



Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii
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Zoom Meeting

Saturday, June 19, 2021

9AM



e-Newsletter

2021

June

Agenda:

Guest Speaker - Kupuna Safe Falling Program
 Treasurer's Report
 OGSB Tour Group for Taikai 2022
 Taikai 2022 Committee
 Okinawan Festival 2021 Update - Nanzan
 Resource Center Project Update
 Bonnenkai - Nov 2021 - Chuzan
 Committee Reports

Upcoming Events:

2021 June 19 -Jeffrey Higa Reading
"Calabash Stories"
 Virtual Event, 3PM, register at dashophnl.com
 2021 July 17 – Speaker Brandon Ing
"Folk Songs and Identity"
 2021 August 21 – Speaker Gwen Fujie

Guest Speaker:

Kupuna Safe Falling Program – Bill Doi



Bill Doi is a 5th Degree Black belt of Kupuna Aikido Hawaii.
 Bill is one of the founders of Kupuna Aikido. Bill and six other experienced Aikido practitioners got together in 2017 and formed Kupuna Aikido, with the purpose of using their experience to teach Senior Citizens how to fall in such a way as to minimize injury.
 Their combined efforts have been very successful and have saved many Senior Citizen from serious injuries.

Joy's Word of the Month

Tabi

(n) traveling, a journey, a tour

President's Message:

Haitai!

OGSH has a busy summer and fall ahead and we are in need of many volunteers.

1. We are forming a Taikai 2022 Committee. If you are planning to attend the Taikai next year, please consider volunteering to plan an OGSB event at the Taikai.
2. Although details have not yet been finalized, HUOA is planning an in-person "Mini-Fest" on Labor Day (Monday); after the Okinawan Festival 2021, which is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, September 4 & 5. I anticipate that OGSB will be running a booth. The Nanzan group chaired by Jackie Toma will be in charge of the planning, so if you are part of the Nanzan group, please consider volunteering.
3. I'm also hoping that we will be able to have an in-person Bonnenkai in November. We currently have the Legacy Ballroom reserved for November 20. The Chuzan group will be in charge of planning the event, so if you are a member of Chuzan, please consider volunteering.
4. We are organizing an OGSB tour group for Taikai 2022 with Sumie at JTB. If you are interested in joining, please send the names of everyone in your party, along with your email, phone number and address to Jackie at jtoma07@gmail.com.

More information will be provided on the above activities, so stay tuned.

Thank you all for your support.

Ippee Nifee Deebiru

Joy Schoonover



Okinawan Literature: An Introduction
Charlene Gima, PhD

Thank you very much for inviting me to share my limited experience with Okinawan literature. I must clarify that I am not an expert on Okinawan history, linguistics, or literature, nor am I fluent in Japanese or Okinawan. When Joy Schoonover first asked me to talk, I tried to pass the buck to Andy Curry-shinshii of UH Manoa who is more knowledgeable than I am. But it didn't work. You are stuck with me. However, I am a trained academic with a focus in literature and I have studied Japanese for most of my life and Okinawan performing arts for the last 19 years. This past semester, I was a student in Curry-shinshii's class in Okinawan language and literature which was an eye-opening experience in many ways. Therefore, this will be a general introduction to Okinawan literature in English because I know there is a lot written in Okinawan or Okinawan languages as well as in Japanese. There's not as much written in English, so that is what I want to be the focus today. Luckily for you, I am done with my finals, so there will be no quiz at the end because I don't want to grade anymore.



Okinawan Literature: an Introduction

Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawai'i
May 15, 2021

Ryukyuan languages:

1. [Amami](#)
2. [Kunigami](#)
3. [Okinawa](#)
4. [Miyako](#)
5. [Yaeyama](#)
6. [Yonaguni](#)



Image from Wikipedia, "Ryukyuan Languages"

As many of you know, the Ryûkyûan languages are a sister language to Japanese. They are on the same linguistic language tree that is located in the East Asia area. According to linguistics, there are 6 to 10 Ryûkyûan languages located in the Ryûkyûan archipelago. I will be using the term 'Ryûkyû' to talk about the geographical area, as well as the Kingdom of Ryûkyû, and the people who live there before 1879. The term 'Okinawan', I will probably use it to talk contemporarily about a place, or a people, a body of literature in general.

There are 6 major Ryûkyûan languages. There can also be up to 10 depending how you define a language. They are Amami, Kunigami, Okinawa, Miyako, Yaeyama, and Yonaguni. Several of these languages are on the endangered language list, which means there are very few native speakers or full-time speakers. As Patrick Heinrich has presented, they are in danger of being lost forever. But, as most of you know, Okinawa and Japanese are Uchinaaguchi, the various languages of Ryûkyû are not Hôgen. The languages of Ryûkyû are a language in themselves. They are distinct from Japanese, although they may share certain points of syntax and grammar and some vocabulary. But points about the Ryûkyûan language will come out later in our discussions because they will pertain to how the text of Okinawan literature are written and presented today as well as in the past.

The oldest written text in Okinawan literature is Omoro Sôshi. Translator Christopher Drake describes these as "an anthology of medieval Ryûkyûan shaman songs collected and transcribed by courtiers in 1513, 1531, and

1613.” There was a third volume that came out in 1623. There are about 1500 songs and about 1200 of those are unrepeated. There is not really a consensus on the majority of the songs’ creators. Nobody knows who wrote these songs or when they were created but they clearly predate their transcription in the late 1500s and early 1600s. They were transcribed in mostly hiragana text with an occasional kanji. This shows an influence of both Japanese and Chinese languages in the Ryûkyû kingdom. The Omoro Sôshi are very vague and challenging. I had a taste of trying to untangle them this semester and it was very difficult because the language used is very elliptical. The images used are also elliptical. Sometimes we have no idea what these songs are referring to.

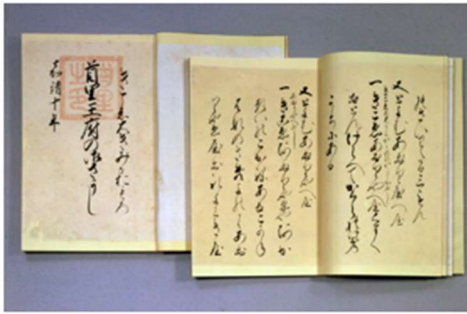


Image from Okinawa Prefectural Museum

Omoro Sôshi
 Transcribed song/poems/prayers
 First volume: 1531
 Second volume: 1613
 Third volume: 1623

1,553 or 1,554 songs (around
 1,200 are unrepeated)
 (Drake 283-284)

Omoro 1041

In the trance place of shining sun
 the great shamans pray, rubbing their palms
 present tribute to Shô Shin,
 King helped by his mother
 in the trance place of Sonto
 the lordly shamans pray, rubbing their palms

Omoro 993

Beautiful-legged brother protected by the shaman-god
 beloved brother
 graceful-legged brother protected by the shaman-god
 when my brother travels to Shuri
 when my brother goes up to the city of lords
 I will fly ahead of his ship
 I will be a bird and lead him
 (translation by Christopher Drake, *Living Spirit* 54, 58)

While it is true the Omoro are frustratingly vague and elliptical, it is possible to glean hints of the society and culture that produced them. One point is that many of these songs were used in the indigenous shamanic practices that were preserved and passed down by the female line, both in the villages and royal family. Referring to a slide, as translated by Christopher Drake, ‘Omoro 1041’, even the king of the Ryûkyûs needed the support of the priestess mother to govern properly. So the female shaman is praying and channeling the power of the sun to Shô Shin. Looking at Omoro 993, you can see that the female shaman is very influential in the extent of her protective powers. She is the person people look to for guidance and protection, especially on sea journeys. Here the brother is protected by the shaman sister-god who flies like a bird ahead of the ship and leads, as he travels to Shuri. This will give you a hint of how important women were to the culture, especially before Confucian philosophy took root.



Ryûka 瑠歌

Unna matsi shita ni
Chiii nu hwe nu tachusi
Kuvishinubu madi nu
Chiii ya nesami
 (Unna Nabii)

Under the pine trees at Unna
 A sign commands: No Rendezvous!
 Did they really expect it would
 Stay the flow of our love?
 (translation by Taira Buntarô)

The next development in Okinawan literature was the poetic form ‘Ryûka’. Like its Japanese counterpart, it is a metered poem, meaning the lines are measured in syllabic counts. The Japanese counterpart were the waka and tanka, more familiarly known in the western world as haiku. For ryûka, you would have 4 lines with 8, 8, 8, and 6 syllables in each line. Referring to a graphic, this ryûka is probably familiar to those who have studied the form or listened or played Okinawan music or are from Onna-son, the hometown of this poetess, Unna Nabii. She was quite well known for her style and she wrote

quite a few ryûka. There were about 3000 ryûka written in the 1700s and 1800s. This particular poem is perhaps famous for criticizing certain government edicts that censured love. The ryûka form is intimately tied to song. Much of Okinawan classical music used ryûka as lyrics to these songs. It is quite astonishing to look at the variety of verses and how many could be used, depending on the occasion of the performance, purpose, or the feeling of the performer. Ryûka are continued to be written today, but not necessarily in the same kind of language. This is the Shuri dialect that ryûka is predominantly written in. It is also a classical version of the language. It would be kind of like writing Shakespearean sonnets today. This is a different kind of language than contemporary languages spoken in Okinawa today. So, it is predominantly a literary form.

Kumiwudui 組踊

Shūshin Kani'iri by Tamagusuku Chōkun

San'yama Bushi

Kunuyu wuti satu ya
Guvin nen sarami;
Fichuyi kugarituti

shinu ga shinchi

In this life there can be
 no fulfillment with my loved one.
 I am desperately involved in unrequited
 love
 and I feel as if I am going to die.

(translation by Nobuko Ochner, Living Spirit 106)



The next development is Kumiwudui or Kumi Odori in Japanese. As most of you know after the Satsuma invasion and takeover in 1609, courtiers from Ryûkyû were often required to travel to Kagoshima or Edo to pay tribute to the Satsuma or Tokugawa Shogunate. One unexpected consequence of these kind of journeys was the creation of a new art form, Kumiwudui. Tamagusuku Chōkun was reappointed the Minister of Dance (udui buqyō) in 1718 for the Ryûkyû court. He probably drew on his experience of seeing performances of Noh, Kabuki, and Kyôgen in Japan in order to produce a new kind of entertainment for the Chinese dignitaries at the Ukwanshin ceremony. Like its name suggests, it is a combination of music, dialog, and dance movement. Tamagusuku's new art form is first recorded as being performed at the 1719 Ukwanshin and this included Shushin Kani'iri, which is the story about a woman who falls in love with a young man and then becomes a demon and takes over the bell at a nearby Buddhist monastery. Tamagusuku created 5 major kumiwudui or goban. They are Nido Tichiuchi, Shushin Kani'iri, Mikarushi, Kokonumaki, and Wunna munugurui. There are other courtiers who wrote and created kumiwudui, following in the footsteps of Tamagusuku. These were also performed at various Ukwanshin ceremonies up until 1879 when the kingdom was abolished and there were no more Ukwanshin. The Kumiwudui was for the pleasure of the king and the Chinese dignitaries. They were not open to the general public and usually performed only at the Ukwanshin. However, in 1879 after the Kingdom was dissolved, Kumiwudui became more public. Kumiwudui is not that accessible except to those who had training in how to appreciate it, the language, images used in it. To a general audience, it was a very slow moving, unexciting, and boring experience. Kumiwudui like many traditions underwent a transition and tailored itself to appeal more to the general audience. So, you will see different kinds of Kumiwudui produced today.

There are different traditions of performing Kumiwudui and this is connected to the development of modern theatrical forms, such as Shibai and kageki.

After 1879, the people of Okinawa, as it was now known, were faced with a loss of cultural identity and language. It was at this time the educational system was being modernized all over Japan. In Okinawa, there was an impetus to assimilate the Ryûkyû people and turn them into Japanese citizens. As in other colonized areas around the world, the native language was banned in schools and most government institutions. At the same time, Japan was struggling to make itself equal to Western nations and to modernize its society, while establishing its own empire. This means the people of the last prefecture were considered inferior to those in the main islands of Japan: uncivilized, barbaric, and in some cases sub-human. For Okinawan writers, they're caught between this very long tradition of written language and the colonial language, which was enforced. Basically, if you were a writer in Okinawa before World War 2 and you wanted to be published, you had to write in Japanese. In most cases, you had to move to Tokyo. This was also the time of emigration. Okinawa had gone through several famines. Many of the population left because they were poor and they found no prospects, and as a result you see a lot of movement overseas and to mainland Japan.



Photo taken by Rev. Earl Bull early 1900s (University of Ryukyu Library)

Yamanoguchi Baku: A Conversation (excerpt)

"Where are you from?" asked the woman.
Where am I from? Well, I light a cigarette and think about a place where the clothes are dyed with images of tattoos and songs are played on snakeskin-covered shamisen!
Way over there . . .

"What do you mean by way over there?" asked the woman.
It's just way over there . . . actually the southernmost point of the Japanese islands. Does she want to hear that the custom in my homeland is for women to carry pigs on their heads and everyone goes barefoot?
Down south . . .

(translated by Katsunori Yamazato and Frank Stewart, *Living Spirit* 21)

Yamanoguchi Baku is one of those writers who moved to Tokyo in the 1920s and continued to write and publish. Referring to graphic: This is a poem, "A Conversation", translated by Katsunori Yamazato and Frank Stewart. This demonstrates the kinds of feelings of alienation, isolation, and being unable to connect with either being an Okinawan in Okinawa or an Okinawan in Japan or being able to be Japanese. (Reads poem)

Referring to a photo: If you look very closely at the photo, you can see the women are carrying a pig and bundles of grass on their heads. This gives you an idea of the kinds of distance there was in the perceptions of Okinawans among the Japanese and for the Okinawans themselves and the struggles that writers had to go through to represent their own life experiences in meaningful ways. In fact, one of the writers of this period, Kushi Fusako, wrote a short story called, "Memoirs of a Declining Ryûkyûan Woman" which depicted the despair and degradation of life in the Ryûkyûs and the nostalgia for an Okinawan identity back then. She came under fire by compatriots from Okinawa at the university she was studying at who accused her of portraying Okinawans in a manner that did nothing to promote their image. She had a defense of the story, basically: 'if you want to write, you should write. I am going to write what I want to write'. So, that was the state of Okinawan literature before World War 2.


I'm sure all of you know the horrors of the Battle of Okinawa, some firsthand. Today, writers still grapple with the lingering impacts of war, as well as the reality of living with constant US military presence. It should be noted however, that the 27-year occupation of Okinawa also produced the first modern history in the English language of Okinawa by George Kerr. Upon reversion in 1972, Okinawa simultaneously became familiar, that is

it was a part of Japan, but also foreign, in that it had been a mystery for 27 years and even now it remains as something unusual because its culture is marked with American bases.

While there are plenty of books written about the war from the American point of view, there are very few from the Okinawan survivors that have been translated into English. There are plenty of writings in Japanese and Uchinaguuchi languages about the war from the Okinawan perspective. Those of you who have been to Okinawan museums can attest to that. There are only 3 that I can find have been published in English. The first is Masako Robbins' autobiography which was titled *My Story: A Schoolgirl in the Battle of Okinawa*, published in 1952. There is a novel by Nobuko Martin called *A Princess Lily of the Ryukus*, published in 1984 and the most recent, *The Girl with the White Flag*, written by Tomiko Higa and translated by Dorothy Britton, published in 2013. Of the 3, only the last one is in print. It is a little difficult to find the others. As we go on, the long shadow of the war continues to impact Okinawan literature to this day.



So Okinawan literature today has actually had a boom. There were 3 Okinawan writers who have won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. This has helped to put Okinawan literature in the spotlight. Oshiro Tatsuhiro won it 1967 for a short story called, "The Cocktail Party," which was later developed into a play. Matayoshi Eiki won it in 1995 for "Buta no Mukui." Medoruma Shun won most recently in 1997 for "Droplets." Other Okinawan writers have been nominated for the Akutagawa Prize and have won other prizes as well. One issue for contemporary Okinawan writers is the use of Uchinaguuchi, or I would say a kind of Okinawan language in their writing. How do you present it? Because there are different ways of writing Uchinaaguchi in Japanese, how do you work between standard Japanese and using the Okinawan words, phrases, language and still be true to it? Do you put it phonetic Katakana? Do you render it in Kanji with the phonetic reading on the side as Furigana? These are all questions that come up. This is especially important if you are a writer from Motobu, the north part of Okinawa, as Medoruma Shun is, or from Amami Oshima, or from Iriomote in the Yaeyama Islands, as Sakiyama Tami is. For translators as well, there is a perplexing challenge of how you render Okinawan languages into a form of English that is accessible to readers.



Okinawan literature today

Challenges of translating

From "Droplets" by Medoruma Shun

"Grandpa, time to git yourself up. C'mon now." When Ushi shook his shoulder, Tokushō's head slid off the pillow and tears dripped from his eyes, wide open and glazed, while saliva drooled from his mouth. "Hurry up! Outta that bed, ya hear?"
(translated by Michael Molasky, *Southern Exposure* 255)

From "Mabuigumi" by Medoruma Shun

Surprised to see Fumi on the verge of tears, Uta asked her, "What in the world's the matter, this early in the morning?"
"Big Sister, please, I need you to come to my house."
"Okay, okay. Wait until I at least have another cup of tea," Uta replied, and began pouring.
(translated by Kyle Ikeda, *Living Spirit* 113)

Referring to graphic: I have an example of 2 different translation choices. They are both stories by Medoruma Shun translated at different times. In the first example, "Droplets" that was translated by Michael Molasky, he has chosen to render the spoken Uchinaaguchi as a kind of regional dialect in American English. So, you have the spoken words by Ushi in regional American dialect and the narration in Standard English. This is his choice of translating of what would be

Uchinaaguchi. This is from a collection published from 2000. The second example is from “Mabuigumi,” also by Medoruma Shun and translated by Kyle Ikeda, who has rendered it a little bit differently. So, the spoken words here are more or less standard. We have the narration which is standard. Kyle shared with me that he had debated quite a lot about how to translate Uchinaaguchi. He initially chose to retain the Uchinaaguchi dialog in romaji, that is in romanization, and in brackets he would provide the English translation. But as it was published, it omitted the romanization and instead you only have standard English. These are some things that are continuing to come up today. How do you present languages and who is it for in the literature?

BOOKS AND WRITERS

Living Spirit: Literature and Resurgence in Okinawa, edited by Frank Stewart and Katsunori Yamazato, *Mānoa* vol. 23, no. 1, 2011

Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa, edited by Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson

Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa, edited by Davinder Bhowmik and Steve Rabson

Takara Ben	<u>Ikemivagi Sekihō</u>	<u>Mabuni Chōshin</u>
<u>Kushi Fusako</u>	<u>Yamanoguchi Baku</u>	<u>Nakamura Kare</u>
<u>Tsukayama Issui</u>	<u>Kishaba Jun</u>	<u>Ōshiro Tatsuhiro</u>
<u>Matayoshi Eiki</u>	<u>Sakiyama Tami</u>	<u>Medoruma Shun</u>
<u>Chinen Seishin</u>	<u>Makiminato Tokuzō</u>	<u>Yonaha Mikio</u>
<u>Nakawaka Naoko</u>	<u>Nagadō Eikichi</u>	

<u>Jon Hiroshi Shirota</u>	<u>Lee Tonouchi</u>
<u>Mitsugu Sakihara</u>	<u>Darcy Tamayose</u>
<u>Evelyn Tan</u>	<u>Daniel Akiyama</u>



I’m sure many of you are aware of Okinawan-American writers who have explored their ties to the culture and heritage of Okinawa. Among them, Jon Hiroshi Shirota, Evelyn Shirota Tan, Philip K. Ige, Mitsugu Sakihara, and Seiyei Wakukawa are writers from the earlier generation who wrote fiction, poetry, autobiography, history, and drama. Some of you may recognize their writings which have been collected in couple of books as well. Today’s writers, descendants of Okinawans from around the world are continuing to examine questions like: “What makes us Okinawan?” “What is Okinawan literature?” “How do we connect or not to Okinawa?” These are questions however that are beyond the scope of today’s presentation. It would take far too long to discuss, so I will leave you with suggested titles to explore on your own. (Refer to graphic shown on presentation)

Ippee niffee deebitan! Thank you for generously allowing me to take up your time today.

Works Cited

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