The Creation of Ethnicity: Hawaii’s Okinawan Community

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the 1980s vitalization movement among the Okinawan community in Hawaii. Through long-term participant observation, I have found some young third generation people of Okinawan ancestry who established the Okinawan Festival and the Hawaii Okinawa Center. I refer to them as ethnic agents, a certain type of transformative agent. They have diffused a new idea of Uchina-culturalism among the Okinawan community of Hawaii.

KEYWORDS: Ethnicity, Hawaii’s Okinawan, Ethnic agent, Uchinanchu movement, Ethnoculturalism

JEL CLASSIFICATION: Z13

1. PROBLEMS AND THE BACKGROUND

In this paper I will examine the 1980s vitalization movement among the Okinawan community in Hawaii. This period saw the emergence of the Okinawan Festival, which has grown into the largest ethnic event in Hawaii, and the establishment of the lavish Hawaii Okinawa Center. These accomplishments were widely covered by Japanese and Okinawan ethnic media as well as mainstream media, which helped increase awareness of the Okinawan community in Hawaii. This, in turn, allowed Okinawans—who had long been grouped with Japanese-Americans—to emerge into the spotlight. These accomplishments incited significant changes in the identities of much of Hawaii’s Okinawan community. Many began to assert that they were not Japanese-American, but Okinawan-American—a trend that gained prominence in the 1990s and onwards. Today, an increasing number of Hawaii’s people consider marriages between Naichi (people descended from mainland Japanese) and Okinawans to be intermarriages, or inter-ethnic marriages. This is one indication that many in Hawaii consider Okinawan to be a proper ethnicity in its own right. Ethnicity is defined here as qualities, characteristics or affiliations resulting from longstanding ethnic ties.

How did this major social event—the creation of new ethnicity—come about? This is the main subject I will examine in this paper.

The aims of this paper are: first, to describe the vitalization movement of the 1980s; second, to shed light on the figures who played key roles in the movement, as well as their actions that affected the movement; and third, to elucidate the historical background of the movement.

Most immigrants bring to their new homes various aspects of traditional cultures of their ancestors. These include lifestyle elements—from clothing designs and fabrics, or even choice of food and culinary ingredients to the furniture and arrangements found in living spaces, and preferences in art, popular culture, and sports. Finally, traces of native culture are also evident in values which become part of common sense and the principles that are derived from these values. Such cultures, when
maintained even in a different country, are defined as ethnic cultures.

There are two ways to acquire ethnic culture—either through unconscious inheritance (often during one’s infancy and always within the ethnic group) or through conscious learning. The belief that one’s ethnic group must learn its ethnic cultures is a particular kind of ideology. The ideology applies to anyone who possesses this belief, even if one may have a different idea from another person within the group as to what that culture looks like and what one’s ethnic group should learn. The conscious learning of ethnic culture can be triggered by motivational factors, but it can also occur through ethnicity awakening movements conducted within an ethnic group by pathfinders—either elders or younger generations who will eventually take their place. Such movements typically come about, not only due to issues specific to that ethnic group, but also from the group’s relationship with the ethnic majority and other ethnic groups. Under this premise, the conscious learning of ethnic cultures can be said to be fundamentally different from the unconscious inheritance of them.

The belief that one must study one’s ethnic culture and pursue one’s ethnic identity in this way is known as ethnoculturalism. It is a form of ideology that hinges on a sense of pride—that one’s ethnicity must hold its own against all other ethnicities. For those who practice this, these ideals are upheld by what are known as cultural symbols—their unique language, popular culture, sports, beliefs, and lifestyle elements such as culinary culture. If applied solely to Uchinanchu (Okinawans) living overseas, it may be referred to as Uchina-culturalism. Uchina-culturalism is defined here as the belief that by learning the unique cultures of Okinawa, people of Okinawan ancestry become more aware and proud of themselves as Okinawans.

2. THREE UCHINANCHU MOVEMENTS IN HAWAII

I have identified three large-scale movements that involved Hawaii’s Uchinanchu community as a whole.

The First Uchinanchu Movement, in the late 1940s, was a campaign to revive Okinawa, which was devastated by intense fighting between the U.S. and Imperial Japanese armies during the Second World War. The Uchinanchu in Hawaii came together to send Okinawa an enormous amount of food and supplies, including 550 farm-raised pigs and 600 dairy goats. This movement was spearheaded by Taro Higa (1905-1984)—a second-generation Okinawan-American who fought for the American side in the Pacific theater and experienced the horrors of Okinawa first-hand. The movement was further implemented by first-generation and future second-generation Okinawan-American leaders who were moved by Higa’s accounts of the plight of the Okinawans.

The Second Uchinanchu Movement was the 1980s Uchina-culturalist diffusion movement—the attempt to spread the cause within and outside the ethnoculturalist Okinawan community—represented by the establishment of the Okinawan Festival and Hawaii Okinawa Center. This specific movement will serve as the crux of this paper. The movement was led mostly by young third-generation Okinawan-Americans, with support from retired second-generation leaders of their community.

The Third Uchinanchu Movement is the ongoing campaign to construct a Hawaii Okinawa Plaza that started in 2005. This project—like the Hawaii Okinawa Center—is expected to take a decade. The goal is to develop commercial property next to the Hawaii Okinawa Center and use the rent and other income accrued from the development to fund the maintenance and operation of the Hawaii Okinawa Center and Hawaii United Okinawa Association (HUOA). It is an undertaking expected to cost as much as (if not more than) the Hawaii Okinawa Center. Large donations from inside and outside the Hawaiian Okinawa community will be needed to complete the project. The pattern of the First and Second Uchinanchu Movements suggests that this third movement would be led by fourth-generation Okinawan-Americans and supported by retired third-generation leaders. This does not appear to be the case, however. Although there are some exceptions, this movement seems to be led mostly by
third-generation Okinawan-Americans—baby boomers who are either currently retired or nearing retirement.

In the late 1970s, I had the good fortune of meeting Akira Sakima (1918-2007), a second-generation Okinawan-American who was a major figure in Hawaii’s Okinawan community. Through Sakima, his wife, and their families, I was able to meet a number of Uchinanchu living in both Hawaii and Okinawa. Over the next thirty plus years, I amassed a large amount of data through these acquaintances—what has become a long-term participant observation.

3. THE SECOND UCHINANCHU MOVEMENT

As mentioned earlier, this paper will focus on the activities of Hawaii’s Okinawan community—and particularly on the Second Uchinanchu Movement—to shed light upon an ethnic group that has moved towards ethnoculturalism while attempting to promote its ethnicity both within and outside its group. Through my participant observation, I have noticed that, among the numerous Japanese-American organizations in North and South America, none are anywhere near as active as the Okinawan organizations. Okinawan organizations in Hawaii, in particular, organize activities that are closer in nature to ethnic movements than community functions. I have labeled these activities as Uchinanchu movements, the most representative of which I believe is the Second Uchinanchu Movement. These movements have had a significant impact on Hawaii’s Okinawan community and could eventually alter the shape of Hawaiian culture as a whole. One aim of the movements’ leaders is to spread the Okinawan spirit and culture through Hawaii as widely as possible until they have become a part of Hawaiian culture (Shiramizu 2008a, 3-24).

At this point, I would like to define some basic principles using innovation sociology terminology (Shiramizu 2011a, 16-25). The innovation—that is, the new idea intended for diffusion—is Uchina-culturalism and the study of the various Okinawan cultures that compose it. It is a compound innovation made up of an intangible concept (Uchina-culturalism) and a practice (the study of Okinawan culture). The targeted social system for diffusion is, at this point, the Okinawan community of Hawaii, with Hawaii as a whole serving as the larger society. The latter is composed of a majority Caucasian population (haole in Hawaiian) who stands at the top of the social hierarchy as well as a number of ethnic communities such as Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipino, and Okinawans. The progress of diffusion is still ongoing, with the ten years of the Second Uchinanchu Movement that started in 1980 showing the fastest signs of diffusion.

Those who direct or promote ethnoculturalist activities will be defined as ethnic agents, or change agents in the context of Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers 2003). In this paper, the term will refer to second- and third-generation Okinawan-American activists who were involved in these movements beginning at a young age under the umbrella of HUOA (which would be the change agency).

When mentioning “ethnic agents,” I will be referring primarily to formal movement leaders in the 1980s, such as HUOA presidents and officers, as well as presidents of HUOA member clubs and officers of the Hui O Laulima all-women association. There are approximately fifty in number, of which about twenty made up a core group of ethnic agents who greatly contributed in the early 1980s to the establishment of the Okinawan Festival and the construction of the Hawaii Okinawa Center. They were mostly third-generation (and a few young second-generation) Okinawan-American professionals in their early 30s to early 40s who were prominent members of society such as high-rank federal and state government employees, lawyers, architects, and entrepreneurs.

The work that ethnic agents perform often transforms their own ethnic communities (i.e. Hawaii’s Okinawan community) as well as the larger society (i.e. Hawaii). They serve, in other words, as transformative agents. Transformative agents have a wide-reaching influence that affects not only their ethnic cultures but also local cultures and other larger paradigms. Cultural transformation is the transforming of values and behaviors of people in a group or local society. Transformative agents,
Therefore, are those people who bring about cultural transformation.

They include officials in public organizations (formal leaders), members of the mainstream and local media (including newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters presenting in the ethnic group’s native language) and activist members of the community (informal leaders).

3.1 Okinawans in Hawaii

Hawaiian residents of Okinawan ancestry refer to themselves as either Okinawan or Uchinanchu—the latter becoming more prevalent in recent years. “Okinawan” is an English expression that, although considered suitable when used in English-speaking countries, is not necessarily the appropriate term to use when referring to native Okinawans and South Americans of Okinawan origin. “Uchinanchu,” however, means “person of Okinawa” in the Okinawan language of Uchinaguchi, and can therefore be used to refer to people of Okinawan descent around the world. It is inconclusive whether or not people of Okinawan descent in Hawaii and the Americas use the term for exactly those reasons, so I will be using both terms throughout this essay. For the sake of simplicity, unless otherwise specified, the terms “Okinawan” and “Uchinanchu” will be used in this paper to refer exclusively to Hawaii’s residents of Okinawan ancestry. In Okinawa, mainland Japanese and their descendants are called Naichi or Naichaa (literally meaning “mainlander”). Both terms are used by overseas Okinawan communities. Those who have advanced knowledge of Ryukyu and Okinawan history, however, may refer to mainland Japan as Yamatu (from Japan’s ancient name of Yamato) and mainland Japanese as Yamatunchu (“person of Yamato”). It is my observation that the use of these terms rapidly increased from the late 80s to the early 90s, in tandem with the Second Uchinanchu Movement.

According to a U.S. Census Bureau survey conducted in 2009, Hawaii has a population of about 1.3 million people; of this, about 250,000 are of Japanese ancestry. There are said to be between 45,000 and 50,000 Okinawans in Hawaii. Viewed from a traditional perspective, Okinawans make up about 20 percent of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii. However, if viewed as an ethnic group in their own right, they make up about 4 percent of the Hawaiian population, making them a de facto minority group. If considered Japanese-Americans, however, they would belong to the biggest minority group in Hawaii, along with Filipino-Americans.

Among Japanese-Americans, Okinawans make up the third biggest subgroup after people from Hiroshima and Yamaguchi prefectures. Beginning in 1900, when the first Okinawans immigrated to Hawaii, through the end of the Second World War, many Naichi in the Japanese-American community treated Okinawans as outcasts. The discrimination before the war had been particularly bad, and instilled Okinawans with a sense of inferiority and a lack of confidence in their own ethnic culture (Aragaki 1998:22-26).

This trend began to dramatically change in the mid-1980s, when Okinawans began to introduce other ethnic groups to traditional Okinawan music, dances, and food—things they had, up until then, kept only to themselves. Young and elderly Okinawans alike who had thus far shown little interest in traditional Okinawan culture began to eagerly study it. Concurrently, the Naichi and other ethnic groups began to show more respect towards the Okinawans. An increasing number of young Naichi began to see Okinawans in a more positive light, and even as equals. It was around this time that young third- and fourth-generation Okinawans began to assert their own ethnic identity by claiming that they were not Japanese, but Okinawan.

How did such change come about, and what was the mechanism that triggered it? Through my fieldwork in Hawaii, I discovered two very prominent events within the Uchinanchu movement: the establishment of the Okinawan Festival and the construction of the Hawaii Okinawa Center. These two events served as propulsion mechanisms for the Okinawan cultural movement. I will analyze these two events to find clues in understanding how the Okinawan community grew to become so active.
3.2 The Okinawan Festival

The Okinawan Festival is a large-scale event organized every year by HUOA. Today, it is held in Waikiki’s Kapiolani Park, which is rented for the occasion, on the Saturday and Sunday of Labor Day weekend. The festival started in 1982 on a much smaller scale at the McCoy Pavilion in Ala Moana, and received around four thousand visitors (Photo 1).

Due to an increasing number of participating organizations and visitors, the event was later moved to a park called Thomas Square in downtown Honolulu. It wasn't long before even this space became inadequate. I, myself, attended the 1986 Okinawan Festival in Thomas Square, and I can attest to the fact that the crowd was so huge that it was difficult to move around. So that the festival could be opened up, not only to Okinawans, but to tourists and the general public as well, the event was finally moved to the large park in Waikiki where it is now held. Today, it is one of Hawaii’s largest events, attracting between forty and fifty thousand visitors over the two days. Ryukyu dances, Okinawan folk songs, martial arts demonstrations, and other performances are held regularly on the stage set up in the middle of the park (Photo 2, 3, 4).

Surrounding the stage are numerous tents (booths) introducing visitors to Okinawan culture, selling Okinawan imports and commemorative T-shirts, and, of course, selling a wide variety of Okinawan food. Food tents (booths) offer everything from pig’s feet soup to Okinawan donuts known as Andagi ("Saataa-andagi" to be exact; literally, “deep-fried cakes with sugar”) that are particularly popular, attracting long lines in front of the tent (Shiramizu 2008a; Sato 2008). Visitors get to enjoy shows, eat and drink, and buy Okinawan souvenirs before going home. Anyone attending a school for Okinawan performing arts has a chance to perform on stage. Visitors who wish to study Okinawan history and culture in more detail may do so at the cultural exhibition tent. The event is designed to let visitors immerse themselves in every aspect of Okinawan culture.

**Photo 1:** The McCoy Pavilion where the first Okinawan Festival held in 1982.

Source: Photo taken by Marie Sato at Ala Moana in Honolulu, September 2005.
Photo 2: The 2009 Okinawan Festival stage, with an opening act featuring flags representing Hawaii’s Okinawans’ ancestral towns and villages in Okinawa.

Source: Photo taken by the author at Kapiolani Park in Honolulu, September 2009.

Photo 3: A performance at the stage.

Source: Photo taken by the author at Kapiolani Park in Honolulu, September 2000.

Approximately thirty organizations perform on stage during this two-day event, while the surrounding tents are staffed with large numbers of volunteers. In 2012 (the 30th year of the festival), approximately two thousand volunteers performed or worked in the tents. Many of these volunteers are members and friends of the fifty HUOA member clubs. They wear T-shirts and/or happi vests identifying their club, which not only heightens their sense of unity but also hides their social status. The volunteers participate simply in the role of private citizens. One might catch the Hawaiian lieutenant governor, his shirt splattered with oil from the Andagi he has been deep-frying, or the wife of a Hawaiian state representative, sweaty from dancing to the rhythms of a small drum known as a paranku. The volunteers are entirely made up of Okinawans and their friends and acquaintances. As I will explain later, non-Okinawans, who attend the festival every year, have come to be described as “Uchinanchu at heart.”
All proceeds from the event go to the operations of HUOA and its member clubs. Before the event begins, club members may purchase tickets valued at fifty cents each that can be used as currency during the festival. Members of the Ginowan Club purchased over $10,000 worth of tickets for the 2012 festival. Seventy percent of sales go to HUOA, while thirty percent goes to the Ginowan Club. This breakdown was approved by HUOA, which has similar agreements with the other member clubs. The Ginowan Club is one of the HUOA's fifty member clubs—which are mostly clubs for people whose ancestors come from the same part of town or village in Okinawa—and is a friendship association for those whose ancestors come from the town of Ginowan in Okinawa. With over a hundred active members, the Ginowan Club is one of the larger HUOA member clubs and is also, therefore, relatively well known. The Club is most famous for being responsible at the Festival for deep-frying and selling Andagi—one of the most popular items on offer at the event (Photo 5).

3.2.1 Heightening group consciousness and cohesiveness

The Okinawan Festival has by now been institutionalized, and therefore has a number of social functions. A social function is a social role that an institution (i.e. festival) plays regardless of its organizers' intentions. I would like to take a look at the social functions of the Okinawan Festival, while also considering the goals of the ethnic agents who organize it.

Photo 5: Volunteers and club members make Andagi at the booth of the Ginowan Club.
The first function is the strengthening of Okinawan self-awareness and the heightening of group cohesiveness. These are generally in line with the goals of the ethnic agents. The festival has Okinawans work together as volunteers to strengthen their bonds. It also asks Okinawans to go out of their way to visit the event as attendees and enjoy shows performed by their fellow Okinawans, which leads to a feeling of pride due to the large crowds attracted to the event. By repeating this every year, the festival allows Okinawans to ascertain their identities as well as strengthening their cohesion.

The performers, meanwhile, become more aware of themselves as guardians of Okinawan culture through the joy and excitement of performing in front of large groups of people. This encourages the performers to put even more effort into their acts. As they improve as performers, their overall confidence increases, and they become more aware and confident of themselves as Okinawans. Seeing non-Okinawans in the crowd enjoying the shows further boosts the confidence of both performers as well as audience members in their Okinawan culture. They come to the realization that their culture is no longer one that can only be enjoyed privately among them; it is one that anyone can exhibit in the open, without shame.

A great story that illustrates this effect involves a food item that has been sold at every Okinawan Festival since its inaugural year in 1982—the Andagi donut. It has been one of the most popular snacks in Okinawa for decades, and Okinawans continued making them even after relocating to Hawaii. It was only the Uchinanchu who ate Andagi, however, as they did not consider it a treat that the ethnic majority or other ethnic groups would appreciate.

One day, several years after the first Okinawan Festival, Andagi appeared on the snacks table in the recreation room at the Hawaiian State Capitol. It was the first time in Hawaii that the Andagi had been brought into a place where members of the ethnic majority and other ethnic groups gathered. The Andagi were a hit and ran out quickly; since then, Okinawan state government employees have continually supplied the recreation room with Andagi (Interview with Gary Mijo: September 5, 1994).

Andagi and other Okinawan snacks began to increasingly appear in other places where non-Okinawans gathered. A culinary culture that had, up until now, remained invisible to the Hawaiian ethnic majority had begun to slowly make its way towards becoming a part of Hawaiian culinary culture as a whole. This transformation of Okinawan culture from a private culture to a public one can be attributed, I believe, to the Okinawan Festival.

3.2.2 The transfer of traditional arts

The second social function of the Okinawan Festival is the transfer of traditional arts. This is, once again, a goal that the ethnic agents clearly intended. The enormous scale of the Okinawan Festival means that grand masters and troupes of various schools of arts often come from Okinawa to offer their support. For such major occasions, it is not uncommon for grand masters—the sensei’s sensei—and their disciples to join them on stage to perform together. Every year, I have watched traditional dance performances and martial arts demonstrations featuring troupes from the school’s Okinawan headquarters as well as its satellite organizations in Hawaii. What are particularly notable here are the tight bonds that still connect Hawaiian performing and martial arts institutions with Okinawa.

3.2.3 Fundraising

The third important social function the Okinawan Festival serves is fundraising. Again, this is a function fully intended by the ethnic agents. The Okinawan Festival is a major fundraising opportunity. My impression of Americans is that they are extremely adept at raising funds for nonprofit organizations and, in this sense, Hawaii’s Okinawan population is very American. Here is an example of the 2012 Festival, it raised around $700,000 over two days, of which approximately $90,000 was pure profit. In recent years, they raise about $600,000～$700,000 and net profit is about $100,000～
$90,000 (information provided by officers of the Festival).

This canny method of running the festival—serving the important social functions mentioned above while also making money—was developed and put into action by young ethnic agents in their 30s and early 40s. Two things are notable here: One is that the elite members of the Okinawan community of high socioeconomic standing worked hard to achieve HUOA’s aims; the other is that the average age of HUOA presidents has been much lower than that of the presidents of other Japanese-American organizations. Although some recent HUOA presidents have been in their 60s, just ten years ago it was most common to see the post filled by someone in their 40s. And these were not just any Okinawan, but, as I mentioned earlier, high ranking state and federal government employees, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and other high profile individuals whom one would think would be too busy to fulfill such a role. In this sense, the appointment of the HUOA president has been rather meritocratic. Among Japanese-American organizations, HUOA is unique in appointing such busy young people to honorary posts. This, I believe, is one reason for the major presence of Okinawans in Hawaii today. If the formal leaders were that young, then the informal leaders were even younger. These young leaders could not have continued to organize a major event like the Okinawan Festival over such a long period of time on their own. They were, in fact, assisted by second-generation Okinawan-American leaders who helped from the sidelines, but absolutely did not want their contributions to be made public. In addition, they were assisted by the over two thousand volunteers who came out to help every year.

Today, the Okinawan Festival is an established tradition of Hawaii. In that sense, it is a classic example of an “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm 1983). During New Year’s parties and picnics held by HUOA member clubs, volunteers sign up for their shifts at the festival. If a shift gets fewer volunteers than needed, the president of each club sends out emails and makes phone calls to find more volunteers. One could say that the system for gathering volunteers has become completely routinized.

### 3.3 Hawaii Okinawa Center

If the Okinawan Festival is the primary intangible mechanism for propelling the Okinawan cultural movement in Hawaii, then the Hawaii Okinawa Center is the primary tangible mechanism. Nine million dollars was raised to build this 108,000 sq. ft. complex, which was completed in 1990. The structure's lavishness and size belies the fact it was built by an association for Hawaiians descended from a single Japanese prefecture (Photo 6, 7). The main building, the Teruya Pavilion, offers a theater-like configuration and can accommodate up to 1,200 guests for a stand-up reception and 900 guests for a seated banquet. It is an elegant, yet typically Okinawan building with a red-tiled roof that contrasts nicely with the off-white walls. It features a wide central courtyard laid out as an Okinawan garden based on a design by a noted Japanese scholar. Opposite the Pavilion on the other side of the garden is a 3,170 sq. ft. two-story annex that contains a library and the HUOA office. The office is staffed with full-time workers and a supervising director. There have been many HUOA supervising directors over the years, but all have been Okinawans, highly qualified for the job, with strong ties to Hawaii. Until the past decade, working professionals such as lawyers often filled the post, but in recent years the trend has been to appoint former civil servants and other retirees.
The Teruya Pavilion is a wide hall for events such as music and dance practice and recitals organized by HUOA and the member clubs, and is equipped with a stage large enough to accommodate a variety of performance and martial arts demonstrations. The hall is rented out to other organizations as well.

Hanging on the walls are plates engraved with the names of donors. The size of each plate indicates the amount donated. For example, B5 sized plates indicate donations of thousands of dollars, while B4 sized plates indicate donations of tens of thousands of dollars. These plates cover almost every inch of the walls. The plates also reveal some interesting details. For example, very few of the donors are companies. Many plates list only a family name, while quite a few list the names of the donors’ parents or grandparents—first-generation Okinawans—even if it is the second- and third-generation Okinawans who primarily funded the center. This demonstrates a strong respect for elders among Hawaii’s Okinawans.
Outside the pavilion are two metal plates standing side-by-side near the entrance. One is engraved with the names of all fifty HUOA member clubs. Most are clubs that represent a single town or village in Okinawa. Before the establishment of HUOA following the Second World War, these clubs were completely independent. Although now branches of a larger organization, they, in practice, still function as friendship associations that offer valuable support to Okinawans. The second plate is engraved with the history of the Hawaii Okinawa Center. According to this plate, the center was approved at the HUOA assembly in 1980—the 80th anniversary of Okinawan immigration to Hawaii. It took ten years to raise the necessary funds and build the center.

The first to suggest an Okinawan center in Hawaii was then Okinawa Governor Junji Nishime, which may explain why a sizable portion of the donations came from the Okinawan government and people. Uchinanchu who traveled back and forth between Okinawa and Hawaii to raise funds included third-generation ethnic agents who were the main proponents of the idea, as well as second-generation Uchinanchu such as Akira Sakima and June Arakawa, who were no longer formal leaders. (Both Sakima and Arakawa have passed away.) As third-generation Uchinanchu leaders were generally not very fluent in Japanese or Uchinaguchi (the Okinawan language), they sought the help of second-generation Uchinanchu who had once served as ethnic agents. Not only was Sakima one of the volunteers who transported about 600 milking goats to Okinawa following the Second World War, (Hawaii Pacific Press, 2007) but, as Hawaii state representative, he often traveled between Hawaii and Okinawa to deepen ties between the two places (Ryukyushimpo 1988). Through his efforts, Sakima had earned a great deal of trust from the political and economic establishments of Okinawa. By the time he was assisting in fundraising for the Okinawa Center, Sakima was in his mid-sixties and retired from office. Although English was, by now, his primary language, he could still speak Japanese and Uchinaguchi well enough. Arakawa, meanwhile, was skilled at submitting official documents and giving formal addresses in Japanese (Ryukyushimpo 1987). She was born in Hawaii after the Second World War, but was sent to Japan for her education. After graduating from an all-girls high school, she returned to Hawaii and found herself suddenly in the position of a second-generation American. She studied diligently to reacquire the English she had forgotten and eventually became an officially accredited librarian. She was a bright, disciplined woman who was around sixty-years-old when the Okinawa Center fundraising operation began. The numerous visits paid to Okinawa by these former leaders, as well as the young third-generation leaders, resulted in enormous success: people of Okinawa including public sectors donated over 300 million yen (about $1.3 million in 1985) towards building the center.

This story illustrates that, no matter how passionate the ethnic agents are, they need a high level of linguistic ability and an ability to earn trust when negotiating important matters with the people of their ancestral home. The construction of a Hawaii Okinawa Plaza—the major goal of the Third Uchinanchu Movement—is also expected to cost $9 million. But fundraising in Okinawa is not going according to plan. Readers must keep in mind that the Second Uchinanchu Movement took place before the Japanese economic bubble burst while, today, Japan is still in a persistent recession.

The Hawaii Okinawa Center project though had a rocky start due to one primary reason—no one had any idea how to raise the required funds. This is why it took ten years for the project to come into fruition. The project did not properly take off until the young Uchinanchu who had been inspired by the 1980 leadership tour joined the team. Due to the Okinawan Festival increasing in scale every year, they possessed a burgeoning confidence but, more than anything, they were full of enthusiasm. They were more than just community leaders; they were genuine ethnic agents who wanted to spread Okinawan ethnoculturalism, namely, Uchina-culturalism throughout the Uchinanchu community (Shiramizu 2008a).

For these young ethnic agents, the Center meant giving back to the first-generation Uchinanchu, telling them, Okagesamade—“I am what I am because of you.” The life that they enjoyed in Hawaii was given to them by their grandparents and their parents, and they wanted to say “thank you.” “Thank you,” is in fact, etched in Japanese, Hawaiian, and Uchinaguchi at the end of the entrance plate recounting the Center’s history.
I have now examined the intangible and tangible mechanisms for propelling the Okinawan cultural movement that defined the Second Uchinanchu Movement. Among all the Japanese-American groups in Hawaii, the Okinawan community was always especially tightly knit, but they began to open up to other communities in the 1980s through this annual festival and through fundraising for a major cultural center. I have observed the Okinawan community for thirty years starting in the late 1970s, but the passion they showed in the 1980s was remarkable. It was an enthusiasm led by ethnic agents who were primarily young third-generation Uchinanchu. I will now examine how these ethnic agents came to be.

4. THE BIRTH OF THE ETHNIC AGENTS

The bonds between the Uchinanchu communities in Okinawa and Hawaii have lasted a long time, and endure to this day through the Third Uchinanchu Movement. The relationships between performing and martial arts groups between the two communities have only grown stronger over the years. In most cases, however, Okinawa seems to be the more dominant of the two. A large portion of the donations that funded the Hawaii Okinawa Center came from ordinary Okinawans as well as Okinawa’s public funds. Although, today, money and knowledge tends to travel from Okinawa to Hawaii, the opposite was the case during the First Uchinanchu Movement that followed the Second World War, when large quantities of powdered skim milk, clothes, food, and other necessities including 550 pigs and about 600 milking goats were donated to Okinawa. At a time when many people of Okinawa were suffering from poverty, these supplies were a godsend. It may not be an exaggeration to say that life may have been substantially different for the war-ravaged generation if it had not been for supplies distributed by Okinawa Kyusai Kousei Kai (Society of Relief and Reborn of Okinawa) and other war-relief efforts.

The people of Okinawa have never forgotten. They are fully aware that they are indebted to countless people living in Hawaii as well as other parts of America—but especially the Uchinanchu of Hawaii. The sense of gratitude expressed by the Japanese phrase _Okagesamade_ is particularly strong in relation to the Uchinanchu. Therefore, in 1980, the governor and mayors of Okinawa decided to invite young Okinawans handpicked by the United Okinawan Association (currently HUOA) to a “leadership tour.” Thirty-five Uchinanchu—mostly third-generation but also a few second-generation—visited Okinawa for two days as part of this tour, and came back completely changed. Some accepted the invite intending to simply sightsee and enjoy themselves, but after being enthusiastically welcomed by relatives, meeting the governor and mayors of Okinawa, and attending lectures on Okinawan culture led by experts, they began to feel like VIPs and were instilled with the feeling that being Okinawan was something very special. Gary Mijo, one of the participants, described the experience as having “lit a fire in [his] heart” (Interviews in September 5, 1994 and August 30, 2008). Not only had the tour participants come home with a deeper identification of themselves as Okinawan, they decided to spread the “Uchinanchu Spirit” they had felt in Okinawa to their friends in America, and to work to promote Hawaii’s Okinawan community. It was the birth of a group of young ethnic agents.

The participants immediately formed Young Okinawans of Hawaii (YOH), a group consisting primarily of third-generation Uchinanchu who went on to take over the presidencies of the Okinawan friendship associations in Hawaii (the HUOA member clubs) and lead their community. For three years starting in 1981, the HUOA president was always a third-generation Uchinanchu who had participated in the leadership tour (Aragaki 1998, 31). It was primarily these ethnic agents who went on to establish the Okinawan Festival. Their inspiration came from the Naha Matsuri festival, which they attended in Okinawa. It is a boisterous event that culminates with an enormous tug of war that excites participants to an astonishing degree. Some of the more energetic young Uchinanchu who were present decided to hold a similar event in Hawaii. According to one participant who went on to serve as HUOA president, the goal was to “come together to organize a festival to increase the presence of the Okinawan community and make participants become more aware of their Okinawan identities; and have people from other ethnic groups come and watch, enjoy, and leave with the realization of how
wonderful Okinawan culture is” (Shiramizu 2008a).

5. FACTORS THAT HELPED THE ETHNIC AGENTS SUCCEED

Influenced by, among other factors, the increase of minority awareness rooted in the African-American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Okinawan community became more aware of their own minority status beginning in the early 1980s. Before the Second World War, Uchinanchu had suffered discrimination in Japanese-American society and, as a result, had lost confidence in their culture. By the 1980s, many in the Uchinanchu community had begun to realize that they needed to stand up to this negative treatment. It was as though their tanks of ethnic awareness were full; someone just needed to turn on the ignition.

This is where the young Uchinanchu who went on the leadership tour come into play. They were the right people in the right place at the right time. They were highly active in the Uchinanchu community throughout the 1980s, and gained further momentum by establishing the Okinawan Festival. They even managed to successfully complete the problematic Hawaii Okinawa Center. They propagated the idea of Uchina-culturalism throughout the Uchinanchu community, thus raising their confidence. Some who awoke to their own ethnicity began to state that they were not Japanese, but Okinawan. This trend was particularly strong among young third- and fourth-generation Uchinanchu.

Let us now take a look at the factors that helped the ethnic agents of the 1980s achieve such tremendous success.

5.1 Extraordinary Passion: Pilgrimage to the Land of their Ancestors

What differentiates an ethnic agent from a simple change agent is the degree of their passion. The ethnic agents constantly worked for the Okinawan community, many without calculating the risks and benefits. Such passion is essential when becoming involved in the identities of one’s people. The source of an ethnic agent’s energy is generally their ethnic spirit. This not necessarily rational and highly excitable frame of mind can, at times, produce incredible results. In the case of the Okinawan ethnic agents, this spirit was instilled—or, rather, awakened—in them in their ancestral home, Okinawa. When I talk to these ethnic agents, they come across as long-distance patriots of Okinawa. Quite a few display a love and pride of Okinawan culture that surpasses even those of native Uchinanchu.

These ethnic agents serve as a case study of how visiting one’s ancestral home and experiencing specific events there can have profound meaning, even for—perhaps especially for—an ethnic group who have not lived in that land for generations.

5.2 Exceptional Talent

Skilled professionals often possess a balance of a fiery heart and a cool mind. It is clear that the ethnic agents of the 1980s were quite passionate; however, they were also highly skilled professionals. They included high-ranking federal government employees, civil engineers working for the state, lawyers, architects, and entrepreneurs. They all demonstrated great talent in their respective fields. This tradition continues to this day at HUOA, where only skilled professionals are appointed to executive positions. This illustrates how successful change agents need to have not only passion, but also a high degree of knowledge.

5.3 Intellectual Support

Today’s identity politics requires a knowledge and deep understanding of social science concepts such as ethnicity, cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, minorities, and diaspora, as well as familiarity with the ethnic history that is tightly entwined with ethnic identity. Passion, on its own, is not enough to
achieve success. Hawaii’s Okinawan community had the intellectual means to make the strides they made in the 1980s, and they still do today. The community includes professors of ethnic studies, sociology, Japanese history, Ryukyu history, and Ryukyu language at the University of Hawaii, as well as community journalists who studied ethnic studies and other social sciences (Shiramizu 2008b). Over the years, these intellectual elites have worked tirelessly with Okinawan ethnic agents to bring dynamism to their community. The Second Uchinanchu Movement owes its success, in part, to having a support system composed of members from the academic and intellectual sector.

5.4 Private Supporters

The Okinawan ethnic agents of the 1980s had powerful private supporters among second-generation Uchinanchu, such as former ethnic agents Akira Sakima and June Arakawa. Although they mostly kept out of the spotlight and out of the way of third-generation ethnic agents, they offered invaluable help at key moments. Perhaps the most important role they played was making the 1980 leadership tour happen. When the governor and mayors of Okinawa contacted them about celebrating the 80th anniversary of the first Okinawan migration to Hawaii by showing their appreciation for the help they received following the Second World War, the second-generation leaders requested that they invite a group of young Uchinanchu to visit Okinawa. The tour ended up “lighting a fire” in the hearts of several prominent young Okinawans. If these former leaders had not made such a request, the Okinawan community may not have ended up becoming as vibrant as it has become.

Another strong source of support was a women’s group that displayed strong planning and execution skills: Hui O Lauilima. This volunteer group composed of Okinawan women has continuously and avidly supported the ethnic agents through demonstrations of Okinawan cooking (including Andagi making), as well as cultural and artistic projects. Hui O Lauilima’s activities have already been reported in detail elsewhere (see Shiramizu 2008a and Sato 2008), but I bring up this organization because no one embodies the Okinawan version of ethnoculturalism that is Uchina-culturalism more than the members of Hui O Lauilima. If Uchina-culturalism is the belief that people of Okinawan descent must have pride in and be aware of themselves as Uchinanchu, as well as study the cultures unique to their people, then Hui O Lauilima have embodied this wonderfully through three books they have published. The books are based on detailed research conducted by Hui O Lauilima into the traditional home cooking and cultures that the first Okinawan immigrants brought to Hawaii (Photo 8). Without the cultural activities of these women, the dynamism of the Okinawan community would have been restricted to fields outside of academic and humanistic interest. One thing worth mentioning here is that not all the members are Uchinanchu; some are, in fact, Naichi (people whose ancestors came from mainland Japan) who married into the Uchinanchu community. Their stories, I imagine, would be quite compelling, and I hope to research them in more detail at a later date.

Photo 8: Hui O Lauilima’s second cook book “Okinawan Mixed Plate”

Source: Photo taken by the author, September 2005.
6. THE OKINAWAN COMMUNITY AFTER THE SECOND UCHINANCHU MOVEMENT

A second leadership tour was held in July 1993, which led to a similar Uchinanchu spiritual reawakening in the deeply affected participants. A few more tours have been organized since then, and I would now like to take a look at whether participants in these subsequent tours also came back with fires lit in their hearts. I will also examine whether or not the original goals of the ethnic agents who began the Okinawan Festival—and who are now growing older—have been fulfilled.

I have attended the Okinawan Festival every year, initially as a visitor and, since 2000, as a member of the Ginowan Club—one of the fifty HUOA member clubs. My job entails helping make Andagi with my students. Longtime participant observers have commented that the 30th Okinawan Festival of 2012 was a success, on par with previous years. I, myself, can attest that the Andagi tent (booth) continues to be supported by a solid number of volunteers, with old hands successfully handing down skills to younger ones. However, this is not the case with all tents (booths)—some continue to be manned only by older volunteers, or have required the help of non-Uchinanchu students to get by.

Since the 1990s, HUOA officers have been putting a lot of energy into the aforementioned YOH to nurture the next generation of ethnic agents. Today's YOH members are composed of third- and fourth-generation Uchinanchu, a few dozen of whom are especially active. Their goal is to spread the Uchinanchu Spirit not just in the Uchinanchu community, but throughout Hawaii as a whole. There is no set definition of what this Spirit is, but common interpretations include “being warm and hospitable to all people alike,” “sharing,” “helping,” “cooperating,” “valuing the family,” and “forgiving.” What YOH members aim to do is to increase the number of people who accept and act in accordance with this Spirit. Anyone who does so, according to YOH, is an Uchinanchu (Shirimizu, Yamashita 1997).

The term “Uchinanchu at heart” has been gaining prominence, I feel, since the mid-1990s. There is a growing tendency for the Uchinanchu movement to openly accept those who are not of Uchinanchu descent as long as they understand the Uchinanchu way of thinking and love Okinawan culture. Evidence of this can be seen in the current roster of HUOA officers and member club presidents—many of whom are Naichi, and even non-Japanese—as well as Uchinanchu marriages. Very few second-generation Uchinanchu men are married to Naichi women, but this phenomenon is far more common among third and later generations. Many Naichi have participated in Okinawan events through their marriages to Uchinanchu. This explains why the strategy of actively taking in those who are “Uchinanchu at heart” has been such a success for the movement.

The late Wayne Miyahira, a former HUOA president, told me once that, although everyone talked about increasing the number of “young” members, it would be a mistake to focus only on the young; instead, they should also reach out to those who were “young” in terms of their relationship to HUOA (From a September 2001 interview). At the Ginowan Club I belong to, even retirees and semi-retirees over the age of 60 are joining as volunteers. The leaders of today are exploring uncharted territory in reaching out to older Uchinanchu and “Uchinanchu at heart.” As this trend continues, it will force Uchinanchu to question whether or not there is still a place for ethnoculturalism, an ideology firmly rooted in essentialism.

As described earlier, a Third Uchinanchu Movement should theoretically be taking place at this very moment, however, I have seen relatively smaller signs of the enthusiasm that defined the 1980s movement. The current ethnic agents of the Third Uchinanchu Movement are people who are in their mid- to late sixties or early seventies, and some young Yonsei or fourth-generation Uchinanchus.

Today, there are little to no prejudice or discrimination from Naichi, and there is an increasing number of Naichi members who are “Uchinanchu at heart”. Every year, the Okinawan Festival is still held without fail. Despite all of these positives, there is relatively little energy in fundraising activities. What happened? If we look back at the ethnic leaders of the 1980s and their fervent supporters, we see
a strong ethnic spirit driving them. This spirit, which is not a rational drive, can convert one’s zeal for beating and standing up to one’s enemies, rivals, and discriminators into a potent energy that charges the atmosphere. For a long time, the Uchinanchu’s biggest rival in economic, cultural, and other spheres was the Naichi; and it was the Naichi who discriminated against them early on. Today, the Naichi openly praise (if not express grudging admiration for) the Uchinanchu’s activities. From a multiculturalist perspective, this is a sign of a mature society. However, if this is the major factor preventing the Uchinanchu community from rediscovering their passion, then the ethnic agents of today and tomorrow have a very complex problem on their hands.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper I took up the 1980s vitalization movement among the Okinawan community in Hawaii. Until the 1980s, the majority of Okinawans in Hawaii had recognized themselves as Japanese, however since the 1990s many of them have started to call themselves Okinawan. At the same time, the Hawaiian mass media have come to differentiate Okinawan from Japanese. This phenomenon should be called the birth of a new ethnicity. How did such a thing happen? Through long term participant observation, I have reached the following conclusion.

Firstly, during the decade of the 1980s Hawaii’s Okinawan community started the Okinawan Festival which became one of the biggest ethnic events in Hawaii, and brought the Hawaii Okinawa Center to completion. The center is a magnificent building and is admired together with the Japanese Culture Center of Hawaii. The Festival and the Center are cultural symbols and have functioned as publicity for making the presence of the Okinawans known to the larger society of Hawaii. Since their activities stand out conspicuously, much of Hawaii’s media have covered it on a large scale. Thus, Hawaii’s people have come to recognize the Okinawans as an ethnic group.

Secondly, a group of young, third-generation people – Sansei – took a key role in this movement: The Second Uchinanchu Movement held in 1980s. They were not only young, but capable and above all, passionate. They attained this passion through pilgrimage to the fatherland, Okinawa. After returning home they were reborn, became new men, and started the movement mentioned above. I named them ethnic agents, or transformative agents, who have diffused Uchina-culturalism among the Okinawan community of Hawaii. They have enlightened not only Okinawans, but also the larger society of Hawaii, showing the difference between Okinawans and Japanese; that Okinawan is a group that has its own ethnicity, having unique cultures and history.

Thirdly, I examined the social context of their impassioned activities. Okinawans had been discriminated against by Naichi or Japanese for a long time. Here in Hawaii, they had been in a similar state. The Sansei ethnic agents stood up and took action towards erasing the negative images and building a positive Okinawan identity. Their activities seem to be influenced, directly or indirectly, by the minority movements, a nationwide trend during that time.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is one of the results of the research group subsidized by Japan’s Ministry of Education (MEXT). KAKENHI 23402045. 2011-2013. The research representative of the group is Shigehiko Shiramizu.

9. REFERENCES


