

NORTH MEETS SOUTH

Eisā and the Wrapping of Identity on Okinoerabu Island, Japan

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ABSTRACT: The small island of Okinoerabu in the Nansei archipelago to the southwest of Japan is located at a crossroads of sub-national cultural flows and exhibits a distinct cultural emblem of island identity in the form of a prominent performing art called *eisā*. This performance style, which combines drumming, choreography and live or recorded music, has its roots in Okinawa prefecture (to the southwest of Okinoerabu), where its function has moved predominantly from a religious ritual context to everyday entertainment, and nowadays signifies regional, cultural and island identity across several cultural spheres. This article offers a musical history and ethnography of *eisā* on Okinoerabu in terms of the layers of cultural association that are wrapped in its discourse and practice. The authors show how inter- and intra-island cultural flows, adoption, localisation and transformation help define Okinoerabu identity through *eisā*, which is often expressed on the island in terms of transregional identity.

KEYWORDS: Amami, *Eisā*, Identity, Okinawa, Okinoerabu

Introduction

The title of this article stresses the meeting of north and south. Several levels of analysis are offered in terms of such geographic confluences on Okinoerabu island (Okinoerabujima) (Figure 1), including: (1) northern Japanese culture meeting southern Japanese culture; (2) Kagoshima prefecture meeting Okinawa prefecture; (3) the northern Ryūkyū islands meeting the southern Ryūkyū islands; and (4) China town (China-chō)¹ meeting Wadamari town (Wadamari-chō). As a case study on island identity, the article reveals a heightened awareness of the importance of the performing art known as *eisā* in the construction of locality based on a geographically defined identity in the context of transregional cultural connections. North meets south on the island in terms of identity construction where sub-national political and administrative boundaries form part of a process of wrapping cultural spheres of identity through creative cultural expression. A close examination of *eisā* on Okinoerabu helps show how this distinct performing art has been adopted and localised as a result of cultural flows between, within and across island

¹ The transliteration of the *kanji* for this town is not to be confused with the nation state of China.

settings, and more specifically how *eisā* helps islanders express a transregional identity through cultural similarity and difference.

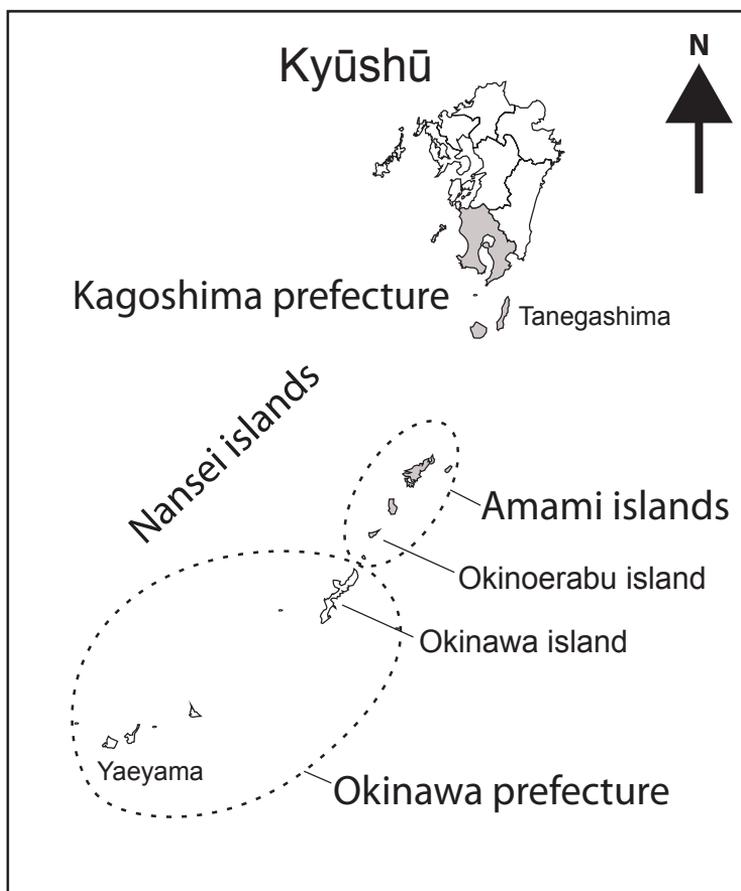


Figure 1. Southwestern Japan and Okinoerabu island. Derived from Kabipan Otoko (2016), Creative Commons License.

While discussing *eisā* on Okinoerabu, we adopt an approach that unwraps the various layers of identity and cultural meaning that are associated with this performing art. Drawing from the work of Japanologists Ben-Ari, Moeran and Valentine (1990) and Hendry (1993), we locate *eisā* in a complex web of significance that can be unwrapped in terms of its physical and conceptual connections. As part of a(n) (un)wrapping process, *eisā* on Okinoerabu might be viewed as part of an assemblage – relating to a concept discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – in connection with its creative practices and self-representation in a context of transregional associations. Such an analytical perspective provides a basis for comprehending some of the underlying structures of Japanese culture more broadly, and for distinguishing the many strands of significance that allow *eisā* to have importance in helping islanders express their identity today.

On Okinoerabu, there are many signifiers of Okinawan cultural influence, including language, cuisine, dance, television and newspapers. In connection with the actual sounds of *eisā*, the musical scale used in the pieces that come from Okinawa is typical of that part of Japan and differ much from most traditional/neo-traditional sounds from other parts of Japan (Koizumi, 1977). Further, some traditional music on Okinoerabu has a similar sound to that on Okinawa, and also differs distinctly to the musical sounds from further north in the same archipelago (ie, Amami or the Northern Ryūkyū islands). In terms of self-identification, islanders often point out that their traditional culture is Okinawan, or at least influenced by Okinawa (Takahashi, 2004; 2006).² Such referencing of a nearby ‘other’ helps indicate a sense of difference and offers hidden meaning about self-identity. In other words, Okinoerabu culture is only Okinawan because Okinoerabu is not (or no longer) an administrative part of Ryūkyū (discussed later), and this opposition refers at a deeper level of analysis to a contested identity in the contemporary political positioning of the island within Kagoshima prefecture and the Amami islands. Even though not administratively within Okinawa prefecture, and also not the closest island in Kagoshima prefecture to Okinawa island (Yoron island is inbetween Okinoerabu and Okinawa), there are distinct cultural flows that are visible on Okinoerabu that impact on the everyday lives of many islanders. It is not a surprise that an island that is relatively close to Okinawa has some cultural influence from Okinawa, and vice versa, but the way islanders use that influence when expressing and constructing their own island identity is particularly insightful with regard to self-identity and cultural representation. That is, for Okinoerabu, creative practices such as *eisā* have recently been adopted on the island and have clear roots in Okinawa, and it is through such modes of expression on Okinoerabu that help islanders assert their historical and cultural links with Okinawa in the face of broader Japanese cultural influences.

In terms of unwrapping Okinoerabu identities, the Japanese anthropologist and Okinoerabu islander, Takahashi, notes “that Okinoerabu islanders have a multi-layered ethnic identity and the most dominant identity varies case by case depending on the circumstances they are in” (Takahashi, T 2013: 383). Takahashi further comments that during research on Okinoerabu many “respondents did not fully identify either as Okinawan [*Uchinanchu*] or Japanese [*Yamatonchu*], but as something ‘in-between’” (1997: iv). These identities might switch between different locations depending on the context of discourse, including “Okinawa/Amami’ [ie, two adjacent island groups], ‘Ryukyu/Satsuma’ [ie, two historical centres of power], and ‘Uchina/Yamato’ [ie, Ryūkyūan and ‘Japanese’ identity]” (ibid). The islanders “have developed a unique but ambiguous identity” (ibid: 384), and, while a part of the Japanese nation state, “they hesitate to identify themselves as mainland Japanese (*yamatonchu*)” (ibid: 384). It is with such spheres of association that we use as examples in our study of *eisā* on Okinoerabu as a way of showing how islanders wrap themselves in various layers of identity.

Eisā is a distinctly Okinawan performing art that blends music and dance. It is found in a variety of ritual, staged and modern styles, and has nowadays been disseminated through migration to many parts of Japan and beyond (Johnson, 2008; Okaze, 1992). Performed traditionally during the summer the Bon festival is a Buddhist ritual that welcomes and farewells ancestral spirits. *Eisā* is nowadays also associated with secular performance in competitions and performative displays. In the context of Okinoerabu, the performance style has been appropriated in its modern-day ‘club’ style where it is especially practised by

² Takahashi (2004) has been a key secondary source for this study. The thesis was published in 2006.

a younger generation of performer who often dance to recorded music (usually in a neo-traditional popular music style) while striking one of several types of drum held by the dancers. Accompanists playing *sanshin* (3-string lute) and singing are sometimes used for more traditional songs. This type of cultural performance helps portray the island's geographical and cultural location and could be viewed within a paradigm of socially-constructed authenticity (MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999) in that it is showcasing a perception of tradition, although in this context the phenomenon is a recently invented one (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). While such a style does exhibit creativity, it should be considered not only as staged but also as an authentic expression of contemporary identity on Okinoerabu. Further, since *eisā* is nowadays given much prominence as a type of heightened cultural expression on Okinoerabu in terms of local (island) capital, it helps reinforce a sense of transregional identity that represents Okinoerabu in the current era.

As well as pursuing historical inquiry through secondary sources, both Japanese and non-Japanese (very little has been written about *eisā* on the island), detailed knowledge was gained during ethnographic research on the phenomenon by one or both of the researchers that was carried out in 2014 and 2015 in the form of observation of performance groups, interviews with key informants, including leaders, members of groups, and town office staff, and informal meetings with many *eisā* performers and enthusiasts. Pivotal in the analysis of ethnographic data and knowledge was the use of an approach that identified significant themes that emerged during the study, which in this case offers new understanding by interpreting how inter- and intra-island cultural flows, adoption and transformation help define Okinoerabu identity through this type of creative practice.

The study of music in connection with cultural flows, adoption, localisation and transformation include a range of case studies where one type of music is transmitted across distinct geographical, political or cultural boundaries, such as the adoption of samba in Wales (Eisentraut, 2001), *taiko* in the US (Bender, 2012), music in multicultural America (Lornell and Rasmussen, 1997), East Indian music in the West Indies (Manuel, 2000), and music in diaspora settings (Ramnarine, 2007). Of such studies, several are particularly pertinent to this article. For example, Eisentraut's work shows how a culture on one side of the Atlantic adopted through cultural flows a music more usually known on the other side of the same ocean. While a similar phenomenon is pivotal in this article in showing the localisation and appropriation of a (new) tradition that was borrowed from another island setting, the two regional cultures in question (ie, Kagoshima and Okinawa prefectures; or the Amami islands and the Okinawa islands, northern and southern Nansei islands respectively) are much closer in terms of geographical, historical and socio-cultural connections. Further, this article is not about the analysis of music in a diaspora or multicultural context but is more concerned with syncretism that was the result of a confluence of cultural influences from outside and within Okinoerabu as part of a distinct assertion of identity that could be suitably expressed through a performing art that traditionally is usually associated with another island, prefecture and cultural location. In this article, *eisā* on Okinoerabu is shown to form not only a part of local identity, but also an identity or community that is expressed in a layering of locations and associations, whether real or imagined (Anderson, 1983).

The article divides into three main parts. The first maps *eisā* on Okinoerabu and helps in comprehending the distribution of this genre on the island in a national context of ensemble drumming. The next two parts explore different learning contexts that help in the transmission of *eisā* as a new form of cultural capital for the island where educational

settings are viewed as institutional repositories of cultural knowledge that are accessed through voluntary (ie, community groups) and formal (ie, school education) locations. The first of these parts investigates *eisā* organisations, and the second is a study of some of the main contexts for learning *eisā*.

Mapping *Eisā* on Okinoerabu

Okinoerabu is a coral island to the southwest of Japan in the Nansei archipelago (Nansei-shotō; also known as the Ryūkyū archipelago) (Figure 1). Within this island chain it is part of the Amami archipelago (Amami-guntō), which is one of several island groups belonging to Kagoshima prefecture. Okinoerabu is the next but one most southerly island in Kagoshima prefecture after Yoron island, and just 60km from Okinawa island (part of Okinawa prefecture) to the south, 31km from Yoron, and 546km from its prefectural capital, Kagoshima city, which is located on Kyūshū, to the north. Okinoerabu has a land area of about 94km² and in 2016 its population was 12,903 (China-chō Yakuba, 2016; Wadomari-chō Yakuba, 2016a) (Table 1). Okinoerabu divides into two administrative towns, which more or less divide the island in half between north (Wadomari town) and south (China town). *Eisā* groups are found in each of the towns, both of which make much use of *eisā* in educational, community and performance activities. The southern part of Okinoerabu has a bulging landmass, with the central part of this area dominated by a large plateau (Ōyama: ‘Large Mountain’) rising 245m, which has only a few small roads on it. It is with such spheres of geo-political positioning that Okinoerabu islanders are able to locate themselves within different localities, which subsequently helps with self-identification and expressions of transregional identity.

Town	Population	Area (km ²)
China	6,160	53.3
Wadomari	6,743	40.39
TOTAL	12,903	93.69

Table 1. Okinoerabujima: Population and Area. Source: China-chō Yakuba (2016); Wadomari-chō Yakuba (2016a).

These spheres of difference and positionality are forms of wrapping and relate directly to the history and politics of Okinoerabu. The island has a history of being bound to its northern rulers while also being culturally influenced by its southern neighbours. Indeed, it is the southern influence that is often foregrounded in discourse regarding island identity and to which *eisā* is usually rooted. That is, emphasis is given to noting the influences from the south in what appears to be a process of identity marking that operates in tension with the island’s political and administrative location. In other words, there is a difference within the framing of local identity. More specifically, when Okinawa/Ryūkyū is referred to as a marker of cultural influence or identity, as with the case of *eisā*, Okinoerabu islanders are purposely negating their political connections to Kagoshima prefecture and the historical culture of Satsuma (an historical clan from southern Kyūshū) to the north. However, while this negation might be a result of the Amami islands being administered by Satsuma and then Kagoshima prefecture, where a collective memory of post-Ryūkyūan colonial exploitation is found in geographic and sub-political juxtapositions (eg, Amami v Satsuma; Amami v Kagoshima), the historical situation was actually one where Okinoerabu’s social conditions were not as harsh as in

the northern part of the Amami islands. On Amami Ōshima, Kikaijima and Tokunoshima, there were sugar cane taxes imposed by Satsuma from 1745, but these were not introduced to Okinoerabu until 1853 (Takahashi, 2004: 81). In this context, the prevalence of *eisā* on Okinoerabu, as well as the importance the style has had in helping create island identity in the present day, seems to be a phenomenon that is not visibly contested due to the historical and geographical links between the island and Okinawa. Okinoerabu maintains cultural affiliation with Okinawa to the south, while simultaneously layering its identity with the culture of Kagoshima and Japan more widely to the north.

By the 1500s, the Ryūkyū Kingdom, which was centred on Okinawa island, ruled the Amami archipelago (which includes Okinoerabu). When the Satsuma clan from southern Kyūshū imposed control on Okinawa in 1609 they allowed the Ryūkyū Kingdom much autonomy (Ravina, 2003: 80) but took over administration of the Amami islands from 1611 on (see Kerr, 1953). However, the Amami Islands remained culturally part of the Ryūkyū and “shared many religious and social practices with the Okinawa archipelago, and conquest by Satsuma did little to change Amami culture” (Ravina, 2003: 80). Within the Amami islands, much local difference was maintained in a context of southern and northern influences, and even local language, for example, which wraps cultural discourse, differed between different islands and parts of islands.³

Of several drum performance styles that are traditionally found in the Nansei islands, including *wadaiko* (literally, ‘Japanese drums’), *taiko odori* (literally, ‘drum dance’) and *chijin* (wedge drum), *eisā* stands out as being predominant in Okinawa prefecture and with more recently established pockets of influence further north and globally. Throughout much of Japan, drumming is defined as *wadaiko* and is dominated by large barrel and cylindrical drums (Bender, 2012). Ensemble drumming took a new path in the second half of the 20th Century with neo-traditional groups becoming popular. Okinoerabu has just one such *wadaiko* group, which was established in 1987: Nanshū Daiko (Wadomari-chō, 2016b).⁴ The name of this group has much local significance in that while the second word in the name refers to drums generically (*taiko/daiko*), the first word refers to Takamori Saigō (1828–77), a *samurai* and poet who had been exiled to the island for several years in the 1860s. He adopted the name Nanshū Saigō during his exile, in reference to his southern location (Ravina, 2003: 25), and he was a much liked figure on Okinoerabu. Such is the absence of *wadaiko* on the island that one informant who had much historical and cultural knowledge noted that Okinoerabu had been influenced enormously by Okinawan culture, and while he knew much about *eisā* activities, he was unable to mention anything about *wadaiko* groups until one of the authors mentioned Nanshū Daiko, which helped remind him that there was indeed one such group, although it was not very active.

During fieldwork on Okinoerabu, the year 1993 was noted by a number of key informants as being significant in the adoption of *eisā* on the island (also noted by Takahashi, 2004). However, one year earlier, there had been several *eisā* activities that helped inspire local enthusiasts to adopt the genre for the island. In 1992, the Wadomari Town Tourism Festival invited about 30 *eisā* performers from the group Nakijin *Eisā* on Okinawa island to perform at the event, and in March 1993 the *eisā* group Yunnu *Eisā* from Yoron island,

³ Haring (1954: 256), for instance, noted 16 dialects in the Amami islands alone.

⁴ In Wadomari town there is a *yakitori* (grilled chicken) restaurant called Amami Daiko (Amami Drum), which has several *wadaiko* that are sounded to thank customers when they are leaving. The significance of such drums here is that they are not *eisā* drums, but are typical of mainland Japan.

which had been established in 1992, performed at the Freesia Festival on Okinoerabu, each event being in collaboration with the Okinawan neo-traditional pop performer, politician and peace activist, Shōkichi Kina (b. 1948; also romanised as Shoukichi) (Minayoshi, 2014). Kina had been negotiating with the Wadamari Town Office since 1991 to hold an event that celebrated Okinawan songs in the Amami islands, which eventuated in his promotion of *eisā* on the island two years later (Takahashi, 2004). With the help of Kina, between 14–15 April 1993 an *eisā* event was held in Wadamari town at the indoor gateball park (*okunai gētobōru-jō*) and about 50 people gathered there to develop their skills in *eisā* (Minayoshi, 1993).

As described by one Okinawan newspaper (Minayoshi, 1993), according to Kina, a former ruler of Okinoerabu named Yononushi (also pronounced Yununushi) was closely connected with Okinawa, and thus a town on the island such as Wadamari was an ideal location to promote *eisā*. Several folk-song specialists visited with Kina and the songs that were performed for the *eisā* lessons over the two days included ‘Chunjun Nagare’, ‘Kudaka Manjū-nushi’ and ‘Erabu Yuri no Hana’ (each is well-known on Okinawa and Okinoerabu, and the latter is from and about Okinoerabu – discussed later). One of the instructors even noted that Okinoerabu islanders were fast learners because Okinoerabu and Okinawa were in the same cultural zone and the songs and rhythms of both regions were the same (Minayoshi, 1993). Here, the influences being referred to connect with 14th and 15th Century colonialism from Ryūkyū. While already influenced much from Ryūkyū, at the start of the 15th Century, the prince of Hokuzan (the northern principality of Ryūkyū) became the ruler of Okinoerabu and was known as *Yononushi* (master of the world).⁵

It was with these events in the early 1990s, along with the enthusiasm of local *eisā* activists, that in the space of just five years four active *eisā* groups were established on the island (and several other groups and activities developed in the years that followed). The first *eisā* group established on the island was the Uruma *Eisā* style originally from Okinawa and brought to the island by Kina in 1993, which resulted in the formation of the group Erabu Yononushi Uruma *Eisā* in the same year. This *eisā* style was also included at Okinoerabu High School Sports Festival (*taikusai*), which was held in September 1993 (Takahashi, 2004: 186). Informants often mentioned that *eisā* enthusiasts Yoshihiro Sō and his wife were instrumental in establishing *eisā* on Okinoerabu, and were responsible for it being at the sports festival, with Yoshihiro being the first leader of Erabu Yononushi Uruma *Eisā*, which was named after the island’s former ruler, Yononushi. Yoshihiro was a member of the Wadamari Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Wadamari-chō Shōkōkai), and was a descendant of Yononushi (Takahashi, 2004: 185) and was thus able to help promote *eisā* widely on the island as a result of his position in island affairs and his social capital. As well as such promotion of *eisā*, the island’s Board of Education actively encouraged the performance of the style (ibid: 53). Initially Yoshihiro and his wife were pivotal in the early teaching of the performing art on the island at Okinoerabu High School (Okinoerabu Kōtō Gakkō), and a few years later they established *eisā* classes for students, which were subsequently taught in each of the three years as an optional activity (discussed later).

Informants would typically identify five *eisā* groups (functional groups as opposed to locations where *eisā* is taught) (Table 2) and one *wadaiko* group on Okinoerabu. Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko was usually noted as the largest of the groups, and most informants

⁵ It was not until 1429 that the three principalities of Ryūkyū were unified into one kingdom.

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identified three main active groups: Okinoerabu Kōkō *Eisā*-bu, Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko, and Buyū Beat (the word ‘Beat’ is written in English).

Name of Group	Established	Rehearsal Location	Membership
Erabu Yononushi Uruma <i>Eisā</i>	1993	Wadomari town, Koshiyama Kenshū Sentā (Koshiyama Training Centre)	Community
Oki-Kō <i>Eisā</i> -bu (Okinoerabu Kōkō <i>Eisā</i> -tai)	1996	China town	Okinoerabu High School students
Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko (Okinoerabu shibu)	1998	Wadomari town, Koshiyama Kenshū Sentā	Community
China-chō <i>Eisā</i> Aikō-kai	2005	China town: Tamina Shōgakkō (Tamina Primary School); Shimohirakawa Shōgakkō (Shimohirakawa Primary School)	Primary school students (and some parents)
Buyū Beat	2010	Wadomari town, Koshiyama Kenshū Sentā (Koshiyama Training Centre)	Mostly graduates of Okinoerabu High School

Table 2. Timeline of foundation of *Eisā* Groups on Okinoerabu (after Johnson and Kuwahara (2013b)).

By mapping *eisā* on Okinoerabu, several spheres of influence and identity have been unwrapped, with political and administrative divisions, island and archipelagic connections, a dichotomy of island towns, historical control from Ryūkyū and from Satsuma, contemporary Okinawan influence and administration with Kagoshima prefecture, cultural traits and the local adoption of *eisā* from the 1990s with the formation of distinct *eisā* groups in a variety of island locations. The following parts of the discussion look more closely at these groups and how they construct transregional identity in their representations of identity on Okinoerabu.

Organisations

Several *eisā* organisations have influenced the dissemination of this staged performing art within and beyond the Nansei islands (Johnson and Kuwahara, 2013b). Erabu Yononushi Uruma *Eisā* was Okinoerabu’s first *eisā* group, and was established in May 1993 soon after Shōkichi Kina’s *eisā* activism on the island (Takahashi, 2004: 186). While *eisā* is nowadays very much a part of island identity, its origins are explained by internal and external social activism. Uruma *Eisā*, a new group performing Okinawan *eisā*, was established in 1992 by Kina at the time of the 20th anniversary of the return of Okinawa to Japan after being administered by the US since the end of World War Two (ibid: 185). Kina’s *eisā* activism in the Nansei islands (covering Okinawa and Kagoshima prefectures) was initiated partly

because Kina believed the islands shared the same cultural roots (ibid: 185). In the 1990s, several Uruma *Eisā* groups were established on a few Nansei islands and beyond: Amami Ōshima (Amami Ōshima Uruma *Eisā*), Okinoerabu (Erabu Yononushi Uruma *Eisā*), Kikaijima (Kikaijima Uruma *Eisā* and Kikaijima Kodomo *Eisā*), Kagoshima city (Kagoshima Uruma *Eisā*), and Tōkyō (Tōkyō Uruma *Eisā*) (Johnson and Kuwahara, 2013a, 2013b; 2015; Takahashi, 2004).

The years preceding the introduction of *eisā* to Okinoerabu were marked by an increased presence of Okinawan popular music more widely in Japan, especially in songs that included Okinawan musical instruments such as the *sanshin* (Roberson, 2001). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly in the early 1990s, *Uchinā* (Okinawan) pop music was part of a cultural flow from Okinawa, and consequently offered an earlier influence on Okinoerabu that helped set the context for the adoption of *eisā* from 1993. As part of the ‘boom’ in the hybrid style of neo-traditional Okinawan popular music around this time, between 19 May and 22 July 1995, Kina, his brother Masahiro and a team of 300 supporters (taking turns in small teams) embarked on a peace mission known as Sabani Pisu Konekushon (‘Sabani Peace Connection’), which was a sea journey of around 1400km in a traditional Okinawan canoe (*sabani*) that travelled from Yonaguni island in the southwest of Okinawa prefecture to Hiroshima city (the site of the first Atomic bomb used during warfare) in Honshū and then to the other A-Bomb site of Nagasaki in Kyūshū (Potter, 2010: 109). The timing of the event was ‘to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ (ibid). The idea of the journey was to foreground a “peace connection” by travelling to these sites of mass destruction, and along the way the boat called in to 23 islands (Satō, 1996). At the time, Kina promoted *eisā* as part of his peace mission and as a result several groups were established at some locations by like-minded activists. The following year, Kina embarked on another spectacle that further showcased *eisā*, although this time it was in international context. The performance was at the Atlanta Olympic Arts Festival, which was staged alongside the Atlanta Summer Olympics in 2012, and included a number of likeminded *eisā* performers, some from Okinoerabu (see later).

The largest transregional and international *eisā* organisation in Japan and on Okinoerabu is Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko (RMKD) (Ryūkyū Kingdom Festival Drums) (see Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko, 2016).⁶ Founded in Okinawa in 1982, RKMD on Okinoerabu dates from 1998 and was the second main style to be transmitted to the island. As with all the RKMD branch organisations, on Okinoerabu the group always dances while playing Okinawan drums of various size to recorded commercial music in a popular music style that often utilises Okinawan musical instruments such as the *sanshin*. The Okinawan organisation now has 41 branch groups in Japan and 12 international groups (Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko, 2016). In Okinawa prefecture, there are eight branch organisations on Okinawa island, one on Miyako island, and one on Ishigaki island. Further north, and into the islands of Kagoshima prefecture, there is one branch on Okinoerabu (the only RKMD group in the Amami islands) and one on Tanegashima. On ‘mainland’ Japan there are numerous branches, and overseas there are groups in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina (there are numerous other *eisā* groups the world over).

RKMD’s leader on Okinoerabu is a Ryūkyūan dance teacher, Teruyo Sakasegawa, who started the branch on the island along with Shūichi Maeda (Deputy Mayor of Wadamari

⁶ Another *eisā* organisation is Yoron Bugenkō, although as the smallest of the three influential organisations it has only branches in Tōkyō, Ōsaka and Yoron.

town). Most of the members, who number around 100, are teenagers up to about 18 years old, but they do have other members, both younger and older. Members come from all around the island and not only Wadamari town, although the town does make good use of the group at special events. Sakasegawa was inspired to learn *eisā* after meeting the chairman of RKMD during a work trip elsewhere in Japan. She then went to Okinawa and was inspired by watching students performing *eisā* and thought that it should be adopted in Okinoerabu. RKMD then sent a teacher to the island from Okinawa who worked on training senior high school students once a month. These high school students in turn taught junior high school and elementary school students. When members of the group move to other parts of Japan they are able to join RKMD branches in their local area, and some then return to the island (eg, after university graduation).

One public performance of the group that was observed during fieldwork in 2015 was outside the airport terminal on Okinoerabu island, where a group of senior high-school students were dancing in group formation while carrying and beating bright red drums of various size and including some vocal interjections between song lines (eg, *iyāsāsā*) and occasionally whistling and stamping (Figure 2; Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko, 2016). The eight second- and third-grade female students were dancing to recorded music being played over a small public address system and had an appreciative audience standing around them, including the two authors of this article. The purpose of the event was to contribute to welcoming several new school teachers to the island. What made the event particularly interesting was that it helped showcase the group's performance as an important part of the island's culture that the students wanted to use to express island identity. While the performance observed at the airport gave the impression that it was a type of traditional performance of the island (albeit recontextualised with its recorded music), closer study of the history of *eisā* on Okinoerabu reveals that it is actually a relatively new phenomenon, having been adopted about 20 years earlier, and having roots in Okinawa.

The social and cultural flows of *eisā* since being adopted on Okinoerabu have seen the dance-drum style being transmitted to other parts of Japan. As well as an Amami Taiko Festival (Amami Taiko Matsuri) that was particularly active between 2000 and 2011 (Johnson and Kuwahara, 2013a), which included *wadaiko* and *eisā* groups in the Amami islands, there is also a broader Japanese connection with *eisā* in the form of regional organisations for Okinoerabu islanders who have moved elsewhere in Japan. In Kobe, for example, *eisā* is practiced by members of the Okishū-kai (the organisation that brings Okinoerabu islanders together while living outside the island in this particular location), which was established by graduates of Okinoerabu High School who had been members of their school's *eisā* team and had subsequently moved to Kobe (Takahashi, 2004: 188).

With such *eisā* organisations, Okinoerabu *eisā* practitioners reinforce their cultural identity through networks that operate within, between and across island, regional, national and international contexts. Through such creative terrains, *eisā* becomes a transregional phenomenon whose very existence helps define the style on Okinoerabu. The different layers of geographical context expose a creative practice that is defined by its ability to cross locations, link different regions and be adopted by locals in different settings. Within each sphere of connectivity, the dance-drum style inherently indexes Okinawa through organisational affiliation and cultural capital.

Contexts for Learning *Eisā*

On Okinoerabu there are several other *eisā* groups that are specific to the island who are actively learning, performing and transmitting this performing art in local context. Oki-Kō *Eisā*-bu (OKEB) is an *eisā* club at Okinoerabu High School and is taught by Yoshinobu Sōmura, who also leads Buyū Beat (see later) and works for the China Town Office (see Okinoerabu Kōkō *Eisā*-bu, 2016). Originally called Okinoerabu Kōkō *Eisā*-tai (a ‘team’ as opposed to a ‘club’ [-*bu*]), and developing from special *eisā* workshops held at the school, as noted above, OKEB now has *eisā* groups in each of its three years, although third-year students do not take *eisā* past the summer months because they have school examinations to focus on. The timing of the introduction of *eisā* at the school also relates to a new government educational policy in 1993 that introduced a part of the curriculum that allowed students to learn local folk arts. The setting for learning *eisā* at the school is that students can choose between taking sports or *eisā*. *Eisā* was performed by students at the school in 1996 in the wake of the influence of *eisā* at the Atlanta Summer Olympics when, as noted above, Kina took a team to the US to perform (Mixi, 2016). Eighteen Okinoerabu High School students travelled as part of Kina’s team, and an *eisā* club was formed at the school soon after.



Figure 2 - Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko *eisā* performers at Okinoerabu island airport.
Photograph by Henry Johnson (March 2015).

Suzuko Yoshimoto was the school’s first *eisā* teacher. She was also a gym teacher at the school and taught dance before focusing on *eisā*. Yoshimoto devised some modern choreography to go with several songs to accompany *eisā*, including ‘Erabu Yuri no Hana’, which is a well-known ‘new’ folk song (*shin min’yō*) and about Okinoerabu, and ‘Saisai

Bushi'. Yoshimoto saw Kina when he came to the island and performed *eisā* as part of his 'Sabani Peace Connection' in 1995 and she was very moved by his performance and thereafter introduced *eisā* to the school. She went to Atlanta with Kina's *eisā* group. Yoshimoto also learned from Yoshihiro Sō (see above) and in Okinawa. Because of the influence of Kina's Uruma *Eisā* on the island, members of that group travelled to Okinoerabu on several occasions to teach *eisā* at the high school for intensive periods. While not having ongoing connections with a distinct Okinawan *eisā* group or organisation, like RKMD, the school's *eisā* has developed with its own interpretation of the style. Yoshimoto left the school in 1997, and the teacher that took over from her was Wakako Wakayama, who developed the group's style and repertoire. Wakayama subsequently took a group of about 40 of the school's students to Hong Kong (a sister city of Kagoshima city) where they performed *eisā*.

Students learn *eisā* after school and on Saturday mornings. As a way of ensuring the sustainability of the group at the school, senior students provide some teaching of junior students. The group's repertoire consists of about 30 pieces and includes traditional Okinawan folk songs, Okinawan neo-traditional popular music, and some well-known folk songs connected with Okinoerabu. The traditional repertoire from Okinawa includes 'Asadoya Yunta', 'Katami Bushi' and 'Chunjun Nagari'. For the traditional songs, the group sometimes has live instrumentalists playing *sanshin* and singing, who might also be students at the school, although the use of recorded music is predominant. The neo-traditional popular music includes two songs by BEGIN (a band from Ishigaki in southern Okinawa): 'Sanshin no Hana' and 'Oji Jiman no Orion Bīru', and 'Shimauta' by The Boom (a band from mainland Japan, but inspired by Okinawan music). From the island, the group dances to several well-known new folk songs, such as 'Erabu Yuri no Hana' and 'Nachikasha nu Shima' ('Natsukashi Shima'). The group has even danced *eisā* to the music of Lady Gaga, thus showing how its members engage with popular culture as a way of constructing a contemporary musical identity on the island. The group's performance settings are vast and include such locations as performance contests, hotels, ceremonies and festivals. There were about 20–25 students learning *eisā* at the school in 2015, and they were all female students except for one male student. The *eisā* club is one of 3 culture clubs at the school, and there are 13 sports clubs. This distribution of gender has been typical of *eisā* and sports at the school with male students usually opting for sports over *eisā*. In terms of the instruments used by the group, the school has about 12 *ōdaiko* (a large double-skin barrel drum that is carried by the player using a strap) and many *shimedaiko* (a small double-skin hand drum) and *pāranku* (single-skin hand drum). At the school, the students are able to make wooden drum sticks (*bachī*) from *yūna no ki* (a type of wood – *Hibiscus tiliaceus*) and also *shimedaiko*, the body of which is made from thick cardboard, which is very light to carry for use by *eisā* performers (they purchase their *pāranku* and *ōdaiko* from drum suppliers). At the school, there are many visual signifiers of *eisā* that help show its significance to this community with numerous posters of the group over many years, along with a DVD that was made primarily for group members.

As an example of one of the local folk songs danced to by *eisā* performers all over Okinoerabu, the song 'Erabu Yuri no Hana', which dates from 1932, is one piece that helps show a distinct localisation and celebration of *eisā* as Okinoerabu culture. Okinoerabu is known for its flowers and limestone caves and the lyrics of the song 'Erabu Yuri no Hana' ('The Lily Flower of Okinoerabu'), portrays a flower that is especially significant for the island. The island's white lily (*Erabu-teppō-yuri*; Latin: *Lilium longiflorum*), which is exported internationally, is known also as the Easter or Trumpet Lily. It grows to about one metre in height, is known in the northern Nansei islands and southern Kyūshū, and is

named after the *teppō* matchlock rifle that was introduced in the sixteenth century by Portuguese to Tanegashima (an island just south of Kyūshū) (Walker, 2014). The locally-themed lyrics of the first verse, which was written by Teizen Yamaguchi, reveal not only reference to the flower, but also to the island and America, thus signifying Okinoerabu islandness and a global link:

<i>Erabu yuri nu hana</i>	The lilies of [Okino]Erabu [island]
<i>Amerika ni sakachi yarikunu, sakachi yarikunu</i>	Let them bloom across the sea in America
<i>Uri ga kuganibana shima ni yōsakasa</i>	Our golden flowers, let them bloom on our island

Nowadays, as well as being well-known in the Amami islands, Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan, ‘Erabu Yuri no Hana’ is found in several different versions. Traditionally, the two towns on Okinoerabu have sometimes used a slightly different version based on the number of verses (Shirakawa, 2014: 48–51), and there are also versions in modern and upbeat styles (eg a version recorded by Rikki in 1998). In connection with *eisā* on the island, performers use different versions of the song, including traditional and upbeat styles (eg see the videos *Erabu Yuri no Hana* and *Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko*, which are both by RKMD).⁷ However, what stands out with this song is that while it is found in various styles, it clearly indexes the island and the cultural identity of its *eisā* performers.

The Ryūkyūan dance (*Ryū-bu*) teacher, Itoko Nishi, runs a private dance studio (*dōjō*) in China town (China-chō) that includes some *eisā* training. Nishi learned *eisā* from Yoshihiro Sō, who had learned Uruma *Eisā* as brought to the island by Kina in the 1990s, and already had an interest in *eisā* and had been teaching the style to some of her students (Takahashi, 2004: 186–187). She was one of the inaugural members of Erabu Yononushi Uruma *Eisā* (ibid: 187). As a result of her activism in China town, in 2005 she started the *eisā* group China-chō *Eisā* Aikō-kai (CEA), which is for children, although some of their parents join in. CEA nowadays has around 80 students between both of the schools at which it teaches. Nishi decided to operate from the primary school in Tamina because that location is somewhat remote on the island and she wanted to support such a community. While the group performs to the usual repertoire of traditional and neo-traditional Okinawan music, it has even extended its repertoire by performing to recorded music from contemporary *anime* (animation) movies, which are very popular with students. With the current teacher of the group, Saori Nishi, there is an interesting transmission of *eisā* learners. Sō Yoshihiro taught Itoko Nishi; and Itoko Nishi taught her daughter, Saori Nishi. Therefore, with the current leader of CEA, there is a third generation of teachers on the island in the space of just over 20 years, and with another generation of student learners continuing the tradition.

The *eisā* group called Buyū Beat, which was established in 2010, is led by Yoshinobu Sōmura (who also teaches *eisā* at Okinoerabu High School) (Buyū Beat, 2016). The group usually practices once a week for three hours and most members are former students of OKEB. In 2010, the group won first prize in the *eisā* section at a Kagoshima prefectural

⁷ See *Erabu Yuri no Hana* online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Deq5DBBliGE> – accessed October 20th, 2016 and *Ryūkyū Koku Matsuri Daiko Okinoerabu-jima kūkō de kangei ibento* online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p58ohtlOk7k> – accessed October 20th, 2016. The upbeat version of ‘Erabu Yuri no Hana’ accompanying RKMD was arranged by a musician from Yaeyama, Hidekatsu, and sung by Okinawan performer, Namiko.

youth festival and second prize in the national event (see below). In 2014, the group had 13–14 members and had about 20 *eisā* pieces in its repertoire. About 15–16 pieces in the group's repertoire are from Okinawa and it considers these pieces to be traditional. Sōmura has choreographed three original dance routines for the group, which follows the more typical practice on the island of dancing to recorded music of neo-traditional or popular music that usually has Okinawan roots or musical influences.

One member of Buyū Beat is Toshie Higashi, a female *eisā* performer who was once a member of OKEB. She learned *eisā* at the school from Suzuko Yoshimoto. Higashi became a gym teacher and taught at Okinoerabu High School for several years, along with teaching *eisā*, and she taught Sōmura when he attended the school. She was responsible for changing the suffix in OKEB's name from *-tai* to *-bu*, which was in 2005. During Sōmura's time at the school he could take *eisā* and sports, but when *eisā* became a club students could not take both options. From this point, most male students have preferred sports and most female students prefer *eisā*. Also, the number of students taking *eisā* halved to about 20–30, which allowed the teaching to become more manageable. After Higashi left the school the *eisā* group went into a period of decline, and once Sōmura returned from living in Chiba in mainland Japan the two of them started Buyū Beat with about 5–6 initial members. They entered the 59th Prefectural Youth Contest (Kagoshima-ken Seinen Taikai) in 2010 as a Youth Council team from China town (China-chō Seinen Taikai Seinen Renraku Kyōgi-kai) and won the section on local performing arts (*kyōdo geinō*), and then came second in the same year in the 59th National Youth Competition (Zenkoku Seinen Taikai) held in Tōkyō. As a result, they became very well-known on the island and membership increased.

Sōmura is especially proud of his choreography for the piece 'Dainamikku Ryūkyū' ('Dynamic Ryūkyū'), with music by Akira Ikuma and lyrics by Daiichi Hirata. Ikuma is from Fukuoka in Kyūshū and is an Okinawa-based performer and songwriter who has collaborated with *eisā* performers on many occasions, which is evident on his album, *Dainamikku Ryūkyū*, and the song itself makes many references to the Okinawan setting of an island, sea and drums. Sōmura also performs pieces such as 'Tōshin Dōi' ('A Chinese Boat is Coming'), which is especially popular in Okinawa as a closing song and dance with audience participation, and 'Sōran Bushi',⁸ as well as collaborating with *yosakoi*⁹ performers. Sōmura's original choreography comprises dance moves to commercial recorded music, either (neo-)traditional or modern. He feels an affinity to Okinoerabu when he performs *eisā*, and if he looks culturally outside of the island he looks to Okinawa rather than to Amami.

As a site of creative practice, Buyū Beat is wrapped in layers of meaning that help reinforce the contemporary place of *eisā* on Okinoerabu and offers a further context for the sustainability of this recently transplanted performance style to the island. Sōmura noted that in Okinawa women were traditionally not associated with *eisā* drumming in its ritual

⁸ 'Sōran Bushi' was originally a fishing song from Hokkaidō in the far north of Japan, but has more recently become popular as a song with dance all around Japan. Kina Shōkichi made his own version of the song, which was a transformation in terms of lyrics, meaning of the title (using different *kanji*) and instrumentation (ie, in a rock band setting and using *sanshin*) (Hughes, 1999).

⁹ As with 'Sōran Bushi', *yosakoi* is a type of Japanese folk music that has been transformed and popularized all over Japan (Takahashi, M, 2013). The *yosakoi* (folk song/dance) group on Okinoerabu called Naruko DE Seryōsa includes some small *eisā* hand drums (*pārānkū*) in some of its *yosakoi-naruko* dance routines (Kochi City Tourism Association, 2006).

setting, but they did often play drums when it became a staged performance genre, and that Okinoerabu only had the style in its modern transformation and with many female performers (Johnson, 2008; Okaze, 1992). In other words, *eisā* had moved from its traditional ritual Bon (Buddhist festival) context to one of staged or cultural performance, which has also been the case in much of Okinawa and amongst the various *eisā* groups that have spread the style to other locations in Japan and overseas. His reference to Okinawa and, in this case, the Bon setting, reinforces a perception of the roots of the style and its subsequent recontextualisation as a modern cultural performance.

Conclusion

On Okinoerabu a transregional identity is expressed through *eisā* in many ways. In this article, various layers of geographical identity have been unwrapped to show how *eisā* is expressed as a heightened cultural expression that demarcates a sense of belonging within a range of settings. On Okinoerabu, this recently adopted creative performing art is nowadays actively learned as a form of cultural capital by islanders in primary school, senior high school, post-school context, diaspora settings and in the community more broadly (some teachers are active in different groups, and may have *eisā* connections beyond the island's physical borders). *Eisā* in this small island setting is a transplanted performance style that has been localised and transformed as a result of Okinoerabu's distinct historical, political and cultural position in the Nansei and Amami islands. Some of the island's *eisā* performers have travelled to North America and Hong Kong, and to other Nansei islands and mainland Japan, and in just over 20 years, *eisā* on Okinoerabu has been a part of a rapid social transmission of cultural knowledge that has transregional identity at its core.

Eisā on Okinoerabu exists as a result of inter- and intra-island cultural flows, musical adoption and cultural transformation, where north and south meet in terms of a geographical confluence of internal and external influences. While there are many *eisā* traits that provide signifiers of cultural meaning that index Okinawa on the one hand, and the Amami islands and Kagoshima on the other, a closer study reveals cultural connections that link Okinoerabu through *eisā* to different local, regional and broader cultural spheres that show how islanders express a transregional identity that is layered in geographical and cultural reference and difference. On Okinoerabu, such regional, cultural and island identity is wrapped in meaning, the unwrapping of which helps in comprehending how one island location expresses a recently adopted local performing art within, between and across a range of geographical, creative and cultural settings. It is with such an island location of cultural flows that a significant aspect of local identity is located in transregional and archipelagic context.

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