

Tracing Ogasawaran Songs, Dances and Musical Instruments

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Abstract

The relatively short history of the Ogasawara Islands enables us to trace the transmission of songs, dances and musical instruments. Among those from various places, folk songs brought from Hachijo Island, four other songs with Japanese lyrics, Nanyo-odori dances and their accompaniment songs from Micronesia took root and came to be identified as Ogasawaran, especially after their designation as an intangible cultural asset of the Tokyo Metropolitan area in 1987. In addition, foreign materials such as a slit drum called *kaka*, hula and steelpan were introduced and developed under the Ogasawara brand.

Key words : *kaka*, Nanyo-odori, Ogasawara-daiko, Ogasawaran bon dance, Ogasawaran folk songs, Ogasawaran hula, steelpan

1. Aquapelagic Songs and Dances (1830s–1870s)

The songs and dances of Ogasawara (Bonin) are “aquapelagic assemblages,” i.e., possessing fluid, changeable and “watery” qualities (Hayward, 2012). In 1830, the first twenty-five settlers arriving from Hawai’i can only be supposed to have brought western and Pacific folk songs, dances and/or musical instruments for their own diversion to Chichi-Jima Island. Since then, temporary visitors and settlers from various places have landed (Robertson, 1876; Long, 2007) with their own music and later, recordings. Although there are no records of these initial repertoires, one nursery song is a possible example. “Tauchine [toutine]” is a traditional baby rearing chant with a few-note melody pattern, thought to be Chamorro in origin. Females chant this, while rhythmically shaking a baby’s limbs (Long & Hashimoto, 2005).

2. Settler Wave from Hachijo Island (1870s–1944)

The Japanese government adopted an immigration policy that boosted the number of Japanese settlers gradually, starting from 1877 (Ishihara, 2007). The majority were poor farmers from Hachijo Island. They brought their impromptu song genres called “*shome bushi*” and “*taiko bushi*.” *Shome* is a call without any specific meaning, *bushi* is a type of song, and *taiko* is a large drum. They were performed in the Ogasawara Islands at both private and public occasions such as at parties and the *bon* dance festival.

“*Shome bushi*” declined in popularity and its usage as an accompaniment for the *bon* dance has disappeared. On the other hand, the drumming practice called Hachijo-daiko in which two drummers beat both sides of the drum simultaneously with a different rhythmic pattern has been incorporated into Ogasawara-daiko practice. The “*taiko bushi*” also survive as “*taiko uta*.”

3. Introduction of Micronesian Marching Dance (late 1920s–1944)

From 1914 to 1944, Ogasawara flourished as a staging port to the Japanese mandate of Micronesia. In Micronesia, where first Western and then Japanese culture were being brought in, the “marching dance,” which is characterized by marching movements and a dance leader shouting words such as “*lep, rai, lep, rai*” (originating from the English “left, right”), was popular. This might have been created by the Marshallese who were inspired by the military drills of the German troops (Nagaoka & Konishi 2007). This dance form rapidly spread to the Eastern, Central and Western Caroline Islands and to Carolinians in the Mariana Islands (Fig. 1).

Ogasawaran individuals picked up the Carolinian marching dance and the accompanying songs of the Mariana Islands after the middle of the 1920s. One Chichi-Jima disseminator was the Western descendant Josiah Gonzales (1899–1935). He worked at the Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushiki Gaisha company in Saipan and finally returned to the Ogasawaras around 1934. The dance materials he brought are currently called “Urame,” “Uwadoro,” “Gidai” and “Aftairan,” Melodies of the former three dance songs are composed in a major scale

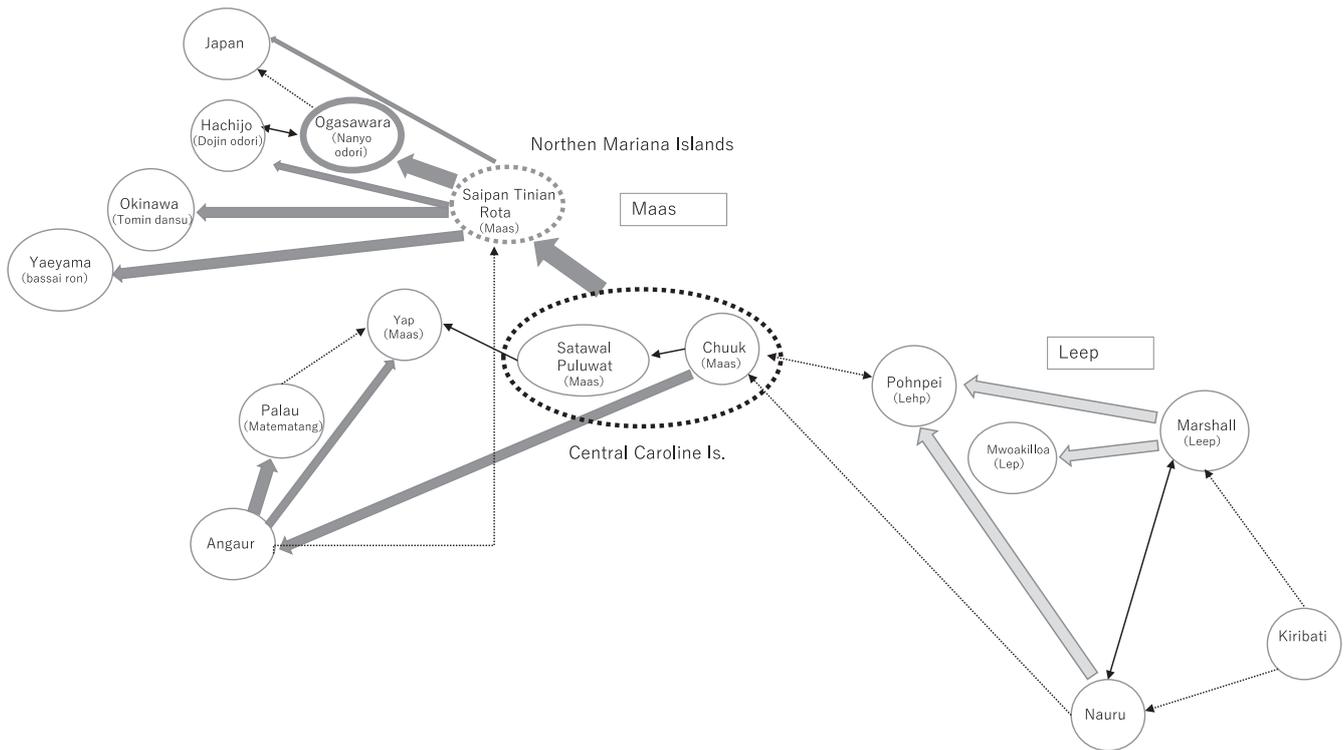


Fig. 1 Possible diffusion of the marching dance.
 () : a local name of marching dance, if any.

with regular beats (2/4), with the ending sounding like a calling. The original form of “Aftairan” is thought to have been a command as with western military drills, “March along.”

The “Yoakemae,” another current form of dance material whose lyrics are written in imperfect Japanese, came later (Danki, 1982). This song is popular with the Palauans, but they say the composer/writer was a Chuukese phosphate mining laborer in Angaur Island prior to the Pacific War.

4. Four Micronesian Songs Written in Japanese (1950s)

Immediately before the Second World War, the entire population of Ogasawara was relocated to mainland Japan. In 1946, only the western descendants were permitted to return to Chichi-Jima Island under the rule of the U.S. Forces (1945–1968). Islanders’ contact with Micronesians continued. In the 1950s, Able Savory (1928–2003) learned “Oyadono tameni,” “Parao no go-chome” and “Remon bayashi” from a Palauan in Saipan. These lyrics were written in imperfect Japanese as with the “Yoakemae.” During and soon after the Japanese period, Micronesians wrote songs in their common language, Japanese, to express the hopeless longing of love.

“Oyadono tameni [Because of his parents (?)],” is said to be a lament song written by a Chuukese. “Parao

no go-chome,” which was originally called “Koror no go-chome [place name]” is a love song from a young Chuukese man to a Palauan girl. “Remon bayashi [Lemon trees],” which was originally called “Lemongrass,” is a Pohnpeian woman’s lament to her Japanese fiancé who never came back to her island. They had promised to marry (*kabobo*, in Pohnpeian) after the war when there would be peace. In contrast to the sad stories in the lyrics of these songs, major scales are used for the melodies (Konishi, 2012).

Another song, “Marukibune,” formerly called “Angauru ko-uta” was transmitted to Ogasawara from Angaur Island in the 1950s (Kitaguni, 2002). The original version might be “Koi no marukibune” written by Yutaka Kadota (1907–1975) (recorded by Teichiku, 1937). Though its origin is unknown, this song had been popular in Angaur Island and seems to have been reimported to the Ogasawara islands.

5. Resumption of Performance and Designation as an Intangible Cultural Asset (1968–1980s)

Soon after the reversion of the Ogasawara Islands to Japan in 1968, Masayuki Asanuma (1911–1992) who had learned the marching dance from Josiah Gonzales started to teach it to Japanese public servants and returnees for entertainment. In 1981, the marching dance, then called “*dojin odori* [indigenous dance],” which sounded discriminatory, was renamed Nanyo-odori (Dance of the

South Pacific), and the Nanyo-odori Hozonkai (Society for Preservation of Nanyo-odori) was established (Fig. 1).

In 1987, the dance songs were recognized as “Ogasawaran folk songs (transmitted from the south)” and designated as an intangible cultural asset of Tokyo Metropolitan area (below, ICATM). “Chichi-Jima shome bushi,” “Haha-Jima shome bushi” and “Iwo-To shome bushi” (transmitted from Japan) and “Oyadono tameni,” “Parao no go-chome,” “Remon bayashi” and “Marukibune” (regarded as being composed in Ogasawara, but in fact, brought from Micronesia) were also designated as ICATM (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 1987).

6. Developing and Branding Songs and Dances (late 1980s–2019)

Since 1968, the village and Tokyo Metropolitan Government have promoted the development of special regional products. Riding this wave, Nanyo-odori and the four Micronesia-originated songs have become emblematic of Ogasawaran culture. The slit drum called *kaka* was developed as a local musical instrument and exhibited at the “Furusato tokyo no kankouten (Tokyo Hometowns Exhibition)” in 1988, in conjunction with the 20th Anniversary of the Reversion of the Ogasawara Islands (below, ARO). This provided the first opportunity for *kaka* players to perform with Nanyo-odori dancers.

Hula, which was introduced to the islands in 1997 by a single individual, has become a “folk entertainment” among Ogasawarans. Almost three hundred performers,



Fig. 2 Nanyo-odori (2007) courtesy of Nanyo-odori.

among a total islander population of 2,000, participate in the annual Hula ‘Ohana performances. Ogasawaran hula has an original repertoire accompanied by local songs. Several drum groups such as Hasshoryu-daiko, Ogasawara taiko dokokai, Bonin-bayashi and Taiko-kai identify their performances as Ogasawaran. Hasshoryu-daiko shows a consciousness of the original Hachijo-daiko. Bonin bayashi’s original repertoire is a mixture of Hachijo-daiko and Edo *matsuri bayashi* [old Tokyo festival music]. They also perform as accompaniment to the Ogasawara-branded *bon* dance festival and attract young tourists.

The steelpan orchestra is yet another item under the Ogasawara brand. With financial support from the village government, Mighty Jamma, the “UK’s No. 1 Steelpan soloist champion” and Breakfast Band were invited for the commemorative festival of the 30th ARO in 1998. In 2003, the village purchased musical instruments, and the Bonin steel orchestra was organized to perform at the opening concert of the 35th ARO. Subsequently, another group, Loco Pan, was organized.

In this way, various elements have been assembled in the Ogasawara Islands and developed as Ogasawara-branded songs, dances and musical instruments. They contribute to attract newcomers and tourists.

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