinawan difference facilitated the identity confirmation of Okinawans and increased their means of livelihood, as well as facilitating the recognition of Japan’s ethnic and cultural diversity, it also increased Japanese appropriation and furthered the commodification and exoticization of Okinawan difference, thereby diminishing the subversive force of Okinawan cultural activism by distracting mainstream Japanese from realizing the continuing political and social marginalization of Okinawa. It undermined to a certain degree the political impetus of those who practiced Okinawan music and dance as a means of cultural activism; these activists expressed their discontent that the authenticity of Okinawan music and dance, and more importantly, the authenticity of their ethnic identity, was being threatened.

This continuing gap between Okinawans and Japanese illuminates the fact that the apparent recognition and celebration of Okinawan difference does not necessarily lead to overcoming the continuing socio-cultural asymmetry, but often disguises it. However, the case of the appropriation of Okinawan dance by Japanese gay males in LGBTQ activism illustrates that

the effects of cultural practice on politics of difference are ambivalent, and ultimately undetermined.

However, there is not always a clear distinction between cultural activism vs. cultural appropriation, Okinawan vs. Japanese, such as whether these movements or groups elect to challenge against or to reinforce the ethnic status quo, and whether they pursue cultural resistance or depoliticized leisure activities. Nor do such distinctions necessarily correspond to the ethnicity of the participants. The distinction between Okinawan and Japanese is not predetermined, but rather mutually constructed through the practice of Okinawan culture and music.

While Okinawan cultural activists reluctantly accept Japanese participants in the hope of educating them beyond their stereotypical understanding of Okinawa, entrepreneurial Okinawans may willingly act on such stereotypes, and accommodate the interest of Japanese Okinawaphiles. Such Okinawan hosts and Japanese Okinawaphiles often form a symbiotic relationship, in which Okinawan hosts facilitate the imagined authenticity of their cultural practice, i.e. appropriation of Okinawan music and dance, while Japanese guests can give the recognition that the host needs but is unable to gain among Okinawans. But such mutual endorsement is often precarious, as the recognition and respect that Japanese Okinawaphiles provide is not absolute – they can move on to a more willing and accommodating host, or even move to another hobby.

Finally, as examined in the last chapter, Okinawan music and dance can be appropriated and performed in a completely different context: politics of sexual difference. The gay males' appropriation of *eisā* in LGBTQ activism challenges the dichotomized understanding of Okinawan music and dance, and shows that the possibility of utilizing a certain popular culture practice in challenging or reinforcing the hegemonic relations is undetermined and ultimately open. And all the cases of Okinawan music and dance groups, whether cultural activism or appropriation, show that actors who participate in Okinawan music and dance do not remain static but are transformed by their own practice, and by their interactions with other participants, and ultimately build a new subjectivity by being and acting together with them.

### **Contributions**

This study can contribute to different academic disciplines in the following ways. This project addresses an important social issue across the contemporary world, namely



multiculturalism. The underlying question that shaped this research project is whether apparent recognition and celebration of cultural diversity guarantees more equitable relations between different groups. I explored the possibilities and limits of the politics of multiculturalism that are newly emerging in Japan, including the pitfalls of the current multiculturalist trend that in effect can counteract its own promises, as well as unexpected possibilities that can change political subjectivities through the mediation of popular culture.

I have critically examined the issues of social relations in Japan, and have added a case study onto the volume of studies of ethnic relations in Japan and Japanese nationalism, and the critique of the dominant ideology of Japanese homogeneity. But I also attempted to extend the scope of those studies. I examined the intersection of multiple factors, especially ethnicity and class that collectively resulted in the exclusion of minority groups, and the geographical configuration of inequality and stigma. In doing so, I tried to illustrate that exclusion of social and ethnic minorities in Japan was not a direct result of abstract ideas of a monoethnic nation and cultural homogeneity that intellectuals and ideologues propagated, but rather resulted from the everyday experience of tangible difference in culture, ethnicity, and class that were conflated together. Until the 1990s, with their economic recession and the consequential economic uncertainty and polarization, discussion of socio-economic class was largely absent in Japanese studies, with the majority of Japanese having accepted the treatise of the classless-ness of Japanese society rather uncritically. In the meantime, studies about class in modern Japan have been separated from other domains of social distinction (Steven 1983; Stevens 1997; Ishida 1993). This study is an attempt to bridge the analyses of ethnicity and those of class in Japanese studies. The examination of Okinawan settlement as a part of the minority crescent in Osaka reveals that class was always relevant and intersected with other different social categories, ethnicity in this case. In fact the beliefs of the new Japanese middle class, supported by the normative middle class family and academic meritocracy, were not evidence of the classlessness or class homogeneity of Japanese society, but in fact another mechanism to maintain the hegemony of homogeneity.

In addition, this study can help understand the possibilities and limits of the politics of multiculturalism that are newly emerging in Japan. By focusing on interactions between marginalized and dominant social groups, and exploring the possibility of changing political subjectivities through the mediation of popular culture (music and dance), I have attempted to

recover the agency of subjects who are shaped not only by their given conditions but also by concrete practices and performances.

This dissertation has significant implications for the studies of multiculturalism, popular culture, and ethnicity politics. This project critically examines the ambivalent influences of multiculturalist discourse on the practices of popular culture that originally belonged to an ethnic minority, namely, Okinawan music and dance. While this study pays attention to the aspect of minority popular culture as cultural resistance, it equally focuses on a relatively less-known aspect of ethnic popular culture: cultural appropriation of minority popular culture by mainstream individuals. It explores how increased Japanese participation in Okinawan music and dance transformed the practices of Okinawan music and dance, often in ways Okinawan participants had not desired. Changes often occurred in order to better accommodate the needs and desires of the Japanese participants, sometimes at the expense of the cultural autonomy of Okinawans, in their art forms and identity. Thus the ethnic inequity between the Japanese and Okinawans, which had existed in the political and social domains in the past, was symbolically reflected in Okinawan music and dance practices.

However, this study also illuminates that the divisions between the seemingly contradictory aspects of Okinawan popular culture, such as whether it challenges or reinforces the ethnic status quo, and whether it is being used for cultural resistance or for depoliticized leisure activities, are neither clear-cut, nor do they necessarily follow the ethnic line of the participants. The increased popularity of Okinawan popular music and dance expands opportunities for individuals of varying backgrounds to intermingle and exchange their ideas on Okinawan dance and music performance. These opportunities create complex consequences for notions and practices of Okinawan music and dance, and by extension, for people's attitudes towards the politics of ethnicity in Japan. Utilizing ethnographic details, this study explores the paradox of multiculturalism and popular culture. It illustrates how a multiculturalist trend may support or undermine its own claim of a greater social equality through acceptance of cultural diversity, and how the practices of popular culture may reinforce or change the politics of ethnicity in complex and unexpected ways that may extend to another realm, such as sexual difference.

In addition, I draw on the interactive perspective that Tsuneyoshi et al (2011) adopted in understanding ethnic relations in Japan, emphasizing the importance of looking at the dynamics

between multiple ethnic groups, rather than focusing on one minority group, or their relationship with mainstream Japanese alone, as many studies of ethnic relations in Japan did in the past. The history of Osaka reveals the long coexistence of ethnic and social minorities, and their cooperation, negotiation, and competition with each other.

I also explore the possibilities and limits of the politics of multiculturalism that are newly emerging in Japan. In my research, I witnessed and sometimes also encouraged my informants to critically reflect upon their own art and/or political practices, which often resulted in important insights in my study.

Moreover, the emerging studies of Japanese multiculturalism tend to focus on the so-called newcomer minorities, who have largely arrived in Japan since the 1980s and clearly stand out in nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, and bodily appearance, and tend to leave out long-existing minorities whose difference seems less prominent and more ambiguous, as if Japan became suddenly ethnically diverse only during the last few decades. I explored the ambiguous place Okinawans have been in as “Japanese but not quite,” and also the shift in the reception of Okinawan difference from negative to positive. I have tried to expand the scope of studies of existing ethnic minorities and studies of multiculturalism, and to create a bridge between them.

Finally, through my rather unexpected encounter with the *eisā* group composed of gay males, I had a chance to explore another domain of difference, that is, the politics of sexual difference. It provides a case study about emerging LGBTQ activism in Japan, where the right-based activism of sexual minority was deemed absent until very recently. It also revealed the supremacy of heterosexual marriage and reproduction as another mechanism of reinforcing the hegemony of homogeneity and policing sexual minorities. The case of cultural appropriation in the context of cultural activism in another kind of politics illuminates the complexity of cultural practice by illustrating in another way the divisions between the seemingly contradictory aspects that I examined in the previous chapters.

### **Further Studies**

There are a few aspects in this study that I hope to further develop in the future. First of all, as I focused more on the actors and their difference in the understanding and interpretation of Okinawan music and dance, I did not do justice to the examination of the actual music and dance. During my research, I learned that the increased Japanese participation in Okinawan

music brought about the actual modification of music and dance, and I was able to collect some evidence, but could not fully develop this line of inquiry due to the scope of this dissertation. I hope a more detailed observation and analysis of music and dance, of texts and performance can contribute to a better understanding of Okinawan music and dance practices outside Okinawa in the discipline of ethnomusicology. The majority of studies on Okinawan music and dance tend to value “traditional” or “pristine” forms practiced exclusively by Okinawans in Okinawa, which are believed to better preserve their original styles and social contexts. In contrast, contemporary practices in an urban environment, especially practices outside of Okinawa by diasporic Okinawans or non-Okinawans, have been deemed to lack “authenticity,” and their stylistic and contextual modification in the process of acculturation was given attention in terms of how it broke away from its traditional forms, or its folk nature (Iguchi 2000; Narisada 1998). However, *eisā* has been going through constant recontextualization in Okinawa as well (Johnson 2008).

I discussed in this dissertation that the notion of authenticity is a cultural and academic construct, rather than something to be taken for granted. I also discussed the fact that the notion of authenticity is created through symbolic practices of social actors, academics as well as practitioners, by choosing to learn, record and perform certain styles of music and dance, and by endorsing, contesting, reinterpreting, or discrediting “Okinawanness” in certain music and dance practices. Further attention to musical and dance performance combined with my contextual analysis will be able to reveal further insights into the politics of authenticity in Okinawan music and dance.

Second, I hope to illustrate further the complexity of practitioners of Okinawan music and dance, a complexity that is due to their intertwined personal relationships. My informants hardly remained in one context but constantly moved about, often having affiliations with multiple groups with different orientations, interacting with those who shared the same beliefs and interpretations of Okinawan music and culture, but also with those who had totally different ideas. For example, I tried to illustrate the interpersonal network of families, friends, and neighbors between the Gajimaru Club and the Children’s Club, yet presented the groups that appeared in the later chapters as being more or less free-standing and isolated; in reality there were more undocumented interactions and intimate relations between some of the participants in different groups that appear throughout the chapters.

And finally, if given the chance, I would like to go back to Tingāra to understand the backgrounds of its members, their motivations for participating, and their ideas even more thoroughly, as my encounter with them was simply so short. I hope further investigation will reveal the current state of sexuality politics in Japan, and the implications of cultural appropriation in ways not fully explored in this study. I also hope to see if there is an intersection between the politics of ethnicity and those of sexuality, two realms that seemed to stand apart from each other at the time of my research.

As I wrote this dissertation, one of many pieces of advice that I received from my advisor Professor Jennifer Robertson stuck with me. “Be critical, but utopian” resonated with my long-time desire as a scholar, or rather, as I would like to see myself, an observer of humanity and a storyteller. As I examined the possibilities and limits of the politics of difference in Japan, I wanted to retain the ethnographic depth, and illuminate the complexity of the actors so that my criticism of the Okinawa Boom and mainstream cultural appropriation of Okinawan culture would not simply come to the dead-end conclusion that social exclusion and prejudice are perpetuated no matter how society seems to change, but they only take subtler forms. Rather, by exploring emergent and potential problems in the current forms of cultural appropriation and multiculturalism in Japan, this study sought to contribute to the search for better ways to approach and treat cultural differences in a manner that would increase equity between groups in their full sense.

Also, I intended to reveal “the internal politics and cultural richness and the subjectivity of the actors,” which is sought in studies of resistance (Ortner 1995, 190). By investigating the possibility of change of political subjectivities from both minority and majority perspectives, I intended to recover the agency of subjects, whose identity is shaped not only by external interpellation but also by the subject’s own performativity (Hall 1996).

In his documentary about the Gajimaru Club and Taisho Eisā Festival (2005), the ethnomusicologist Terada called Osaka’s *eisā* “the place where thoughts crisscross.”<sup>82</sup> Through *eisā* and *min’yō* practice, different people with different ethnic and class backgrounds, ages, life experiences, and ideas gathered and various exchanges occurred, sometimes in the form of cooperation and alliance, sometimes in the form of conflict. Such complexity is significant, as it

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<sup>82</sup> This is the Japanese title of Terada’s documentary film “Drumming Out a Message: Eisā and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan.”

shows how individuals' attitudes and practices evolve and transform beyond their initial positionality, often through their interaction with other participants. In the Taisho district and elsewhere in Osaka, I observed what Ian Condry viewed as "nodes" of Okinawan music and dance practice, that is, "gathering places, networks of peers, and underground paths of cultural flow...where collective activities have performative effects" (Condry 2006, 18-19). I believe that such interactions and exchanges between people are the starting point of change, as even when it creates conflict, it is what leads people out of their comfort zone to reflect on their world and actions. If people's attitudes have changed through Okinawan dance and music in Osaka, it was not just because they did Okinawan music and dance, but because they did it with other people. Individuals and groups in my dissertation proved that people sometimes can use critical imagination and create symbolic and social affinity in ethnic groups or cultural forms beyond their immediate ethnic or geographical affiliation. I hope, through this study and my future studies, to contribute by inspiring such critical but utopian imaginations in human life, beyond the geographical scope of my study.

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