

Voices from an Unsealed ‘Time Capsule’: Decoding the Vocal Styles in Okinawan Folksong Singing by Argentinian-Uchinanchu

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Okinawa Diaspora (Uchinanchu) history in Argentina can be traced back to 1908. It is thought to be a ‘Time Capsule’ for it preserves the Ryukyu music style that was no longer prevailing in current Okinawa. Existing research covers its history (1908-1993) focusing on collecting and interpreting its music as “to remember, negotiate, and construct social identity.” (Dale A. Olsen, 2004)

With an interest to explore the ‘old’ singing style and current situation, I started fieldwork in 2014 and I was enchanted unexpectedly by a high incidence of falsetto singing (Uragoe) and strongly ornamented vibration in Argentina. It triggers an inquiry on why these unrecorded minute vocal features are highly welcomed and what value can be decoded from them.

This paper adopts computational and ethnographical data into analysis and argues that the special vocal phenomenon has roots in four origins: early style from 1st generation, vibration from Kobushi & Enka (mainland Japan), and falsetto singing from Shima-uta (Amami) and La Baguala (North-western Argentina), which display influences in accordance with cultural processes in Okinawa: *Yamatonization* and *Classicalization*; and in Argentina: an identity rethinking after a 1999 project sending a young generation ‘returning home’. Different vocal techniques mirror different cultural re-positionings within Argentinian-Uchinanchu.