

HAWAII'S OKINAWAN MIGRITUDE AND MUSEUMS

SHIROTA Chika

Department of Intercultural Studies, Oita Prefectural College of Arts and Culture, Japan

E-mail: dance@f5.dion.ne.jp (home); shirotac@oita-pjc.ac.jp (office)

The migration from Okinawa to Hawaii started in 1900. Today, approximately 50,000 people claim Okinawan ancestry, and they tend to identify themselves as “Okinawan” in multicultural Hawaii. Hawaii’s Okinawans have held annual Okinawan Festivals since the 1970s; additionally, during the 1990s, they built cultural centers. Nevertheless, the first and second generations of Okinawan immigrants faced discrimination from other Japanese in Hawaii because of their distinct culture and lower social status among Hawaii’s Japanese communities. After WWII, some Okinawan families were physically and psychologically divided between the US and Japan, or between Hawaii and Okinawa. From the time when control of Okinawa reverted from the US to Japan, in 1972, Hawaii’s Okinawans have reaffirmed their identities and celebrated their culture, influenced by the minority movements in 1960s America.

The concept of “migritude” is used to define the Okinawan experience across time, space, and social boundaries. It is important to note that the experiences of migritude are shared within families and communities using various styles of communication, such as song, dance, writing, and museum exhibits. The experience of migritude has been demonstrated in exhibits particularly vividly. Therefore, this paper focuses on how the experiences and memories of Hawaii’s Okinawan migritude have been represented in three different spaces.

First, by looking at the Okinawa Centers in Hawaii, the paper discusses how Okinawans in Hawaii have represented their history and culture within their community, taking into consideration family ties, the networks of towns and villages in Okinawa, and the relationships developed in Hawaii. Second, it looks at public museums in Hawaii and analyzes how these institutions have described Okinawans in their respective exhibits in order to discuss the connection between multiculturalism and museum representations. Third, museums in Okinawa and Osaka that contain exhibits of the Okinawan migration to Hawaii are considered. One of the characteristics of the Okinawan migritude in this regard is that in the exhibits of the Okinawan migration to Hawaii, Okinawans are not only displayed as immigrants in Hawaii but also as emigrants in Okinawa, and even as migrants in other places, as in Osaka, where Okinawans also migrated.

Therefore, this paper examines the Okinawan migritude by looking at the museums where I, an Osaka-born third-generation Okinawan, conducted fieldwork. This is an ongoing project/process, what I call migritude anthropology; it is a practice done by migrants or their descendants and one that focuses on migrant peoples and cultures in multi-sited spaces.

Keywords: Okinawan migration to Hawaii, Museum, Cultural centers, Migritude anthropology