

Crossing International Borders: Okinawans, Festivals, and Representation in Hawaii

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The colors guard stepped out in time as they moved down Kalakaua Avenue. They were followed by the Navy band in their navy whites, playing a rousing version of the *Star Spangled Banner*. The rest of the parade fell into step behind them, given their marching orders by volunteer parade marshals. Labor Day weekend is a busy time for parades in Hawaii, as is the New Year, President's Week, and the Chinese New Year, and this year's Hawaiian United Okinawa Association's parade was one of the bigger parades. The half dozen red convertibles, carrying congressmen, governors, mayors, other politically important people, and, of course, beauty queens, drove off at snail's pace, their occupants' faces etched with their best public smiles. Behind the cars came one of the organizers of the parade, The World *Uchinanchu* Business Association, with their banner bearing the words, "*Aloha, Mensore, Haisai*" (Welcome, Welcome, Welcome). Carrying the banner was a group of small, bearded¹ Okinawan-American men in white, yellow or purple polo shirts, dark shorts, and loafers: standard casual wear for Hawaiian businessmen.

Behind the organizers marched the organized. At the head of the marchers came the hosts, the fifty-one Hawaiian Okinawan member clubs, representing their ancestors' village, town, or city, each carrying their English and Japanese labeled banners. The associated clubs—the Genealogy Club, Hui Makaala, women's groups, the Young Okinawans—all marched together, most dressed in festival wear—kimono, or eisa clothes.² All ages were represented, from children in baby buggies through to men and women in their eighties. Following the locals came many smaller groups of performers, dressed in eisa costumes, who performed dances with their own musical accompaniment. Chinese dancers performing ritualized sword-fighting, opera and age associations, Korean expatriate associations, local high school marching bands, cheerleaders, and many other Asian participants had registered for the parade and all contributed to the multicultural/multi-Asian feel to the event.

Occupying central stage, though, certainly from a political standpoint, and following the performers, were the many "overseas Okinawans," more than a thousand of them in all, each group carrying identifiers of who they were. The "overseas Okinawans" flags bore the names of their adopted countries—Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Taiwan, the Philippines,

1 Many of the men had grown beards before the festival as a sign of 'Okinawan-ness.' This was to demonstrate pride in their more hirsute ethnic heritage. The beards were shaved off on the last day of the conference, following the Hairy Chest Contest, which was a memorable spectacle.

2 Eisa is the festive dance during the festival of the dead, celebrated in Okinawa, and undergoing a significant revival in recent years.

Argentina, Canada, the continental United States, and New Zealand (!).³ The Okinawans living in Japan were also identified as “overseas Okinawans,” but their identifiers were more precise and represented the areas from which the delegates had come—Kansai, Kantō, Kyūshū, and Okinawa itself. Bringing together Okinawans, “overseas Okinawans,” and “*Uchinanchu*-at-heart”⁴ outside of Okinawa for the first time, the HUOA and the WUB acted together in staging the events with the blessing of the Hawaiian and Okinawan state governments. It was a serious undertaking, and, as it turned out, a highly successful one.

As the parade reached Kapiolani Park, it spontaneously unraveled, the marchers casually mixing with the crowds already thronging the venue. What had been a roiling celebration of sound, color, and rhythm was absorbed by an even more colorful, louder (thanks to the efficient PA system) celebration. The parade simply ended, and participants were rendered mundane in an instant by the sheer press of people around them. There were literally thousands of people milling around the transformed bandstand, in the seats arranged around it, sitting in and under trees, lining up for food at the food tents, and so on. The crowd was multiethnic, and the brilliant purples, yellows, reds, greens and blues of Okinawan performers flashed through crowds of Aloha shirt-wearing haole men, and halter-top-wearing haole women, sensibly-dressed Japanese women with large sun hats, crowds of children in T-shirts, and military families, all enjoying the spectacle. On stage, a series of performers, some from Hawaii, most from overseas, performed to the crowds, as television crews from Hawaii, Japan and Okinawa recorded the event. In fact, by the time the marchers had arrived at the festival site, the 21st Annual Hawaii United Okinawa Association Festival for 2003 was already well underway.

Everyone loves a parade, but why this one?

There are distinctive “marching seasons,” and public parades are relatively common in Hawaii. Not only are the parades well-attended, there are also many participants.⁵

One of the main themes of this particular parade was that of cultural pride, although couched within the terms of togetherness, inclusivity, welcome, and peace. Like other parades, it is difficult to remove the notion of politics from the act of marching in a public place, and although participants may not be either consciously or primarily focused on

3 I am a White Australian who works in New Zealand, and was entered in the parade by the organizers as the New Zealand contingent of overseas *Uchinanchu*, complete with a sign to carry. I was given no advance warning of my expected participation in the parade, and my attire and demeanor attested to this.

4 *Uchinanchu*-at-heart refers to people being invested with the spirit of *Uchinanchu*—what has been referred to as *yuimaaruu* (See below for more discussion of this term). When I inquired as to why I was encouraged to participate in the parade, I was told by one of the organizers, Ed Kuba, that it was because I was “*Uchinanchu*-at-heart.” In this case, the term superseded any cultural or ethnic criteria, and referred to my interest in Okinawan culture. As a catch-all expression, it is invoked to incorporate a sense of inclusivity for those who may be culturally or ethnically distant from Okinawa.

5 There are many accounts of parades and their histories in the United States. Mary P Ryan has written a number of accounts of parades in the United States, the best-known of which was in 1990 (*Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots 1825–1880*) and Simon Newman (1997) has written a carefully constructed account of parading origins in the new US Republic. Susan Davis (1986) has written about Philadelphia marching traditions, but Kurashige’s (2002) account of Japanese-American parades in Los Angeles from the 1930s to the 1990s is probably most salient to the discussion that follows.

the politics of their position, they take on political meaning in the context of the parade, march, procession, or demonstration. The United States has a history of public participation in demonstrations of political popular culture, ethnicity, and class.⁶ The HUOA parade, too, expressed popular political sentiment.

On their website, the organizers supplied the following information for potential participants in the parade:

Parade: Aug. 30, 9:00 am

The International Parade will be held along the world famous Kalakaua Avenue and proceed to Kapiolani Park, site of the Okinawan Festival. The parade will feature all participating countries and dignitaries as well as local marching units. *International visitors are being encouraged to showcase the colors and diversity of their respective countries.* Kalakaua Avenue runs right thru (sic) the heart of Waikiki and along the beach so *it will be a great opportunity to show case (sic) our cultural pride to the 30,000 plus spectators.* (<http://www.uchinanchu.com/>, accessed on 29 September, 2003) (italics added).

The italicized words above are highlighted to emphasize the political orientation of the parade; from these words, it is apparent that the parade was to promote the global nature of Okinawan cultural pride. As with the “*Uchinanchu-at-heart*” label applied to non-Okinawans who were associated with the events, Okinawan culture was fore-grounded, as people paraded their identity before the spectators, celebrating the diversity of their interpretations of Okinawan life in various countries. The fact that this was the first time such a celebration of Okinawan culture had been held *overseas* (that is, outside Okinawa) for both Okinawans in Okinawa and those of Okinawan descent living abroad, marked an important transformation of the event. No longer simply a celebration of Okinawans “returning home” as had been the case in the previous Worldwide *Uchinanchu* Festivals, held in Naha,⁷ Okinawans went overseas to celebrate being Okinawan. New meanings were being generated in the spirit of “aloha” and “mensore”. Moreover, the crossover with the Hawaii United Okinawa Association’s Annual Festival blurred the boundaries of representation. More than an ethnic parade of Hawaiians of Okinawan descent, it became a celebration of diasporic Okinawan culture in a distinctively Hawaiian Okinawan cultural context.

Displays of Okinawan ethnic and cultural pride have not always been so public, so inclusive, or so popular in Hawaii. Like other migrant groups, Okinawans have a long and complex history of settlement in Hawaii. The Okinawan group is special in that the

6 Such expressions of popular political sentiment were manifest in the processions, festivals, and feasts of late eighteenth century early republican life (Newman, 1997, for example). There are countless, more modern examples too that span the twentieth century. Most recently protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are two such powerful examples of popular political movements in the United States.

7 In 1990, and again in 1995, the Okinawan Prefectural Government sponsored *Uchinanchu* festivals for expatriate Okinawans. Both occasions signalled the intention of the OPG to develop global links with Okinawans overseas, and to encourage the expatriate communities to develop closer ties with Okinawa itself.

people of Okinawa are originally from a Japanese prefecture, albeit one that was annexed late in the nineteenth century. As a group from a Japanese prefecture, it is interesting to note that the representation of Okinawan self today in Hawaii is a fluctuating spectrum that involves being both “Japanese American”, and “*Uchinanchu*.” Arguably, it also involves being “American,” and more importantly, perhaps, “local.” Jon Okamura (1980, 1994, 2002) has talked about the concept of “local” applying to an increasing number of people born in Hawaii from mixed cultural and ethnic backgrounds, in which he locates Hawaiian Okinawans. Still, the fact that a single prefectural group can represent itself as distinct from “Japanese Americans”—that is as “Hawaiian *Uchinanchu*”—and be simultaneously incorporated within the wider “Japanese American” mainstream, is important to this study.

Okinawans—particularly second and third generation (*nisei* and *sansei*)—in Hawaii have become increasingly politically and economically influential since World War 2. As both part of the mainstream (Japanese Americans) and as a distinct cultural group, they have a high public profile. This is due in part to the success of certain substantive Okinawan-owned enterprises—Times Supermarket chain, Tamura Supermarket chain, Zippy’s, Higa, and so on—and partly due to the activities organized by the HUOA and the member clubs. Clubs tend to be involved in four main activities each year: their *shinnen enkai* (New Year Party); their summer picnic; the annual clean-up; and the Okinawa festival. Today, though, one of the more important roles they perform is in organizing funerals so they can be conducted in a culturally appropriate manner. This is because so many of the club members are aging.

Activities organized by the HUOA—and supported by the clubs—apart from the annual festival and parade, include an annual charity golf tournament, a series of craft fairs, many public performances of Okinawan culture and music, a number of children’s fairs, sporting sponsorships, academic scholarships, and so on. Centered at the Hawaii Okinawa Center at Waipahu, the community has a “*kaikan*” (public hall) with a paid executive officer, and four other employed staff. The center was built with funds raised by the Okinawan community in Hawaii—particularly some of the larger Hawaiian Okinawan corporations—and by Okinawan companies and private sponsors from Japan. It is a sizeable piece of real estate, a two-storey office complex with library and exhibition area (the Higa Building), and a 1200-seat auditorium (the Teruya Pavilion) set in park-like landscaped grounds, designed and constructed by Okinawan craftspeople from Japan—with a land and plant value of around \$US9 million. It is held “debt-free.” This is a significant, publicly conspicuous asset, which serves many purposes for both the Okinawan community and for other communities and groups, who use the Teruya Pavilion in particular. It is used, for example, as a central meeting and function center for Okinawans, as the repository of official (and unofficial) information about Okinawa and Okinawans in Hawaii, for the HUOA committee meetings, and other groups of people wanting a venue for sporting, social, or business activities in Hawaii.

How was it that such a small number of people from this small prefecture in southern Japan were able to forge for themselves a complex, dynamic, public identity as “*Uchinanchu*” in Hawaii? Perhaps Mr. Miyahara was right when he stated, “This could happen

only in America.” The *Uchinanchu* community in Hawaii is quite different to *Uchinanchu* communities in Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, or indeed the mainland of the United States, and it is unarguable that what the *Uchinanchu* in Hawaii have become could only have taken place in America, or to be precise, in Hawaii. The highly-charged cultural, social, economic, political and religious context of Hawaii in the twentieth centuries provided an idiosyncratic backdrop against which new forms of Hawaiian Okinawan identity emerged; Hawaii was not Okinawa.

Like Kent, I too think that the inculcation of US free market values—simply put, that wealth, status, and power should be equated with success—in the second and third generations of the Asian plantation children in postwar Hawaii was of great significance in the reconstruction of Okinawan identity in the “new” Hawaii. As Kent says, “An education for selfishness and self-aggrandizement in the traditional American sense” (1993: 130) was an important element in transforming a generation of “migrants” into a generation of “locals.” Okinawan political consciousness, awakened during World War 2, was predicated on assumptions about economic and social success in the postwar world.

But there were also issues from the “old country” involved. The cohesion of the community could not have been achieved without powerful signifiers from Okinawa being employed. In the case of this community, it was the *aza-*, *son-*, *chō-*, and *shi-jinkai*⁸ that formed the backbone of identity throughout the prewar and postwar years. Linking the old ways with the new, the old people with the young, the young with the young, the clubs sought to retain specific, localized elements of Okinawan culture within their members. They transmitted cultural values and mores to the next generations, and developed or extended ties with the areas from which their families had originally migrated. In this way, the links with Okinawa were continued, even through the war years. After the war the ties were strengthened, initially following the US acquisition of Okinawa, and then through the “pigs from the sea” incident, the “milking” goats incident,⁹ and donations of clothing, food, and money for Okinawans collected in Hawaii and the West Coast.

Ties with the “homeland,” then, are significant elements in assessing how identity is constructed or retained in the settled community. But in Hawaii’s case the relationship between Japanese and Okinawans as the “Japanese other,” as Arakaki frames it, (2002: 136–8) is equally important. This relationship is complex, and historically charged. In order to locate the relationships between Japanese and Okinawan immigrants in Hawaii in historical context, I would like to look at the relationship between the prefecture and the “motherland” (*hondo*, or *naichi*). This will allow the subsequent, ambivalent relationships

8 These locality clubs were formed by first generation Okinawans, the earliest in 1907–8, based on the area from which they’d come. Some, like the Naha-Shuri Club, and the Kin Club, were very large, and constituted thousands of members. Others, founded on villages and hamlets, were small. Most were active, and were centres of Okinawa-centric activities, such as dance, music, crafts, and conversation. Dialect was commonly used in most of this discourse—meetings were held in either Uchinaguchi, or Japanese until after World War 2.

9 In the late 1940s two famous expeditions were organised by the Hawaiian Okinawan community. The first involved buying and transporting to Okinawa 600 pigs to use as breeding livestock for the massively depleted pig population (pork is a significant part of Okinawan diet). These pigs formed the basis of the pig farming industry that developed in the 1950s. The second involved buying and transporting 500 milking goats to Okinawa. They were to be used to provide milk for infants whose mothers were malnourished and unable to produce breast milk. The goats were slaughtered and eaten.

between Okinawans and other Japanese in Hawaii to be contextualized.

A pocket history of Japan-Okinawa relations

Japan's modernity formally swept up Okinawa—the former Ryukyu Kingdom—into its sphere of influence in 1879, when the kingdom was annexed, its official status as a nation-state was revoked, and its new status as a prefecture instated. Being careful not to provoke China more than necessary (from the Chinese perspective, Japan had invaded and annexed a tributary state with close ties to China), the Japanese Meiji state introduced changes to government, education, language use, land ownership and taxation, and conscription more gradually than it had in Hokkaidō (Morris-Suzuki, 1998: 27). But by the late 1890s, after the successful prosecution of a war against China, Japan approached the assimilation of Okinawa with more enthusiasm, determined to bring Okinawans “up to the level of civilized Japanese.” Significant land and taxation reforms were introduced, language was standardized, and education made compulsory (but not free). Citizens were expected to vote, and to be eligible for conscription. Okinawans were increasingly seen as “new” Japanese. To “get ahead” one had to be “more Japanese” and “less Okinawan.”

While Okinawans struggled to learn to become more Japanese, economic conditions in the countryside deteriorated for farmers. Poor weather and bad harvests led to economic desperation for many rural Okinawan families by the end of the century. Unable to pay the new taxes, and often in debt, villagers were forced to consider leaving their homes to search for work, or at the least, sending the young, strong men away to work overseas and repatriate funds to keep the *jika*¹⁰ going. Some went to mainland Japan, some went to Taiwan, Japan's most recent colonial possession, while others followed Tōyama Kyūzō 当山久三 to Hawaii, the mainland United States, or to South America. By the early twentieth century, as Japan became an international “power” following its defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, Okinawans left their homes in increasing numbers, driven by a number of factors: continuing economic hardships, increased taxation, conscription of young men, for example, acting as “push” factors; better economic or educational opportunities acting as “pull” factors. This trend reflected the relative levels of economic development in the mainland and in the frontier prefectures. Okinawa, as the latest internal Japanese territory, remained the least developed, and contributed the highest per capita emigration statistics.

In fact until 1907, when the “Gentlemen's Agreement” designed to dramatically slow labor migration between Japan and the United States was introduced, Okinawan male emigration continued at a rapid rate. By 1907 around 8,500 Okinawans had landed in Hawaii, constituting about twenty percent of all Japanese immigration to the islands. After the Gentlemen's Agreement, emigrants from Japan were restricted to those with family members already in Hawaii. The period until 1924 was known as the *yobiyose jidai* (period of summoning families), as family members, and in particular the “picture brides” of the Okinawan men working in Hawaii came to the island in substantial numbers. According to Kimura (1962, reprinted in *Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawaii*, 1981), a total of about 20,000 “summoned” from Okinawa arrived in Hawaii between 1900 and

10 *Jika* refers to the ‘traditional’ family home.

1924, of whom about one half moved to the continental United States, or returned home.¹¹ Kay Yamada (2000: 24) estimates that there were approximately 25,000 Okinawans living in Hawaii in 1924 when the Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Asian Exclusion Act) came into effect, largely halting Japanese emigration to the United States until 1945.

When the first Okinawans arrived in Honolulu, they were the latest in a string of imported labor, mostly from East and Southeast Asia, that had been contracted to work in the sugar cane plantation economy of Hawaii. In 1900 when the first 27 Okinawans arrived in Hawaii, led by Tōyama Kyūzō, they were tied to contracts that included 26 days of work a month, 10 hour days, for a salary of \$15 a month for men, and \$10 a month for women (Yamada, 2000: 23–4). This was considerably better pay than they received in Okinawa. But the work was hard, the living conditions difficult, and the social environment repressive and discriminatory. As a “minority within a minority” they faced discrimination not only as “Japs” from the *haole* land-owners and managers, and from the *luna* (the mostly Portuguese overseers), but also as “Japan-pake” (a pejorative used by *naichi* literally meaning “Japanese-Chinese”) from other Japanese, and even from other Asian migrants. They were identifiable as Okinawans, rather than Japanese, primarily by their small stature, their names, or their accented Japanese.

In the early twentieth century the sugar plantations in Hawaii were controlled by a group of *haole* land-owners, mostly long-term settler families and missionaries. This sugar “aristocracy” dominated the labor market, and from the middle of the nineteenth century had established substantial plantations in which were housed the migrant workers (Kent, 1983: 37). By the beginning of the twentieth century, decades of practice had led to the establishment of discrete, mostly ethnically exclusive, settlements within the plantations. To some extent pragmatism drove this process—a common language was necessary both at home and in the fields. Japanese workers tended to live and work together, as did Filipinos, Chinese, and Portuguese.¹² Complex hierarchies of power and influence had been organized over time, based to some extent on the length of time a group had been on site, and partially based on management’s perception of workers’ abilities. Okinawans were given a rude introduction into this maelstrom of political intrigue, as they realized they were at the very bottom of the migrant heap.

Almost all the migrants from Okinawa came to Hawaii to work in the plantations.¹³ They lived and worked in a rigid, stratified society controlled by labor overseers and faceless owners. Occupying a dualistic identity, the workers were both Japanese and a Japanese minority simultaneously. To Japanese eyes, they spoke in dialects incomprehensible to others; they grew and ate pork; they spoke Japanese with a strong accent; they came from a culture not commonly associated with Japan “proper”; they were shorter

11 Kimura Yukiko, “Social-Historical Background of the Okinawans in Hawaii” in *Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawaii*, Ethnic Studies Oral History Project, University of Hawaii, United Okinawan Association of Hawaii, 1981: 58.

12 The Portuguese workers were frequently employed as *luna*, or labour overseers. Seen by the plantation owners as more ‘civilised’ than the Asian immigrants, they were regarded as able to work in management roles within the plantation economies.

13 Mitsugu Sakihara, 1981.

than most Japanese; and they were hairier. Perhaps most importantly, they were “different.” From other Japanese eyes, Okinawans were a lower echelon of Japanese, culturally different, somehow less developed.¹⁴ From non-Japanese eyes, though, they were still Japanese. The second-generation children (*nisei*) went to the Japanese schools that sprang up around the plantation towns and market garden areas. They spoke Japanese and pidgin English in the second generation, just as other Japanese children did. However, pig-raising, eating habits, cultural behavior, language, musical activities, and so on identified them as different to other, mainland Japanese groups.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, many Okinawans remained working on the plantations. As most were from rural districts in Okinawa, they tended to stay in professions in which they were comfortable. When plantation workers started to become independent in this period they took to pig and chicken farming, market gardening, and opening small businesses, often cleaning or food related.¹⁵ These activities were made possible by *tanomoshi* or *mouiai* (mutual credit societies) set up by expatriate Okinawans.¹⁶ The credit groups still operate among Okinawan, Filipino, and other communities in Hawaii, and elsewhere. They provide funds for one member each month at very low or zero interest which they can invest in whatever they choose.

Subjected to discrimination on many fronts, Okinawans looked to their original communities for support. Most of the locality clubs were founded in the 1920s and 30s as Okinawan groups bought into Hawaiian business culture, by moving into urban centers for paid work or to set up private enterprise. Some consolidated their positions on the plantations through seniority and upward mobility. Others remained on the plantations. The clubs provided opportunities for mutual support (*yuimaaruu*) for members, and enabled Okinawans from particular districts to interact in culturally familiar environments.¹⁷

World War 2 acted as a watershed in changing relations between Japanese and Okinawans, both in Japan and in Hawaii. It also acted as a watershed in developing new race relations between *haole* and non-*haole* in the postwar world of Hawaii. The war, and the attack on Pearl Harbor in particular, led to a marked shift in US official (i.e. *haole*) attitudes in Hawaii towards “Japs.” Although racism directed at Asians was common in prewar Hawaiian society, Japanese integration into the mainstream was well-advanced. Pearl Harbor put an end to that for the short-term. Japanese leaders—school principals, officials, some businessmen, and some priests—were incarcerated, and movements of Japanese-Americans were closely monitored. On the mainland, Japanese-Americans were rounded up en masse and sent to “relocation camps”. But in Hawaii, three factors

14 A number of anthropological theories had been published by the end of the nineteenth century proposing that the Okinawan dialects were in fact “proto-Japanese,” and Ryukyuan culture was a less evolved form of Japanese culture. Fuyu Iha (1922) writes about this topic at length in his famous treatise on Okinawa’s relations with Japan.

15 Some well-known Honolulu and Waikiki landmarks are owned and operated by Okinawan families even today.

16 These societies still operate today, and employ workers’ contributions to enable individuals to advance economically in society through the provision of interest free loans.

17 Kimura Yukiko, “Locality Clubs of Okinawans in Hawaii” in *Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawaii*, 1981: 285.

mitigated this issue: Japanese were the most numerous ethnic group living in Hawaii in the early 1940s; Japanese workers accounted for much of Hawaii's total employment in agriculture, hence farm workers were necessary for the war effort; and Japanese American males in Hawaii enthusiastically rushed to enlist in the war effort, eventually forming the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. These soldiers fought with distinction and bravery in Europe, becoming the most decorated group of US soldiers during the war. These three issues had a significant impact on the postwar environment in which Okinawan pride emerged.

The emergence of the Okinawan community in the years after World War 2 was linked to the Japanese ascent to power in postwar Hawaii. Some of the newfound confidence in representation and belonging in reinvented Hawaii was based on the success of the *nisei* soldiers in surviving the war, and with such distinction. Having higher expectations than in the prewar years of the society they fought and died for, many took advantage of the GI Bill to educate themselves and become politically and economically active. Hawaiian society's infamous *haole* insularity was actively undermined by an increasingly conspicuous Japanese American and other Asian entrepreneurial and political presence in Hawaii's business and social elite.

This postwar success of Hawaiian Okinawan business and political leaders, driven by American-taught ideals of capitalism, influenced the extraordinary charity of the responses to the devastation of postwar Okinawa. It has been argued that the drive to help the people of Okinawa recover from the extreme destruction of life and property caused by both US and Japanese military during the last months of the war helped cohere the expatriate Hawaiian Okinawan community (Jane Miyahiro, interview January 2003).

Driven by fears of Cold War socialist domination of East Asia, the United States ensured that its own security in the region would not be compromised, and proceeded to build a fortress in Okinawa. In doing so, the US effectively made stateless those who lived in the part of Japan most devastated during the Pacific War, while simultaneously awarding advanced human rights to the rest of the Japanese people, and those Okinawans living within the United States. This ambivalence eventually influenced the attitudes of many Okinawans living in Hawaii, who, in the first instance, viewed the relationship between the United States and Okinawa as a positive thing. That is, many believed that because Okinawans were now under US government care, they would have had the same personal freedoms and opportunities as Okinawans in Hawaii.¹⁸ Many would change their views over time, however, as contrary evidence emerged.

The drive to do something for the family 'back home' was one of the most significant factors in bringing the community's consciousness of being *Uchinanchu* to the fore in the postwar period. The Okinawa Relief Clothing Drive Committee was organized at the end of 1945, and by February 1946 it had collected more than one hundred and fifty tons of clothing from around the islands.¹⁹ June Arakawa, who worked in broadcasting when she initially returned to Hawaii after the war, said that the radio drive for donations

18 Interviews with Ronald, Don, and June, HOC, January 2004.

19 Sakihara Mitsugu 1981: 115.

for Okinawans' relief was warmly supported by the Okinawan community.²⁰ And when the Pigs for Okinawa program, mentioned above, was begun, the organizers were able to collect \$50,000 worth of pledges with little trouble. Moreover, many of the locality clubs, idle during the war, were reconstituted around the issue of raising funds, clothing, and food for Okinawans at home. The devastation wrought upon Okinawa by the United States was being compensated for by naturalized Okinawan-Americans. There was some injustice in this equation.

These fund-raising exercises also raised the consciousness of Hawaiian Okinawans about their roots, and about family still in Okinawa. Perhaps even more significantly, in 1951 the United Okinawan Association (UOA) was formed to coordinate efforts to distribute aid, find and contact relatives, conduct official business with the Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG), and generally interact with Okinawa on behalf of Hawaiian Okinawans. At this stage comprising 14 clubs, it grew to encompass almost 40 clubs by 1980. The attempt to form a single, overarching and representative body was a crucial step in altering the discourse of Okinawa in Hawaii.

Okinawa's reversion to administrative rule by Japan in 1972 was seen by many Okinawans as an opportunity of installing a new foundation of civil rights, and of ridding themselves of the American bases. The post-reversion reality did not live up to the ideals expressed by the pro-reversionists, and there was widespread disillusionment with political representation, the continued presence of the US military, poor social welfare, and outdated social and physical infrastructure. Purves (2004, Chapter 5) cites former Okinawa Governor Yara Chobyō's views as representative of the pro-reversionists:

During the war Okinawa acted as a shield for the defence of the homeland, and over 100,000 of our comrades lost their lives in that effort. After the war Okinawa became a spoil of victory, a means with which to settle the problem of defeat. Okinawa was sacrificed and entrusted to the rule of an alien people. Now it is to be placed in the uncertain position of becoming a keystone of the Japan-US Mutual Security Treaty, so that it may help to protect the peace and safety of Japan and the Far East. To this day Okinawa is, as it has always been, the sacrificial lamb of state power" (1972).

To counter the impact of the bases, massive injections of capital from Tokyo in development and construction projects to bring Okinawan standards of living into line with other Japanese prefectures were rapidly introduced, and have had a powerful impact on quality of life.²¹ Yet the social, economic and cultural gap between *uchinaa* and *naichi* remains significant.

In Hawaii, in the 1970s, while Okinawans were "reverting" to Japan, Hawaiian Okinawans were getting college educations, and some were inventing themselves as important people in the military, the legislature, the judiciary, in business, and in education.

²⁰ Interview at the HOC, February 2004.

²¹ See Gavan McCormack's excellent piece on construction and Okinawa's economic change (McCormack, Gavan. 1999. "From the Sea That Divides to the Sea That Links: Contradictions of Ecological and Economic Development in Okinawa." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Journal of Socialist Ecology* 10, no. 1 [March]).

Aspirations of third and fourth generation Hawaiian Okinawans increasingly converged with the “American dream,” and increasing numbers of Hawaiian Okinawans became middle or upper middle class. Some of the locality clubs were faltering, as *issei* passed away, and *nisei* and increasing numbers of *sansei* were not interested in replacing them in official roles in the clubs. Membership within the younger generations had declined in most of the clubs for a number of reasons. Among them was the relevance of Okinawan culture in daily Hawaiian life. In a society where individual wealth was equated with happiness, Okinawans, as part of the postwar “local” community, were able to compete with all other groups in society for material rewards. Academically inclined *sansei* and *yonsei* (third and fourth generation people of Okinawan descent) were moving away from Hawaii to pursue education and careers on the continental United States or elsewhere. The issue of Okinawan culture did not seem relevant to many young people. That is, until the civil rights movements were underway in the United States, and Ethnic Studies was introduced as a course of study at the University of Hawaii.²²

Karleen Chinen was a student of the early Ethnic Studies program, and remembers the radical nature of the courses and the reputations of the teachers. She recalls how the civil rights movement gave birth to many other ethnic issues, and the rise of Ethnic Studies’ popularity in the United States. In Hawaii, this meant that not only were indigenous rights of Hawaiian peoples revisited, but also that categories like “Japanese American” were questioned. In this context, she says, Okinawan identity was allowed more public recognition. Not content with converging their identity with Japanese—what Karleen refers to as “hushed representation”—some Okinawan young people began to more actively participate in political movements and other ethnic events as a distinct minority group. Strong political alliances were formed with students from minority groups in the mainland United States, in Japan, and in Okinawa, and a radical, multi-cultural philosophy with a central focus on world peace was developed.

From the UOA leadership’s perspective, however, radical student leadership was not necessarily a prerequisite for leading the *sonjinkai* or the UOA. Indeed, the conservative leadership was deeply concerned about the declining number of young people interested in Okinawan community organizations, and how to fill the leadership gap that would certainly appear in the near future. This was addressed in 1980 with the introduction of the first young leadership tour to Okinawa, organized and sponsored by the UOA, the *Sonjinkai* Association of Okinawa Prefecture, and the Okinawa Prefecture City Mayors’ Association to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of immigration to Hawaii. Thirty-five Hawaiian Okinawan *nisei* and *sansei* were selected from over two hundred applicants from the locality clubs.²³ This trip had a profound impact on not only the people who went on the trip, but also on the subsequent organizational structure of the Okinawan community in Hawaii. The “young leaders” mostly lived up to their titles. They formed the Young Okinawans of Hawaii, and a number of them led their own locality clubs, or

22 Of course, the fact that such courses of education were accessible to Hawaiian Okinawans suggests that many were now able to afford college education.

23 Karleen Chinen (above) was one of the young leaders selected.

the UOA as presidents (Arakaki, 2002: 135–6) through the 1980s.²⁴

By the mid 1980s, and riding on the new energy from younger members, it was decided to raise funds to build the Hawaii Okinawa Center following a visit from Okinawa Governor Nishime to Hawaii in 1981, where he remarked upon the absence of a “*kaikan*” for Okinawan people.²⁵ The fund-raising enterprise was successful and significant for the community in Hawaii, and reinforced the importance of *yuimaaruu*.²⁶ It symbolized a revitalized community, with a centrally located physical presence in the new Center. The Center, and the personnel it houses, has come to represent Hawaiian Okinawans in official matters with the state of Hawaii, and with Okinawa Prefecture. It draws people from numerous *sonjinkai* to volunteer their time as gardeners, office workers, festival workers, teachers, guides, organizers, and so on. and has become the center of Okinawan cultural representation in Hawaii—at least the *official* center of representation. It is the property of the HUOA, which sees its purpose as being “to promote and build a bridge of friendship and fellowship with our homeland Okinawa.”²⁷ The monthly newspaper, *Uchinanchu*, produced by the HUOA, is circulated to 10,200 families and contains news of *Uchinanchu* activities, cultural events, HUOA events, reports from clubs, personal Okinawa-related stories, upcoming exhibits, and a substantial (3 pages of 16 in the January 2004 edition) section acknowledging gifts and pledges received in the HUOA’s “Preserving Our Legacy” annual fund drive between October and November 2003. It also maintains a web-site with up-to-date information about the Hawaiian Okinawan community. The Centennial celebrations—the most substantial yet—were successfully organized by the HUOA, and housed at the Center.

Other forms of Okinawan representation have also emerged in the past decade. I’d like to consider briefly just one group: the “alternative Okinawan music project,”²⁸ started around 1997. This “organization” implicitly challenges the “representativeness” of Hawaiian Okinawan culture as produced by the HUOA and the Center. This is not to say that it disagrees with the tenets of HUOA policy; rather it is to suggest that its agenda involves a difference of approach to the issue of identity. Participants in the group are young, polit-

24 A second young leaders’ tour was organised in 1993 which was also successful in restimulating young people’s interest in Okinawan society and culture. In 2000, on the centennial of Okinawan immigration into Hawaii, groups of intermediate school children from Okinawa sailed on a training ship from Okinawa to Hawaii to reproduce the voyage of their ancestors. Hawaiian school children, not all Okinawan, boarded the ship for the voyage to Okinawa. This may have stimulated interest in Okinawa among Hawaiian children. It appears to have had some impact in Okinawa.

25 Interview with Wayne Miyahira, executive director of the HUOA, HOC, February 2004.

26 *Yuimaaruu* translates as “mutual assistance, support or aid,” but encompasses more culturally specific context than this implies. Ostensibly developed as a concept in pre-Japanese days, mutual help was foundational in enabling Okinawan farming communities to survive extreme climatic conditions. That this word has been incorporated into the lexicon of Hawaiian Okinawans is indication of its perceived importance as a concept binding the Okinawan expatriate community.

27 This statement appeared in the centennial publication, *To Our Issei*, 2000: 76. The publication was a substantive account of the early settlers and their legacy.

28 I have grouped as one “entity” the collective musicians, performers, and stage artists who make up, and have made up, a list of the most talented and innovative young Okinawan performers born in Hawaii. One group in particular, led by Eric Wada and Norman Kaneshiro, has made a powerful artistic and political set of statements about the representation of Okinawan “culture” by HUOA-approved representatives.

ically aware, and focused on producing music and performance that incorporate elements of authentic Okinawan culture, but also incorporate improvisation and innovation as Hawaiian Okinawans. Moreover, they are inclined to play and perform with others from outside the *Uchinanchu* community. While they believe this is the appropriate way to get their music to a wider audience, it has not been met with enthusiastic support from conservative members of the HUOA committees. Such performances are contrary to HUOA views that music and dance must be performed in their “original” form—that is, the form dictated by current political thinking in Okinawa. Such contradictions in representation can be seen to marginalize original thinkers within the community, a pity when the current cultural and ethnic diversity within the Hawaiian Okinawan community is so significant.

Parading identity and facing the future

This brings me back to the issue of performance in the parade of 2003. From my position as an inside-outsider,²⁹ the parade was a fascinating mix of what Okamura refers to as “local” cultural groups, Okinawans from many different places, a few other ethnic groups, and a number of well-known officials from both Hawaii and Okinawa. It was the mixture of international *Uchinanchu* that most caught the eye. In each case, the participants had adopted some elements of the host culture beyond language. The mixing of different ethnic clothing from South America was beguiling; the United States representatives were at home in Aloha shirts; the Japanese and Okinawan contingents also wore ill-fitting and sometimes lurid patterned Aloha shirts, in the men’s case, or *muumuu*s for women. The celebratory atmosphere continued all the way to the festival site, where serious conversations began in earnest.

For those interviewed at the HUOA Center the day after the festival, the opportunity to meet and “talk story” with Okinawans from Okinawa and the Americas in particular was the highlight of the festival.³⁰ The parade facilitated this interaction between participants, in that all were gathered together in the hiatus before the procession began for at least an hour. Many of the overseas *Uchinanchu* had already met at the reception at the Sheraton Hotel on Waikiki Beach the previous night, and these people greeted each other cordially, discussed business and personal issues, and generally were relaxed in each others’ company. After the parade, the International Tent in the festival grounds became the site of many cross-cultural and multilingual interactions between *Uchinanchu* of different nationalities. I suspect many thousands of business cards were exchanged.

This was the crux of the *Uchinanchu* “diaspora” as expressed at this meeting of people; through personal, family, and company ties, many *Uchinanchu* talked a lot about business, business opportunities for *Uchinanchu* overseas, investment opportunities, real estate opportunities in Hawaii and Okinawa, development of sales networks, and so on. While there was considerable contact of a personal nature too, particularly among women participants, and a small amount of academic and political content in the conference that followed the festival, business contacts proliferated, the WUB influence apparent from before the opening parade. Underscoring this was the obvious personal wealth of the

29 In the sense that I was an outsider walking in the parade.

30 Interviews with four volunteers from the festival, HOC, September, 2003.

WUB participants. As one Peruvian conference delegate said, “because it is so expensive to come here, of course those who are here are wealthy. We have come to develop personal and business ties, and to enjoy the sunshine.” I think that one of the factors most salient in the development of *Uchinanchu* pride in Hawaii was this notion of “success,” with respect to education, business, politics, and society. For many of the generation that lived through World War 2 on Hawaii, though, the “success” they now experience was won at a substantial cost over a long period of time, as we have seen.

An example of their success was when in 2002, the Japanese Culture Center of Hawaii (JCCH) was threatened with bankruptcy. In October it was found that the organization needed to raise \$9 million by December 31 to pay creditors. It was faced with a serious crisis: should the center be sold, and the formal center of Hawaiian–Japanese culture be lost—or should the community fight to repay the debt? The latter course of action was chosen, and thanks to the extraordinary efforts of a number of prominent Japanese Americans, and the Japanese American community as a whole, and the generosity of the lending institutions, the center was saved. In 2003, it began its new look with an open mind. JCCH turned to the Okinawan organization for ideas. “We can learn a lot from the Okinawans’ organization. In particular, their annual festival is amazing. They get so many volunteers each year, and they just know what to do” (Brandon Hayashi, Cultural Activities Coordinator, JCCH, interview, February, 2003). This is a significant change from attitudes in the past, where Okinawans were viewed as second-class citizens in Hawaii by Japanese. It appears that in modern Hawaii, Japanese Americans are having to imitate Hawaiian Okinawans in order to resuscitate their own cultural heritage. There is some irony in that it is precisely because of Japanese discriminatory attitudes towards Okinawans in both Japan and Hawaii that Okinawans were forced to form their own locality clubs, which have subsequently come together under the more general rubric of the HUOA.

In the context of contemporary wealth and status, many Okinawans, particularly those at the festival from overseas, were “successful” people. Okinawans in Hawaii, though, have had to undergo a number of significant changes in their own status since the arrival of the first *Uchinanchu* at Honolulu in 1900. The transformation in this community’s wealth and status over the years since World War 2 need to be addressed in any such discussion. It is this transformation, and the context in which it occurred, that enabled people from the *Uchinanchu* community to participate actively in the commercial, cultural, social, and political life of Hawaii. But there are other elements involved. It is not simply Okinawans becoming economically successful that drives the dynamic of identity construction and reconstruction. And it is not simply because “they” are Okinawan either, because apart from the essentialist orientation of such a statement, fewer in the Hawaiian Okinawan community are indeed ethnically or culturally Okinawan. Joyce Chinen, in the centennial booklet on Okinawan immigration has said:

“With an annual inter-ethnic marriage rate of over forty percent in Hawaii, a race-based definition of *Uchinanchu* is increasingly becoming irrelevant. Instead, it is probably more productive to speak of the *Uchinanchu* in terms of the spirit” (page 68).

This spirit to which she is referring is a new, hybrid development of *yuimaaruu*, I think. That is, in the specific historical context of the emergence of the Okinawan community the term has had to be modified to suit the society in which it is employed. Today, it depends on who uses the term as to what it means. The notion of *yuimaaruu*, as a formalized concept, implies the necessity for humane and mutually beneficial interactions. *Yuimaaruu* has been cited as being the foundation of the “*Uchinanchu* Spirit” in Hawaii—that it is elementary in any Okinawan home. It is seen to be the basis for the locality clubs,³¹ the interactions between members, the *tanomoshi* credit system, the numerous conferences, events, and festivals held by *Uchinanchu* in Hawaii, and for the interactions between *Uchinanchu* from other nations.³²

With many of the challenges of the previous century behind them, today’s Hawaiian Okinawans face complex new incursions into their identity. There is little doubt that the existence of the locality clubs and the formal representation of the HUOA continues to inject life into the maintenance of the *Uchinanchu* identity in contemporary Hawaii. Its overlaps with “local” identity, though, and the overlaps with “Japanese American” identity cannot be overlooked. Nor can the issue of the rapidly diversifying multiethnic membership of Hawaiian Okinawans. Meanwhile, there is a need for strong discursive reconsideration of identity narratives for the “young and the restless.” As others have discovered, trips to the homeland tend to revitalize ties. It may well be time for another trip for the fourth and fifth generations to reestablish contact with their roots.

Although the JCCH may be using the HUOA as a model to emulate, within the HUOA all is not quite as functional and invested with the *yuimaaruu* spirit as it may appear from the outside. Interpersonal politics, legal proceedings, personal conflicts, conflicts of interest over representation, and sharp divisions of opinion punctuate the differences within the HUOA. Yet, the organization manages to re-align itself and carry on. Today, though, it is faced by the perennial problem mentioned above: the shortfall of young members, and continued exogamy and emigration.

Perhaps the future of *Uchinanchu* identities lies in the hands of those like the young performers mentioned above, who are attempting to bridge Okinawan and Hawaiian cultural values, in an openly hybridizing fashion. For, in carrying their interpretations of Okinawan culture to a wider audience they make performative truths about identity as it is currently lived in Hawaii. In Anderson’s words, they are expanding the boundaries of the imagined community, in the face of encroaching multiculturalism, globalization, and ethnic diffusion.

Uchinanchu in Hawaii will continue to promote Okinawan culture as they see it, and it will change to suit the times, as it has already. *Yuimaaruu*, as a concept, can cross cultural borders, real or imagined. *Uchinanchu* in Hawaii, with the active support of the Okinawa Prefectural Government, are actively pursuing business links with the motherland, encouraging the crossing of borders. Educational ties—for example exchange programs at universities, colleges, high schools, and even at some of the locality clubs—actively seek to make more personal ties among young folk in both island groups, and to

31 See Sakihara (1981).

32 See Arakaki (2002: 139–141).

increase the relative experience of cohorts of young people. Yet *Uchinanchu* in Hawaii are still Okinawan Americans, or even Japanese Americans. The American-ness of their life experiences, their contact with Okinawa and Okinawan culture notwithstanding, remains the central point of departure in defining themselves in the early twenty first century.

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