



## Heritage Production in National and Global Cultural Policies

### Folkloristics, Politics, and Cultural Economy in Ryukyuan/Okinawan Performance

The term “cultural heritage” gained currency in Japanese public discourse in the 1990s, when the national government began to reorient cultural administration. Cultural policy has entailed the promotion of “cultural heritage” as a new platform of local and global economic development, while holding on to the long-established institution of the protection of “cultural property.” This article explores how the discourse of cultural heritage has interacted with the history, politics, and economy of the nation state, and how folkloristic and anthropological theories and practices have been involved in the process. Discussing Kumiodori, a form of traditional Okinawan dance and theater, which was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative List in 2010, it will look into the intersection of global and national cultural policies centered on intangible culture, paying attention to its classificatory system, which I see as an instrument of defining, ordering, and reproducing the images and meanings of national culture and identity.

KEYWORDS: intangible cultural heritage—intangible cultural property—  
Okinawa—Ryukyu—Kumiodori—heritage production

The term “cultural heritage” (*bunka isan*) gained currency in Japanese public discourse in the 1990s, when the national government began to reorient cultural administration. The emergence of cultural heritage signified new dynamics that challenged Japan’s nationally bounded system of culture. It indicated that the nation was making full commitment to global cultural policy led by UNESCO, as Japanese officials have taken the lead in organizing and supporting the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (Aikawa-Faure 2009; Kōno 2004). Until the signing of the World Heritage Convention in 1992, however, the government had not been particularly enthusiastic about adopting the heritage program.<sup>1</sup> Since the enactment of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Property in 1950, it had developed the cultural protection system to encapsulate “Japanese culture” in the concept of “cultural property” (*bunka zai*).

The Law for the Protection of Cultural Property provided a symbolic foundation to unify the people as Japan engaged in the reconstruction of the nation after the Pacific War (Kurin 2004, 67–68). Cultural property, classified as tangible and intangible, can be imagined as the anchor for substantiating the coherence of the national cultural tradition. In the decades since its inception, the legal system could create an assurance that Japanese culture, evoked as “traditional” within the conceptual framework of cultural property, would be protected, separate from popular, contemporary, or Western-influenced culture. The classification has been further elaborated over the years, building up a large repository of cultural property. Cultural property has been selected by scholars, experts, and officials and managed as a technical matter at the national and local levels through a system that connects the Agency for Cultural Affairs and municipal offices. Cultural property has been embedded in cultural practices and expectations for half a century.

In contrast, cultural heritage has come to light in the context of the growing influence of the neoliberal global economy and politics; as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes: “world heritage is actually made possible by globalization, both in political and economic terms” (2006, 161–63). It has been framed by a new sense of “cultural policy” that invites a practical and flexible approach to culture (Negoro 1999, 36–42),<sup>2</sup> while the government has undertaken administrative and economic reforms, introducing a deregulatory strategy or working with the private sector during the period of economic stagnation (Borovoy 2010; Yoshimoto 2010). The term took hold more formally after the Fundamental Law for the

Promotion of Culture and the Arts (renamed the Fundamental Law for Culture and the Arts in 2017) was enacted in 2001, anticipating the ratification of the 2003 ICH Convention. Adopted in the basic policy plans of the Fundamental Law,<sup>3</sup> “cultural heritage” has been broadly and loosely interpreted in official reports and publications. In the emerging narrative, “cultural heritage” seems to be used as a generic term that includes “cultural property,” without making a clear distinction between them. Because of the vagueness of its meaning and usage, it has been flexibly applied to expand the policy agenda.

Under the new law that foregrounds “promotion” instead of “protection,” cultural heritage can be employed compatibly in the national and global context of economic development, and the thriving literature on cultural policy in economics or management has looked to the values of cultural heritage in the global market. The prestige of UNESCO’s name can be persuasive in the promotion of cultural industries, and cultural heritage has now become a promising resource and platform where the government can motivate local municipal programs in community revitalization and tourism as well as demonstrate the nation’s initiative and contribution in international cooperation projects. The 2017 revision of the law has also underscored the community-based promotion of cultural heritage, encouraging the appreciation of local culture and identity.

The discourse of cultural heritage, enhanced by the burgeoning field of cultural policy, has given rise to the formation of a new sphere of public culture, which can connect research projects, administrative matters, and community interests, thereby reorganizing bureaucracy-centered cultural institutions. As the promotion-based policy of the new law has led such institutions to look for the economic prospects of cultural heritage, however, its narrative has obscured the UNESCO’s humanistic mission, especially of the 2003 ICH Convention, which describes “the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity.” The new national policy has certainly embraced cultural diversity, but rhetorically by interpreting it in terms of diversifying the scope of the cultural genre and its application. This rather superficial approach to diversity would point to the premise that national culture and identity will always somehow remain seamless, which hasn’t been thoroughly questioned in the policy discourse. If more collaborative research with communities and governmental sectors can progress, it would be more significant for anthropological and folkloristic studies to seek a critical perspective on the historical, political, and economic implications of cultural heritage and its policy, to reassess its deeper meanings and functions (Miller and Yúdice 2002).

This article explores how the discourse of cultural heritage has interacted with the history, politics, and economy of the nation state and how folkloristic and anthropological theories and practices have been involved in the process. I will look into the intersection of global and national cultural policies centered on intangible culture, paying attention to its classificatory system, which I see as an instrument of defining, ordering, and reproducing the images and meanings of national culture and identity (Shore and Wright 1997, 3–18; Miller and Yúdice 2002). A focal point is the relation between the UNESCO’s category of “intangible cultural heritage” and its counterparts in the Japanese system of cultural prop-

erty: “intangible cultural property” and “intangible *folk* cultural property.” ICH elements have been nominated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs from the existing inventory of both categories of intangible cultural properties, and that doesn’t mean the UNESCO’s and Japanese terms have the same meanings (Logan 2001).

Each category carries with it a layer of meaning derived from its specific historical context. The term “intangible cultural heritage” has inherited the history of UNESCO’s discourse on what had been called “folklore,” “traditional culture,” or “oral and intangible heritage” (Early and Seitel 2002a, 2002b; Bouchenaki 2008). ICH was coined as a new term to depart from the uncomfortable implications of these predecessors, but as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, by “admitting cultural forms associated with royal courts and state-sponsored temples, as long as they are not European, the intangible heritage list preserves the division between the West and the rest and produces a phantom list of intangible heritage, a list of that which is not indigenous, not minority, and not non-Western, though no less intangible” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 55–57). The underlying implications of cultural hierarchy between Western and non-Western culture may have been moderated but haven’t been completely erased.

At the same time, the division between “intangible cultural property” and “intangible folk cultural property” was brought about through the process of reinventing Japan as a modern nation state, in which the image of Japanese cultural identity had been reorganized by stratifying intangible culture into two categories, “non-folk” and “folk,” that is, professional and nonprofessional, artistic refinement and communal tradition, or urban theater and rural neighborhood. Whereas the binary involves the complex hierarchical divisions of culture and history, UNESCO’s “intangible cultural heritage” by definition subsumes both “intangible cultural property” and “intangible folk cultural property” and thereby nullifies the divisions of the national classification. How has this contradictory juncture between national and global policies unfolded in actual performance? Arguing that the categorical interaction could bring a new dynamic to the performance of intangible culture, I will discuss Kumiodori, which has been at the forefront of national and global policies, particularly in defining Japanese culture and identity, even since long before the inception of the cultural property law.

Kumiodori, a form of traditional Okinawan dance and theater, was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative List in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Kumiodori’s significance comes from its relevance to the formation of folkloristic research of intangible culture as well as its roots in the history of Okinawa, previously called the Ryukyu Kingdom, which has been entangled in power relations between Japan, the United States, and China. Named earlier as an important intangible cultural property of Japan, Kumiodori has appeared at a juncture of Okinawan and international politics, economics, and folkloristic and anthropological studies that have made Okinawan culture the subject of their research since the early twentieth century. Its performance has involved the complex force of the historical and political relations, and scholarly research and practice, which have exerted control and authority over it but also have advocated and supported it. Asking how national and global policies have converged in Kumiodori, I will illu-

minate the way in which it has evolved in the multilayered process of heritage production, in the intersection of politics, economy, and disciplinary history (Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2013).<sup>5</sup>

#### KUMIODORI AND THE SYSTEM OF CULTURAL PROPERTY PROTECTION

Cultural property was formulated as a core concept of the 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Property in postwar Japan. The institutional process of cultural protection, however, goes further back to the early decades of modern Japan, when the nascent government, upon its establishment in 1868, pursued the transformation of Japan into an enlightened and civilized nation. The modern project entailed the public representation and education of the nation's culture and history, and one of the primary measures was the cataloguing, management, and display of cultural artifacts, selected from architectural and fine arts objects. In the growing consciousness of the nation's cultural past, intellectuals who had been inspired by folkloristic and ethnological inquiry perceived the historical and cultural value of things archaic, customary, and performed, such as dances, songs, and rituals of small local villages (Konagaya 2020). As these scholars set out to organize the study of communal practices around the country in the early twentieth century, they devised the staged presentation of folk songs and dances by performers from local communities, while interest in live performances had been stimulated by the proliferation of folk songs through radio broadcasting and the record industry (Takeda 2001, 4). They set up the Local Dance and Folk Music Convention in 1925 to showcase performance traditions from various local communities (Suzuki 2010) and started the Folk Art Society in 1927,<sup>6</sup> along with the publication of its journal (Hashimoto 1993; Konagaya 2020). What (and where) they documented as meaningful and valuable materials and how they categorized and defined them constituted the foundational framework of what would be later named "intangible cultural property" and "intangible folk cultural property." After a period of disruption before and during the war, this prewar research was reorganized as folk performing arts studies (*minzoku geinō kenkyū*): a public-sector-related field somewhat distinct from academic-centered folklore studies (*minzokugaku*), which contributed to the development and administration of the protection of intangible cultural property.

In these formative years of the field, "Okinawa" had been rediscovered as a key subject of folkloristic and anthropological interest in the cultural and linguistic origins of Japanese; leading scholars Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) and Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953) highlighted Okinawa in their study. Researchers came to see Okinawa as an enclave where they could identify the remnants of the Japanese cultural past and where they could observe many ancient ritual dances and songs still functioning as "living traditions." Inquiry into Okinawa enhanced the scope of classification, and presentational practices of folkloristic performances and turned "Okinawa" itself into the field of "Okinawan studies." Orikuchi, above all, valuing the study of ancient ritual and performance, suggested the historical development of Japanese performances from their ancient origins as shown in Okinawan ritual

performances; his theory and classification of performances gave impetus to the formation of performance studies in prewar years.

Investigating Okinawan culture and history in reference to those of Japan in particular, however, had attracted not only scholars from a wider range of fields than anthropology and folklore but also government officials and political thinkers. The question about the boundary between Okinawan and Japanese cultural identities had been interwoven with politics and the policy of nation-state building.

Since Japan's annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1872 and the subsequent renaming of it as "Okinawa" prefecture, Ryukyuan/Okinawan culture and identity had emerged as the crucial political issue that concerned national policy toward Okinawa and the construction of the modern "Japanese" identity. Debate on Okinawan assimilation had diverged, and negative and prejudicial views of Ryukyuan as uncivilized and foreign others had hampered their cultural and social assimilation (Oguma 1998, 280–319), but anthropological and folkloristic hypotheses on the cultural and linguistic consistency of Okinawa and Japan could be used as scientific evidence for an assimilationist argument.

On the question of Okinawan/Ryukyuan culture, the historical account of "Kumiodori" by the Okinawan folklorist Iha Fuyū (1876–1947) delineated the development of Okinawan performance. Calling it the "national theater" (*kokugeki*) of Ryukyu, he located its historical and sovereign roots in the court practice of the kingdom (Iha 2000 [1906], 207–10). At the time of his writing, Kumiodori no longer existed as it had in the past, since upon the fall of the kingdom its actors and musicians had lost their certified status and stability dependent on court patronage. His description also indicates its historical basis in the sovereignty of the lost kingdom.

The island kingdom of Ryukyu, having reigned as a trading post between the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea, maintained a tributary relationship with imperial China from the fifteenth century and also with feudal Japan, while from the seventeenth century it was put under the direct control of Satsuma, the southernmost feudal domain. Surrounded by these neighboring powers, Ryukyuan employed music and dance performance as a diplomatic tool at the receptions of Chinese envoys and also in their mission's visits to the shogunate capital of Edo. The performance as such served as a principal political ritual and had been a serious occupation dominated by male court officials (Misumi 2011, 145–53). Citing the historical record of the court compiled in the early nineteenth century, Iha showed the national theater, called Kumiodori, meaning "combined" (*kumi*) "dance" (*odori*), was the creation of the court playwright Tamagusuku Chōkun (1703–73), who put the myths, legends, and ancient words of Ryukyu together into a theatrical form (Iha 2000 [1906], 207–08).

Kumiodori, described as such by Iha, however, appears to be rather ambivalently posited in the definition and category of folkloristic and anthropological subject. Its "non-folk" quality designed as courtly performance by professional actors would have been outside their disciplinary purview, although Iha noted the folkloristic relevance of Kumiodori as its dance and theater had been passed down through the festive events and local customs of villages (Gibo 1986, 71–73).



Indeed, folklore researchers were more concerned with “Okinawan” folk songs and dances than “Ryukyuan” court traditions. Nevertheless, the “otherness” of Kumiodori could capture scholarly interest at that particular historical moment. His reference to this distinctively Ryukyuan legacy as a counterpoint to the study of Okinawan folk traditions suggests the ambivalence of his own position as a “native” scholar within the intellectual and political discourse of Japan at that time. Later called the “father of Okinawan studies,” Iha was among the forerunners who argued for the common origin of Okinawan and Japanese culture and language (Iha 2000 [1906], Namimatsu 2000) and called for the modernization of Okinawa through identification with Japanese. However, his statement of Kumiodori as the “national theater,” which has its sovereign Ryukyuan origin outside Japan, would counter his own assimilationist claim in public and reveal his own belief in Okinawan subjectivity. The conflicting perspective in which Kumiodori was recontextualized in the scholarly discourse by Iha would reverberate in the way it came to be later performed as intangible cultural property/heritage.

While Iha put forward Kumiodori in the modern Japanese context, it was woven into the emerging institutional process of folkloristic performance, mediated by Orikuchi. As he endorsed Iha’s work, Orikuchi’s articulation of the historical continuity of Japanese theatrical tradition, specifically *nō* and *kabuki*, and Kumiodori confirmed its significance in the study of performance. Orikuchi also stressed the need for the preservation of the Ryukyuan/Okinawan performance in the face of deteriorating social and economic conditions in the imminence of war. Following the first introduction of a troop of Okinawan folk songs and dances at the previously mentioned Local Dance and Folk Music Convention in 1928 in Tokyo (Kumada 2007), Orikuchi and his colleagues organized the Ryukyuan Classical Performing Arts Convention in 1936, also in Tokyo, by inviting Kumiodori performers from Okinawa (Misumi 2011, 217–49; Shimabukuro 2005, 289–92). The performers were the heirs of the Ryukyuan court actors, who had managed to survive despite financial difficulties. After going through the devastation of the Pacific War, Okinawans had been put under the control of US forces. Yet they continued to perform at makeshift commercial theaters and created new dance and theatrical forms for popular audiences instead of courtiers, joined by female dancers in place of men, who left for better-paid jobs. Orikuchi and his colleagues had worked for the continuation of their performances, while Okinawans remained stateless through the US occupation period after the war. The advocacy of scholarly authority constituted an integral part of the heritage-making process.

But it was after the 1960s that Okinawan/Ryukyuan performances experienced a dramatic transformation. They began to be embraced in the national institution for the protection of performance traditions, which was buttressed finally by the foundation of the National Theater in Tokyo in 1966. Following the cultural protection policy, the national theater was designed to implement the protection of performances designated as the nation’s “important intangible cultural properties” such as *nō*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku*. The theater gave a permanent venue, programs for public performance, training, research, and archiving, and the knowledge and expertise of performance research was essential to this institutional process of

intangible culture. Orikuchi's successors, who were among those in charge of public programming, incorporated the "Folk Performing Arts Programs" as part of the regular schedule in parallel with *nō*, *kabuki*, or *bunraku* programs. The introduction of this folkloristic program anticipated the incorporation of "intangible folk cultural property" in the 1975 revision of the cultural protection law, as the classificatory term parallel to the existing "intangible cultural property" (Kikuchi 2008). The law defines the former as "indispensable for understanding the transition in the daily lives of the Japanese people" and the latter as "of historical or artistic" value.<sup>7</sup> In terms of performance, the revision included "folk performing arts" in the definition of "intangible folk cultural property" and thus distinguished the non-folk forms that are performed by professionals on a theater stage from the folk forms that are observed by lay "folks" on communal occasions. The division produces hierarchical cultural spheres for the governance and management of the national culture. If non-folk performances serve for the exaltation and refinement of the nation's art and skill by acclaimed master artists, folkloristic performances function as a reminder of the nation's cultural past for the maintenance of national cohesion. However, the division also speaks to a shift that occurred in postwar Japan during the 1960s and 1970s.

Triggered by the radical student protests in 1960 against the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty, Japanese society was shaken by the intensity and magnitude of political activism and resistance throughout the decade. It was this social and historical force that brought the category "intangible 'folk' cultural property" into the national cultural system. The term "folk," which still continued to project its early modern conception of voiceless collectivity, also reappeared as an agent of social change.

One of the most critical issues in the social movements from the latter half of the 1960s was the increasing call for Okinawa's Reversion to Japan. While Japanese and Okinawan intellectuals and researchers had a profound influence in shaping the discourse of the reversion, the folkloristic literature of Okinawa, led by Yanagita and Orikuchi, constituted a prominent narrative that attracted a wide range of readers and impacted on altering Japanese perception of Okinawans, replacing the negative stereotypes with a closer affinity to the "vulnerable" folk community.

As the reversion was a pressing issue facing Okinawans, their performances re-emerged as the platform for reflecting on the deeper meaning of the reversion with respect to Okinawan/Ryukyuan identity. The National Theater provided a definite confirmation for Okinawan and Ryukyuan performances at the height of the political debate by launching Ryukyuan Performing Arts Programs in 1967, for "Ryukyuan" court dances and theaters as well as urban stage performance forms invented after the annexation (Misumi 2011, 256–57). At the same time, subsuming "Okinawan" folk songs and dances into the Folk Performing Arts Programs, the theater alternately presented Ryukyuan and Okinawan performances in the respective programs toward and after the Reversion in 1972.

The juxtaposition of the Okinawan and Ryukyuan categories reframed the earlier question of Okinawan/Ryukyuan identity in the reversion context. If the Ryukyuan program represented Kumiodori performers as external others by the



foreign-sounding name “Ryukyu” to pose a question on their identity, by contrast the folkloristic program portrayed Okinawan folk singers and dancers as internal natives who preserved the Japanese cultural roots. Experiencing the transformational process of their identity at the threshold of the national boundary, Ryukyuan/Okinawan performers have heightened self-consciousness of participating in cultural politics.

To be sure, Okinawans had been always made aware of their own cultural identity caught by foreign control. Also faced with the popularization of Okinawan performances in the commercial context, cultural and political leaders of Okinawan society were concerned for the authentic continuation of Kumiodori. While they organized the Kumiodori Preservation Society (Dentō kumiodori hozonkai 1993, 26; Shimabukuro 2005, 294; Karimata 2013), *Ryūkyū Shimpō* and *Okinawan Times*, two major newspaper companies in Okinawa, instituted an annual competition of Okinawan/Ryukyuan performances, encouraging the faithful presentation of their cultural traditions. Following the inception of the Ryukyu Performing Arts Programs at the National Theater, the Ryukyuan government, under the administration of the US force, registered Kumiodori as Ryuku’s important intangible cultural property in 1967<sup>8</sup> and selected the “Five Pieces” composed by the founder Chōkun as the foundational texts. The political implication of Kumiodori was reinforced at the Okinawan Reversion in 1972, when it was designated as important intangible cultural property of Japan. Performers of Kumiodori and “Ryukyu buyō” (dance), which was added in 2009, had secured their cultural status and confidence by the designation as “important intangible cultural property”; nine Okinawan forms, such as festivals and customs, have been selected as the nation’s “important intangible folk cultural properties” as of 2019.<sup>9</sup> What transformed Kumiodori into the “important intangible cultural property” was the modern institutional force of national politics and policy, with which the authority and advocacy of folkloristic research of performance had been inextricably interconnected.

#### “RYUKUAN” PERFORMANCE, TOURISM, AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

“Cultural policy,” which had emerged as the official term of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, proposed a practical approach to the promotion of culture, namely accepting funds from the private sector, facilitated by the Japan Arts Council that was established in 1990. Given this new paradigm of cultural policy, Okinawan performing arts have been framed by the national policy devised for the economic promotion and social development of Okinawa. This policy measure points to the fact that Okinawa has continued to be the nexus of security relations between the US and Japan, as will be discussed later. Soon after the Reversion, tourism, along with the hosting of the US military, developed as the primary resource of the Okinawan economy, stimulated by the launch of direct flights from Tokyo to Okinawa and the International Ocean Exposition held in 1975 (Tada 2015, 97–98). As the cultural protection system gave license to Ryukyuan/Okinawan cultural traditions, tourist industries fashioned traditional dance and song as a mainstay of Okinawan tourism within the context of the national-local economic project. In

addition, boosted by the growth of mass tourism through the 1980s and 1990s, Okinawa has been reinvented by its large-scale economic redevelopment as a subtropical resort, akin to Hawai'i (Tada 2015, 91–101; Andō 2007, 2–5). Romantic nostalgia for Okinawa, created by the folkloristic discourse, had been a persuasive force to move Japanese society during the Reversion movement, and Japanese tourists rediscovered “Ryukyu” as an exotic, utopian resort and “Ryukyuan,” who were embodied by dance and music performed at tourist sites. Ryukyuan performance has become a vital economic resource for Okinawa, widely popularized by advertising campaigns by airlines, tourist industries, and popular media.

Media attention on Ryukyuan culture grew as the once-destroyed Shuri Jō (Shuri castle) of the Ryukyuan Kingdom was restored in 1992 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Reversion. In the following year, NHK, the national broadcasting corporation, aired a historical drama that featured the Ryukyu Kingdom solely as the theme of a year-long period drama series, the first time a national TV program depicted Ryukyuan history (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 33–32). “Cultural heritage” came into clear view within this rapidly expanding economic and tourism context. In December 2000 Shuri Jō was nominated for the World Heritage listing, grouped together with related archaeological sites of Okinawa, and registered as part of “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu.” Okinawa, hosting the G8 Summit in the very same year, found its self-image projected on the global stage from outside national boundaries (Kyushu Okinawa Summit 2000). The rebirth of Shuri Jō as World Heritage marks the moment in which Okinawan culture began to be reconfigured in light of the global heritage discourse.

As renewed interest in “Ryukyu” has been generated at the convergence of global politics, economics, and tourism, images of Ryukyu have been embodied and performed predominantly by female dancers donning the colorful stereotypical Ryukyuan garb. They appeared as a visible feature of the summit reception and also as part of the regular performance program of Shuri Jō. Increasing interest in the imaginary “Ryukyu” relates to the large-scale enterprise laid out in the Okinawa Economic Plan for the 21st Century by the Okinawa Policy Council. Its final report put out in August 2000 specified one of the basic principles of the policy as the “development of (Okinawa) as a hub of Asia-Pacific regional interactions” and listed the “new development of tourism/resort industry” as a major economic promotion scheme (Okinawa Seisaku Kyōgikai 2012; Mulgan 2000). The nomination of Shuri Jō for World Heritage had in fact been foreseen in the objectives of the tourism/resort scheme, which later developed the Shuri Jō district as a nationally managed park in accordance with the conservation effort of the surrounding historic landscape.

The project also expected the construction of the tentatively named “National Kumiodori Theater.” The Okinawan prefectural government had petitioned for building a national theater for Kumiodori earlier in the mid-1980s. By that time, four national theaters had already been constructed: National Theater (1966), National Engei Hall (1979), National Nō Theater (1983), and National Bunraku Theater (1984). Unlike these genre-based theaters located in the metropolises of Tokyo and Osaka, the one opened in Okinawa in 2004 turned out to be condi-

tioned on different premises. Eventually called the “National Theater Okinawa” instead of “National Kumiodori Theater,” its name shows “Okinawa” itself makes up a discretely marked cultural genre.

The National Theater Okinawa, as well as the New National Theater, which was opened in 1997 for Western theatrical genres including opera, ballet, drama, and contemporary dance, was established in the transitional period of the major reform of cultural administration and organization, preceding the enactment of the Fundamental Law for the Promotion of Culture and Arts. The management and operation of the two theaters have been entrusted to the respective National Theater Management Foundations by the Japan Arts Council, which directly administers and manages the other four national theaters. In contrast to those theaters for *nō* and *kabuki*, which were intended primarily for the faithful preservation of the nation’s important intangible cultural properties, the National Theater Okinawa and the New National Theater have been given more autonomy, depending on the particular needs of each theater.

Unlike the other theaters, National Theater Okinawa had its beginning in this “global” context. In the previously mentioned Okinawan Economic Plan for the 21st Century, the theater was designated as a “hub of interaction through traditional culture in the Asia-Pacific region” (Ōshiro 2005, 17–32) and Ryukuan historical tourism. But what pushed Okinawa’s petition for the national theater forward were not only economic but also geopolitical forces, which would redefine the position of Okinawa in the region. The shifting political context is illustrated by the regional categorization of “Asia Pacific,” in which the National Theater Okinawa and Shuri Jō and other World Heritage sites are located. The term has taken on a new meaning within the discourse of global politics and security that involves Okinawa, Japan, and the US, driven by the US-Japan Joint Declaration on Security signed in 1996. Revising the 1951 Japan-US Security Treaty, the declaration expanded the scope of the treaty to the “Asia Pacific” region and reconfirmed the bilateral determination to tackle the controversy over the US military bases within Japan, which are disproportionately concentrated in Okinawa (Matsumoto 2004). Indeed, the Okinawa anti-base movements gathered momentum and put pressure on the national government to solve the imbalance during the mid-1990s and thereafter. While Okinawans had been repeatedly annoyed by violent and often sexual crimes by US military servicemen, the gang rape of a twelve-year-old girl in 1995 provoked the largest anti-base protest rally since the Reversion (Davis 2011, 218–19; Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016). This rising consciousness in Okinawan society of the issues relating to the US base and the political subjectivity of Okinawa underlies Kumiodori’s inscription by UNESCO as ICH and relevant Ryukyuan performance events and projects, which I will discuss later.

Whereas the National Theater Okinawa was designed under these economic and political conditions, its primary objective has been the preservation of Kumiodori. As an important intangible cultural property, Kumiodori needs to meet certain requirements, just like *nō* and *kabuki*. First of all, most of the main performers of a Kumiodori play, including actors and musicians, should be members of the Traditional Kumiodori Preservation Society, who are certified as the holders of

the tradition. The performance and dramatization, as for scripts, costumes, and stage props, should be based on those of tradition (Dentō kumiodori hozonkai 1993, 28), and performers should only be male. The National Theater of Okinawa provides a training program for the prospective heirs of Kumiodori, who are males under thirty years old, following the practice of the Ryukyuan Court. Efforts to preserve the Ryukyuan tradition were facilitated by the establishment of the “Ryukyu Performing Arts” program at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts created in 2004, renaming the previous “Traditional Japanese Music” program. Kumiodori performers, supported by these national systems, have strengthened their cultural status and secured the continuity of the Ryukyuan tradition. Kumiodori, as defined as an important intangible cultural property, needs to be a highly specialized practice that requires the artistic and professional mastery of its authentic tradition, to the extent that talented individuals who have acquired the exceptional artistic virtuosity of the genre may be approved as “Living National Treasures.” But this emphasis on mastery or authenticity could in turn distance Kumiodori even from larger, perhaps younger, Okinawan audiences, just as the “Ryukyuan language,” which is a mainstay of Kumiodori, is no longer intelligible to Okinawan, much less to Japanese, audiences (Okinawa Sōgō Jimukyoku 2016; Shimabukuro 2005, 295–99). This dilemma points to the limitation of the faithful preservation of Kumiodori just as the elevated status of Kumiodori has conversely energized the popular movement of traditional Okinawan performances, all the more diversifying and commercializing the images of Ryukyuan/Okinawan performance. The economic and tourism discourse of “cultural heritage” then could offer an alternative framework to that internal dilemma.

#### CREATIVITY AND KUMIODORI AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Kumiodori was included in the Representative List of ICH in mid-November 2010, ten years after the entry of Shuri Jō in the World Heritage List. If the designation of Kumiodori as important intangible cultural property in 1972 was mainly a concern of selected numbers of experts and scholars affiliated with the government committee, the process before and after the announcement drew the interest of a much larger part of Okinawan society. Conversations and activities exploring what the listing means for Okinawans took place in the lead up to UNESCO’s announcement through forums, events, and exhibitions, boosted by the expanding role of online media and social networking. An illustrative attempt that encapsulated the perspectives of the Kumiodori community would be the performance held at the National Theater Okinawa for two days at the end of that month. The performance celebrated the accomplishment by reaffirming the history of Kumiodori, particularly its eighteenth-century founder Chōkun. It showed one of his “Five Pieces,” the play “Shūshin Kaneiri” (Possession, divine protection), and also one other play from the theatrical genre called “Okinawa shibai.” “Shūshin Kaneiri,” known as one of the earliest pieces performed at the Ryukyuan court, has been a foundational piece of the genre, and “Okinawa shibai,” developed at the popular theater after the disruption of the Ryukyu Court, was a newly created play.

The presentation of these paired plays indicates the commitment of performers and producers to reframing Kumiodori, looking for new approaches.

What is distinctive about this program is that it was women who took charge of Chōkun's classic piece, and male actors instead played the popularized piece, reversing the all-male convention of Kumiodori as an important intangible cultural property. Enacting the canonical text "Shūshin Kaneiri" in the name of Chōkun, the performance turned out to be an unprecedented one. *Ryūkyū Shimpō* reported that the stage directors, actors, and musicians of the "Shūshin Kaneiri" were all women, and it was the first time that Kumiodori was performed solely by women at the National Theater Okinawa (Furugen 2010). The article, titled "Preservation of Kumiodori: An Opportunity for Discussion," concludes with the expectation that "the two plays, presented right upon the inscription of Kumiodori by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, would become an occasion to advance the discussion of how Kumiodori, with long-established tradition, should be preserved." The comment refers to the concern expressed among performers and producers regarding how they envisioned the future of Kumiodori. Gender—specifically whether Kumiodori continues to restrict female performers—has been one of the main issues to be dealt with. The all-female performance manifests the reality of women's enlarging influence in the realm of Ryukyuan performance, which had already started before the Reversion. They have continued to take on a more active role as performers, instructors, and amateurs (Shimabukuro 2005, 292–93), particularly since the long-awaited designation of "Ryukyuan buyō," in which the majority of performers are women, as an important intangible cultural property in 2009. While the cultural property protection law restricts Kumiodori performers only to men, the heritage context provides an experimental framework in which women could assume a principal role in Kumiodori.

Even as the authority of tradition has prevailed, consolidated by the law, an important step forward has been made by a series of works by an Okinawan intellectual leader and novelist, Ōshiro Tatsuhiro. He had written about Kumiodori and other Okinawan performing arts since the pre-Reversion period and created new Kumiodori plays, encouraging the production of new Kumiodori. Underlying his works is a political message against the violence of the war and the US base (Ōshiro 2012), and he has become a well-known voice of the anti-base protest movements. As his view moved away from the unquestioned submission of Okinawa to Japan, his new Kumiodori plays published in 2001, titled "New Five Pieces" (Misumi 2011, 260–61; Ōno 2005, 267–70), are a departure from Chōkun's revered "Five Pieces." These plays were Ōshiro's attempt to contextualize the conventions of performance, which has bound Okinawan identity to the eternal and imaginary Ryukyuan past.

Ōshiro's challenge for creative Okinawan performance was in parallel with the powerful force that had driven Okinawan society at that moment. As manifested by a wave of anti-base protests, Okinawans now not only asserted their subjective will in US-Japan relations but also acted on it. Within this context of Okinawan self-consciousness, Kumiodori performers chose to arrange the epoch-making program at the National Theater Okinawa in a rather unconventional way to reflect

on the meaning of Kumiodori, not in a way that would just replicate the “authentic” rendition expected by the title of the important intangible cultural property. That performance at the Theater was actually presented as what they called the “research program” that the national theater organizes annually, distinct from the “regular and special programs” (Kakazu 2014). The two-day event included a lecture titled “Orikuchi Shinobu and Okinawan Performing Arts,” which recalled the weight of the scholarly authority and perspective in the affirmation of heritage. The “Okinawa shibai” piece in the second part of the event was a rendition of the play written by Orikuchi in 1946, produced by Haruo Misumi. As one of the contemporary authorities who succeeded Orikuchi’s study, Misumi also produced the “Ryukyuan Performing Arts Program” at the National Theater in Tokyo in 1967 and advocated for the public presentation of Okinawan performing arts since the Reversion movement (Misumi 2011, 256).

In the fictional play titled “Shūshin Kaneiri Engi” (The origin of Shūshin Kaneiri), Orikuchi contextualized the process in which Chōkun created “Shūshin Kaneiri” while participating as a court official in the Ryukyuan missions to Japan (Misumi 2011, 156). “Shūshin Kaneiri” was modeled on a widespread old Japanese legend,<sup>10</sup> which has been adapted in *nō*, *kabuki*, *jōruri*, *kabuki* dance, and other Japanese theatrical and musical performances. It is the play that could best illustrate the cultural and historical continuity of Japanese and Okinawan performing arts traditions (Orikuchi 1995 [1929], 354–55; 1996 [1936], 456–57). Orikuchi wrote the play in 1946, when he expressed deep concern for the dire situation of Okinawa right after the war, and in his writings he urged the continuation of the performance (Orikuchi 1996 [1946], 460–66; 1996 [1950], 467–78). He depicted Chōkun’s resolute devotion to the creation of the new Ryukyuan performance, Kumiodori, by accepting Japanese influence but resisting complete absorption by it (Orikuchi 1997 [1946], 160–73), and he perhaps associated Chōkun’s pioneering role with that of the Okinawan folklorist Iha in Okinawan studies.<sup>11</sup> As UNESCO’s inscription has expanded the horizons of Kumiodori, Misumi recontextualized his mentor’s play to evoke Chōkun’s creative impulse for performers today. In his 1950 essay Orikuchi took note of the importance of the male tradition of Kumiodori. However, Misumi also stressed the preservation of tradition but, given the ICH announcement, called for commitment to the creation of a new Kumiodori, from a global point of view, by juxtaposing Orikuchi’s play (Misumi 2011, 289–94) with the female-only performance of Shūshin Kaneiri.

#### GLOBAL POLITICS IN THE ICH PERSPECTIVE

Kumiodori’s inscription on the UNESCO ICH List fostered a series of public programs for greater numbers of Okinawans outside the national theater space to celebrate it and to call attention from even those who had not been familiar with Kumiodori. One of the notable projects that took an innovative approach began with an announcement at the Okinawan prefectural government office, as it was funded by a grant from the Japan Arts Council and sponsored by the prefectural board of education and other organizations in Okinawa (*Ryūkyū Shimpō* 2010).



It was an attempt to present “Ryukyuan” performances through the documentary film-making process, involving a large number of participants and audiences. It was a way to invite Okinawans to reconsider the history that brought about Kumiodori and Ryukyuan performance traditions in their relations with Japan. The film followed the process in which the project team made up of scholars and research-performance groups reconstructed the cultural and political history of the mission that the Ryukyuan King had sent to Edo, present-day Tokyo.

The journey, called *Edo nobori*, literally meaning “going up to Edo,” was the more than year-long round-trip from Ryukyu to Edo via Satsuma, by ship and foot, which was conducted eighteen times between 1634 and 1850. *Edo nobori* was the important historical context of Kumiodori, as Chōkun participated in it several times and learned the theatrical form of *nō* and *kabuki* to organize Ryukyuan dance (Orikuchi 1995 [1929], 349–56; Misumi 2011, 156). Moreover, *Edo nobori* was a decisive historical process that structured the relationship between Ryukyu and Japan (Okamoto 2013; Miyagi 1976; Maehira 1995). The major task of the project was to reconstruct the music and dance that the Ryukyuan embassy had performed not only in front of the Shogun inside the Edo Castle but also in a procession on their way to and from Edo for Japanese bystanders, as well as the kind of musical instruments played in a procession on the street. The task was also to reenact them at the theater in central Tokyo in February 2011 and film the whole process, in a documentary titled “Regenerating Ryukyu Performing Arts: *Edo nobori*.” The film depicted the group’s endeavor that culminated in their performance in Tokyo and, after the preview events in Okinawa and Tokyo in May, it continues to be displayed in different settings. Even though *Edo nobori* may have been a technical term in Okinawan history, the project highlighted this term to call the attention of a larger public to it. Recontextualized in the contemporary Okinawan discourse, it has given a new meaning and perspective to review what *Edo nobori* performance meant at the time and what it meant to be Ryukyuan in their relations with Japanese.

This was not the first time that *Edo nobori* was taken up as a public project. It was reformulated as a field of global heritage politics in 2001, when the project “Research on Materials Relating to *Edo nobori*” was carried out by the park management foundation (Kaiyōhaku Kōen 2007, 14–15). The research was intended for the development of Shuri Jō Park, which relates to the tourism/resort scheme laid out in the Okinawan Economic Plan for the 21st Century, and its initial plan had already envisioned the reenactment of *Edo nobori* in the future. Its findings were repeatedly displayed to Okinawans in a public exhibition program at the university and municipal libraries in 2003, a musical performance at the National Theater Okinawa in 2007, and also at the Shuri Jō Park in 2009. The *Edo nobori* discourse began as part of the economic enterprise, but it also allowed them to reinterpret Okinawa’s relationship to Japan entangled by the US military base issue. The anti-base movements intensified, shaking national politics, and on a far greater scale since 2009 when the opposition party overtook the nearly half-a-century-long majority party by promising the relocation of the controversial US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma out of Okinawa (Davis 2011, 218–19; Chanlett-

Avery and Rinehart 2016, 1). Despite the fact that the relocation proposal was turned down by the US government, Okinawans, informed of the *Edo nobori* discourse, reaffirmed their strength rooted in the Ryukyuan past as well as the symbolic significance of Kumiodori's inscription in the UNESCO List.

The relevance of *Edo nobori* to the rising protest movements was expressed by the participants of a public forum in Tokyo organized by the historical society in 2009 to mark the Satsuma invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom four centuries ago (Muta 2010, 105–6). A focal point in this discussion was the interpretation of the Ryukyuan identity constructed by the embassy's procession, that is, how Japanese audiences had perceived the Ryukyuan missions and, more significantly, how Ryukyuan members presented themselves to Japanese. The procession, generally comprised of a hundred members, would have been an impressive spectacle for Japanese spectators during those times when the country was secluded from the outside world. Researchers have investigated existing historical materials regarding *Edo nobori*, including picture scrolls and woodblock prints, to analyze in detail the meanings of the procession depicted on the scrolls, such as the type and design of clothing and hairstyles that the mission members wore and various gear they carried. What particularly concerned the historians and participants in the Okinawan issue was the Chinese-looking appearance of the Ryukyuan members in the procession (Tomiya 2010; Kamiya 2010; Seifman 2012; Marco 2014).

The accepted interpretation had been that Ryukyuan members had been required to put on Chinese clothing by the Satsuma domain, which had had direct influence over the kingdom and also had led the Ryukyuan mission to Edo. This view, put forth by Okinawa-born historians since the prewar years, had prevailed among researchers, even as it was repeatedly reinterpreted in the postwar context. They argued that this imposition by Satsuma had been responsible for imprinting Ryukyuan members as “exotics” in Japanese perceptions. However, contemporary historians have argued that this explanation itself is built on the assumption of the common origin of Ryukyuan members and Japanese, which was really a construct of modern discourse (Tomiya 2010, 33–38). In their intricate analysis of historical documents, they have examined geopolitical relations in the eastern Asian region at that time and suggested that Ryukyu could have used its tributary trade with China in its relations with Japan (Kamiya 2010, 66–68). Ryukyuan members could have manipulated power by impressing the Japanese bystanders with their exotic appearance and performance, without completely yielding the Ryukyuan perspective. They could use the same tactic by projecting the “exotic” images of Ryukyuan performance, even exaggerating it by countering it to the “folk” images of Okinawan performances, in the contemporary context of cultural politics.

The Japanese cultural policy has expanded its scope by incorporating the UNESCO's cultural heritage framework, while continuing to be built on the concept of “cultural property” under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Property. Indeed, intangible cultural heritage has opened an experimental space and time beyond the national cultural policy for Ryukyuan/Okinawan performers. It has generated a public sphere in which Okinawans reconstruct their culture, history, and identity.

The concept of cultural heritage can be employed as a useful and effective platform to implement economics-centered cultural policies under the Fundamental Law for Culture and the Arts. However, the approach toward its flexible applicability and versatility, which has prevailed in the narrative of cultural administration and cultural management research, can overshadow an inquiry into the complex history and politics of the heritage process. It can conceal the way in which Kumiodori performers and Okinawan society have turned the performance of intangible cultural heritage into a transformative process in their struggle and challenge under historical and political relations. To be sure, they themselves may look for a practical way to affirm their tradition by applying it in tourism and economic development. But folkloristic research also needs to question and clarify what has been buried in the narrative of Japanese culture under the modern structure of the nation state and how its disciplinary discourse and practice have been involved in the national project. It is important to address the fact that both cultural property and cultural heritage have functioned as an instrument of governance in national and global cultural policies, which can impact profoundly on the way people perceive and experience their culture, identity, and history. Cultural heritage, even if it was intended as an alternative to folklore or traditional and oral culture, cannot replace cultural property, of which the non-folk and folk division has been entrenched in Japanese cultural discourse. Japanese cultural policy, while actively promoting cultural heritage at its forefront, needs the division to administer the national culture.

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#### NOTES

1. Japan was the 125th country to join the convention at that time.
2. Akira Negoro (1999) explained in his study of Japanese cultural policy that there has been the unstated rule, established during the postwar years, that the government maintains a detached and cautious attitude toward culture to avoid government control and interference with the content of culture during the war effort.
3. To implement the law, basic policies were laid out in four stages from 2002 to 2015.
4. Kumiodori is among the twenty-one inscribed ICH elements from Japan as of 2019.
5. I will be drawing on the ethnography of communication to investigate the way in which “heritagization is communicated at a hyper-intensive level” through various media, including

“in print, online, and in face-to-face settings on and off screens, as well as in growing stacks of memoranda” (Bendix 2009, 265).

6. The term “folk art” was initially used for the name of the society, which was reestablished as Folk Performing Arts Society in the early 1950s. Although the terminology for “folk art” (*minzoku geijutsu*) and “folk performing art” (*minzoku geinō*) was still ambiguous during the formative years, the latter prevailed as the cultural property protection law adopted it.

7. “Intangible folk culture properties” was added into the classification of “intangible culture” by the 1975 amendment, along with “conservation techniques for cultural properties.”

8. Even under administration by the US force, the Ryukyuan government had preserved the cultural protection laws of the Meiji government and likewise had established the Law for the Protection of Cultural Property in 1954, following Japan’s 1950 law.

9. Among the nine forms of important intangible folk cultural properties, two are the “folk” form of Kumiodori that the local village had adopted from the Ryukyuan court tradition.

10. In the legend on the temple Dōjōji, a woman, possessed by love for a traveling priest who rejected her, burns him to death.

11. In the play, on his way back to Ryukyu from Japan Chōkun loses a novice actor, who had been possessed by his longing for Japan, but overcoming the loss he determines to create Kumiodori.

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