

FROM LOCAL MEDIA TO VENDING MACHINES

Innovative ways of sustaining Okinawa's *shimakutuba* and island culture¹

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ABSTRACT: This article, referring to the notion of island communicative ecology, explores the role of local Okinawan initiatives for language revitalisation through community radio and island cultural agents, especially focusing on the activities of an individual, Minoru Ikehara, his private information and communications technology company, Crest Co. Ltd and their innovative use of vending machines. In Okinawa, the movement for re-introducing *shimakutuba* (community languages) officially started in 2006 when Okinawa Prefecture's legislated *Shimakutuba no hi* ('Community Languages Day'). Since then, local governing bodies have increased their language revitalisation efforts especially at school level. However, there have been difficulties with allocating time for *shimakutuba* education under the control of Japanese government curriculum guidelines. The choice of which language to work with, among various *shimakutuba* nurtured in each island community, has also raised endless discussions. As a top-down approach is not sufficient, the local media and grassroots efforts have played an important role for in the language revitalisation process.

KEYWORDS: Okinawa, *shimakutuba* language revitalisation, vending machines, island communicative ecology, island cultural agents, community radio

Introduction

This article builds on Papoutsaki and Kuwahara's (2018) concept of island contextualised communicative ecology (ICE),² which refers to the various forms, resources, activities,

¹ In this article we use the revised Hepburn system of romanisation of Japanese and Okinawan written language and macrons are added to terms that have long vowels, including proper nouns transliterated into English without macrons, eg *Ryūkyū Shimpō* (*Ryukyu Shimpō*). An exception is *Ryukyu*, which is used as an English word.

² Based on the concept of communicative ecology developed by Tacchi et al (2003) and Hearn and Foth (2007).

channels and flows of communication and information unique to an island or group of islands. It also refers to island context and identity and a milieu of island agents “who are connected in various ways by various exchanges of mediated and unmediated forms of communication” putting “emphasis on the meaning that can be derived from the socio-cultural framing and analysis of the local context which communication occurs in” (Hearn and Foth, 2007: online).

This ecological metaphor provides us with a conceptual framework for understanding the people and culture of Ryukyu through their use of *shimakutuba* (community languages). The word, which consists of *shima* (island/hometown) and *kutuba* (language) is a recent coinage that Okinawa Prefecture adopted when strategic language planning was started in 2006. Karimata refers to *shimakutuba* as not only evoking a village or an island “but also *furusato* (one’s spiritual home)” (Naha City, 2013: 70), so it does not necessarily specify a physical space where the language is spoken. The word *shimakutuba* is distinguished from the most commonly used word for Okinawan language, *Uchināguchi*. *Uchināguchi* indicates a language spoken in the middle and southern part of Okinawa Island and the surrounding islands and excludes the languages of other areas of Okinawa Prefecture such as the northern part of Okinawa Island, Miyako, Yaeyama and the Yonaguni Islands (see Figure 1). Okinawa Prefecture utilised the national ‘Grand Design for the 21st Century’ (the Fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan) formulated in 1998 to promote the independence of local regions and the creation of a beautiful country. In particular, one of the five identified tasks, that of “promoting the independence of regions and creating regions which residents can take pride in” (Kokudo chō, 1998: 128-129), proved a useful reference point for the promotion of distinctive languages.

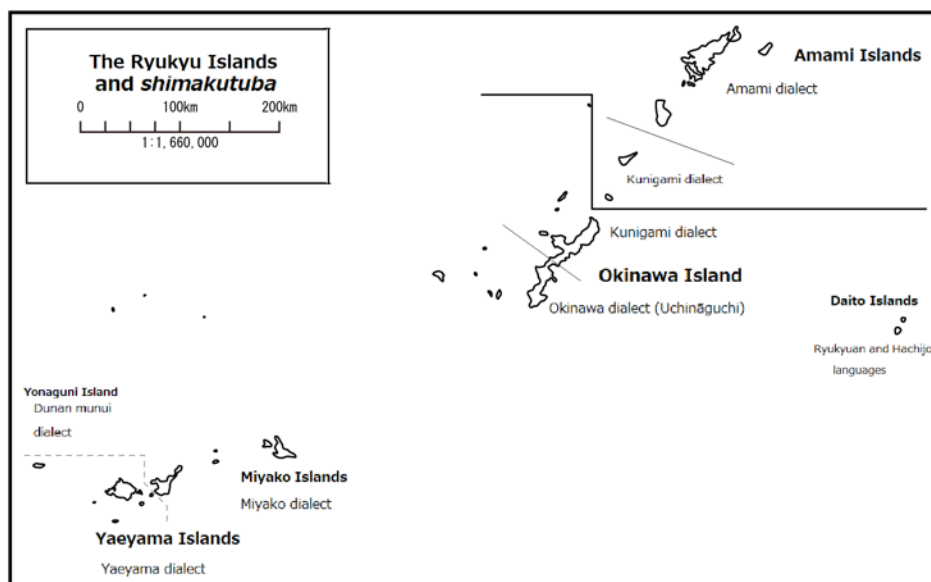


Figure 1 - The Ryukyu Islands and distribution of *shimakutuba*

As Suwa argues (2007), *shima* (denoting both island and community in Japanese), embodies a dual meaning, islands as geographical features and islands as small-scale social groups where cultural interactions are densely intermeshed. *Shima* are also spaces that

communicative performances and distinct meanings of *shimakutuba* fill to produce unique island communicative ecologies (Papoutsaki and Kuwahara, 2018). Patterns of communication exchanges in these contexts develop in various inter-personal, familial, social, cultural and economic networks and accumulate as the communicative ecologies of *shima* (ibid). It is reasonable then to expect the loss of *shimakutuba* to result in changes in the socio-cultural and political ecology of these island communities. Okinawan languages are essential for operating traditional local events and are the foundation of Okinawan cultural forms such as *kumiodori* (musical theatre), Ryukyuan traditional music and dance, and Okinawan *shibai* drama. In 2006, the Okinawa Prefectural House legislated that September 18th would be the date of the annual *Shimakutuba no hi* ('Community Language Day'), which aimed to re-introduce and strengthen *shima* languages.³ Following this, in 2009 UNESCO designated eight languages as endangered in Japan, five of which are spoken in Okinawa prefecture – Yaeyama and Yonaguni (classified as severely endangered) and Kunigami, Okinawa and Miyako (classified as definitely endangered).⁴

This article takes into consideration Okinawa's communication action context (Wilkin et al, 2007), which here refers to the manner in which islanders' socio-cultural and political environment shapes their communicative sociality.⁵ The Ryukyu Islands' maritime history and geopolitical role have resulted in a distinctive island culture that bears witness to the islands' interconnectedness with its natural neighbours and other external, often imposing, forces. In addition to the nature of island-ness, the pressures exerted by China and Japan since the beginning of the Ryukyu kingdom, and by Japanese and US armed forces during and after the Second World War, have shaped the diverse nature of Okinawan communities. At the outset, we provide background on Ryukyuan languages and *shimakutuba*, highlighting the efforts of local governing bodies and other organisations and the role of media in language revitalisation. We then focus on the innovative and enterprising activities of an Okinawan businessman, Minoru Ikehara (1950-) and his company Crest Co. Ltd, and discuss how they contribute towards the revitalisation of *shimakutuba*. We place this person within the communicative ecology and milieu of island agents and ascribe to him the role of a cultural enabler who forms an integral part of the island's storytelling networks.

Ryukyuan languages and *shimakutuba*

The term "Ryukyuan languages" refers to the languages spoken in Amami and in Okinawa Prefecture (Figures 1 and 2). They are thought to be derived from the same proto-language as Japanese and constitute two linguistic branches (Anderson, 2009; Matsumori, 1995; Hokama, 1986/2010; Hattori, 1968). Hokama sets up a hypothesis referring to his own comparative studies of archaic words in the *Omoro Sōshi* (a compilation of ancient poetry from Okinawa) while Hattori's studies on linguistic chronology (1968) posits that the proto-language divided between the 2nd and 7th centuries and the dialects formed around the 11th and 12th centuries. The contact with written Japanese language in 13th Century

³ The numbers of the date "9.18" can be sounded as "ku tu ba" in Ryukyuan languages.

⁴ The other "critically endangered" language is Ainu.

⁵ Adapted from Hartley and Potts (2014), communicative sociality in this context refers to the language/dialects, identity and kinship relationships that bind island communities together. Together with language and identity, story (communication) enables the collective construction of *shima* groups (see Papoutsaki and Kuwahara, 2018).

then stimulated the development of a written Ryukyuan language system. Ryukyuan literature started between the 15th and 16th centuries (Hokama, 1986/2010: 94-104).

In the period of the Ryukyu kingdom (1429-1879), most people spoke their local vernacular and perhaps the Shuri dialect of Japanese that the administrative officials used as a lingua franca. After 1879, to build a unified and modern nation-state, the Japanese government introduced language standardisation throughout the country. In 1880, to facilitate the spread of *futsūgo* (common Japanese language), a communication training centre was established for teachers and interpreters of the Japanese language under the control of the Ministry of Education.⁶ Through compulsory school education, the Japanese language started replacing Ryukyuan quickly in all public domains (Heinrich, 2015). To accomplish the conversion of Okinawans and other Ryukyuan islanders into *kōmin* (imperial subjects), “standardised Japanese” was introduced to the education system (Christy, 1993 in Ginoza, 2019: 49). According to Christy, this education and language standardisation was not simply to facilitate communication in Japanese (as Okinawan was incomprehensible to the Japanese) but to “fundamentally... change thinking process and identificatory impulses” (ibid). By the early 20th Century educational spending had increased to more than half of the prefectural revenue. This had the effect of breaking “the stubborn thought of the Okinawans and assimilating them to the civilisation (*bunmei*) of the home island (*naichi*).” (Ichiki in Ginoza, 2019: 49).

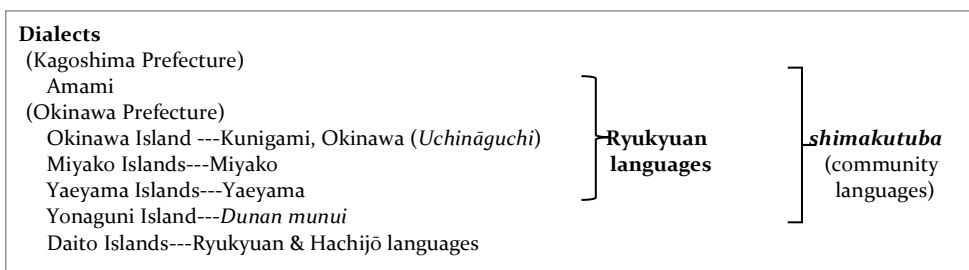


Figure 2 - Ryukyuan languages and *shimakutuba*

In 1940, Muneyoshi Yanagi’s⁷ criticism of the excessive Japanese language education developed into a *hōgen ronsō* (dialect dispute) (Nohara, 2005; Heinrich, 2004 and 2005; Itani, 2006 and Kondō, 2006).⁸ On the other hand, Okinawa Prefecture promoted a campaign of *hyōjungo* (standard language) that was followed by an enthusiastic campaign to change manners and customs to standard Japanese style, especially for Okinawan emigrants (Shinjō, 2017: 114-115). As a result, between 1939 and 1945 the Ryukyuan languages commonly spoken in family and the neighbourhood settings were increasingly replaced by standard Japanese (Heinrich, 2015).

⁶ The communication training centre - *kaiwa denshūjo* - was replaced by the Okinawan *shihan gakkō* (Okinawa Normal School) after four months. The word *futsūgo* was changed to *hyōjungo* (standard language) after 1935.

⁷ Muneyoshi Yanagi was the first president of *Mingei Kyōkai* (‘the Japan Folk Handicraft Association’).

⁸ Since the end of the 19th Century, Ryukyuan languages were framed as *dai-hōgen* (‘greater dialects’) of the national language Japanese (Heinrich and Ishihara, 2017: 168). This has caused long discussions (see Anderson 2009).

After the Second World War, US authorities occupying Okinawa spread pro-Ryukyuan/anti-Japanese propaganda to distance Ryukyu from Japan, and the use of the Ryukyuan languages and English were encouraged (Heinrich, 2005: 5). However, according to Anderson (2009: 261-268), intergenerational transmission loss occurred rapidly between about 1950 and 1954. Possible reasons include the promotion of Japanese language ideology, reaction against the US occupation, post-war hardship that perceived language not to be a priority, criticism of unskilled speakers and loss of proficiency in formal language and in-group solidarity/conformity (ibid).

After the 1950s, the US armed forces took large parts of the islands to build several bases, which scattered people away from their birthplaces/*shima*.⁹ For example, the most urbanised area in Okinawa Prefecture, Naha, was built as a “mosaic city” (Yoshikawa, 1989), its population consisting of internal migrants who had moved from villages and other islands due to poverty or displacement by US base building. They often established residents’ associations or *kyōyūkai* (associations of people from the same birthplace/spiritual home) as alternative expressions of *shima* and as a way of maintaining their island connections. As each *shima* shared a common language in accordance with its custom (Deguchi, 2001: 36-38), many of these institutions and associations were formed with a focus on various cultural activities concerned with *shimakutuba*.

Ishihara’s (2015: 36) analysis of three recent surveys on the use of *shimakutuba* indicates that many Okinawans feel familiar with *shimakutuba* and wish their children and grandchildren to speak them. However, this positive attitude toward *shimakutuba* does correspond to language behaviour: only elderly people are fluent speakers, while the middle-aged are unpractised or semi speakers. Elderly people have little opportunity to meet with their grandchildren living away from their village and middle-aged parents cannot speak in *shimakutuba* to their children. As a result, the number of *shimakutuba* speakers in their twenties and teenagers is under 10% (ibid: 36-37). Several voices have stressed that discrimination and forced assimilation of Okinawans has never ceased.¹⁰ Ginoza (2019), however, argues that the ongoing Japanese assimilation policy has not been completely successful and has been recently actively confronted by Okinawans positioning themselves as different to Japanese. This difference manifested in 2013 with the emergence of the *Uchināguchi* language revival movement driven by the Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans¹¹ (Ginoza, 2019: 56).

Shimakutuba revitalisation efforts

Okinawa Prefecture recently introduced steps towards more strategic language planning.¹² With the legislating of *Shimakutuba no hi*, a commemorative symposium was held in 2006 where an *Uchināguchi* (Okinawan language) play was performed. In 2012, Okinawa Prefecture committed to preserving *shimakutuba* as the base of Ryukyuan culture in an

⁹ These bases today occupy 20% of the island of Okinawa and host over 70% of the US armed forces in Japan.

¹⁰ See Kikuyama (1992); Akamine (2003) and Arashiro (2014) - cited in Ginoza 2019.

¹¹ An alternative spelling of the phonetic term Ryukyuns which was used by US Commander Perry when he visited Okinawa in 1853.

¹² Efforts by other municipalities include the Naha City Board of Education publishing a reader for elementary school classes (2013), and Nishihara Town Community Centre’s opening of four courses of *shimakutuba* in 2014 (Ishihara, 2015: 30-31).

initiative entitled Okinawa 21 *Seiki Bijon Kihon Keikaku* ('Okinawa 21st Century vision master plan'). In 2013, under the plan for 10 years' promotion of *Shimakutuba*, a prefectural campaign of community languages took place involving municipal governments, schools, mass media, private corporations and ordinary citizens. The first *Shimakutuba Kenmin Taikai* (gathering of citizens for community languages) was held in 2013, and in 2014, Okinawa Prefecture Division of Culture, Tourism and Sports (hence, OPDCTS) published a *shimakutuba* calendar with *kugani kutuba* (proverbs) and a language manual entitled *Katati Ndana Shimakutuba* ('Let's speak community languages'). In 2015, OPDCTS published *Shimakutuba Tokuhon* ('the companion reader to *shimakutuba*') for elementary and junior high schools (Heinrich and Ishihara, 2017: 172-177).¹³ OPDCTS also offers information on related activities on its website. However, introducing *shimakutuba* into existing frameworks of school education has been challenging due to the fact that *kokugo* (the national language) curriculum operates under Japanese central government guidelines.¹⁴ In addition, official accreditation for Ryukyuan language teachers does not exist (Nakamoto, Oshiro and Murakami, 2013; Ishihara, 2015).

In 2017, the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts (OPUA), managed by OPDCTS, started a program for developing practical *shimakutuba* education. Influenced by the *Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani* (College of Hawaiian Language) at the University of Hawaii at Hilo (UHH),¹⁵ the project attempts to instruct students in Ryukyuan traditional dance and music using Shuri/Naha dialects that had been used in the Ryukyu court and Okinawa *shibai*. OPDCTS also established *Shimautuba Fukyū Sentā* ('Centre for Revitalising Shimakutuba' - CRS) via the *Chūki Shimautuba Fukyūsuishin Kōdō Keikaku* ('Act for the medium-term planning for the revitalisation of *shimakutuba*') in 2017. The Centre functions as a core for the revitalisation of *shimakutuba* and coordinates with other organisations in order to progress its re-introduction and transmission of local language.¹⁶

Civil society's efforts to revitalise *shimakutuba* started around 2000. The *Okinawa Hōgen Fukyū Kyōgikai*¹⁷ ('Society of Okinawan Dialect Revitalisation'), founded in 2000, grew its membership to over 200 when multiple branches were created in 2001. This Society promotes the introduction of *Uchināguchi* to school curriculums and established a unified system for writing *Uchināguchi* in *katakana*, which was published in a beginners' textbook for elementary school students (Anderson, 2014: 14). The *Uchināguchi Bukai Nahashi Bunka Kyōkai* ('Okinawan language group of the Cultural Association of Naha City') was established in 2001 with the staging of Tatsuhiko Oshiro's Okinawan comic drama *Uchināguchi banzai* in cooperation with performers, actors and scholars of Okinawan traditional music and theatre. The organisation Okinawa Hands-on, established in 2002, has also been active in making documentary films. Entering into partnership with FM Ginowan, these films are broadcast as one-hour programs entitled *Chimu Ganasa Shimakutuba Nusu* ('News in *shimakutuba* with our heart') every Tuesday and

¹³ The materials can be downloaded from the OPDCTS webpage. Also note criticisms of "salvage linguistics" referring to approaches that only produce documentation (Sugita, 2007; Anderson, 2014: 2).

¹⁴ *Shimakutuba* lessons can be given as part of "the comprehensive learning period" that involves 70 hours classes for 3-6 grades of elementary, 50-70 hours for junior high school students and 3-5 units for high school students.

¹⁵ See the college's website for historical information and recent projects.

¹⁶ CRS gradually emphasised vernacular/community languages, publishing manuals on local languages from Yomitan and Nago on Okinawa island in 2019 (see Shimakutoba website).

¹⁷ The organisation changed its name to *Okinawago Fukyū Kyōkai* in 2006.

simultaneously uploaded on YouTube.¹⁸ Okinawaken Uchināguchikai ('Association of Okinawan language in Okinawa Prefecture'), which operates in the middle to north part of Okinawa Island, is also notable. In 2016 it carried out various activities such as sending a lecturer to a *hōgen* school club, participating in events and opening *shimakutuba* courses.

These non-profit organisations (NPOs) and their various activities in nurturing *shimakutuba* are scattered across Okinawa. To connect them, the *Shimakutuba Renraku Kyōgikai* ('Council of Connecting Community Languages') was established in 2013. This is where Minoru Ikehara, comes into the picture with his election as the second Council president and his relocation of the Council office to Crest Co., Ltd (hence, Crest) in 2016.¹⁹ Ikehara and his company Crest also hosted a significant symposium in the same year entitled *Hawaigo Fukkō ni Manabu: Gakkō Genba ni Okeru Shimakutuba Kyōiku ni Mukete* ('Learning from the Revitalisation of Hawaiian Language: Toward School Education in *Shimakutuba*') in association with the 6th World *Uchinānchu* Festival in October 2016.²⁰

The role of mediated communication in *shimakutuba* revitalisation

Audiovisual and online media play an important role in *shimakutuba* revitalisation. For example, the *Okinawa Times* produced podcasts and promoted articles written in *shimakutuba* entitled *Shūkan Shimakutuba Shinbun Uchinā Taimusu* ('Weekly *Shimakutuba* Newspaper') on a dedicated page in 2013-2019.²¹ A five-minutes program entitled *Uchinā de Asobō* ('Let's Play in Okinawan') has been broadcast by the public broadcaster, NHK, in Okinawa since 2010 for parents and children, and has been put online so viewers can access past programs and learn *shimakutuba* in their own time. Information on other three to five-minute language programs broadcast by the local commercial broadcasters RBC (the Ryukyu Broadcasting Co.) and OTV (Okinawa Television Broadcasting Co.) is also available on the Okinawa Prefecture website.

Due to the strong link classical and folk music and dance have with *shimakutuba*, the broadcasting of local cultural content has made a solid contribution to language preservation. NHK Okinawa produces *Okinawa no Uta to Odori* ('Songs and Dances of Okinawa'), a regular program that covers Ryukyuan traditional dance, *kumiodori*, folk songs and Okinawan theatre on one Friday every month (including celebrity performances from the archives). Similar programs transmitted by commercial broadcasters include OTV's *Kyōdo Gekijō* ('Local theatre'); RBC's *Shimanchu nu Takara* ('Islanders' treasure'); and a local information program entitled *Kokizami plus* broadcast by QAB (the Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting Co.). However, these are exceptions. Most programs are made by key Tokyo stations and cable TV broadcasts local news and events. Notable exceptions are

¹⁸ By interviewing students, teachers, elders, artists and academics, this NPO tries to share contrasting and sometimes controversial views in order to maintain the community's strong ties via *shimakutuba*, and to reconnect *Uchinānchu* around the world. For further discussion, see Heinrich and Ishihara (2017: 178-180).

¹⁹ The first president, Yoshimi Teruya was elected as the political advisor of Okinawa Prefecture on 1st August 2015 and Ikehara succeeded him.

²⁰ The panle, including a linguist, Yumiko Ohara as an interpreter, five speakers from *Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani*, UHH and Eric Wada from *Ukanshin Kabudan* drew parallels with the revitalisation of languages in Hawai'i. This event was co-sponsored by *Shimakutuba Renraku Kyōgikai* and the *Okinawa Uchināguchikai* and *Okinawaken Okinawago Fukyū Kyōkai*.

²¹ The service ended with issue 298 on 31st March 2019.

Okinawa Cable Network (OCN), Ishigaki Cable TV (ICT) and Miyako TV (MTV), which broadcast independently produced programs. Among these, MTV's program is unique in broadcasting in Miyako language with Japanese subtitles.

Radio programs related to *shimakutuba* are introduced on CRS's website and comprise:

- *Hōgen nyūsu* ('Dialect news'), a five-minute program starting at 1pm every weekday (since 1960);
- *Akachichi dēbiru* ('At break of dawn'), a one-hour program starting at 5am every weekday on Radio Okinawa (ROK) (since 1986);
- *Minyō de chū wuganabira* ('Bouquet of folk songs'), a 54-minute program starting at 4pm on Radio Okinawa (RBC) (since 1963);
- *Okinawa neccyū kurabu* ('Enthusiasm about Okinawa'), a 50-minute program starting at 5pm on the last Friday of every month on NHK Okinawa Daiichi Hōsō (NHK) (since 2007);
- *Okinawa Music jānī* ('Journey to Okinawan music'), a 50-minute program starting at 6pm on the first Friday every month on NHK FM (since 2010); and
- *Rinken Bando no tanmē karahāi* ('Grandpa's compass by Rinken Band'), a 30-minute program starting at 10pm every Sunday (since 2014) on FM Okinawa.²²

Among these, *Hōgen nyūsu*, an independently produced program which is archived as a podcast, has directly focused on the language since the station opened. Promoted as *Rōkaru ni Tessuru* ('being devoted to local'), ROK's *Hōgen nyūsu* encourages personalities and readers to speak *Uchināguchi* (Okinawa Times, June 27, 2001, cited by Anderson 2014: 12), and a number of Ryukyuan language speaking personalities have lead some of the 30-minute programs. The other, longest-lived independently produced program since 1960 is RBC's *Minyō no hanataba*.²³ ROK has also contributed to *shimakutuba* revitalisation by hosting *Miuta Taishō*, a contest for new folk song composition, since 1990. ROK encourages younger monolingual generation in Japanese or *Uchinā-yamatuguchi* (Okinawa-substrate Japanese) speakers to write a new folk song in *shimakutuba* accompanied by traditional Okinawan musical instruments such as *sanshin* (a long-neck plucked lute with three strings), *tēku* (drum), *samba* (wooden castanets), *kutu* (zither) and *fue* (flute) (Tottoribe, 2010). The prize winners' songs are subsequently broadcast on station. In 2010, ROK published a CD of recordings of winners' songs from 1990 to 2009 as a commemoration of its 50 years in operation.

Nineteen of the 318 community FM stations in Japan are in Okinawa. The ratio of community FM stations per head of the population in Okinawa (1 station per 76,513 people)²⁴ is currently the highest among prefectures. After the revision of the Japanese Broadcasting Act in 1992, community FM stations in Okinawa rapidly increased. The oldest, FM Koza (Okinawa City), opened in March 1997, and FM Taman (Itoman City) in

²² Information on these programs was obtained from the *Shimakutuba Fukyū Sentā* website in 2020.

²³ Interview with the director, Takako Ari (November, 2017).

²⁴ Calculated on the basis of the population being 453,750 on 1st September 2019.

April that year, followed by FM21 in Urasoe City and FM Naha in 2001. The newest one is Heart FM Nanjo (Nanjo City), which opened in March 2018. While some follow a commercial model, others are operated on a not-for-profit model by volunteers. However, maintaining a community FM station is difficult for financial reasons (Matsuura et al, 2010: 92). Some stations get grants from the municipality by operating as part of the emergency broadcasting system (*bōsai musen*). Others, such as FM Naha, whose executive chairman Tōsei Taira stated that the station is commercially managed, does not accept grants in order to keep independence from governmental policy (interview, June 2018).

Each station is characterised by its own mission and program content, as well as location. The independently produced programs on FM Lequio in Naha City mainly feature old Japanese songs. Between the songs, a host personality or guest shares their own story in *Uchinā-yamatuguchi*. This programming model, based on FM21 in Urasoe City (Matsumoto 2018), involves a presenter code-switching between *Uchināguchi* and Japanese on air. As Anderson has identified, apart from greetings and other set phrases such as interjections, the majority of the programs are in Japanese (2014: 12). On the other hand, the number of programs that commit to revitalising *shimakutuba* is slightly increasing, although the ratio is small. On the CRS website there are single programs from FM Naha, FM Motobu, and FM Ishigaki, two programs from FM Yanbaru, FM Koza, and FM Ginowan, three programs from Ginowan City FM, FM Yomitan, and FM Nirai (with others on web radio), four programs from FM Nanjo, and FM Taman, five programs from FM 21, and six programs from FM Kumejima. These include news, talks, music and comedy in *shimakutuba*.

Due to the limited range of transmitters, community FM radio station signals do not reach all areas of the prefecture. However, many stations simultaneously broadcast or else upload the programs as webcasts, on YouTube, or as podcast archives for wider listeners. Internet platforms are increasingly developing initiatives for revitalising *shimakutuba* (Heinrich and Ishihara, 2017: 180). However, it requires a strong will, motivation, ability and/or the correct device for people to access them. In this sense, using ICT alone is insufficient to sustain the language revitalisation movement.

Shimakutuba Hōsōkyoku, FM Nirai and vending machines: culture and language in island enterprise

Whilst the research that informs this article was initiated to expand on the work of Papoutsaki and Kuwahara (2018) on island community media and their role in island communicative ecologies, our first encounter with Ikehara resulted, rather serendipitously,²⁵ in our shifting our focus to *shimakutuba* revitalisation efforts that we believe link with community media in a rhizomatic fashion. Adapting Carpentier's (2016) work on community media, Papoutsaki and Kuawaha (2018) take a rhizomatic approach to island communicative ecologies, arguing that their approach articulates more explicitly the diversity, complexity, contingency and fluidity of island communication networks and agents. Island community media, unlike their mainland/national counterparts, can be regarded as part of a more fluid, inter-connected island network system that embraces both individual and collective agents.

²⁵ Serendipity - the art of making an unsought finding - as opposed to purposeful discovery by experiment or retrospective prophecy, has a recognised role in ethnographic practice (see Rivoal and Salazar, 2013).

Minoru Ikehara was born in 1950, in the aftermath of the Battle of Okinawa that destroyed large areas of the island and killed one third of its inhabitants; a trauma compounded by 27 years of US occupation and the continuing presence of US military bases on the island. Ikehara grew up speaking Japanese in public and in school, in an environment where *shimakutuba* was looked down on, and his only exposure to *shimakutuba* was at home with his parents. He studied engineering at the University of the Ryukyus, which, at the time, was housed at Naha's iconic Shuri Castle. He subsequently built a business around medical equipment services, developed his company and became the chairman of the Kadena town Chamber of Commerce and Industry. But it was not until the Okinawan Prefecture declared a *Shimakutuba* Day in 2006 that he felt he could be proud of his island language. As he has stated, "all Okinawan culture consists of *shimakutuba*":

When we were school children, teachers would reprimand us when we spoke shimakutuba at school, so I used to think it was a bad language. As I get older, I begin to think that the culture of Okinawa is all based on the language and that this is our pride. Before or around the time when we started the Shimakutuba Radio Station, the Prefectural Office (legislated) Shimakutuba Day and my consciousness of Shimakutuba started to change. It had been characterised as a bad language, but it was not. I began to see it as our pride.
(interview, 2017, authors' translation)

It took an elderly woman in one of the old people's homes he was visiting in 2012 for medical technology maintenance to awaken his interest in *shimakutuba* and his subsequent transformation to an island cultural agent through his enterprising activities. The old lady was listening to radio and complaining that there was hardly anything in *shimakutuba*. This made him think that this could present a viable business opportunity. Aware of the loss of island languages, he expanded his business to radio broadcasting in *shimakutuba* by purchasing FM Chatan²⁶ in 2009. He subsequently changed its name to FM Nirai, orientating its programming to younger listeners and webcasting its material as the first community radio in Okinawa. Ikehara noticed the merit of media convergence and the opportunities it afforded him in terms of both his business and the underpinning ethos of language revitalisation. His argument is that by using *shimakutuba* "as a cultural resource, it may survive" (ibid).

FM Nirai operates through a model that sells airtime and program frames to individuals. Except for using the program for political or religious purposes, anyone can apply to host a program. When asked if the radio airs discussion of issues concerning the presence of the US military in Okinawa, Ikehara replied that "if it is in *Uchināguchi*, everything can be said" (ibid). Unlike FM Naha, FM Nirai reached an agreement with Chatan Town in 2014 to broadcast emergency disaster prevention information provided by the municipality. This was intended to build a relation of mutual trust. FM Nirai initially purchased programs from Music Bird, a group of Tokyo FM stations, and broadcast them for 6 hours on weekdays, and 11-15 hours on the weekends.²⁷ However, soon after the contract finished in 2018 these programs were replaced by local community programs featuring traditional Okinawan songs and *shimakutuba*. FM Nirai's 24-hour broadcasting now consists solely of local programs focusing on Okinawan culture including *shimakutuba* and local news concerning the Chatan Town, Ginowan City and Kadena Town.

²⁶ Which had been in operation since 2004, run by a private company, Terepuro.

²⁷ Almost 30 personalities broadcast live programs. The cost for one hour's program per week is 27,000 yen per a month (interview with Yūri Tamaki, 20th November 2017).

In 2014, Crest established *Shimakutuba Hōsōkyoku* (SH), a station that broadcasts all its programs in *shimakutuba* online, through its website, including messages by Ikehara. The programs are freely accessible on the webpage. Twitter and Facebook are linked to the application, and listeners check them while listening to the programs. Ikehara, though, sees the internet as a “only a tool” and is conscious of the limitations online technology poses when it comes to language revitalisation, especially in terms of accessibility for older people. His company website states that he emphasises “the development of human resources as software” and he insists that in order for island languages to be revived they should be spoken and listened to not only at school or in the private domain but also in public spaces. We regard this as a vital element in his language revitalisation activities, enabling the island language to claim the public space:

If we are just teaching, it (the language) will decline and disappear eventually. That is why I thought about the demand for the language in every-day situations. Without keeping the demand and only teaching, one cannot speak the language. When I considered what would be the biggest demand, I came up with (the idea of starting) a broadcasting station, in terms of the daily language demand. (ibid)

The number of organisations and individuals hosting programs on SH are around 110. This includes community members from all over the Okinawa Prefecture *rōjinkai* (old peoples’ societies), associations of various cultural activities (such as Ryukyuan dance, music, various crafts, bullfighting and karate), international organisations (such as the World Youth *Uchināchu* Association and Okinawa Brazil Association), members of congress, parent-teacher associations and *michinoie* (government-designated rest areas found along roads). These are all sponsored by Crest and thus delivered free of charge by the service. The station is managed by Crest staff who carry out background research and attend to the recording of host programs.

Keen to increase audiences for SH material, Ikehara conceived of a novel approach that facilitated the webcasting of his *shimakutuba* programs through recycled vending machines, bringing the programs closer to the everyday life of island people. His innovation consisted of upcycling and repurposing disused tobacco vending machines to dispense goods such as drinks, books, tickets for local restaurants, key rings, bags and clothes - using *shimakutuba* as the language of communication (Figures 3 and 4). Clothing merchandise sold in other dispensers (Figures 5 and 6) has inscriptions of *Ryūka* (Ryukyuan poetry) in *Uchināguchi* as way of promoting ancestral knowledge. The vending machines also broadcast SH programs 24/7 from a recycled computer inserted within them. The vending machines are located in the town/city halls of Chatan, Kadena, Haeburu and Uruma, and in other places such as the parking space of a cooperative private company, a medical office and in health and welfare centres. During our initial fieldwork we located one at the American Village in Chatan town, right outside a Starbucks café. We could not help but noticing the symbolism of its location but also its entrepreneurial astuteness given that this was a popular spot for tourists who would be interested in buying a local souvenir. 20% of sales through the machines are paid to Crest as a charge. These vending machines can also sell drinks by different manufacturers (cutting down in the number of vending machines and saving electricity and space) and tickets for local restaurants helping them with advertising while contributing to the town’s local economy. Crest also sells some of the goods dispensed from these machines online.



Figure 3 – Vending machines in the parking area of a fishing tackle shop in Chatan, on Okinawa's south-east coast. The yellow machine on the left is operated by Crest and sells discount tickets for local restaurants. (Authors' photo, 2019.)

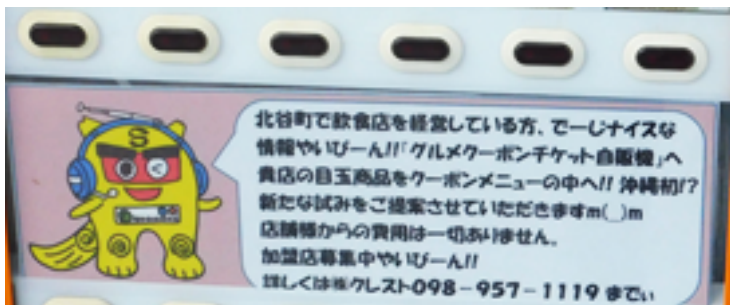


Figure 4 – Close up of *Uchināguchi* caption on vending machine shown in Figure 3 (above) acknowledging local owners for participating in the venture. (Author's photo, 2019.)



Figure 5 – A Crest vending machine outside FM Nirai selling caps, T-shirts and key-holders printed on or with a card of *Ryūka* (Ryukyuan poetry), encouraging tourists to visit places cited by the poets. (Authors' photo, 2019.)



Figure 6 – Close-up of vending machine shown in Figure 5 (above) with an *Uchināguchi* caption (left side, vertical in green) declaring that purchasers are given free access to online learning of the Okinawan, Yaeyama and Miyako languages for two months. (Author's photo, 2019.)

Ikehara's various innovative enterprising activities also include promotion of a comedy contest entitled *S-1 Okinawa Shimakutuba Mandan Taikai*, cultural bus tours and theatre performances which his company acts as an agent for. The comedy contest commenced in 2016 and has been sponsored by local well-known companies, such as *Okiham*, *Orion Beer*, *Okinawa Syokuryō* and *Okashi Goten*. Audiences are admitted free of charge and the contest is open to both professional and amateur individuals or groups who are judged by

presidents of Okinawan cultural associations and Ikehara. At the 4th contest, twelve entries included performances by elementary school children and a veteran in his eighties (Figure 8).



Figure 7 - Minoru Ikehara (left) presents certificates for the *Okinawa Shimakutuba Mandan Taikai* to Momoka and Kimi Kanejana from Yomitan village. (2019, courtesy of Crest.)



Figure 8 – Commemorative photo of the entrants, judges and staff of the 2019 *Okinawa Shimakutuba Mandan Taikai*. (Courtesy of Crest, 2019.)

Crest runs the *Okinawa Engēgakuēn* (a school for training *shimakutuba*-speaking entertainers) and *Shimakutuba Kankōbasu* (cultural bus tours with commentary in local

language) with support from Okinawa Prefecture along with *Okinawa Bunka Kyōkai* ('the association for Okinawan culture'), *Okinawaken Haiyū Kyōkai* ('the association of actors in Okinawa Prefecture'), OTV, RBC, Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting, *Okinawa Times*, *Ryūkyū Simpō* and Shimakutuba Renraku Kyōgikai.

One-day bus tours include trips to the Okinawa National Theatre, to live performances of Okinawan folk music and provide opportunities to explore the historical sites of the Ryukyu kingdom. The fees for the first two include not only transportation, lunch and entrance tickets but also the services of a *shimakutuba*-speaking guide. The third tour promotes visits to *kahi* (song monuments) to understand history of Okinawa through poems composed by ancestors (see Gillan 2017). Crest also can send MCs, entertainers and performers who can speak *shimakutuba* to private parties and official ceremonies. These activities attempt to demonstrate how language is connected to local history, culture and places and how best to enjoy them with the help of a *shimakutuba* guide.

Placing Minoru Ikehara in Okinawa's communicative ecology

In this article we explored the communicative ecology of Okinawa through *shimakutuba*. Small islands are distinctive communities in possession of a communicative sociality that is – in many cases – defined by their languages/dialects, distinctive island identities and kinship relationships that bind their communities together.²⁸ Along with language and identity, story communication enables the collective making of *shima* groups (Papoutsaki and Kuwahara, 2018). Harley and Potts argue that:

The social production of meaningfulness works through the principle of the agent as an intentional system (shorthand: purposeful, performative individual) acting with intention. Such agents, often interconnected to others via various webs of signification and time based interactions, produce meaningfulness: semiosis in any medium that expresses all three dimensions of identity, sociality and meaning at once. (Hartley and Potts, 2014: 28-29)

In Okinawa Prefecture and its municipalities, schools, NPOs and other organisations, media, especially radio, linked to websites and platforms supported by ICT, all act as agents. Among them, Minoru Ikehara and Crest's activities are notable. These agents are part of networks created through a storytelling process in which Okinawans, community organisations and *shima* media work with each other in ways that allow a shared construction of a vision and reality for their *shima* as places where they belong and in which they share their concerns. In our interviews with Ikehara²⁹ he has stated that he values his Okinawan community and culture, especially the language that has supported his enterprises. He sees island languages as a cultural resource, and he espouses the opinion that for *shimakutuba* to thrive it needs to be part of the island economy. To that extent, he believes that it is vital to encourage local businesses to use it as part of their daily activities:

²⁸ Adapted from Hartley and Potts' (2014) concept of communicative sociality.

²⁹ The first interview with authors took place in November 20, 2017 with a subsequent meeting on 14th June 2019 where his assistant manager, Chōsaku Maekawa, was present. Sano's (2017) interview with Minoru Ikehara in Japanese (17th March 2017) also provides information concerning Ikehara and Crest Company.

Therefore, it is business-driven, so to speak, social business. There are people who strive to diffuse the language on an individual basis, but it is very difficult to take off. In order to popularize anything, business entities should come into the scene. Take a look at sports and culture, professional baseball or football. As we discussed earlier, our current members are all individual people. There is no corporate member. This is because their way of thinking is that "Island language is great, but it has nothing to do with business." Disseminating shimakutuba feels like an imposition. But that is not the way to go. Contribution to a society can become a business. In order to expand our association, we need approval of many companies. Unless major corporations in Okinawa join, wishing to maintain our culture, Okinawan language will not revitalize further. (interview, 2019).

The concept of the Storytelling Network (STN) is applied in research in order to understand how people construct their identity through sharing storytelling in media (Wilkin et al, 2007). These stories contribute to maintaining identities and sustaining communities in challenging times. The *shima* stories generated and circulated through these networks by individual and collective agents – on air or in print, digitally, or face to face – shape island identities in a culturally and socially relevant manner. Island media and communication processes are oriented towards the communities they serve, and they operate at a micro-level. ROK maintains a policy of being devoted to the local (which it regards as a cluster of island communities) and encourages young Japanese monolingual generations to create new folk songs. FM Lequio in Naha City broadcasts Japanese songs together with conversation in *Uchinā-yamatuguchi* as a standard. FM Naha leaves the defining of the community to each program personality host. But catering for such diverse island communities is difficult in the urbanised area of Okinawa where competition further fragments the audience.

Communication Infrastructure (CI) theory (see, for instance, Jung and Ball-Rokeach, 2004) offers a valuable framework of analysis in this research through three clearly identified levels of storytelling agents (micro, meso and macro), depending on who is the primary storyteller and their audience. When studying island communicative ecologies, one needs to take into consideration island community-focused media as they act at both meso- and micro-levels, intermeshing island collective and individual storytelling agents with overlapping and multifunctioning networks (kinship, community, intra-island, inter-island, trans-peripheral and diasporic island-based). While mass media tell stories at a macro-level that focus on the nation and beyond with a national or regional audience in mind; the meso-level provides a greater complexity that can be of more relevance to the unique communicative ecologies of places like Okinawa. At this level, island media and community organisations can act as key agents in specific island populations. The storyteller agents at the meso-level work closely with those at the micro-level, which may include community members in their networks. The focus on meso- and micro-level storytellers fits well within an island communicative ecology approach as they address island communities that are closely defined by specific geographic features and small-scale social groups where socio-cultural interactions are closely intertwined. Our study of Ikehara's initiatives shows how individual island agents are not operating on their own but as part of a *shima* collective that facilitates and influences each other's contributions. These storytelling agents often act as cultural enablers of *shima* at a meso- and micro-levels (pan-island and community). It is evident that by creating a new storytelling network through

shima radio, the islands' local media ecology has changed considerably. Ikehara acts not only as an agent who runs a network but also as a cultural enabler and catalyst for change. He displays a high level of island identity awareness when he speaks of his desire to maintain the language of his childhood.

SH and FM Nirai, operated by Ikehara and Crest, have succeeded in creating a sustainable part of the island media ecology because of media convergence; and, having tapped into the connections his enterprise provides, have also enabled the setting-up of vending machines. With bus tours and the *Okinawa Shimakutuba Mandan Taikai* contest, Crest also mediates and promotes direct verbal communication in *shimakutuba* involving various individuals, organisations and companies. Their activities also include a *shimakutuba*-speaking guide, a bus company, performances of traditional dance, music and Okinawan plays, restaurants, and food and drink supply companies. In contrast, the vending machines act as an example of merging old technologies with new media. *Ryūka* (poetry) is written in *Uchināguchi* on the sides of these vending machines as well as on the goods sold from them. The goods come packed with an explanation of the poem along with a free ticket for e-learning *shimakutuba* for two months and the recycled computers installed in the vending machines broadcast SH programs hosted by local people. Thus, face-to-face communication, a poem, e-learning and talking on the radio contribute towards the *shima* communicative ecology³⁰.

In this sense, Ikehara, as an island agent, uses radio as a tool for conviviality, a concept introduced by Illich (1973), who imagined a scenario where people had an open relationship with the material world surrounding them, including the technologies they used. Conviviality, in this context, is about being actively engaged in island storytelling networks, and above all being conscious of island values and meanings, something that Ikehara has demonstrated in our interviews with him and evidenced in his activities. Convivial tools are those which give “each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision” (Illich, 1973: 21). Ikehara achieves Illich's vision in that both his radio stations and vending machines are used as convivial technology that he has succeeded to transform, adopt and control in an agentic way that enriches the island communicative ecology.

By merging old and new media and innovating the use of *shimakutuba* through vending machines, this island storyteller succeeds in bringing in different generations together and blurring the boundaries between mediated and unmediated forms of communication. Although he operates a private company, Ikehara does not seem to be driven solely by profit; rather, he has found a way to use his entrepreneurial activities to serve his island community and language. He has astutely identified a gap in the market that can cater to an older population speaking *shimakutuba*, but also seeks to create opportunities to bring the language to other generations in a way that is sustainable as a business model. Ikehara and Crest prove that a private company can contribute to language revitalisation. But the very reason that made this possible is that Ikehara operates in a milieu of island agents whose island identity defines their actions.

³⁰ Press coverage of Ikehara's activities indicating the increasing public recognition for his *shimakutuba* revitalisation efforts, see, for instance *Okinawa Times* year?

Conclusions

The island communicative ecology (ICE) approach contains elements that can help identify specific island communication needs but also how island communities develop culturally relevant ways to respond to the external and internal pressures that might have an eroding impact on their culture. These elements include the information landscape of the island, dynamics of access, information needs, use and impact, production and movement, agent-influencers and social trust. An island with a strong information ecosystem is evidence of a healthy island community capable of producing and disseminating information that caters to their unique communication needs. In Okinawa, language politics have shaped the island's identity and its communicative ecology to such an extent that they have become inseparable.

Island communities such as Okinawa require storytelling agents that engage in a distinctive and convivial manner, reflecting and contributing to communicative sociality. In this article, we demonstrate, via discussion of Ikehara's work, how storytelling (communication), together with the nurturing of language and a sense of identity, enables the collective making of *shima* groups. As socio-cultural interactions on islands are more closely interconnected and thus more inclusive than in other communities; island communicative ecologies are defined primarily by human agency. Focusing on learning how island communication agents use the media as a social mechanism to address island needs provides valuable observations on island communicative ecologies.

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