

# OKINAWAN MUSIC: A MINORITY CULTURE ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

沖縄音楽

Okinawa, Japan's southernmost prefecture, is an island chain stretching over 600 km from the south of the Japanese mainland to Taiwan. From 1429, the islands were ruled independently of Japan and China as the kingdom of Ryūkyū until their incorporation into the modern Japanese state in 1879. A period of U.S. military government between 1945 and 1972, and the continuing presence of American bases on the islands, has also given the islands a unique cultural position in the Japanese nation. Since the early 1990s, Okinawan culture, both traditional and modern, has found widespread popularity in mainland Japanese society. Okinawan musicians regularly perform in Tokyo and other large Japanese cities, Okinawan restaurants have sprung up throughout the country, and several national prime-time television dramas have been set in the islands. This talk will consider some of the cultural meanings of Okinawan music in modern Japan, and will include performance of Okinawan songs accompanied by the sanshin, an Okinawan banjo that is a symbol of the region's cultural identity.

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