Capturing Ryukyu:
(Re)Interpretations and Receptions of Okinawan Culture and Identity in Cyberspace and the Case of "Shima Uta" on YouTube

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Introduction

This article examines the construction, reception, (re)interpretation and appropriation of Okinawan culture and identity in the space of Youtube.[1] Taking off from the concepts of Arjun Appadurai,[2] the article looks at the processes and the artifacts of culture as largely realized, made possible by the conjunction between the so-called Okinawan "ethno-scape" and the all-pervading presence of the media-scape of the Internet. As in any other spaces, the YouTube hosts contending discourses and, in many ways, encourages encounters between them, which in turn reveal disjunctions in interpreting political as well as cultural realities. Its "hosting" of various (re)interpretations of Okinawan realities via music shows the enigmatic salience and persistence of "culture" as a lens for understanding social reality.

Okinawa and Japan: "Same" and yet "Different"

Both the islands of Japan and Okinawa formed as a result of millions of years of volcanic activity and coral build up. Both areas constitute a continuation of "island Asia" separated only by human imagination, specifically by conceptualizations of what consists "Northeast" and "Southeast," as well as "maritime Southeast Asia." Japanese images of Okinawa, however, place it in the exotic tropics where the Amami Oshima group of islands constitutes its "gateway to difference which is realized in completion in the main Island of Okinawa."[3]

Difference (and oddly, sameness) also pervades discussions over the Japanese and Okinawan languages. "Okinawan" or *Uchināguchi* actually comprises a sub-group that belongs to the Japanese-Ryukyuan language group. This sub-group is further divided into two main categories: the Shuri-Naha dialect and the Southern dialects. Both Japanese and Okinawan are believed to have evolved from an earlier form of Japanese and then started to separate sometime in the sixth century.[4] Although 70 per cent of the vocabulary is supposedly shared, the two languages do not seem to be mutually intelligible.

In terms of social institutions, Japan engaged in significant cultural borrowing from China much

[1] The writing of this paper was made possible through a generous grant from the Sumitomo Foundation.

[2] Appadurai, Arjun. *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.* In http://www.intcul.tohoku.ac.jp/~holden/MediatedSociety/Readings/2003_04/Appadurai.html (accessed: 3 December 2010).

[3] Tze M. Loo, expressed during conference discussions, *Appropriating Japan* (QC: Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University, 30 January 2010).

[4] The theory of Hattori Shirō is quite well-known in this aspect.

earlier, at the time of Prince Shōtoku, and Ryūkyū sometime later during the Shō dynasty, when investiture ceremonies accompanying Chinese Imperial consent were formalized sometime in the 15th century. Both forms of monarchy are closely related to religion. The Japanese *tennō* is an "emperor" who is at the same time Shinto's highest priest while the Ryūkyūan king shared the symbolic center with his sister (or some other female relative of senior status), who presides as the *kikoe-ogimi* or the a head priestess of the Okinawan ancestor worship-centered religion. Whereas the former evolved into a patriarchal society sharing many similarities with the Northeast Asian mainland societies, the latter evolved into a "bi-archy" sharing this particular aspect of social organization with Southeast Asian societies.[5]

Eventually, the greatest difference is that one became the "conqueror" of "the other." The forces of history fated the primacy of Japan over Ryukyu, first during the conquest led by Satsuma in the early 17th century, followed later by Meiji integration in 1872 and then Okinawa's return to Japanese sovereignty from US military and administrative rule in 1972. Yet, even in an unequal condition, "sameness" once again rears its head. Both societies experienced the horrible ravages of war, albeit the "difference" in their sources of suffering. Mainland Japan, more specifically Tokyo, was subjected to indiscriminate carpet bombing, while Hiroshima and Nagasaki became cities forever associated with the atomic bomb. Meanwhile, Okinawa went through a "storm of steel," the only land battle in Japan during WWII, and more significantly, the experience of suffering under the Japanese Imperial Army as the tales of the Himeyuri brigade and the "caves of salvation and doom" poignantly express.

Presently, many see Okinawa as a part of Japan that is not quite Japanese, a "third world" section of a post-industrial society associated with good baseball players, singers and beer, an "unliberated" part of post-postwar Japan that continues to suffer "post war" conditions of military bases whose imposed presence imply a "third disposal" of Okinawan society, once again asked to sacrifice its general welfare and happiness for the greater good of the larger Japanese society. It therefore does not come as a surprise that discourses surrounding Okinawan artifacts dwell mainly on the narratives of war, marginalization and difference; narratives of suffering and continuing frustration of what appears to be embedded in being one of Japan's eternally internal others. This is apparent in *Shima uta.*

***Shima Uta*: A Most Ironical Icon**

"Shima uta" is a song composed by Miyazawa Kazufumi in 1992 for his band, The Boom. Strictly speaking, as a work of composition, it is a Japanese contemporary song done in the Okinawan style. Its

[5] I have been developing this idea of a "bi-archy" during the course of my experience in teaching Southeast Asian culture and society at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines. Indeed, in many Southeast Asian societies, social organization unmistakably veers away from models of patriarchy. Matriarchal models also appear to fail in describing "shared lineage" and "shared social roles" between men and women, husband and wife. As such, a bi-archy provides a convincing although yet undeveloped alternative of a model for social organization. Likewise, I have also identified the existence of "women of prowess" or "matrons," paralleling the patron, who exercise power in an alternative mode that may be described as a "radial and nodal" type of leadership, as opposed to the patron's "pyramidal and sectional" mode. This type of politics I label the "politics of matronage."

lyrics evoke an imagery of the islands starting with the flamboyant beauty of the scarlet blossoms of the *deigo* tree and the powerful force of a coming monsoon season storm. The poetic reverie that proceeds from Miyazawa's text makes for a song that is as beautiful as it is sad:[6]

でいごの花が咲き 風を呼び 嵐が来た
でいごが咲き乱れ 風を呼び 嵐が来た
The storm comes, called by the wind as the *deigo* blooms
The storm comes as the *deigo* blooms and casts its petals
on to the earth

くり返す悲しみは 島渡る波のよう
Like waves reaching this shore,
It recounts a story of sadness

(Refrain)

島唄よ 風に乗り 鳥とともに 海を渡れ
島唄よ 風に乗り 届けておくれ私の涙
Songs of the islands, ride the wind and
upon bird's wings, cross the sea
Send my tears across the waters, and tell my story,
songs of the islands

(Refrain)

海よ 宇宙よ 神よ いのちよ このまま永遠に夕凪を

Ocean…heavens…God…life
Embraced by an eternal evening…we remain…

(Refrain)

The title, "Shima uta" which literally means "island song," is by itself an appropriated label. Its original meaning refers to a traditional genre of vocal music accompanied by the *sanshin* sung in the Amami Ōshima group of islands. It appears that Okinawan traditional music was not known as *shima uta* before The Boom's "Shima uta" phenomenon; instead, the label Okinawa *minyō* was used and (is still, although observed mostly by traditionalist artists).

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[6] Song and original Japanese lyrics by Miyazawa Kazufumi from *Ryūkyūu minyō: Okinawa ongaku tokushū* (Tokyo: KMP Co., LTD., 1997). Translation by this author.

Miyazawa is not from Okinawa. He and the other members of The Boom hail from Yamanashi prefecture. His "Shima uta" can therefore be seen as marvel of trans-national creation. An outsider has appropriated an insider label, fashioned his own version of the insider's artifact, which in turn is accepted by the insider and lauded as a song that is most representative of Okinawan culture. Miyazawa relates his initial encounter with Okinawan culture, which eventually leads to the creation of "Shima uta:"[7]

> "I went to Okinawa to take some photos for the Boom's third album, to a very beautiful and natural area called Yanbaru, and for the first time saw a deeper side of Okinawa. I saw some remains of the war there, and visited the Himeyuri Peace and Memorial Museum and learnt about the female students who became like voluntary nurses looking after injured soldiers. […] I was still thinking about how terrible it was after I left the museum. Sugar canes were waving in the wind outside the museum when I left and it inspired me to write a song. I also thought I wanted to write a song to dedicate to that woman who told me the story. […] There are two types of melody in the song "Shima uta", one from Okinawa and the other from Yamato (Japan). I wanted to tell the truth that Okinawa had been sacrificed for the rest of Japan, and Japan had to take responsibility for that. […]"

Several elements make Miyazawa's tale of trans-creation a most interesting case for study.[8] First, his process of creation was, like most cases of good research, empirically-based. It was spurred by an actual encounter with a historical narrative through the agency of a peace museum constructed on an actual Okinawan war site, and an encounter with an actual person who lived the Okinawan war experience. Second, he appears to be most clear about his intent to commemorate the encounters via the creation of a song. This makes him a conscious agent of memory-making (although, perhaps, an "adopted" son of Okinawan memory-making) as well as an active political agent advocating through his creation an admission of Japanese war responsibility. Third, Miyazawa possesses a rare awareness of hybridity, a realization of being a cultural outsider using an insider genre. Even more remarkable is his pro-active pursuit of sharing his thoughts on issues of cultural ownership with a representative of the insider culture, who is the famous Okinawan singer-song writer, Kina Shōkichi. Miyazawa is aware of his "Japanese-ness" and all the attendant issues that might be linked to it as a result of his appropriation of Okinawan music. As such, it may be said that, as far as "Shima uta" is concerned, Okinawa's processes of memory-making, and struggles against marginalization and identity politics, may be elucidated by an empathizing outsider, Miyazawa. Although the political background of "Shima uta" in its production is quite clear and actively voiced by its creator, its political nature is more subtle if not passively "covert" in the artifact's marketing and consumption by the public. The CD single is most apolitical in form and substance, portraying

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7 "Miyazawa," Interview with *fRoots Magazine*, April 2003. Also accessible through http://www.farsidemusic.com/acatalog/miyazawaFROOTS.html (accessed: 19 November 2010).

8 Transcreation as a process of creating between two cultures is well discussed in Fernandez, Steven Patrick C. "From the Original to the Stage: Transcreating Indigenous Expressions for Show." In *Musika Jornal,* 6 (UP Center for Ethnomusicology, 2010).

"beautiful Okinawa" with Miyazawa sitting on a white sand shore singing his hymn to the azure waters of the islands. Here, indeed, politics often takes on the form of an aura of energy engulfing the artifact of the song invisible yet audible the myriad voices that accompany the oral poetics of its creation and aesthetics. The narrative of the song comes with its own baggage of "lore," allied texts so to speak, providing interstices from which other Okinawan narratives may emerge. These narratives we shall study in the user comments posted in uploaded music videos of the song in the YouTube.

The YouTube: Probing a New Space of Encounters with Okinawan Culture

To say that YouTube is a new space of social and cultural encounter is most probably an understatement. The YouTube as a video-sharing site officially was launched in February 2005.[9] Two aspects of YouTube are relevant to this study of Okinawan culture and identity: first, various versions of a particular song, either be professionally recorded or produced by amateurs, may be uploaded and compared virtually for free via this site; and second, registered users are allowed to post comments either in the form of written messages or video comments. Popular video uploads come with a great volume of posted comments, which range from genial to venial expressions.

In order to study this "thread" of history a purposive sampling of the following video uploads was selected. The video uploaded by *kabuyoushi17again*[10] shows the singer-composer, Miyazawa Kazufumi, wandering and singing in an Okinawan location. The location site for the shooting of this music video is a quintessential Okinawan neighborhood with coral walls and tropical flora framed by a blue sky and the clear waters of the islands. Miyazawa, the non-insider, is "inlaid," both figuratively and literally, in the cultural and geographical site of Okinawa. Association via appropriation of images becomes the vehicle of cultural legitimization of this song that did not originate from the locale.

The video uploaded by *rimit30*[11] shows the singer, Natsukawa Rimi, in what appears to be a television appearance. One clear difference between this video and that of Miyazawa can be seen in the absence of property or artifact that may help cue the viewer in associating the singer with Okinawa. Appropriation notwithstanding, her legitimization is embedded in her identity and public persona as an "Okinawan singer," allowing even for a most "culturally unorthodox" accompaniment by a guitarist!

The following video uploads of *10teko10*[12], *kazuo1970*[13], and *bluesea7walker*[14] all show Natsukawa Rimi singing in a concert. In all of these videos, Natsukawa wears western clothing. She accompanies her singing with her own playing of the Okinawan *sanshin*. This performative device brings the artifact, "Shima uta", into the fold of traditional Okinawan vocal music where the singer accompanies himself or herself with *sanshin* playing. This act of re-appropriation reconstitutes the product of outsider creation

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9 Hopkins, Jim (11 October 2006). "Surprise! There's a Third YouTube Co-founder". In *USA Today*. http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-10-11-youtube-karim x.htm (accessed: 20 November 2010).

10 http://www.youtube.com/watc?v=oFSDyM8whtk (accessed: 27 August 2010).

11 http://www.youtube.com/watch?vAMEsNVcnirA (accessed: 27 August 2010).

12 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E8XndFHFXQ (accessed: 27 August 2010).

13 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrgVxRRDNOk (accessed: 27 August 2010).

14 http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=yyp41Kc_IdI (accessed: 27 August 2010).

into a form that is closer to home. An insider had just reclaimed the product of an earlier appropriation, thus reversing the direction of its (re)production.

The last two video uploads by *thomasguoan*[15] and *Knuta666*[16] are a music video of a performance by rockstar, Gackt, and traditional Okinawan singer and producer, China Sadao. If the Natsukawa concert videos "sowed" the seed of re-appropriating "Shima uta" as an artifact, this music video realizes it flowering and eventual fruiting. It starts with an inlay of an excerpt of traditional Okinawan singing (and dancing) by members of the popular Okinawan female band, the Nenes, who come in full *bingata* (traditional Okinawan rice paste-resist costume). This is followed by a very traditional rendition of the song by Gackt, and then by China Sadao, who accompanies himself with the *sanshin*. In this video, other Okinawan artifacts frame the non-Okinawan artifact of the song as performed by Okinawans, completing the song's reclamation by cultural insiders. It seems that re-appropriation via performance has made the song "truly Okinawan." It is Okinawan *because the people say so*.

Commentaries as "Linked" Artifacts

The "user's comments" section of the YouTube viewing page may be viewed as a rich lode of allied texts that in turn may be seen as "linked artifacts or ideo-facts" to the uploaded song or video itself. Table 1 presents the general sampling used in this brief study as well as the distribution of comments across categories of comments and uploads. As can be seen in the frequency distribution of categories, the comments surrounding the song in seven uploads indicate, in essence, the makings of an "aesthetic community" through exchanges of views about the song, the singer, advice on other video uploads, greetings, and other forms of social communication. This is apparent in the top four categories presented in Table 1. The category in fourth place, however, touches on the locale of Okinawa and the Okinawan people. This category can very well be understood or equated as the cultural context of the context of the song itself. This is followed by the category on inquiries on the singer in the sixth spot. The set encompassing the seventh (song analyzed) up to the twelfth category (military bases), however, is the most interesting to this researcher. This is because they comprise comments that link the artifact of the song to Okinawa's troubled past concerning war, and its "continuing" past of its troubled present, which is almost always linked to the presence of US military facilities in the prefecture.

[15] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v+3xdWZCVIR_4 (accessed: 27 August 2010).

[16] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cshXwsCk810 (accessed: 27 August 2010).

Table 1. Comment Type and Frequency

Comment	The Boom	N. Rimi 1	N. Rimi 2	N. Rimi 3	N. Rimi 4	Gackt 1	Gackt 2	Sub total
Admiration for song	82	25	4	5	7	1	1	**122**
Admiration for singer	14	27	2	3	10	1	8	**65**
Miscellaneous /Banter	33	12			1	1	1	**48**
Background of singer	20	9	1	1	6	1	2	**40**
Okinawa/Okinawan	7	12			2		1	**22**
Inquiry on singer	7	6			2		2	**22**
Song analyzed	13	6					3	**22**
War/War related	13	1						**14**
Nostalgia	3	1			7			**11**
Peace	6				1			**7**
Military bases	6							**6**
Okinawan music	1	2			1	1		**5**
Japan/Japanese	1	2					1	**4**
Critique of singer	1	1	2					**4**
America/American	2	1						**3**
Okinawan history	3							**3**
Critique of song	1							**1**
Discrimination	1							**1**
Foreign view	1							**1**
Politics	1							**1**
Environment	1							**1**
Null (taken out)	3	7	1		2	1	4	**17**
Sum total	**220**	**112**	**10**	**9**	**39**	**6**	**23**	**419**

Note: The Boom = *kabuyoshi17again*, Rimi 1 = *rimit31*, Rimi 2 = *10teko10*, Rimi 3 = *bluesea7walker*, Rimi 4 = *kazuo1970*, Gackt 1 = *thomasgouan*, Gackt 2 = *knuta666*

Articulating Culture and Identity: A Content Analysis

One of the earliest comments by *tamachanto* posted two years ago shows how the process of re-interpretation allows for the viewer to appropriate the song for societal agenda-setting purposes. Background literature on "Shima uta" and Miyazawa Kazufumi does not appear to reveal any environmental intentions in the composition. Yet, *tamachanto* states that "he intentionally included the current theme of environmental problems"（最近では環境問題にも積極的に取り組んでいるそうです）. It may be said that *tamachanto* over-reads Miyazawa's text and, through suggestion, introduces his or her own agenda or opinion over issue-area of concern.[17]

[17] The comments from this sub-section taken from the upload made by *kabuyoshi17again* comes from http://www.youtube.com/watc?v=oFSDyM8whtk (accessed: 27 August 2010).

Individual concern or advocacy is once again apparent in the transformation of the very idea as well as in the expansion of the operative range of a particular idea. For instance, *reirei 01201* atates that "Shima uta" sends "a petition(song) to the Japanese mainland" (惨状(歌)を届けて欲しい) which is indeed a very usual interpretation of the song. *microcorin350* however interjects and states that the song sends "not a petition but an aspiration of peace" (惨状じゃなくて「平和への願い」).

The hermeneutic changes made by the comments reproduced above may indeed be slight, but their significance is perhaps inversely proportionate to their subtlety in expression. It is quite obvious in the *fRoot Magazine* interview mentioned earlier that Miyazawa directed the song to the Japanese mainland, and pointed to Japan as the responsible party for the tragic Okinawan experience. *micorin350's* interpretation may therefore be seen as fundamentally "expansive." The same artifact may indeed hold different semiotic significance for different receivers.

When external recipients of an artifact "meet" and exchange views in a non-synchronic or immediate manner, results such as the following may prove to be more interesting:

> *igedearyapardita* (7 months ago)
> the melody is similar to Javanese and Balinese folksong… (I think it's logic since both Java and Bali are island). Hearing this song the image of my hometown, Bali, popped up in my mind. (translated) Thank you for this song.
>
> *JeikokuNippon* (7 months ago)
> I like his singing style. Sounds like a hybrid of traditional Japanese singing and modern Western singing
>
> *asiansands* (8 months ago)
> This is a Japanese song, assimilating Okinawa's folk song aspect. It's beautiful. I feel the nature spirit

Three outsider views all receive the artifact very positively, but in three different ways. *igedearyapardita* associates it with traditional or folk music in Indonesia. "Shima uta" does employ a rolling pentatonic melodic pattern reminiscent of gamelan playing. *JeikokuNippon* looks at it as a Japanese-Western music hybrid. The instrumental bridge which employs the ornamentation of rock compositions, though not mentioned as Western by the composer, may easily be identified or associated with "Western music." *asiansands* recognizes an "Asian hybrid" resulting from elements of Japanese and Okinawan music traditions. These characterizations of "one" song underscore difference, but they do not necessarily constitute opposing views.

The following chain of three comments turns decidedly political with talk of Okinawa's tragic war past and its "continuing past" with the US military bases pricking the people's collective memory:

> *eibonn* (2 months ago)
> (Translated)

Although I understand the anti-US military bases feelings of the Okinawan people, the bases are necessary as a force of deterrence. Its presence is to assure that fighting does not happen.

eibonn
1 か月前
沖縄県民が基地反対って言う気持ちはよくわかるけど、抑止力のため基地はどうしても必要です。また争いをおこさないためにも。

onaga1031 (four weeks ago)
(Translated)
Although I belong to a generation that has not personally experienced war, I feel that this song brings the message of peace. This is for the reason that the present peace is built upon the blood sacrifice of the past.

*onaga*1031
4 週間前
私は戦争を肌で体験していない世代ですが、この歌から平和とはなにかということが伝わってくる気がします。なぜなら事実現代の泰平は先人たちの血と犠牲によって築かれたものなのですから。

hungseki1 (22 hours ago)
(Translated)
Many feel that the Japanese government has forced the (military) bases on Okinawa. However, it is the United States that wants to do so. Okinawa is the first line of defence and best fulfils the requirements of the United States policy towards China…The most important operative condition is Okinawa. Doing without the bases is impossible. In addition, the reason for the existence of the US military also disappears. I believe that it is most ideal to discuss things pragmatically by looking at facts.

hungseki1
22 時間前
無知な人間は日本政府が基地を沖縄に押し付けてると思ってるけど、アメリカが沖縄に基地を置きたいんだよ。アメリカの対中防衛の最前線、最高の立地条件が沖縄。基地をなくすには親中に傾かないと無理だろうね。そうしたらアメリカ軍の存在意義がなくなるから。もっと論理的に物事を見た方が良いと思う。

eibonn's talk about the presence of the bases takes on a pragmatic tone and appears to adopt a "realist" perspective of international relations with its use of the term "deterrence." *hungseki1's* discussion is suffused with pragmatism and adopts the language of strategic studies by talking about "first line of defense" and "checking China" or "measures towards China." *onaga1031*'s takes a historical perspective

and relates how the peace of today results from the sacrifices made by earlier generations. In this chain, the political context of "Shima uta"s creation is well-articulated and actively voiced.

From a different video of "Shima uta" performed by Natsukawa Rimi as uploaded by the *rimit30*, the following chain of comments starts with an innocent inquiry made by *Gugugagamyself* about difference between the Japanese people and Okinawans. This triggers a rebuttal-laden debate featuring comments that are well supported by carefully selected and projected data:[18]

> *Gugugagamyself* (3 years ago)
> Hey :) what is the different between being Okinawan and Japanese? Sorry haha… Please email me :) I wanna learn. And I heard a Chinese version of this song… somewhere
>
> *Hyperaphid* (3 years ago)
> GOD I miss Okinawa.
> "gugugagamysel":
> Japanese and Okinawans are totally different! Before the Japanese took over, Okinawa was an independent kingdom and we had our own language and culture and everything! Even now, the Japanese spoken in Okinawa is very different. Okinawans are also ethnically very dissimilar to japanese, we are indigenous! I think Okinawa has more cultural ties to China, Taiwan, and Malaysia than japan.
>
> […]
>
> *Chrisshwada* (3 years ago)
> You do realize that okinawan and all ryukyuan languages are from the proto ryukyu-japnic and are japonic languages. You are making it seem like okinawan is more similar to Chinese when it is not. Okinawan is in the SAME LANGUAGE FAMILY as Japanese. It is 70% lexically similar to japan. The ryukyuans while different then Japanese are very similar people.

Hyperaphid's answer to *Gugugagamyself*'s inquiry takes on an extreme view of Okinawan difference. In this space, this must be considered and important articulation of difference since it purportedly comes from an Okinawan. Indeed, the difference is "totally" overwhelming. It also introduces the idea that the Japanese are actually "outsiders," in contrast to the Okinawans who are "indigenous." This construction of identity is very difficult to support as both present-day Japanese and Okinawans are descendants of both "outsiders" and "indigenous" peoples. *Hyperaphid*'s answer may be seen as an expression of a discourse of difference, while *Chrisshwada*'s rebuttal is an expression of a discourse of same-ness. *Chisshwada*'s irritation is apparent with her use of "all caps" font.

[18] The comments from this sub-section taken from the upload made by *kabuyoshi17* again come from http://www.youtube.com/watch?vAMEsNVcnirA (accessed: 27 August 2010).

The following comment by *Godz92* momentarily breaks the expressions of discourses of difference and sameness:

> *Godz92* (2 years ago)
> It's about the battle of okinawan during WWII. The first line goes: "The deigo flower has blossomed, and it has called the wind, and the storm has arrived." The storm being the American troops on their way to Okinawa is to fight the Japanese. The deigo flower blooming has to do with when the troops came, in spring time.

The comment explains the semiotic imagery of the song's first line. It therefore makes sense to "see" the Japanese device of the *kigo* (seasonal cuing word) in the song. The deigo is the *kigo*, and therefore locates the time-space nexus in Okinawa during the summer months of July and August. The blooming of the *deigo* ominously heralds the start of the only land battle in Japanese territory, one that resulted in a great number of casualties to both sides with the Okinawans helplessly caught in between.[19]

With a different cast of characters, the next three comments seem to continue the earlier chain of expressions relating to discourses of sameness and difference that happened three years ago:

> *Hoehoe1960* (1 year ago)
> Sound like Indonesia sound, any mysterious (relations) between Indonesia and Okinawa

> *Chibuyanchu* (1 year ago)
> I think Okinawans have closer DNA to Indonesia than Japanese. The ancient Okinawans (before being subjugated by Japan) traded throughout SE Asia. We look more like SE Asians than Japanese.

> *P0611010* (1 year ago)
> Okinawa's people's DNA is closer to Yamato race than any other race of the world. Both Okinawa and Yamato race mainly come from Siberia through Sakhalin or Korea. And Okinawa people's DNA are very different from Malay race (south Mongolian). That's why Okinawa's culture is very similar to Yamato. For example language and religion, Japonic languages and Shinto.

Hoehoe1960's comment starts the discussion, just like the earlier one by *igedearyapardita*, with an observation of similarity between Indonesian and Okinawan music. His comment leads to an inquiry about affinity which *Chibuyanchu*, a user who implicitly reveals his Okinawan origin, answers with the notion of the Okinawans having "closer DNA" to Indonesia compared to Japan. This triggers a strong

[19] Very well written narratives on, among others, the Okinawan war experience may be found in Arasaki Moriteru and others, *Kankō kōsu de nai Okinawa* (Tokyo: Kōbunken, 1983).

reaction from *P0611010* who expresses the opposite view using the language of physical anthropology.

The move towards a position of nativism is well illustrated in the following "dialogue" taken from another upload:[20]

> *behaitu* (2years ago)
> I love rimi… she is the most adorable singer keeping the Japanese music alive… go rimi go…
>
> *Ihatomi* (1 year ago)
> Rimi is great and has been my favorite ever since she came on the scene and even when she sang locally but please, she does not keep the Japanese music alive, she keeps Okinawan music alive. Don't confuse the two.

Ihatomi's admonition not to confuse Okinawan and Japanese music appears dissonant given "Shima uta's" provenance. It also implies that Natsukawa Rimi cannot contribute to the idea of "keeping the Japanese music alive."

Some Observations

The data acquired and analyzed in this brief study indicate the salience of culture in music production and consumption. Miyazawa's narration of how he composed "Shima uta" shows that "Okinawan culture" is embedded in the music-making process. The encounter with the Himeyuri Memorial, an Okinawan artifact by itself, spurred his composition of the song. Moreover, Miyazawa is aware of the contrasting (and possibly contending) elements in his composition. He, in fact, identified Okinawan and Japanese melodic lines, downplaying the strong presence of a Western (pop rock) element in the instrumental bridge. The aesthetic tensions his composition created may very well be seen as the wellspring of its expressive force, attracting individuals from different cultures across time (generations) and space (nationality).

"Shima uta" is a product of astute marketing. In the context of rising interests in "ethnic" or "world" musics in 1990s Japan, it may be said that *shima uta* "banked" on its association with Okinawan culture. The design and execution of Miyazawa's "Shima uta" jacket, as well as the music video that eventually evolved out of it and that graced many a karaoke screens, are replete with Okinawan imagery. In this manner production "coats" the artifact with another layer of culture.

When "Shima uta" is (re) appropriated by Okinawan artists and (re)presented as a typically Okinawan song, it again goes through a process of re-interpretation, which further pursues its Okinawan-ness. Sung by an Okinawan in a concert featuring Okinawan songs, it penetrates Okinawan culture through its inclusion in a set of so-called "canon" pieces. When translated and performed in the Ryūkyūan language or Uchināguchi, its re(verse) appropriation, in many ways, becomes complete.

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[20] The comments from this sub-section taken from the upload made by *10teko10* comes from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E8XndFHFXQ (accessed: 27 August 2010).

The discussion presented above points to the "transnational" quality of "Shima uta". As an artifact, it was produced trans-nationally and consumed trans-nationally. "Shima uta" is generally received as an Okinawan song by both non-Okinawan and non-Japanese. Consumption of one song or any other artifact often leads to consumption. Paralleling this consumption of artifact is the acquisition of knowledge about the cultural context of its creation and place and culture of provenance. In short, consumption leads to acquisition of knowledge about Okinawan music and about Okinawa.

Our familiarity with a certain culture may be seen to be constitutive of strings of artifacts and strings of knowledge that respectively make up the weft and the warp of our fabric understanding of that culture. Ross Poole operationalized culture as a gallery of symbols and meanings, or a process of producing such gallery of symbols and meanings.[21] Cultural membership can therefore also be seen as the ability to interpret this gallery as well as the production of this gallery of artifacts. The artifacts themselves constitute symbols and meaning. Membership therefore requires the ability to make sense of the and the ability to make sence of self in relation to the community via these artifacts. The artifacts themselves constitute symbols and meaning. Membership therefore requires the ability to make sense self in relation to the community via these artifacts. Miyazawa's success in producing "Shima uta", an "Okinawan" artifact as recognized via re-appropriation by insiders, makes him an "agent" of Okinawan culture, albeit not possessing insider status of that culture. Miyazawa's situation is therefore that of an outsider producing an artifact consumed by both insiders and outsiders. This situation best characterizes transnational cuiture, one that is freed from notions of territoriality and notions of the prestige of insider provenonce.

Orthodox thinking normally views traditional artifacts as bound by territory (place) and grouping (ethnicity). However, the world has long evolved away from these rigidities. For instance, ballet, although still largely French in "vocabulary," has for a very long time ceased to be a "French" expression. Via so-called Okinawa Pop or Uchinaa Pop,[22] Okinawan music has gone global. In a sense, the tradition has evolved and come up with creations or specific works that may be called semiotic artifacts. In their processes of creation, semiotic artifacts downplay the importance of provenance defined in terms of place and people. Instead, what are emphasized in their making are the intangibles of the craft or the techniques in production and aesthetics, as well as an "evocation" of culture, of place and of people.

Before concluding this piece, some observations on the creation of Okinawan identity in YouTube should be discussed. In the sampling examined for this piece, three points in the polar construction of Okinawan identity may be observed. The first, which may be called "Uchinanchū-ron (Okinawan-ron), adapts the rather" ideological concept nihonjinron to the Okinawan case, thereby producing a theory of Okinawa and Okinawa-ness. This discourse, above all others, aims to distance Okinawan identity and culture from Japanese identity and culture. It undergoes processes of "othering" through an insistence of uniqueness of the in-group or self. These processes are in descriptive terms "absolute" in insisting on

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[21] Poole, Ross. *Nation and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[22] For a comprehensive discussion of the genre of Uchinaa Pop, see: Robertson, James E. "Uchinaa Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music." In *Critical Asian Studies*, 33:2 (2001), pp. 211–242.

"total difference." Although self-professing a bias for hybridity via the term *champurū* (Uchinagūchi: mixed, and Malay: campur), this perspective favors a southern orientation, seeking to identify with Southeast Asia and not at all with *naichi* or Yamato towards the north.[23] The second point, which may be called the Uchinachū-equals-nihonjnron. This perspective is a variant of nihonjinron that simplistically subsumes Okinawan culture and identity as a sub-category of the Japanese. It subverts the Uchinanchū-ron discourse by adopting the opposite. Its perspective on same-ness is total. Proponents of a variant of this view, which includes the pioneer folklorist Yanagita Kunio, look at Okinawa as a repository of cultural forms that have already vanished from the Japanese mainland. This view harnesses the power of romanticism and nostalgia in its meta-narrative of same-ness based on the idea of lost past present in the margins.[24] The third, "the Diverging-Converging Hybrid-ron", is a derived category from the first and the second. It aims to strike a balance between the two and to portray the fluidity of culture and identity. This view looks at identity and culture as products of encounters, which in turn are either diverging or converging at any certain period of history. Japan's relationship with China shows such twists and turns in culture, converging during the Nara period, diverging shortly after the Heian period, converging again with the restoration of contact during the Kamakura period, going into an almost extreme form of divergence during the Edo period due to a policy of *sakoku*, and so on. Finally, this view orients the processes of diverging and converging towards multiple directions, and thus portraying an idea of multi-cultural exchange that is more complex and sophisticated.

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[23] Uechi Noboru of Okinawa University has expressed a version of this "ron" or theory in his work on Okinawan music in "Okinawa as the Northern Limit of Southeast Asian Music-Culture," paper delivered in "The Transnationalizing Cultures of Japan in Asia: Dramas, Literatures, Musics, Arts and Agencies" [International Conference on Japanese Studies], Japanese Studies Program, Escaler Hall, Ateneo de Manila University (9 February 2008).

[24] Yanagita Kunio apparently first expressed this view in his work *Kaijō no michi* [The Sea Route]. Some of his views are well studied in Mori Kōichi, "Yanagita Kunio: An Interpretive Study." In *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1980).

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