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**In this issue**, Ms. Mami Hayashi explores certain aspects of Okinawans' efforts to overcome their historically ingrained inferiority complex vis-à-vis *Yamato* Japanese. The essay summarizes her study of large-scale, long-running programs on overseas Okinawans at Okinawa Television (OTV) and Ryukyu Shimpō Newspaper. The programs were guided by the spirit of "local media for local people."

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## **Being Local Media for Local People: OTV and Ryukyu Shimpō Series of Reports on *Uchinānchu Worldwide***

By Mami Hayashi

Okinawans tend to see themselves as inferior to Japanese on the mainland. Since the mid-1970s, Okinawan media have been encouraging the Okinawan community to feel differently by featuring Okinawans overseas and providing another perspective in which to see Okinawa. This paper, an excerpt from my master's thesis, *Okinawa Television (OTV) Oral History Series: Uchinānchu Worldwide*, provides an overview of the OTV and Ryukyu Shimpō series on the Okinawan diaspora and discusses the Okinawan media's role as "local media for local people."

### **Uchinānchu Worldwide: Overview**

The Okinawa Television (OTV) series, *Uchinānchu Worldwide*, is an Okinawan local TV documentary program which portrays Okinawans living in different countries around the world. The series was broadcast in Okinawa from 1987 to 2001 and in 2004. It contained 210 episodes. The series received NAB Awards from the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan (NAB) in 2001 for its long-term success, which few local TV stations had achieved. The series, which is a 30-minute per episode human documentary program, also aired in Hawai'i and Gardena, California from 2002 through an American premium cable TV channel, Nippon Golden Network (NGN). In 2003, Shinichi Maehara, the director and reporter of the program, received recognition from the Hawai'i State Council for his enduring contribution to *Uchinānchu Worldwide*.

Basically, *Uchinānchu Worldwide* is comprised of two original series: *Okinawa Hatsu Warera Chikyūjin* (We, the Earthlings from Okinawa) and *Sekai Uchinānchu Kikō* (The Worldwide Okinawan's Travelog). The former series contains 135 episodes and aired from 1987 to 1996; 11 to 17 episodes from a particular region or country were created each year. The countries and regions covered include: the United States, Europe, Canada, Hawai'i, Southeast Asia, Oceania, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina. The latter, *Sekai Uchinānchu Kikō*, aired from 1997 to 2001 and in 2004, contained 75 episodes, including 13 additional stories created in 2004. It is noteworthy that this series placed a greater emphasis on people than places unlike the first series. For Hawai'i and California, these two series were combined, subtitled with English, and aired as *Uchinānchu Worldwide*. This combined version has 206 episodes.

The aim of the program was to visit people of Okinawan ancestry living in foreign countries, interview them, and show their lives to the audience in Okinawa. The program followed a travelog style entertaining the audience by showing the scenery, the people, and the cultures of each country they visited. Overall, it was a half-hour human documentary series on Okinawans abroad.

Producing the program took the crew to 35 countries over 15 years. They traveled more than 400,000 km (248,602 miles), which equals approximately 10 times around the earth. The number of Okinawan interviewees reached 500, including Issei (first generation immigrants), Nisei (second generation), Sansei (third generation), Yonsei (fourth generation), and the so-called "newcomers" or "Shin-Issei," who emigrated or moved to foreign countries more recently, particularly after World War II.

From 1987 to 2001, the program aired in Okinawa every Monday at 7:00 P.M., which is prime time for the TV station. The new series for each year started in October and continued for about three months. Then, for

the next three months OTV would run episodes that were chosen from the previous years' series. In essence, this local program was broadcast six months a year for a period of 15 years alongside other competitive programs most of which were from the major TV stations in Tokyo.

Because *Uchinānchu Worldwide* involved many countries and people all around the world, each interviewee embodied distinct attributes and uniqueness as shaped by his or her host country's culture, and also by their time of arrival, occupation, or generation. However, the program also showed that there are some common values and interests among people who share the same roots. For instance, many Issei, regardless of which country they emigrated to, said they worked very hard for the sake of their children ("kodomo no tame ni"). Another notable example is that many Okinawans and those of Okinawan ancestry mentioned a strong attachment to their homeland and displayed their enthusiasm for perpetuating Uchinānchu identity and heritage to the next generation.

Strong community ties among Okinawans abroad are key elements of the program. While tracing the history of Okinawan emigration, the program showed how these people have developed their overseas communities while maintaining strong solidarity and helping one another to the present day. For instance, people who immigrated to Bolivia created an Okinawan enclave called "Colonia Okinawa," where they exercise a high degree of autonomy with their own schools, hospitals, and governmental and economic institutions. Overseas Okinawans' strong solidarity is also exemplified by the Uchinānchu community in Hawaii that raised millions of dollars and built the Hawai'i Okinawan Center (HOC) in 1990. Today the HOC serves as the core location for cultural activities and is the symbol of Uchinānchu identity among Okinawans on the island.

The program highlighted the importance of culture and language in terms of preserving and perpetuating ethnic identity to the next generation. There were the elderly Okinawans in the show who comforted themselves by playing the *sanshin*, and many young people of Okinawan ancestry who enjoyed the Okinawan songs, music, and dancing. The episodes about Europe featured some Okinawans who, with a strong sense of pride in being Uchinānchu, devoted themselves to teaching karate, while at the same time pursuing their own personal goals.

Regarding language, it is surprising to see many people of Okinawan ancestry in South America speaking fluent *Uchināguchi* (Okinawan language), which is not commonly spoken in Okinawa today. Often, many Okinawan descendants in South America do not speak Japanese and have never been to Okinawa but can speak *Uchināguchi*. As Maehara noted, there were several Okinawan enclaves in Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and Bolivia, where Issei, who emigrated before World War II, spoke only *Uchināguchi* at home. As a result, the language, even with a particular local accent, was preserved and passed down to the following generations. This phenomenon is a sharp contrast to the present situation in Okinawa, where most Okinawans do not speak *Uchināguchi* anymore because of the Japanization of Okinawa after World War II.

The show, as well as interviews with Maehara, also revealed a remarkable contrast between Okinawans in Okinawa and those overseas in terms of cultural characteristics, or to put in another word, "Uchinānchu-ness." According to Maehara, Uchinānchu spirit, or what is called *chimugukuru*, which includes warm hospitality and mutual assistance, remained strong in the mindset of Okinawans in Okinawa until the 1970s. However, after Okinawa reverted to Japan, people on the island began to change. Japan was enjoying an economic boom at that time, and Okinawans were pressured to catch up with the mainland Japanese as citizens of "Okinawa Prefecture, Japan." Capital from mainland Japan poured into the island, and Japanese influence became ubiquitous in Okinawa. As a result, many of the Uchinānchu cultural characteristics often represented by warm hospitality, a slow life, and mild personality, were taken over by fierce competitiveness and desires for further economic development. This trend continued until the late 1980s.

Many Issei interviewees in *Uchinānchu Worldwide* recalled that Okinawans had strong solidarity during the early days of their emigration period, and helped one another when they were having a hard time. This mentality of mutual assistance was later passed down to the Nisei and Sansei. In the program many people of Okinawan ancestry in various countries helped other Okinawans, especially new arrivals, who needed some assistance to become self-reliant. In addition, some prosperous Okinawans overseas summoned their families and relatives from Okinawa and supported them until they had acquired enough skills as businessmen or artisans and could run their own businesses.

Although many Okinawans in Okinawa did not realize their own cultural alteration, overseas Okinawans recognized it quickly. In the 1960s and 1970s, all the family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors gathered together and welcomed overseas Okinawans from the bottom of their hearts. In the 1980s, life in Okinawa had become so hectic that not many had time to provide hospitality to their guests who came all the way from South America, Hawai‘i, or other faraway countries to visit them. It was not the same Okinawa and Uchinanchu that overseas Okinawans remembered from their past visits. Okinawans outside Okinawa saw a huge gap between Okinawans of the 1960s-70s and those in the 1980s.

### **Director Shinichi Maehara**

The director and reporter of *Uchinanchu Worldwide*, Shinichi Maehara, produced the entire series. He did almost everything by himself from the beginning to the end of the production, including research, finding the interviewees, conducting the interviews, and the post-production work—editing, narration, scoring (music), and writing the script. Due to a limited budget, when Maehara traveled abroad for the shooting he was accompanied by only two crew members: a cameraman and a sound mixer. Maehara even did logistic preparation such as making appointments with the interviewees, applying for visas and other travel documents, and arranging lodging and transportation.

Although it is fairly routine for a national TV station to produce shows requiring overseas travel, it is very difficult for most local TV stations to conduct overseas shooting. Therefore, Maehara had to find a sponsor for his project. Fortunately, he gained support from then-President of KDD Corporation, Masamichi Maekawa. KDD’s sponsorship enabled him to produce in 1987 the first series of what would eventually become *Uchinanchu Worldwide*. The program received a good audience response, and Maehara managed to secure JAL (Japan Airlines) as a new sponsor for the following year. Support from the sponsors and the audience made it possible for him to continue the program for 15 years; it was initially meant to be a one-year project.

Although his family was originally from Shuri, Maehara was born in Koza in 1948, three years after the Battle of Okinawa. His family was poor as were most families at the time in Okinawa. Maehara recalled that although the land was devastated and everybody was struggling, Okinawans helped one another and took care of not only their own but also others’ children. Therefore, he did not feel miserable. Okinawans of this era became Maehara’s model of “Uchinanchu,” which he longed and looked for in the course of his program production.

When Maehara was ten years old, he went to live with his grandparents who had returned home from Hawai‘i. They went to Hawai‘i in the 1920’s and worked there for several decades, first as sugarcane plantation workers and later as pineapple factory workers. Maehara remembered them speaking some Hawaiian, such as “kaukau pau” (done eating). During his interview, Maehara revealed that his grandparents had a great influence on the forming of his identity as an Uchinanchu. Maehara’s grandparents took care of him and supported him financially so that he could continue his schooling. He then moved to mainland Japan to study journalism at Doshisha University in Kyoto.

Maehara admitted that it was not until he started producing the documentary series on Okinawans overseas that he confirmed and strengthened his own Uchinanchu identity. When he was studying in Kyoto, he and other students from Okinawa hesitated to tell people that they were from Okinawa, since many Japanese, especially those in Kyoto at that time, discriminated against Okinawans, having a stereotypical image of Okinawans as vulgar countrymen. Therefore, he was not interested in his Uchinanchu identity at all and even tried not to think about it. However, as he continued producing the series and met many Okinawans abroad, he started to think about his own identity.

Maehara wanted to be an announcer from the time he was a high school student. To pursue his dream, after graduating from the university in 1972 he accepted a job at Radio Okinawa, a local radio station on the island. After about a year and a half at Radio Okinawa, he moved to OTV and started his career as a newscaster. He eventually found out that he was more a journalist than an announcer. He then shifted his interests toward reporting, which required more research.

A turning point in Maehara’s career came when he read a series of news articles about Okinawans overseas in the *Ryukyu Shimpō*, one of the two major local newspapers in Okinawa. The newspaper series was called *Sekai no Uchinanchu* (Uchinanchu Worldwide) and lasted for two years from 1984 to 1985. It featured

Okinawans in many countries and described each person's life story along with photos. The series became very popular in Okinawa, and Maehara got the idea of visualizing it as a human documentary TV series. Since television enables people to watch the actual images of interviewees and listen to their voices, he thought that a TV version of the series would have a bigger impact on people.

His idea of a TV version of *Sekai no Uchinanchu* crystallized when he went to the United States in 1986 for a six-month English program at Syracuse University in New York. After studying English for a few months, he visited some media companies as part of his field research. Meanwhile, he also visited many Okinawan associations and met a lot of Okinawans all over the States. Maehara's experience with Okinawans in the United States inspired him and instilled in him a stronger motivation to create the TV program. Therefore, it was natural for him to start the program with a series about Okinawans in the United States.

For the first ten years of his program production, Maehara traced the history of Okinawan emigrants and their descendants in the documentary by visiting their enclaves and communities in different host countries. He documented how they struggled and survived in foreign countries, and highlighted the strong communal ties among overseas Okinawans. The program came out as *Okinawa Hatsu Warera Chikyūjin*. After covering major host countries, he changed the program title to *Sekai Uchinanchu Kikō*. As mentioned earlier, this time he decided to focus more on the interviewees individually by emphasizing their unique lives as Okinawans who lived in foreign countries. However, the fundamental theme of the program remained the same.

Maehara said it was the *Ryukyu Shimpō* newspaper series of *Uchinanchu Worldwide* that gave him the idea for the TV series. Some people appeared in both versions because Maehara, while making his own series, used the *Ryukyu Shimpō* series and the journalists who wrote the articles as a resource for finding some of the interviewees. Therefore, there is a strong connection between the two series, and it is essential to know about the *Ryukyu Shimpō* series for a better understanding of the OTV series.

### **The Ryukyu Shimpō Series *Uchinanchu Worldwide***

The Newspaper series of *Uchinanchu Worldwide* started on January 1, 1984. There were a total of 484 different *Uchinanchu Worldwide* articles, all with color photos, and this series of articles continued until December 28, 1985. This was an unprecedented long-term project for them. Many reporters were sent all around the world to cover Okinawans overseas. The countries and regions they covered included: the continental United States, Hawai'i, Canada, Central and South America, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, and Micronesia. After the series ended, it was published as a three-volume book with the same title in 1986.

The *Ryukyu Shimpō* series caused a great sensation in Okinawa. People were surprised to learn that so many Okinawans were actively engaged in their respective societies in so many foreign countries. The series attracted a large number of avid readers. Seiho Matsuoka, former Chief Executive of the Government of the Ryukyus, remarked: "When I woke up in the morning, I started my day by reading *Ryukyu Shimpō's Uchinanchu Worldwide*. When the article was not in the newspaper, I felt sad the whole day long." Some schools adopted the book as part of their educational reading, while many clubs and associations in Okinawa set "Uchinanchu worldwide" as their discussion topic in their meetings.

There was a reason for the newspaper series to be produced. After Okinawa reverted from the U.S. occupation to Japan in 1972, Okinawans went through a tempestuous period, dealing with numerous problems caused by political, social, and economic changes due to the transition from *America Yū* (the American age) to *Yamato Yū* (the Japanese age). The transition affected people's everyday lives, causing them difficulty in trying to adjust to the new society. Also, the media at that time often compared Okinawa with Japan, which implicitly urged the people to adopt Japanese systems and catch up with Japan.

Okinawan society finally became relatively stable in the early 1980s, about a decade after the reversion. Yo Nozato, one of the key *Ryukyu Shimpō* journalists who started the newspaper series recalled that many journalists in the 1980s began to see people concerned about the unclear future of Okinawa. The Okinawa International Ocean Exposition held from 1975 to 1976 was expected to become a trigger for boosting the island's economy, but it did not make a dramatic impact. Moreover, during that time Okinawan students threw Molotov cocktails at the Crown Prince and Princess of Japan when they visited the island for the Exposition held at Himeyuri Peace Memorial Park. The incident shocked Okinawan society and raised fundamental

questions regarding Okinawa's reversion to Japan. After this and other shocking incidents, the Okinawan people seemed to have lost confidence in themselves, and wondered in what direction they should go.

The *Ryukyu Shimpō* wanted to encourage people by instilling in them a new and positive outlook on Okinawa, and that is why the newspaper series of *Uchinānchu Worldwide* was born. Therefore, the main purpose of the series was to inspire Okinawa Okinawans and to inculcate positive attitudes in them once again by introducing people from the same island who were struggling to pursue their goals in foreign countries while maintaining positive attitudes.

Before the newspaper series of *Uchinānchu Worldwide* came out, when the media covered Okinawans' foreign experiences, the interviews were usually conducted in Okinawa. However, for the *Uchinānchu Worldwide* series the *Ryukyu Shimpō* sent reporters abroad instead of interviewing people in Okinawa so that they could cover people's real lives in foreign countries. As Nozato observed:

You can only see superficial things by interviewing those who already came back to Okinawa. To really understand people, you should visit the places where they live and see how they work every day. Then you will see their real lives. It is so different from just listening to their stories in Okinawa.

The series was strongly supported by Okinawan communities, both inside and outside of the island. The *Ryukyu Shimpō* believed that the articles helped people see themselves more positively and feel proud of being Uchinānchu.

It is important to recognize Yo Nozato, who played a crucial role in the production of the newspaper series *Uchinānchu Worldwide*. He covered the European portion of the series and surprised readers by introducing, in his very first article, Okinawans living in the Canary Islands who ran a fishery business there. His attempt to attract readers was a big hit because it was just astonishing for people to know that there were Okinawans in such a faraway place. The most noteworthy thing about Nozato was that the idea of the *Uchinānchu Worldwide* series could be traced back to his short series written in the mid-1970s, about a decade before the *Ryukyu Shimpō* series.

In November 1975, Nozato asked the *Ryukyu Shimpō* for a one-month leave to travel around Europe. As he mentioned in his autobiographical book, *Iyashino Shima, Okinawa no Shinjitsu*, it was his dream to take the Orient Express. However, he did not forget his job as a journalist. Before he left for Europe, he searched for Okinawans there, visited them during the travel, and wrote articles about them after he returned to Okinawa. His reports became a short set called *Yōroppa no Uchinānchu* (Uchinānchu in Europe) and appeared in the newspaper five times in January, 1976. They covered five people in four major cities in Europe: the first Asian assistant stage director at the Opera House in Rome, an artist in Paris whose painting was purchased by the French government, a student studying medieval religious music at the University of Heidelberg, a young, successful karate teacher in Madrid, and a lecturer who was studying at the University of Madrid.

The narrative style of the Nozato articles of 1976 became a standard for later reports on *Uchinānchu* in the *Ryukyu Shimpō*. Stories usually began with the interviewees' past, especially about their early struggles until they stabilized in their host countries. Then the description of their present situation, usually steady and successful, followed. If the interviewees were still in the process of achieving their goals, their enthusiasm for the pursuit of their dreams was emphasized. Finally, the articles discussed the interviewees' perspectives including, most importantly, their nostalgia for and attachment to Okinawa. Sometimes, the interviewees shared their thoughts on Okinawa from both an insider's and outsider's perspectives, which often became comparative analyses of Okinawa and their host countries.

Yo Nozato was born in 1942 in Ishikawa Prefecture on mainland Japan. In 1967 after graduating from Hosei University in Tokyo, he decided to work at the *Ryukyu Shimpō* as a journalist. He wanted to discuss Okinawan issues with the local people as well as inform the Japanese on the mainland about them. He went through hard times, occasionally being assaulted by local Okinawans who hated Japan and the Japanese. Nevertheless, Nozato kept putting all his efforts into understanding and contributing to the Okinawan community, which eventually led to the *Uchinānchu Worldwide* series.

Eishin Chinen, Secretary General of the 4<sup>th</sup> Worldwide Uchinānchu Festival Executive Committee in 2006, articulated that Okinawans owed a lot to these two individuals, Nozato and Maehara, who devoted almost their entire lives working on Okinawa and Okinawans. According to Chinen, these two men pursued

their projects even at their own expense. For instance, for Maehara's OTV series, despite the fact that the program was successful for a long time, sometimes the sponsors were reluctant to continue their support. However, Maehara did not quit. He continued assuming the risk of paying all expenses for visiting and shooting (TV scenes) abroad by himself in order to keep the program going. Therefore, in addition to the support from the *Ryukyu Shimpō* and OTV, Nozato's and Maehara's personal commitments were vital for the *Uchinānchu Worldwide* projects to flourish.

### **Being Local Media for Local People**

Broadly speaking, the audience of the OTV series *Uchinānchu Worldwide* could be divided into several categories, such as those who watched the program in Okinawa, those who watched it outside Okinawa, including mainland Japan, Hawai'i, and other foreign countries, and the viewers who appeared in the program as interviewees. They all had different responses to the program. For instance, some Okinawan viewers in Okinawa wrote letters to Maehara, saying that they learned a lot from the program about Okinawan emigrants and their descendants overseas, and that they were inspired by the Okinawans abroad through watching the program. Others said that they appreciated the program because it would inspire and give hope to the younger generations.

Although the program was not broadcast in some foreign countries, a number of Okinawans overseas had opportunities to watch it because their families and relatives in Okinawa videotaped the program and sent it to them. For these people, the program sometimes consoled them, as well as encouraged them; they learned that there were many Okinawans abroad with similar experiences they could relate to. The program even inspired Okinawans in mainland Japan who were not so far away from their homeland, but still lived in a different culture.

In addition to serving as an inspirational and informative resource for the viewers, the program played a significant role in reconnecting Okinawans overseas to their families, relatives, friends, and communities in Okinawa. For instance, Ginyu Igei, an Okinawan in Peru, wrote that after he was featured in the program, he received phone calls and letters from many friends and relatives who watched the program. Another Okinawan, Michiko Shiroma in Argentina, thanked Maehara for visiting her in the inland of Argentina, saying that her elderly mother in Okinawa would be very glad to see her in the program. Moreover, some interviewees in South America were gratified by the fact that the program informed people in Okinawa about the Okinawan settlement and the present condition of the Okinawan communities there. Jinyu Higa, an Okinawan in Bolivia stated that he felt that his efforts and struggles in the settlement had paid off when he watched the series on Bolivia that traced the history of Okinawan settlement there and featured Okinawan immigrants' struggles and accomplishments in the country.

Similar to OTV's *Uchinānchu Worldwide* series, the *Ryukyu Shimpō*'s newspaper series also helped reconnect Okinawan individuals and communities overseas to Okinawa. For instance, there was an Okinawan in Stockholm, Sweden who seldom wrote letters to his family in Okinawa. His mother had no idea about how and what he was doing there and was very worried about him. Also, she was embarrassed that she could not provide enough explanation about her son to relatives who wanted to know about him. When Nozato introduced him in the newspaper series and portrayed his life in Sweden, the mother almost cried with joy. She thanked Nozato, saying that now she could proudly tell her relatives that her son was leading a decent life abroad.

For the families, especially mothers who were anxious about their children abroad but had almost no idea how to reach them, Maehara, Nozato, and other reporters of the *Ryukyu Shimpō*'s *Uchinānchu Worldwide* series became saviors who helped these families regain ties with one another. Moreover, because the *Ryukyu Shimpō* and OTV were respected local media in the Okinawan community, the families of the interviewees could use the articles or episodes as proof of their children's endeavors and successes overseas, and could feel satisfaction and pride.

### **Conclusion**

Maehara stated that, because today's Okinawan society is fairly Japanized, just being born in Okinawa does not necessarily ensure that a person is Uchinānchu anymore. He observed that Okinawans in Okinawa have reached the critical point where unless they make serious attempts to understand, preserve, and perpetuate their cultural heritage, Uchinānchu-ness will disappear and Okinawa Okinawans will be completely assimilated into mainstream Japanese culture. Now that the pre-war generation who kept the "good old" Uchinānchu mindset are passing away both within and outside Okinawa, it is becoming harder and harder to picture a clear image of Uchinānchu-ness.

Generally speaking, although many Okinawans in Okinawa today seem to have less interest in their Uchinānchu identity, few would doubt their authenticity in being Uchinānchu. Although the primary purpose of *Uchinānchu Worldwide* was to inspire Okinawans in Okinawa by portraying Okinawans overseas who were active in the society of their respective countries, the documentary also functioned as a reminder for Japanized Okinawa Okinawans to self-reflect by portraying people of Okinawan ancestry abroad who appeared more Uchinānchu than Okinawans in Okinawa, despite the fact that they were far away from their homeland for a long time or had never been to Okinawa.

Okinawans overseas are living in many different countries around the globe. Even if they identify themselves as Uchinānchu and belong to a community of Uchinānchu worldwide, they would not know or meet most other members of the community. In this point, this community is what Benedict Anderson calls "an imagined community." Nevertheless, Okinawans overseas have developed solidarity and fostered ties with Okinawans in Okinawa. In this way, there has been a formation of a community named Uchinānchu Worldwide. OTV's and the *Ryukyu Shimpō's Uchinānchu Worldwide* series have certainly played a vital role in strengthening the foundation for this community formation by informing and educating Okinawans about their fellow Uchinānchu abroad, who tend to be forgotten—but who never forget about their motherland. [END]

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