

Visualizing Priestesses or Performing Prostitutes?: Ifa Fuyū's Depictions of Okinawan Women, 1913-1943

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On January 18, 1913, the “Great Fire of Naha” consumed half of the area known as Higashi-machi, adjacent to the Tsuji-machi pleasure district on the main island of Okinawa.¹ The local police arrested several women identified as *yuta* (diviners or shamans) accused of suspicious connections to the fire. Despite their separate social and religious functions, *yuta* were often conflated with and ridiculed in ways similar to unlicensed prostitutes. Newspaper reports in the *Ryūkyū Shinpō* and the *Okinawa Mainichi Shinbun* implicated *yuta* as suspects involved in spreading rumors during the fire, foretelling the event, and attempting to heal the possessed female arsonist responsible for the blaze.² Headlines forewarned of a “great offensive” by the Naha police that would punish all *yuta* of the district with “the goal of removing their ‘noxious bane’ once and for all.”³ Although the authorities only detained three women in total, these intense statements against *yuta* reflect a larger historical process that targeted women of the Tsuji pleasure quarters as potential

¹ Although there were several “Great Fires” that affected Okinawa in the early twentieth century, including the “Great Fire of Naha” in 1901, the “Great Fire of Higashi” in 1910, and Tsuji fire in late 1913, Ifa’s work on *yuta* specifically identifies the “Great Fire” with the date January 18, 1913. See Ifa Fuyū, “Yuta no rekishiteki kenkyū,” *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, March 11, 1913.

² Okinawa-ken Kyoiku Inkai, et al., *Okinawa Kenshi: Shiryō Hen* vol. 16-17 (Naha: Okinawa-ken Kyoiku Inkai, 1995), 54.

³ Ibid. See also Yoshimasa Ikegami, “Local Newspaper Coverage of Folk Shamans in Aomori Prefecture,” in *Folk Beliefs in Modern Japan*, ed. Nobutaka Inoue (Tokyo Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1994).

threats to Japan's imperializing mission, including performers, prostitutes, and priestesses. These women perpetuated female-centered folk practices from the previous era, and thus were portrayed as embodiment of the "backward" and "primitive" aspects of Okinawa which seemed to challenge Japan's efforts for modernization.

Responding to these attacks on *yuta* and subsequent measures launched against women associated with the pleasure quarters, Ifa Fuyū (1876-1947)⁴ published a series of articles under the title "*Yuta no rekishiteki kenkyū*" (Historical Research on *Yuta*),⁵ and highlighted the role of women as a key cultural site for defending the civilizational position of "Southern Islanders." By 1919, Ifa, known appropriately by the paternalistic appellation "Father of Okinawan Studies," published *Okinawa joseishi* (History of Okinawan Women) in which he discussed the cultural historical status and significance of women.⁶ Similar to the opening articles of the *yuta* series, the first section of this volume draws heavily from his 1911 publication to establish the position of women in "ancient Ryukyu." The second section of the same volume is devoted entirely to "*Juri no rekishi*," or

⁴ In many works, Ifa's family name is romanized as "Iha." However, the pronunciation in the Shuri-Naha variant of the dialect *Uchināguchi* might be better rendered as "Ifa" which I will use throughout this paper.

⁵ Serialized March 11-20, 1913, *Ryūkyū Shinpō*. While Ifa references his previous work from 1911, this article focuses on Ifa's publications over a thirty year period, starting with the *yuta* series in 1913 and ending with his publication on the clothing of Ryukyuan women in 1943.

⁶ Ifa Fuyū, *Okinawa joseishi* (Naha-ku: Ozawa Shoten, 1919). Some of the page numbers cited in this paper are from the reprinted versions which include his later publications relevant to Okinawan women such as *Okinawa joseishi* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2000) and volumes 7 and 9 of *Ifa Fuyū zenshū* ed. Hattori Shirō et al. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1974-1976).

the history of *juri* (or *zuri*), the Okinawan term which signified unclear categories that blur the positions of women as un/licensed prostitutes, stage performers, along with *yuta* shamans and even *noro* priestesses by the early twentieth-century.

The depictions of Okinawan women in Ifa's work, specifically his representations of women associated with the pleasure quarters and performance traditions in Okinawa, is the subject of this paper. In particular, I examine the ways in which Ifa excavated visual traces of female bodily practices to recast Okinawan women as ethno-religious bearers of Ryukyuan cultural traditions. I situate Ifa within and against historical discourse that reduces Okinawa to images of bordellos and "Ryukyu pox" (syphilis), especially as featured in Japanese pictorial magazines, newspaper articles, and didactic texts for women. Through the analysis of his visual and narrative texts concerning Okinawan women, I argue that, while Ifa reclaimed the images of women in general, he both resisted *and* reinforced historical discourse of colonial imperialization of and in Okinawa.

As Matthew Allen pointed out, Ifa exhibited his "ambivalence in defining himself as Japanese, Okinawan, or as a Southern Islander (*Nantōjin*)," ⁷ and Okinawan mimicry of Japanese-ness involved a "splitting of colonial discourse" through which Ifa produced Okinawa as "a kind of prototypical Japan." ⁸ Accordingly, Ifa's work tends to portray Okinawa simultaneously as part of and yet separate from the Japanese nation, as he grappled with the complex and contradictory position of Okinawa vis-à-vis Japan proper. In fact, although Ifa became celebrated as the original "Ryukyuan linguist" with a degree from the prestigious Tokyo Imperial University, as Patrick Heinrich pointed out, Ifa did not learn to speak Japanese until

⁷ Matthew Allen, *Identity and Resistance in Okinawa*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2002), 234.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

he was eleven years old which helps to understand why bilingual textbooks continued to be a necessity in Japanese imperial education within Okinawa through the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ Ifa once stated that “Okinawans were born at a disadvantage, and had to learn to articulate their needs in the language of their masters if they were to achieve recognition.”¹⁰

Ifa is, by no means, a non-controversial figure in Okinawan studies. Although he is often credited as the “anointed founding father of Okinawan studies,” some contemporary scholars of the field criticized him for certain aspects of the cultural movements Ifa promoted as the librarian of the Okinawan Prefectural Library. For example, former Okinawan Governor Ota Masahide, historian by training, argued that the library’s “social education” programs under Ifa amounted to “nothing more than another aspect of the drive to hasten and broaden the shape of *kōminka*,” the making of imperial subjects in Okinawa.¹¹ Nevertheless, even the scholarship of famed *minzokugaku* ethnology scholar Yanagita Kunio is viewed as constructed on the foundation of Okinawa and thus on Ifa as “the most important informant of his entire career.” As Alan Christy pointed out, “with the wealth of information he [Ifa] provided Yanagita on ancient Okinawan language and customs (neither of which Yanagita could have researched on his own),” and thus, “Ifa should be seen as the indispensable producer of Yanagita’s Okinawan

⁹ Patrick Heinrich, *The Making of Monolingual Japan: Language Ideology and Japanese Modernity*, (Bristol U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2012), 89.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Alan Christy, “The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa,” in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 156.

foundation.”¹² In this sense, the legacies of Ifa and his work in understanding the politics of identity in Okinawa and Japan at large require close reading of Ifa’s textual and visual representations of Okinawa. The following is my attempt to contribute another layer to the multifaceted views of Ifa and how his scholarship sheds light on the process of colonial imperialization in Okinawa. By doing so, I hope to bridge a gap in the English-language scholarship on Ifa, namely to provide a preliminary analysis of his specific treatment of women and his strategic use of visuality as a technique for re-inscribing historical meaning. As my analysis of the intersection of Ifa’s visual and textual sources in the following pages suggests, Ifa’s early works on Okinawan women beginning in the 1910s provide the groundwork for and may even be considered the forerunner to mainland Japanese scholarship which brings ethnologists to Okinawa in the 1920s and beyond searching for Japan’s racial and religious origins.

Depictions of Women in the Imperialization of Okinawa

In the early twentieth-century, Okinawa teetered in a tenuous economic, political, and racialized position situated in a complex system of “nested colonialisms” within the Japanese empire.¹³ Policies under the Japanese colonial governorship to “dispose of Ryukyuan culture” targeted women associated with religious practices,

¹² Alan Christy, *A Discipline on Foot: Inventing Japanese Native Ethnography 1910-1945*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2012), 161.

¹³ The concept “nested colonialisms” explains how Okinawa might not be colonized in the same way as Korea or Taiwan, but rather that Japan’s empire involved a relational web that requires conceptualizing a plurality of imperial relationships. See Valerie Barske, “Performing Embodied Histories: Colonialism, Gender, and Okinawa in Modern Japan” (PhD diss., University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2009).

dance traditions, and pleasure quarters. These women were depicted as backward, exotic, erotic, and even criminal threats to modernization. For example, the colonial governorship instituted controls over “*noro*” (or *nuru*), female priestesses of the Ryukyu court. These controls included censoring folk religious activities, criminalizing ritual body practices such as hand tattoos, and redefining religious hierarchies of women. Beginning with a ban on shamanistic ritual practices in 1881, the policing of *yuta* by the Japanese governorship culminated into full-blown “*yuta* hunts” during which over five hundred women were reportedly arrested from 1937 to 1942.¹⁴ Under Meiji Japan’s institutionalized system of licensed prostitution, by 1897, women working in Tsuji (Chīji) were subject to forms of surveillance including regular medical exams to prevent the spreading of venereal diseases throughout the empire. Newspaper articles published around the time of the Naha fire in 1913 featured headlines on local prostitutes proclaiming that “five in one hundred carry sexual diseases.”¹⁵

Reflecting such conflated and confused discourses on Okinawan women from Meiji policies and from the previous eras, Japanese visual depictions at the end of the nineteenth century often featured images of the pleasure quarter women to represent what Okinawa meant. For example, the pictorial magazine *Fūzoku Gahō* published sketches of “Okinawan courtesans” (*shōgi*).¹⁶ In an issue

¹⁴ Reports and policies related to the “Problem of Tsuji” include an official statement made by the Governor to the Prefectural Assembly in December of 1938. See Ota Yoshihiro and Sakuta Shigeru, ed. *Okinawa no yūkaku: shinbun shiryō shūsei - Tsuji, Nakashima, Watachi* (Naha: Gekkan Okinawasha, 1984): 954.

¹⁵ “Five in one hundred carry sexual diseases,” *Okinawa Mainichi Shinbun*, January 16, 1913. Reprinted in *Ibid.*, 612.

¹⁶ *Fūzoku Gahō* August 1893 Vol. 63, (Tokyo: Tōyōdō 1889-1916).

from 1893, Okinawan women stand in comparison with Ainu men, another group subjugated under Japanese imperialism (Figure 1). The top caption states, “A Picture of Courtesans Playing a *Chankoro* Game in Okinawa Prefecture, Shuri.” The term *chankoro* may be read as a derogatory term used in reference to things Chinese or Chinese people, a racial slur that recalls the historical relationship between the Ryukyus and China.¹⁷ In this case, images of “courtesans” defined as racialized others serve to reinforce the tenuous position of Okinawa within imperial Japan.

¹⁷ On the use of the term *chankoro* and other derogatory Japanese terms used in the nineteenth century, see Andrea Vasishth, “A Model Minority: The Chinese Community in Japan,” in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* ed. Michael Weiner (New York: Routledge, 1997), 122.



Figure 1. “A Picture of Courtesans (*shōgi*) Playing a Chankoro Game in Okinawa Prefecture, Shuri,” in *Fuzoku Gabō* August 1893 Vol. 63.

As these popular representations of women proliferated, the colonial governorship of Japan in Okinawa targeted female students for its imperial reform policies through Japan’s imperial education system. Three primary school girls became the first female Okinawan students to attend school in 1885 at a separate girls’ classroom attached to the Teachers Training School. These schools have been referred to as *Yamato-ya*, spaces for learning to speak and act like “Yamato” people, a phrase that emphasizes Okinawans as distant from the ancient origins of the Japanese race. The classroom functioned as a key site for disciplining Okinawans, at times forcibly transforming them into modern subjects of the Japanese empire

through the process of imperialization (*kōminka*; here, *Yamato-ka*).¹⁸ Such multi-layered process of colonizing Okinawa involved reforming linguistic, cultural, and bodily practices.

In the schools, Japanese educators mocked Okinawan women for their backward clothing, hairstyles, and crude sexual practices. Through the 1890s, female students continued to wear *Ryūkyū kasuri* or *Ryūsō* (Ryukyuan fiber textiles) and *kajira* (long hairstyles), considered “out of date” (*hijaidaiteki*).¹⁹ An article published in 1899 by the *Ryūkyū Kyōiku* (Journal for the Association of Ryukyu Education) included a comment on the clothing of Okinawan women, “even though Okinawa is part of the Japanese empire, the Japanese clothes worn in Okinawa are ones from seven hundred years ago, while clothes in other prefectures of the mainland are from contemporary times.”²⁰ In addition, Japanese teachers had begun wearing Western style clothes, which further marked Okinawans as physically and visibly behind in the process of modernization.

Despite the assimilation policies enacted by Japanese educators and eventually embraced by local organizations for social customs reform (*fūzoku kairyō*), Okinawan elites in the early twentieth century continued to express concern about the perception of Okinawan women throughout the empire. These fears may also be linked to real political concerns that the Meiji state might rescind

¹⁸ See especially Kondō Kenichirō, *Kindai Okinawa ni okeru kyōiku to kokumin tōgō* (Sapporo: Hokkaidō Daigaku Shuppan, 2006), 62, 77).

¹⁹ “Kuba Tsuru: Ryūsō kara wasō e,” in *Jidai o irodatta: Kindai Okinawa joseishi*, ed. Hokama Yoneko (Naha: Niraisha, 1996), 46-51.

²⁰ *Ryūkyū Kyōiku*, Vol. 12, ed. Okinawa-ken Shiritsu Kyōikukai Jimusho (Tokyo: Honpō Shoseki, 1899), 44.

Okinawa's "prefectural" status.²¹ The often cited "*Jinruikan*" Human Pavilion Incident from 1903 serves as a prime example of how local elites reacted to negative representations of Okinawan women. Ota Chōfu, founder of the first newspaper in Okinawa, *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, published a series of articles from February to May of 1903 in which he criticized the portrayal of Okinawans at the Osaka Industrial Fair.²² His first piece reacted to the news that Okinawan women were to be featured at the Osaka Fair performing "*Ryūkyū te odorī*" (Ryukyu hand dances). He argued that this example of local customs, censored by the colonial governorship, would work against Okinawan "*Yamato-ka*" efforts to act like mainland Japanese people.²³ Along with being insulted by the inclusion of Okinawans with Taiwanese *seiban* (barbarians/savages) and Ainu, Ota emphasized that the women selected to represent "Ryukyu noble ladies" (*Ryūkyū keifujin*) were "nothing more than Tsuji prostitutes."²⁴ This comment reflects the fears of how images of women, along with their

²¹ For further discussion about the Human Pavilion Incident and the process of making Okinawans into imperial subjects, see Alan Christy, "The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). For a discussion of Okinawa's parliamentary representation, higher taxes, and the political organization of Okinawa as a different kind of "governorship," see Kodama Kōta and Asato Susumu, *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2004).

²² Ota wrote at least four articles including a commentary on using Ryukyuan dances after the initial exhibit. See Ota Chōfu, *Ota Chōfu zenshū*, ed. Teruo Hiyane and Shinichi Isa, (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1993), 211-216.

²³ *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, February 25, 1903. Ibid., 210.

²⁴ The first quote appeared in his April 7, 1903 *Ryūkyū Shinpō* article and the second quote is from *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, April 11, 1903. Ibid., 211, 213.

“backward” bodily practices, might deny Okinawans the status of fully modern, civilized, and racially Japanese imperial subjects.

Visualizing *Noro* Priestesses and *Hajichi* Hand Tattoos

It was in this historical context that Ifa attempted to reclaim the position of women, particularly women’s bodily practices as a corporeal synecdoche for the body politic of modern Okinawa. In challenging assimilationist strategies that targeted women to cleanse Ryukyuan cultural traditions, Ifa criticized the colonial treatment of Okinawa and yet reinforced Okinawa as subsumed within Japan’s imperial history. Ifa opens his aforementioned volume on women’s history by situating the role of women as central to understanding Okinawa as “*Nihon no saiko no shokuminchi*” (Japan’s oldest colony).²⁵ He traces origin myths that explain how disparities in the gender distribution of Okinawa’s original ancestors placed females in a position of value.²⁶ Due to a relative lack of women, male household heads would not readily part with female family members, such that most married couples did not live with the husband’s family. Ifa suggests that this tradition existed in Japan until around the Heian period, but in Okinawa it remained much longer.²⁷ His discussion of Ryukyuan folk practices often includes analogous Japanese examples, demonstrating how Okinawa *preceded* or *maintained* cultural traditions of “Japan.”

After establishing women as valuable assets to the ancestors of Okinawa, Ifa quickly turned to a discussion of the religious even divine components of ancient women. Prior to modern imperializing controls over the *noro* system, Ifa described how women occupied

²⁵ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

key religious positions as sister priestesses to male political rulers.²⁸ These priestesses became known first as *noro noro* from *inoru* meaning “to pray,” and later when their roles were centralized they were referred to with an honorific, *noro kumoi*. *Noro* presided over ethno-religious rites including marriage ceremonies, funerals, and healing prayer services that featured dancing to appease the local gods. *Noro* also received their own land holdings, giving them power even beyond the religious realm. Ifa referenced a graphic chart of the rankings and hierarchies of *noro* with the high priestess title of “*kekoe oogimi*” at the very top. This organizational structure mirrored the male-dominated political and military hierarchy.

Ifa used the organization of *noro* as a means to state one of his most emphatic points in the text, namely that Okinawan folk religious practices and female practitioners must be considered part of and even forerunners to Japan’s Shinto. He credited Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) for recognizing that Japan’s Shinto derived from the folk customs of the Southern Islands. But it is Ifa himself who was arguably the first scholar focusing specifically on the role of Okinawan women to demonstrate the historical validity of this argument. Yanagita published his research on *miko* throughout mainland Japan in 1913, which Ifa cited as his inspiration.²⁹ However, one might argue that Ifa’s 1913 work on *yuta* shamans and later 1919 volume on women’s history provided the groundwork for *minzokugaku* (ethnology/folklore) studies, which brought mainland scholars to Okinawa in search of Japan’s racial and religious origins.

At the end of his section on the organization of Japan’s folk religion, Ifa lamented that Okinawa had lacked well-known scholars who could establish the Southern Islands as the origin of Japan’s

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Yanagita Kunio, “Imōto no chikara miko-kō,” (1913) in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shu* Vol. 9, (Tokyo, Chikuma Shobō), 1962.

ancient religion. He stated, “I will never give up on the hope that scholars of ancient Shinto will glance at/consider Ryukyuan Shinto.”³⁰ Following this hope, Ifa employed references to Japanese sources that situated Okinawan women as bearers of ancient Ryukyuan ethno-religious traditions within Japan’s visual imaginary. For example, Ifa included images of *norō* from records such as *Nantō zatsuwa* (Miscellaneous Tales of the Southern Islands), a text written between 1850-1855 by Nagoya Sagenta, a Satsuma officer traveling in Amami-Oshima.³¹ The graphic source included discussions of folklore along with bodily practices such as martial arts. In his account, Nagoya described the physical markers of the *norō* dating back to ancient Ryukyu practices including their robes, underskirt of “48 pleats,” “*ganashī*” headdress, and prayer beads that marked their religious status (Figure 2).³²

³⁰ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 43.

³¹ Reprinted as Nagoya Sagenta, *Nantō zatsuwa: Bakumatsu Amami minzokushi*, ed. Kokubu Naoichi, Era Hiroshi (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984).

³² See Images 8-10 in Ifa Fuyū, “Ryūkyū nyōnin no hifuku,” in *Hifuku* 14.5 (1943).



Figure 2. Images of “*noro kume*” with their “*ganashi*” headdress, “48 pleats” robe, and beads, as according to *Nantō zatsuna* [1855]. Images 8-10 in Ifa Fuyū, “*Ryūkyū nyōnin no hifuku*,” in *Hifuku* 14.5 (1943).

Ifa’s textual and visual representations of women, including *noro*, also reflect twentieth-century Japanese scholarly views of Okinawa. Torii Ryūzō (1870-1953), one of Japan’s first anthropologists and founding member of the Anthropological Studies Society (1894), employed Ifa as his local guide/research assistant during his surveys of the Southern Islands in 1896 and 1904. In exploring Ryukyuan and Taiwanese *seiban* as “newly territorialized colonial people,” he conducted anthropometric studies including “measurement of physique, hair growth, maximum cranial indices,

shape of face and proboscis, skin color, and so on.”³³ Torii’s photographic taxonomies of Ryukyuans feature several images of women in *Ryūsō* clothing, dancers, shamans, and *noro*. One of the most notable *noro* images features a woman in bright white robes with a version of the *ganashi* headdress, but also a large fan used in ritualistic performances (Figure 3). Ifa’s later publications referenced a similar image from Torii’s collection of an older *noro* from the area of Chatan. In his textual and visual citations, Ifa might be viewed as echoing, extending, or reiterating Torii’s ethnographically produced world view that “projected the colonial order back onto the past.”³⁴

³³ Tomiyama Ichirō, “The Critical Limits of the National Community: The Ryukyuan Subject,” in *Social Science Japan Journal* 1.2 (1998): 170.

³⁴ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Japan’s Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930*, ed. Sharon Minichiello, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 174.



Figure 3. “Shukujo holding a fan” (*Noro*: Main Island of Okinawa),” Image #6135. Copyright 2006 The University Museum, The University of Tokyo Database of Images from East Asia and Polynesia, Torii Ryūzō Collection (<http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DJinruis/TJinruis.htm>)

Ifa addressed another quintessential element featured in many historical depictions of *noro* and Ryukyu “*bijin*” (beauties) more generally, namely hand tattoos known as “*hajichi*” (*hajiki*, *hazuki*) (Figure 4). In 1930, Ifa published an article on the tattoo practices of

the Ryukyus to explain the cultural historical meanings of *hajichi*.³⁵ A girl received tattoos on the back of their hands as early as age seven to ten, as a coming of age ritual around age 12 or 13, and then to mark significant moments in her life such as the year she married, bore her first child, or reached sixty years of age, among others. Visually, the tattoos begin rather small, with two dots on each hand, but then the ornamentation becomes far more elaborate with “Maltese cross designs” or the shape of “plum flowers.”³⁶ For example, Ifa cited Sasamori Gisuke’s 1894 visual representation of the intricate work of women’s hand tattoos from Miyako Island (Figure 5).³⁷ The designs depended on the specific island, but also on the spiritual needs of the stage and position of a woman. Ifa tried to trace the origins of this cultural practice, sharing tales about high priestesses of Kudaka Island. Ifa discussed the possibility of the hand tattoos deriving from Taiwan, which had its own history of body markings. But in the end, he referenced “Western” scholars who situated Ryukyu tattoos in comparison with other island peoples. Ifa cited images and text from Wilfrid D. Hambly in 1925, who commented on the remarkable ornamentation of Ryukyuan women (Figure 6).³⁸ Drawing on Hambly, Ifa suggested that Ryukyuan tattoos most likely derived from trade relations with places like Samoa and Borneo. By situating the Ryukyu Islands in the cultural sphere of Polynesia and Indonesia, Ifa placed the Southern Islands in

³⁵ Originally published as Ifa Fuyū “Nantō no hazugi,” in *Nihon chiri fūzoku taikai* v. 12 ed. Nakama Teruhisa (Tokyo: Shinkōsha, 1930). See also Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 256-272.

³⁶ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 262.

³⁷ Sasamori Gisuke, *Nantō tanken* (1894) (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1973), 401.

³⁸ Wilfrid Hambly, *The History of Tattooing and its Significance, with some Account of other Forms of Corporal Marking* (London: Witherby, 1925).

a world historical context emphasizing their historical differences from Japan. In this case, Ifa worked to resist Japan's assimilationist policies that sought to erase these ethno-religious traditions.



Figure 4. "Noro kumoi no zu." Image #A-9896 of "*noro*" from the nineteenth century.

Courtesy of the Tokyo National Museum

(<http://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0033203>)

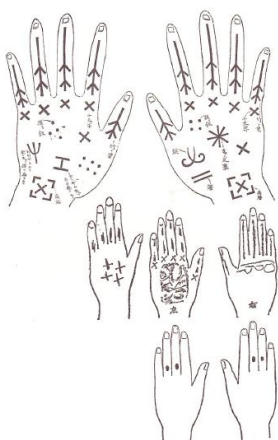


Figure 5. “Top: Miyako, *Nantō tanken* [1894], Middle: Kikai Island, Bottom: Naha, Shuri Young Girl,” *Okinawa joseishi*, 262.

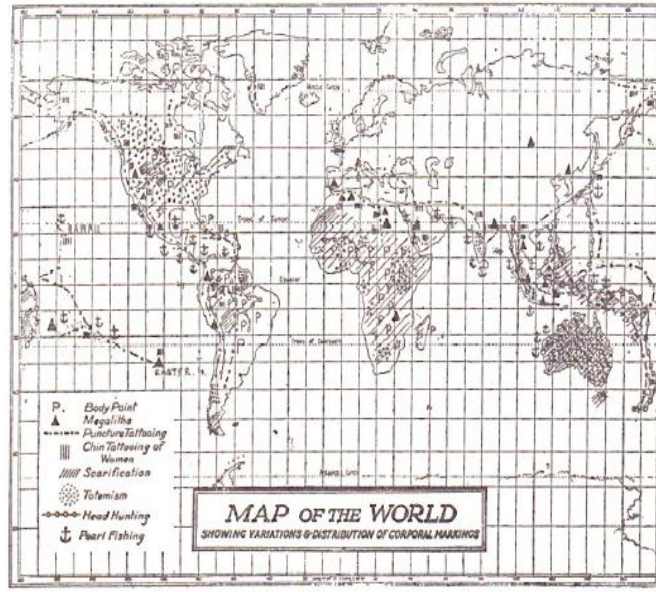


Figure 6. Wilfrid Hambly's "Map of the World Showing Variations and Distribution of Corporal Markings," *Okinawa joseishi*, 264.

In the latter sections of his article, Ifa reminded his readers of the connections between religious practices and *hajichi*, emphasizing that women who possessed a sense of religiosity were adorned with tattoos. He cites religious songs from the *Omoro sōshi* (first compiled 1532) that tell about the importance of *hajichi* for the spiritual protection and health of women. For example, he quotes a saying reinforced in song that suggests if Okinawan women die entering the other world without receiving any tattoos, they would be forced to do the hardest forms of labor "digging reed potatoes."³⁹ In the end, he adds a postscript that there are some contemporary "civilized"

³⁹ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 270.

Southern Islanders, who possess a sense of ethnic inferiority, and thus view the fact that this religiously significant practice existed as a “cultural curse.”⁴⁰ However, Ifa utilizes his writing to historically and culturally situate this practice not as an unspeakably backward folk tradition, but as a religiously meaningful component of Okinawa’s ethnic past.

As this postscript suggests, the focus on *hajichi* reflected imperializing tensions in Okinawa through which the Japanese governorship, along with local Social Customs Reform Associations sought to discipline the “not-so modern” Okinawan female body. The Japanese governorship issued the Prohibition on Tattoos in 1899, which declared that anyone caught performing or receiving the practice of marking people’s bodies with tattoos could be fined or jailed as criminals. In a didactic text on women’s education from 1902, Nakamoto Masayo argued that when “women from our prefecture go to work in Taiwan or Kyushu, according to the people there, our women who put tattoos on their bodies are seen as barbarians (*Nihon no seiban* or *banjin*).”⁴¹ Women caught with *hajichi* on their hands were not allowed to travel abroad and some were even forcibly deported, therefore many Okinawan female immigrants wore black gloves to cover their tattoos, as in the case of Higa Ushi (Figure 7).⁴² The experiences of Okinawan women encountering discrimination while attempting to “pass” as Japanese in order to work in the larger empire provides context for Ifa reclaiming women to reaffirm Okinawa’s cultural historical position within imperial Japan.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 272.

⁴¹ Nakamoto Masayo, *Okinawa jōkan* (Naha: Ryūkyū Shinpōsha, 1902).

⁴² Arakaki Yasuko, “Kaigai Imin,” in *Naha Onna no Ashiato: Naha Josei-Shi (Kindai Hen)*, ed. Joseishitsu Somubu (Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1998), 156.



Figure 7. "Woman wearing black gloves to hide *hajichi* (hand tattoos)." Arakaki Yasuko, "Kaigai imin" in *Naha onna no ashiato: Naha jousei-shi (kindai hen)* 1998, 156.

Defending *Yuta* and *Juri*, Shamans and Ethno-Religious Performers

The representation and treatment of *norō* overlap with other categories of women in Ifa's work, including "*yuta*" and "*juri*." Ifa begins the study of *yuta* by referencing the Naha Great Fire, particularly the ways in which women's groups in Okinawa reacted by deeming *yuta* a social problem. He notes that while some people may view the topic of *yuta* as ridiculous or absurd (*bakabakashii koto*), *yuta* are a phenomenon that truly existed in Okinawan society and so

should be addressed. However, it appears that the historical record lacks visual sources that clearly identify *yuta*, and thus Ifa does not provide a single visual reference. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were very few visual artifacts of *yuta*. The closest one might find to a *yuta* image are a few pictures from Torii's photographic record. He includes photos of women labeled "*kami onna*," (goddesses, priestesses) marked as separate from the photo labeled "*noro*" (Figure 8). However, these women in their hairstyles, facial expressions, body poses, and clothing appear similar to images of women with *hajichi* tattoos, wearing Ryukyu clothing, and "performers" (*juri*) from the pleasure quarters pictured with formal studio backdrops (Figures 9-12).



Figure 8. "Two '*kami onna*,' Main Island of Okinawa," Image #6024
Copyright 2006 The University Museum, The University of Tokyo
Database of Images from East Asia and Polynesia, Torii Ryūzō Collection
<http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DJinruis/TJinruis.htm>



Figure 9-10. Left: “Women with tattoos,” Image # 6025. Right: “Two young women in Ryūzō (Ryukyuan clothing),” Image #6091. Copyright 2006 The University Museum, The University of Tokyo, Database of Images from East Asia and Polynesia, Torii Ryūzō Collection <http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DJinruis/TJinruis.htm>



Figure 11-12. Left: “Young woman in a dance costume,” Image # 6102. Right: “Young woman in *Ryūsō*,” Image #6103. Copyright 2006 The University Museum, The University of Tokyo Database of Images from East Asia and Polynesia, Torii Ryūzō Collection <http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DJinruis/TJinruis.htm>

In order to situate the religious and socially valuable aspects of *yuta* and *juri*, Ifa draws on his depictions of *norō* along with his general discussion of the unity of politics and religion in ancient Ryukyu society. Building on images of *norō*, Ifa explains that priestesses associated with noble classes were not the only women with religious powers in ancient Ryukyu. Among the commoners, “*yuta*” held revered positions as healers and mediums.⁴³ Ifa adds:

In Okinawa, the people have a popular phrase “*isha yuta*,” which derives from the same origin as the Polynesian Islands where the role of the doctor and the *yuta* are one and the same. Even today, there are a large number of Okinawan women who, if there is a sick person in their home, first they invite a *yuta* as a medicine woman (*gokitō*). In fact, in remote areas the power/influence of *yuta* is greater than a teacher or doctor.⁴⁴

The power of *yuta* lies in her ability to foretell the future, read the destiny or fate of individuals, channel divine spirits, and/or speak

⁴³ Although many sources collapse the difference between *norō* and *yuta*, they are usually marked by a different level of function and training. *Norō* were associated with noble status and the Ryukyu court, and required extensive training. *Yuta* could be from any status, but often are women who have experienced some sort of spirit-possession or powers as a medium.

⁴⁴ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 59.

with the dead. In fact, Ifa notes that the term *yuta* derived from the Okinawan term “*yunta*” meaning “*shaberu*” or to talk. Another term he highlights is the ancient Ryukyu word for “oracle” (*jintaku*), “*misu zuri*.” The term includes the word *zuri* or *juri* which was used in reference to performers, but *misu zuri* also encompasses folk practices known in ancient Japan as “*kami gakar*” or divine possession.

Overall, *yuta* as female healers proved useful not only in strictly divine or religious matters, but also in economic activities. Village heads relied on *yuta* to decide when festivals should be celebrated, which held financial ramifications. Likewise, *yuta* could be consulted for grand events such as the *sappūshi* (*sakubōshi*) investiture ship visits from China to the Ryukyu Kingdom. *Yuta*, along with other women of the pleasure quarters, were viewed as hardworking, but also at times criminalized for their role in performing deceptions to maintain relations with both China and Japan. In 1932, Ifa published an article in the journal of *Criminology* (*Hanzai kagaku*) for a special issue on “Women and Crime” (*Josei to hanzai*). The issue is covered with black and white photographs of “Western” women in bras, slips, with other assundry underwear and features a subsection on women as “spies” (Figure 13).⁴⁵ Although he acutely criticizes Japan’s “economic exploitation of the Ryukyus,” the article explains that the working women of the pleasure quarters were charged with entertaining visiting Chinese officials so that they would not discover Satsuma men hiding in the countryside. Ifa explains that the “oft repeated phrase ‘in Okinawa the men play, and the women work,’” originates from comments by outsiders who came to Okinawa and found that women were often in charge of complex social and financial matters.⁴⁶ Some *yuta* maintained their own businesses in and around the pleasure districts, a space where female-centered power

⁴⁵ Ifa Fuyū, “Kyūyō zatsuwa,” in *Hanzai kagaku* (May 1932): 271-276.

⁴⁶ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 61.

found capitalist outlets in modern Okinawa. In this sense and in many other ways, the category of *yuta* often intersected with, was conflated with, or became simply mistaken for “*juri*.”

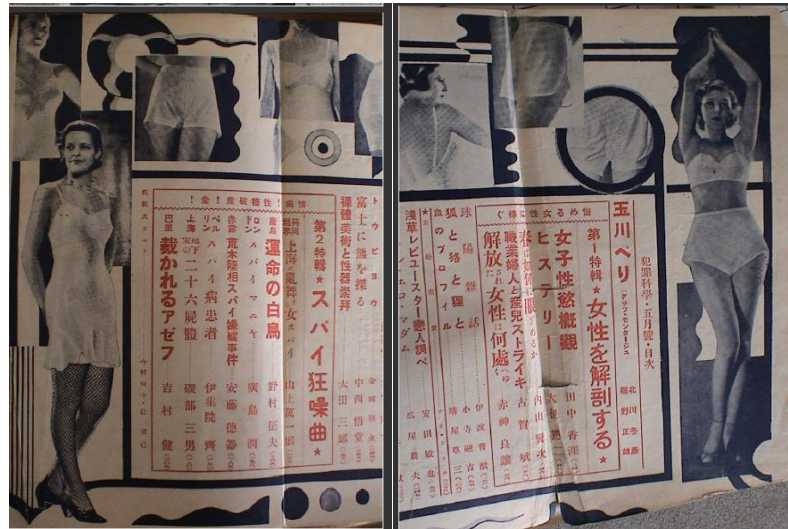


Figure 13. Table of contents of the May 1932 issue of *Hanzai kagaku*, a monthly magazine published in 1930-1932.

The image of hardworking women and “lazy men” resonates with popular discourses within the Japanese empire that reduced Okinawa to images of the pleasure quarters, the quintessential place where women labored and men played. The June 1896 special issue on Okinawa shows “*shōfū*” prostitutes in the Naha marketplace, wearing *Ryūkyū kasuri* (Figure 14).⁴⁷ In addition to listing statistics for the number of active *shōgi* (1371 prostitutes) and *geigi* (79 performers),

⁴⁷ Tsubokawa Tatsuo ed., “Okinawa fūzoku zue, Halfan chicken tōji no Okinawa no fūzoku,” in *Fūzoku Gahō* (Tokyo: Tōyōdō, 1896), 20.

this account also employs the term *juri*, commenting that “the playing of the *jabisen* (*shamisen* or *sanshin*) and singing of songs by prostitutes or *juri* are said to be most interesting.”⁴⁸ The focus on *juri* and Tsuji more generally reflected representations of the Okinawan people as a whole. For example, in this same publication, Okinawans were described in the following way:

The nature of the people is gentle, submissive, frugal, and frank. They adhere to rules and do not want to be modernized. Men indulge in seeking pleasure at a prostitution house; at the worst a father induces his son to follow his example.⁴⁹

This depiction speaks to the ways in which gendered colonial images of emasculated mild-mannered men and promiscuous women produced “Okinawa” as synonymous with *juri* and Tsuji.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12-13.



Figure 14. Depictions of prostitutes (diddle bottom), “Naha shōfu” in *Fūzoku Gabō* 1896.

As aforementioned, Tsuji, the area of Naha which was designated as a pleasure district to service Chinese investiture officials and Satsuma merchants as early as 1672, became institutionalized within the larger Meiji registration system of licensed prostitution (Figure 15). However, the categories of registered versus unregistered prostitutes, female shamans, and dancing entertainers remained less distinct in the case of Okinawa. In practice, all of these women could be interchangeably referred to with the term *juri* or *zuri*. Okinawan *juri* could serve food, drinks, and other services. Based on the Decree for Controlling Play Performances of 1882, *juri* were the only women allowed on public stages, only in government sanctioned commercial

theatres subject to censor.⁵⁰ Both colonial policies and local Social Customs Reform Associations employed gendered discourses of modernization that sought to rescue Okinawa's sons by disciplining the primitive bodies of "Ryukyuan" women, especially *juri*.



Figure 15. Map of Tsuji District, ca. 1868, Below: 1916. Insert from Ota Yoshihiro and Sakuta Shigeru, ed. *Okinawa no yūkaku: shinbun shiryō shūsei-Tsuji, Nakashima, Watachi* (Naha: Gekkan Okinawasha, 1984).

⁵⁰ This decree also reiterated the *Ryūkyū shobun* policies of destroying the Ryukyu court practices. Ryukyu dance traditions were to be eradicated and their public performance forbidden. See Tokashiki Shuryō, "Aru haiyū no kiroku," in *Okinawa no geinō*, ed. Misumi Haruo (Tokyo: Hōgaku to Buyō Shuppanbu, 1969), 194-196.

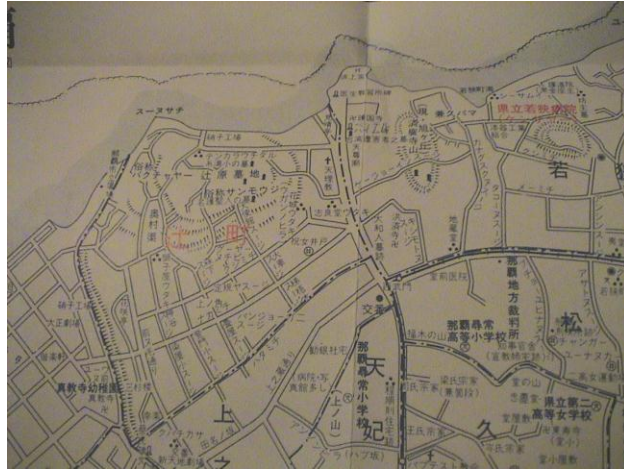


Figure 15. Map of Tsuji District, ca. 1916, Above: 1868. Insert from Ota Yoshihiro and Sakuta Shigeru, ed. *Okinawa no yūkaku: shinbun shiryō shūsei-Tsuji, Nakashima, Watachi* (Naha: Gekkan Okinawasha, 1984).

Engaging with these tensions of modernity that threatened the position of *juri*, Ifa grapples with how to reclaim *juri* in his works on Ryukyuan folk traditions and women's bodily practices. Ifa challenges negative images from outside Okinawa, but also separates himself from local elites who resented the association of *juri* with Okinawa at large. Whereas Ota Chōfu expressed anger that Okinawa would be represented by women from Tsuji, Ifa seeks to re-establish the position of *juri* within the cultural sphere of Japan by citing visual representations in historical documents. For example, Ifa quotes images of “girls from the pleasure quarters dancing” from the 1721 text *Chūzan denshin roku*, a record from the Chinese investiture envoy

for the reign of King Shō Kei (1713-1751).⁵¹ He also includes visual cultural references to *juri* and their clothing from a Japanese publication by Nishimura Sutezō in 1886.⁵² In these images, women of the pleasure quarters are not depicted as markedly different from high status women (Figure 16-17). These visual similarities support Ifa's claims that at certain times in history *juri* were well-respected and associated with the royal palace, referred to as “*ōjō*” (women of the palace), some even tracing their lineage to noble families.⁵³

⁵¹ Originally published in Chinese and Japanese by Xu Baoguang, 1721. Modern Japanese version translated in the early 1900s by Nagasawa Kikuya trans. *Chūzan denshin roku* (Tokyo : Koten Kenkyūkai, 1977).

⁵² Nishimura Sutezō, *Nantō kiji gaihen* (Tokyo: Ishikawa Jihei, 1886).

⁵³ In his opening section on ancient Ryukyu, he already addresses this issue along with the relationship between the noble family structure and the pleasure quarters. Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 75-76.



Figure 16-17. Right: “*Juri* from 40 years ago with others,” from *Nantō kiji gaiben* [1886], *Okinawa joseishi*, 104. Left: “Upper class women from the time when Okinawa Prefecture was created,” from *Nantō kiji gaiben* [1886], *Okinawa joseishi*, 66.

However, returning to the 1721 record, *juri* were described as wearing red robes or red silk edges on their collars supposedly to “distinguish them from girls of good families (*ryōke*).”⁵⁴ Ifa clarifies the meaning of the red clothing by citing textual depictions of *juri* dancing for the *ukwanshin* (Chinese investiture ships). He writes that the marking of *juri* with red robes embodies additional cultural references. In this context, he explains that red is one of the few

⁵⁴ Ibid., 95.

colors, along with blue, mentioned in the ancient *Omoro sōshi* songs.⁵⁵ Ancient Ryukyu *bingata* dyed textiles feature red as a central color to intricate patterns. Red signified the color of plants used in various performances or rites including local “*akabana*” hibiscus and *deigo* (Indian coral bean). In the Ryukyu court, dancers incorporated the red hibiscus in costumes and headdresses such as the “*hanagasa*” (Figure 18). After the dissolution of the Ryukyu court, the red hats became a symbol of performers in Tsuji, who both maintained Ryukyu traditional dances and established the foundation of modern Okinawan dances.



Figure 18. “Hanagasa” Dance Hat, included in love stories and romanticized representations of Tsuji. Tokashiki Kinsui, *Ryūkyū Tsuji shōwa* (Naha: Okinawa Kyōdo Bunka Kenkyukai, 1949).

⁵⁵ Ifa often analyzes the linguistic and cultural components of the *Omoro*, a compilation of poetry and songs that extends to the 12th century, which he calls the analog to Japan’s *Manyōshū*. He traces the term *omoro* as signifying divine songs and sacred groves in the Ryukyu Islands.

In addition to the significance of “red” in cultural context, Ifa’s main point about the clothing of *juri* is that red robes did not only serve as a disciplining sign or an attempt to limit mobility by cloistering women in Tsuji.⁵⁶ Rather, *juri* were once the only women permitted to travel to and from the palace and city unaccompanied, especially during official visits from Chinese or Satsuma dignitaries. Additionally, *juri* recognized for their abilities and standing could also serve as “*agushitari*,” go-betweens or guides to accompany visitors for religious, political and social events (Figure 19). Ifa emphasizes that for a period of time, the Ryukyu court recognized the official function of *juri* as *agushitari*, who were depicted in the processions of noble wedding ceremonies.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 97.

⁵⁷ Ifa’s descriptions fit with a series of images ca. 1889 by Nakasone Shozan. See the reprinted version Uezu Hitoshi, *Ryūkyū fūzoku ezu: Hawai Daigaku Toshokan zō Hōrei bunko* (Hawaii: Hawaii University, 1982).



Figure 19. *Juri* with red robes as “*Agushitari*,” ca. 1889, Nakasone Shozan, *Ryūkyū fūzoku ezu: Hawai Daigaku Toshokan zō Hōrei bunko* (Hawaii: Hawaii University, 1982).

The role of physical and spiritual guide once again serves to recuperate the image of *juri* as connected with or even indistinguishable from *yuta* and *norō*. In his volume on women’s history and later repackaged in an article for *Shin shosetsu* in 1926, Ifa argues that originally *juri* were respected as *miko*, maidens who performed for *marebito* or visiting deities.⁵⁸ Visually he cites Nagoya’s

⁵⁸ Here Ifa’s work intersects with Origuchi Shinobu’s discussion of *marebito* as a god from ancient Japan who could bring good luck, but also be potentially dangerous. On Origuchi’s theories of *marebito*, see Ikeda Yasaburō, *Origuchi Shinobu: marebito ron* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978) and on how *marebito* relate to local rituals and folk beliefs in the Ryukyu islands, see Yoshinari Naoki,

Nantō zatsunwa, which portrays an image of a *juri* “sent from the Ryukyus to Oshima” in order to chase away “*maka*” (demons) or evil spirits by “singing songs playing the *sanshin*” (Figure 20-21).⁵⁹ This depiction of *juri* in flowing robes ready to perform a healing ritual or purification rite is pictured in both the 1919 and the 1926 publications. He juxtaposes a photograph of a contemporary *juri* with the spiritually imbued, “*juri* from 90/100 years ago,” reinforcing the historicity of their religious roles (Figure 22).⁶⁰

Marebito no bunkashi: Ryūkyū Rettō bunka tagen kōseiron (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobo, 1995).

⁵⁹ Ifa Fuyū, “Ryūkyū no baiwaraifu,” in *Shin Shōsetsu* 9 (1926): 73-87, 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 79, 83.



Figure 20-22. Left: “*Juri* from 100 years ago,” from Iha Fuyū, “*Ryūkyū no baishōfu*,” in *Shin shōsetsu* 9 (1926): 79. Middle: Original image from Nagoya Sagenta, *Nantō zatsunwa (shosha shiryō)*, (Naha: Kiwaki keishirō-sha, 1886-1889). Copyright Waseda University Library, http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/ru04/ru04_04671/index.html

Right: “Contemporary *Juri*,” from “*Ryūkyū no baishōfu*,” (1926): 83.

Reclaiming *Mō Ashibi* and *Juri Uma*, Dancing for the Gods

In his depictions of *juri* as ethno-religious performers, Ifa defends the role of women in the pleasure quarters as protectors of Ryukyuan dance traditions against modern assimilation processes. Along with his extensive discussion of religious songs and divine chants, he highlights the social and religious significance of dancing throughout

this works. For example, in a piece on the historical clothing of Ryukyuan women, Ifa includes a photograph of women dressed in *bingata* dancing a ceremony to protect men while at sea on trade ships (Figure 23).⁶¹ Ifa explains how racial distinctions from Japan may be found in Ryukyuan performance and seeks to reclaim banned local dances. He makes a highly politicized statement against attempts to demean Okinawan cultural practices as unsanitary, immoral, or detrimental to modernization. In particular, he recuperates dances sexualized and thus forbidden under the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Japanese imperial state for their supposed corruption of the people.



Figure 23. “Saishiki buyō,” Dance performed by women to protect men at sea, referenced in *Okinawa joseishi*, 274.

⁶¹ Ifa Fuyū, “Ryūkyū nyonin no hifuku,” in *Hifuku* 14.5 (1943).

On sexualized dance practices, Ifa argues that “in ancient times, *hadaka odori* (naked dances), meant *uchi hareru*, clearing of dirt and impurity attached to one’s clothes.”⁶² Although in the present-day some of the original meanings might be lost, in the past, performances such as *shinugu* were intricately connected to religious expressions. In an article published in the Japanese literary journal of Keio University, *Mita bungaku*, Ifa explains that *shinugu* started as a religious performance where women danced naked to please the ancestral god who taught people how to cook food. However, the Ryukyu King at Shuri forbade the dancing and the festival itself, disturbing the worship of ancestral gods an integral part of maintaining communal life in the village. He adds that “as much as we feel embarrassed to be naked, the primitive man (*genshijin*), found it embarrassing to be dressed.”⁶³

Along with specific dances, Ifa topicalizes folk sex practices and sexual tales about the Ryukyus. For instance, he examines *mō ashibi* (field play) or *yoru ashibi* (night play). The character *mō* refers to “fields,” but also serves as a bodily reference to “hair” with a sexual connotation of “pubic hair” (*inmō*). After a long day’s work, young men and women, starting as early as fourteen or fifteen years old, gathered in the fields. The men played music on the *sanshin* and the women danced. Reportedly these events would often lead to young Okinawans pairing off into couples and having sex in the fields. Although Ifa recognizes some of the potentially negative issues associated with *mō ashibi*, he argues that this practice served as a

⁶² Ifa Fuyū, “Ryūkyū no sashiki buyō ni tsuite,” in *Zaidan Hōjin Meiji Seitoku Kinen Gakkai kiyō* 29 (1928): 83-100, 97.

⁶³ Ifa Fuyū, “Ryūkyū kodai hadaka mai,” in *Mita Bungaku* 1.5 (1926):31-35, 33.

“necessary entertainment system and system for finding a mate.”⁶⁴ By forbidding this system, people devolved beyond the community structure of the village and began to create places like teahouses and restaurants, which contributed to “moral decline.”⁶⁵ Writing in 1919, Ifa laments the fact that while twenty years before *mō ashibi* was a standard part of male/female relations in Okinawa, as a result of women’s associations and youth groups influenced by modernizing education, there is no longer even a trace of this folk custom.⁶⁶

According to an article from 1899 in the *Ryūkyū Shimpō*, Social Customs Reform Associations in areas such as Kin and Ginowan began prohibiting these “questionable” nighttime activities.⁶⁷ In addition to preempting parents the right to decide who their children should marry, this practice promoted images of Okinawans as lazy *sanshin* playing mild-mannered men and nude dancing promiscuous women. As late as 1939, a mainland Japanese pamphlet based on military surveys portrayed Okinawans in the following way:

Young men and women play the *sanshin* at night keeping company with each other. In the farming villages there are no women who are virgins. Because of this group sex and promiscuity there are a lot of young Okinawan men in their prime who are short in stature.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ifa Fuyū, “Māgaya yori mō ashibi made,” in *Minzoku gaku* 2.1 (1930): 46-51, 48.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ifa, *Okinawa joseishi*, 70.

⁶⁷ *Ryūkyū Shimpō* December 21, 1899 in *Okinawa kenshi: Shiryō hen*, 34).

⁶⁸ Miyagi Harumi, “Fūzoku Kairyō no Haikai,” in *Naha onna no Ashiato: Naha joseishi (kindai hen)*, (Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1998), 341.

Instituting modern concepts of hygiene, mainland Japanese medical doctors claimed that the practice of *mō ashibi* increased the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in Okinawa. The *Ryūkyū Shinpō* featured a piece based on research conducted by Japanese physicians in 1902-1903 and then again in 1905, which showed that a recent drop in venereal diseases could be linked to the successful reform of local customs and the “prohibition of *mō ashibi*.”⁶⁹ Following this report, more villages made these night activities officially forbidden, especially for women, under the assumption that the women could reform the men.⁷⁰

While prohibiting the youth from “dancing” in fields, government policies restricted and at times banned the performance of a “*juri*” dance procession known as “*juri uma*” (*jurinma*) (Figure 24). On the auspicious occasion of January 20th in the lunar calendar, *juri* performed a rite to share with the public “*kariyushi*” (or *karī*) a spiritual sense of happiness and harmony. Elaborately adorned in brightly colored *bingata* textiles, *juri* processed through the streets chanting “*yui yui*” (of *kariyushi*) as prayers for prosperity and health, while dancing with wooden horses (Figure 25). While the exact sources vary, the standard tale about the origin of this event often focuses on the enigmatic life of Ryukyu poetess Onna Nabi (ca. 1713-1761). According to Uehara Eiko (1915-1990), who was sold into prostitution in 1919, the elder women of Tsuji credit Onna Nabi for starting this yearly procession. Due to a complex romantic past, Onna was living in protection in Tsuji. Once a year, during the lunar New Year celebration, her family would attend an event known for “horse games.” So she gathered the women of Tsuji to parade

⁶⁹ *Ryūkyū Shinpō* May 5, 1905, in *Okinawa kenshi: Shiryō hen*, 297.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

through the town. The original performance started in the middle of the night and continued through morning.⁷¹



Figure 24-25. Left: “Juri uma,” in “Ryūkyū no baiwaraifu,” (1926): 84. Right: “Uma maisha,” in “Ryūkyū no baiwaraifu,” 83.

Based on newspaper reports, in 1908 the procession became restricted to the early morning, starting at 7AM and ending around 9-10AM. This restriction reflected fears that the performance encouraged sexual corruption, and especially when held at night, allowed for the shameless recruitment of new costumers for the *juri*. At other times, the *juri uma* procession was not allowed to be held.

⁷¹ Uehara Eiko, *Tsuji no hana: kuruwa no onnatachi* (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1976), 98.

For example, in 1913, the year of Ifa's publication on *yuta*, the public event was officially cancelled. Newspaper accounts mention the fire, but also the inappropriate tone of such a festive celebration in the year following the death of the Meiji emperor.⁷² Echoing the treatment of *yuta* blamed for the fire, articles published around this time intensified anxieties about women in the pleasure quarters by emphasizing tales of *juri* committing double suicides with their lovers, trying to flee the Tsuji district, or being hospitalized in large numbers due to venereal diseases.⁷³

In his writings, Ifa once again reaffirms the cultural and religious components of the *juri uma*. First, his volume on women includes visual depictions of ancient Ryukyuan women riding horses (Figure 26-27). He explains that noble women, women of the palace, but also commoners rode horses not like men, rather in the style of "Western women," side saddle. He cites this aspect of Ryukyuan women as another example of how traditions that made their way to ancient Japan first started in the Southern Islands. With regard to the *juri uma*, Ifa suggests that *uma maisha* horse dancers reflect the actual practice of female horse riders. The horse dances have also been linked to Japanese Buddhist *kadozuke* or *nenbutsusha* itinerant performances of shamanic rituals, which employed *ningyō* (puppets) in various shapes including wooden horses as mediators between the human and divine worlds. The puppets served several ritualistic significations including functioning as a vessel for spirits, embodying a specific person, or warding off danger and sickness.⁷⁴ Overall, Ifa

⁷² *Ryūkyū Shinpō* February 11, 1913, Yoshihiro, *Okinawa no yūkaku*, 616.

⁷³ Yoshihiro, *Okinawa no yūkaku*, 607-616.

⁷⁴ Jane Marie Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyō Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1997): 33-34.

concludes the discussion of *juri uma* by stating that he “laments the fact that unfortunately this religious performance, which also exemplifies specific artistic qualities, becomes portrayed by ‘modern’ standards as ‘immoral.’”⁷⁵ He reiterates that *juri uma* represents a performance for deities and that *juri* derive from the same origins as *miko* (shaman, *yuta*).



Figure 26-27. Ryukyuan woman riding a horse side saddle. Left: Original image from *Nantō zatsuna* [1886-1889], Right: Iha's version of the image, included in *Okinawa joseishi*, 47.

⁷⁵ Ifa, “Ryūkyū no baiwaraifu,” 85.

Conclusion: Problematic Iconography of Okinawan Women

This lamenting cultural loss and striving to retrieve a meaningful position for Ryukyuan traditions within Japan's imperial history becomes the main thrust of Ifa's attempts to reclaim *juri* and Okinawan women more generally. The opening image of his original 1919 volume on women's history represents an amalgamation of visual sources on Okinawan women (Figure 28-29). Through the 1930s, "new women" of Okinawa, reflected in the modern style headdress featured on the front cover, continue to embody the historical ethno-religious roles of *norō*, *yuta*, and *juri*. Ifa seeks to challenge gendered imperial discourses that target women as unhygienic, backwards, barbaric, or immoral. He celebrates *juri* as representatives of the pure unadulterated bearers of cultural tradition whose actions have become pathologized by modernization processes. In particular, he utilizes visual representations from historical records to situate Okinawan women within the cultural sphere of Japan. His visual depictions and textual recuperations of priestesses, shamans, and pleasure quarters' performers established an iconography for representing Okinawan women in the twentieth century. Subsequent sources on Tsuji through the post-WWII period return to the images that Ifa excavated, especially Nagoya's "*juri* from 100 years ago" (Figure 21) and photographs of the *juri uma*, *uma maisha* dancer (Figure 25).



Figure 28-29. Left: Original cover of *Okinawa joseishi* 1919. Right: “Modern Okinawan Women” series printed in *Ryūkyū Shimpō* 1934.

Despite efforts to emphasize histories that redeem *yuta* and *juri*, Ifa’s visual vocabulary in ways reinscribed Okinawan women as sexualized, exotic, at times criminalized, and overall trapped in the folds of ancient Ryukyuan pleats. While Ifa openly criticizes Japan’s exploitation of Okinawa and rejects the destructive aspects of assimilation, he also supports the larger imperialization project in Okinawa from a different perspective. For Ifa and mainland *minzokugaku* scholars, the greater empire should be educated about the original position of the Ryukyus as the cultural origins of Japan. Ifa suggests that if scholars champion Okinawan women as the contemporary embodiment of Ryukyuan traditions, assimilation policies that target bodies, sexual practices, and dances would not be necessary. In the end, Ifa creates Okinawan women as priestesses who dance for the gods, thus always already the divine fore-sisters of the nation of “Japan.”

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