THE JAPANESE/OKINAWAN DESCENDANTS IN CUBA: TRANSCULTURATION, FESTIVALS AND POP CULTURE

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Introduction

Although plenty of literature addresses the contributions of the Indigenous, African, and European components of Cuban culture, little has been written about the Asian counterpart. Most documents available focus on the Chinese during the sugar boom but rarely on the Japanese and Okinawans. Okinawa, although part of Japan today, was once an independent kingdom known as the Ryukyu Kingdom, colonized by Japan during the late nineteenth century. Rather than addressing them as one group of people, the Japanese/Okinawan distinction is analyzed throughout this study as an attempt to step away from Japan's colonizing discourse, which has deprived Okinawans of agency, by grouping all people under a homogeneous umbrella. There are also cultural differences between Japanese and Okinawans that are crucial for establishing this distinction. This essay will attempt to demonstrate the significance of the contributions of Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants to Cuba's complex socio-cultural mixture. It will explore the preservation of Japanese culture in Isla de Pinos, specifically through the celebration of the Obon Festival to honor ancestors. By expanding on what Ortiz has coined *transculturation* or cross-fertilization as a main theoretical framework, my research will focus on establishing the role Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants have played and continue to play in this *ajiaco*.[1]

The large gap in the social science literature and the new emerging opportunities in Cuba make it necessary to develop Ortiz's work on transculturation and use what has been written in the field of sociology about the Chinese to assess the revival of culture. The study of the traditional Japanese festivals, Obon, in particular, and the new emerging *otaku* (geek)

[1] The blending of European, African, Indigenous, and Asian ingredients is comparable to the process of making *ajiaco*, or Cuban stew, where minimal participation is granted to Asians in the process, and even less so, to the Japanese/Okinawan and their descendants.

annual festivals in Havana, will demonstrate that Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants have been and continue to be active participants in the creation of the Cuban identity. In order to place the lack of contemporary literature about Japanese/Okinawan-Cubans in context, the first part of this essay addresses well-established theories and historical approaches to the study of minorities, from transculturation to the constant use of an Orientalizing narrative, as well as some reflections on diaspora literature. Then, while examining these concepts, I will summarize the recent scholarship on Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants in Cuba and their portrayals as challengers of the status quo. Finally, I will situate my own research and discuss future ideas to further develop these theoretical frameworks.

On the Social Phenomenon of "Transculturation" and Its Importance in Cuba

Fernando Ortiz, in his book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947), describes the term transculturation as a process of "mutual cultural fashioning" and "the result of extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here [Cuba] and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk" (Ortiz 98). As proposed by Ortiz, the term transculturation is considered a substitute for "acculturation" – the transition of one culture to another – and became a way to differentiate the island and its people in a post-colonial anchoring in the Atlantic rather than in the Mediterranean (Tsang 2).

Like in the Cuban *ajiaco*, the literature has mainly attributed the Asian ingredient in this cultural mix to the Chinese and Chinese descendants living in Cuba, but minimal attention has been paid to other Asian minorities. Shortage of labor was perhaps the main pull factor that propelled the migration of East Asian minorities to Latin America and the Caribbean. In the case of Cuba, the Chinese were the highest in number and have been studied on numerous occasions from the sugar industry boom until recent times. Japanese and Okinawans were also attracted to the labor opportunities available on the island of Cuba, but the number of migrants was much smaller. These Japanese and Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants have contributed to the cultural richness of Cuba, yet no anthropological study has explored their impact as attempts of cultural revitalization take place. One of the primary objectives of this essay is to look at the processes that facilitated Japanese contribution to the *ajiaco*.

Scholar Martin Tsang writes about *sinalidad* to represent the Chinese and establish an opposition to *cubanidad* or "Cubanness" (Tsang 2). The Japanese/Okinawans were also considered the "others" and were often lumped with the Chinese, frequently referred to by the pejorative term "chinos," which further complicated the process. Perhaps the only time when there was a differentiation of these Asian minorities was during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria leading to World War II. Japanese imperial expansion into Manchuria led the vast majority of Chinese immigrants on the island to voice their displeasure with Japanese actions. The Chinese also appealed to the Cubans' sympathy, making their differences as Asian immigrants clear, at least for some time. Other historical factors, such as the Cuban government's declaration of war against Japan and incarceration of Japanese naturals and second-generation (*nissei*), played a role in this differentiation that lasted almost as long as the war. In light of the theoretical frameworks selected for this preliminary study, it seems that Ortiz's *transculturation* and the persisting Orientalizing discourse surrounding Asian minorities find themselves at odds when trying to explain the Japanese/Okinawan phenomenon.

Orientalism: Patronizing Representations of "The East" According to Edward Said

Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said 1). According to Said, the Orient has served to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience (2). Said clarifies that far from being merely imaginative, the Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture (2). In Cuba (ex-Spanish colony), where racial identity continues to be a way of negotiating social status, Asians were labeled as non-white most of the time, yet this negotiation could be overridden by economic status. However, the literature of their descendants shows pride in their ancestry by marking the distinction from everything "Cuban."

The further disconnection from Japan/Okinawa in embellished narratives of their homeland and culture contrasts with Ortiz's transculturation. The primary sources of literature fetishizing the Far East continue to present Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants in contrast to what it means to be Cuban. After all, Ortiz claimed the *ajiaco* was Indigenous, African, and European, with some of these ingredients, especially the African, in constant negotiation of their positions. The

premises of Orientalism are engraved in the literature Cuban scholars have produced. There is a tendency to fetishize Asian cultural practices as beautiful, foreign, and exotic. Although of tremendous historical value, the work produced in Cuba has portrayed Japanese/Okinawan cultural practices through the nebulous narrative of Orientalism, albeit benevolently. The challenge of portraying Asian minorities in an accurate light is still very much present in the current literature as it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between a commodified tradition and genuine cross-fertilization.

This interplay between transculturation and Orientalism is present in literature, for example, in Lidia A. Sánchez Fujishiro's biographical novel. As narrated by the author, "the last name Fujishiro denominates us all, regardless of the place we occupy in the family tree" (50).[2] Sánchez Fujishiro emphasizes the "otherness" surrounding Japanese and Japanese descendants by implying that the Japanese ingredient of her Cuban family would always distinguish them as "others." In her book, it is also explained that other Cubans opted to call them just Fujishiro, omitting the Sánchez altogether because of its "exotic" character (50). In the text, she mentions that although her ancestors were from Japan, they are a "Cuban family that is not afraid to flaunt its ancestry and adds with pride that it is such a mix what makes them diverse" (Sánchez Fujishiro 50). While there seems to be a purposeful claim to the Japanese ethnicity because it made the family special and different, the search for a transcultural identity drove the author to embark on a journey to reinforce her Japanese identity while also upholding her Cuban roots.

Latin American and Caribbean writers cultivated a specific type of Orientalism that fetishizes the Far East. Sánchez Fujishiro describes the people of Japan as tenacious, hardworking, and intelligent: "peoples that like the phoenix always arise from their ashes to achieve progress" (50). She takes pride in her ancestry as a third-generation Japanese-Cuban. Without knowing so, or perhaps on purpose, the scholar reinforced her and her family's status as "others" in Cuba. Like many Asian-Cubans, Sánchez Fujishiro claims her identity by adhering to a form of self-orientalization. This perception also shows the readiness of other Cubans to situate them as

[2] See Sanchez Fujishiro, *Un japonés en Santiago de Cuba: Una historia de amor* (Santiago de Cuba: Ediciones Santiago, 2013), p. 50. All of the citations from this book have been translated from Spanish to English by me.

different, ignoring all Cuban ancestry and simply labeling them as "the Fujis."

Another example of the few pieces written by Cubans about the Japanese immigrants who settled on the island is a book produced by Rolando González Cabrera (2009). His work celebrates multiculturalism with a heavy focus on history. González Cabrera briefly elaborates on the role the Japanese played in the formation of the Cuban identity. Curiously, he emphasizes the hard work and tenacity also mentioned by Sánchez Fujishiro. However, his contribution is significant because it mentions and provides examples of preserving traditions. Indeed, he stresses the importance of preserving the Japanese language and cultural festivals such as *matsuri*, a tradition associated with a successful harvest (González Cabrera 60). González Cabrera writes about Japanese-Cubans as an integral part of Ortiz's *ajiaco* since they maintain and contribute to forming the Cuban national identity. Nevertheless, it is unclear which contributions (besides their own condition as mixed individuals) specifically represent transculturation. His description of Japanese people and traditions, like Sánchez Fujishiro's, has a tone of admiration of them as "others," as something not typically Cuban.

Orientalizing Narrative: Hispanic Orientalism

Addressing the Orientalizing narrative from Said's perspective alone would be insufficient to explain the Cuban case. Erik Camayd-Freixas defines Orientalism in the Hispanic world as "the formation of Latin American constructs of the Other and self, from colonial times to the present" (3). In subsequent works, Camayd-Freixas refines his approach to Orientalism from the perspective of the probable Asian origin of Amerindian peoples. He argues that the "degenerated" Asians and "primitive" Amerindians "were imbricated stereotypes conceived by colonialist discourses as an exotic continuum of otherness" (Camayd-Freixas 2). By linking the Asian and Amerindian and the degenerated with the primitive, the scholar argues that the traits of exoticism are perpetuated and transferrable. Camayd-Freixas also indicates that Latin American *modernismo* was characterized by its own veneration of the Orient compared with the European version (8). This, in turn, somewhat explains why many novels written in Cuba, even those biographical accounts, contain traces of this "benevolent" Orientalism. Hence, this particular approach was adopted because it "departs from the hegemonic paradigms to

reconfigure the Orient in parallel with Latin America's own peripheral, uneven, and conflictive modernity" (Camayd-Freixas 8).

Sánchez Fujishiro's description of and reminiscence on Japanese paintings as something otherworldly is also explained by Camayd-Freixas's approach. Chinese and Japanese plastic arts and literary texts were influential in creating Latin America's Orientalist discourse and were "the engendering sources of Modernist Orientalism" (Camayd-Freixas 105). This narrative has been prevalent in Cuban literary production: "Underlying the *modernista* creed was a rejection of Western rationality and their use of synesthesia is actually related to Eastern mysticism" (Camayd-Freixas 120). Thus, it explains the fascination with the Orient of Japanese and Okinawan descendants and Cubans themselves, whose literary productions seem more poetic than biographical at times. The work produced continues to emphasize the yearning for a land and culture completely disconnected from the Cuban reality. It is in this attempt to venerate the land of their ancestors that current narratives continue to emphasize "otherness." By doing so, these literary productions reinforce exclusion as opposed to the inclusion of these minorities. Questions about the predisposition to embrace the Japanese/Okinawan ancestry and reject the Cuban counterpart come to mind. Some factors addressed later, such as the negotiation of social and economic status, may also play a role.

Labor and Asian Diasporas

In diaspora literature, two specific theoretical debates are worthy of attention. First, as Robin Cohen suggests, in labor diasporas, "instead of arising from a traumatic dispersal, a diaspora could be caused by the expansion from homeland in search of work" (57). This definition fits the Japanese and Okinawans who arrived in Cuba propelled by the opportunities that the sugar boom presented. Most Japanese/Okinawans initially arrived on the island following earlier Chinese migratory waves of indentured labor to meet labor shortages (Masaaki Yokota 91). Cohen proceeds to further clarify that if among these migrant workers there is any evidence of retention of group ties maintained over a period of time, a myth of connection to a homeland, and high levels of social exclusion in the destination societies, then a labor diaspora is said to exist (58). This definition of labor diaspora proves to be problematic when classifying the Japanese/Okinawans who arrived in Cuba.

Cohen utilizes the Indian indentured workers as an example of labor diaspora. Although the Japanese/Okinawans and other Asian

minorities who arrived in Cuba searched for better economic opportunities, a few points deserve elaboration. First of all, the Japanese and Okinawans came from two different territories, as previously mentioned. Okinawa was known as the independent Ryukyu Kingdom, colonized by Japan in 1879. Only twenty-eight years after the colonization of the Ryukyu Islands by the Japanese did the first Okinawan migrants arrive in Cuba in 1907. Masaaki Yokota explains that Okinawans were the largest group to migrate to Cuba, suggesting that Cuba had more exposure to Okinawan culture than Japanese overall (92).

These factors present a major dilemma when applying Cohen's definition of labor diaspora to my research. Principally, the myth of a strong connection to a homeland is invalidated. Okinawans had their own culture and territory before becoming part of Japan. Therefore, when applying the labor diaspora discourse, it is essential to recognize their differences to avoid falling into the colonizing discourse used by the Japanese themselves post Okinawan annexation. Another issue is the lack of differentiation between mainland Japanese and Okinawans by Cubans. If it was almost impossible for Cubans to make the distinction between different Asian immigrants, it was harder for them to separate migrants from Japan and Okinawa as different ethnic groups.

Additional problems arise with the labor diaspora theory when considering the Japanese and Okinawans who migrated to Cuba for other reasons besides labor shortage demands, such as wars or other types of conflicts. Although ultimately looking for a better life, they did not specifically form part of the indentured labor system. This category also includes those who used the island as a "back door" to enter the United States after the immigration restrictions imposed by the US Immigration Act of 1924 (Masaaki Yokota 92).

Similar to the myth of a strong connection to the homeland among Japanese and Okinawans, the strong retention of group ties regarding language, religion, and cultural norms is also questioned. Okinawans have their own language and cultural practices, although they speak Japanese and celebrate festivals like Obon. Because of the small number of immigrants that came from this region, compared to other migrant minorities, and because Okinawa is considered part of Japan today, it is helpful to address both groups as one migratory wave while always distinguishing between the two. It can be argued that a transculturation process may have happened within the Okinawan and Japanese diaspora in Cuba as cultural practices blended with elements of the destination over time.

Within the diaspora literature, a significant factor exists in the argument of trade diasporas in which Asian minorities, specifically the Chinese, are cited by Cohen as examples to study. When discussing the Chinese, Cohen affirms that "second or third generations became culturally localized and began to drop away old habits associated with the past" (89). The argument of trade diasporas seems inadequate when applied to the Japanese and Okinawans since few of them worked as merchants, unlike the Chinese, and instead focused more on farming and day labor (Gardiner 55).

Lastly, Cohen elaborates on cultural diasporas by using Caribbean diasporas as a comparison. He suggests that at least three elements should be present: (1) there should be evidence of cultural retention or affirmation of identity (in reference to the place of origin); (2) there should be literal or symbolic interest in "return;" and (3) there should be cultural artifacts, products, and expressions that show shared concerns and cross-influences between the countries where the migrants come from and the destination countries (Cohen 144). Although his analysis was focused on Caribbean diasporas abroad, it can be applied when studying Japanese and Okinawan migrations to Cuba.

Even though no one particular diaspora literature fits these groups of migrants, combining several aspects of them all can be helpful when studying festivals and cultural practices. Using Cohen's broad definition of labor diaspora as migrants searching for work, both Japanese and Okinawans in Cuba can be inserted into the literature. Although some aspects of the definition are invalidated by the "myth of homeland," the strong connection of Okinawans to Japan, specifically, as well as to language and cultural practices, indicates that such a definition can still be used by treating each migratory group separately and identifying which of the aspects overlap or *syncretize* (as Cohen prefers to call it) due to the Japanese colonization of Okinawa. This concept can be further developed and linked to Ortiz's transculturation by merging the Cuban element. Eliminating the distinction between Japanese and Okinawans (or ignoring Cohen's suggestions) would not be the best approach, as it would produce an incomplete result due to the exclusion of certain cultural aspects. Besides the main challenges presented by each discourse, using Cohen's imagery and applying it to specific groups is in itself problematic. Even so, the concepts provided in the book can prove to be extremely useful when intertwined with Ortiz's transculturation.

A Commentary on Recent Scholarship

Some US scholars have taken the lead in elaborating on the cross-fertilization process found in the Asian-Cuban cultural mixture. Martin Tsang's claim of Asian influence in Afro-Cuban religions was a breakthrough in the social sciences field. Cuban scholars emphasize otherness as a way to express mystery and uniqueness, inadvertently separating these Asian minorities from everything "Cuban," while US scholarship has written very little about transculturation of Japanese/Okinawan practices in Cuba. Some scholars have written about the Japanese presence in Cuba, but there are still gaps in the literature and more so in the social sciences. For instance, Masaaki Yokota mainly explores how the Japanese in Cuba differed from the Chinese migratory patterns, which were the product of the indenture labor system as well as the shortage of labor force in the early 1900s. His work is vital when studying the Asian presence on the island of Cuba. He claims that although both sets of Asian migrants arrived in Cuba to meet labor shortages, their cultures are completely different. Distinct cultural practices would then yield a different process of transculturation in the way they influenced the island's socio-cultural dynamics. Since Asian minorities cannot be studied with a one size-fits-all approach, in future studies, I plan to address the cross-fertilization or transculturation that could occur between Japanese and Cuban culture.

The vast majority of the academic literature written on Asian minorities in Cuba is either a historical or biographical primary source, which does not address in-depth socio-cultural processes. Martin Tsang's pieces on the Chinese-Cubans are the exception; however, he addresses another minority altogether. The small number of migrants from Japan and Okinawa is possibly the cause of the lack of attention paid to these migrant groups over the years. Nonetheless, the current organizations in Cuba that act as liaisons with Japanese/Okinawan governments have been re-inculcating a broader sense of community (Masaaki Yokota 101). Outreach has increased, facilitating the revitalization of culture.

Newly available technology and Internet access in Cuba will facilitate further cultural exchanges. It will be essential to explore the process of transculturation before and after this "revival" of culture. For example, the taiko drum, a typical Japanese musical instrument, was donated to one of the communities as an attempt to continue cultural heritage practices by using it in festivals. Scholars like Masaaki Yokota have been pioneers in writing about Japanese and Okinawan presence in

Cuba, and their historical accounts have been comprehensive in their collection of information. But the process of transculturation, as researched by social scientists in these communities, lacks concrete examples. Masaaki Yokota employs this theoretical debate concerning transculturation as a closing remark highlighting the importance of these ethnic groups despite their small size. His utilization of the term, far from lacking development, is rather an invitation to scholars from other fields to continue researching the social and cultural phenomena that have taken place and will continue to evolve.

Cuba's movement from the agricultural and industrial sector toward a tourist economy will represent greater exposure and cultural exchange (Masaaki Yokota 102). In effect, Masaaki Yokota claims that these official touristic encouragements have played a small role in developing a greater multicultural awareness amongst the younger generations (102). These claims and perhaps the fact that most of the literature on Japanese/Okinawan-Cubans has been produced in recent times call for attention in the social sciences field. Observation of these cultural practices, such as traditional festivals, and their evolution over time as Cuba becomes more open to the world, physically and technologically, provides an excellent opportunity for new scholarship.

Other scholars like Martin Tsang and Kathleen López have challenged Ortiz's tripartite definition of Cuban cultural heritage by emphasizing the contributions of Asian immigrants. The work that has been produced in recent times, including their own, still focuses on the Chinese. Because Cuba was associated with the production of sugar and the majority of indentured laborers were Chinese, every Asian migrant has been coined a "*chino"* (Chinese), as the Japanese have disappeared in the literature with no anthropological work conducted to assess how their traditions have influenced Cuban culture in general.

The central premise of this analysis is to establish, albeit with limitations, to what degree transculturation has occurred with the Japanese/Okinawans and how, if at all, they have tried to preserve their cultural practices. Although the work of Ortiz does not focus on Asian minorities, his contribution to the field of anthropology means that his work is relevant to my research. It is his analysis of the process of transculturation that I use to explore this topic as my main theoretical framework to fill the gap in the current literature. Because of the pioneering nature of this research, using Ortiz's theoretical foundation is essential

when comparing it to the work conducted by other scholars as a way to break ground in this field.

Martin Tsang's studies of Chinese religiosity and syncretism are probably among the best inclusions of Asian minorities in the constructs of Cuban cultural heritage. In his recent publication titled "Yellow Blindness in a Black and White Ethnoscape: Chinese Influence and Heritage in Afro-Cuban Religiosity" (2016), he addresses the foreignness with which Asian migrants, especially Chinese, have been studied in Cuba. Specifically, he emphasizes *sinalidad* (Chineseness) as a counterpoint to *cubanidad* (Cubanness) to argue for the exclusion of these migrants (Tsang 2). He claims that religion provided a space within Cuban society, where Chinese practices merged with the Afro-Cuban religions. I will attempt to determine if such a space existed for the Japanese and Okinawans. Tsang's work provides a framework of study to analyze how differentcultural practices can merge into Ortiz's *ajiaco*, particularly addressing the exclusion of certain minorities and how important these have been to the formation of Cuban culture. Caution is necessary for my research because the Japanese/Okinawans and Chinese occupied different spaces within the Cuban ethnic landscape.

Although Chinese and Japanese/Okinawan migrants both went to Cuba looking for better economic opportunities, the cultural diversity of their homelands is completely different. Whereas China is more diverse in terms of minority groups, Japan is more homogeneous. This particular difference could mean, for example, that the Chinese would be more open to acceptance of other cultures, whereas the Japanese/Okinawans would be more reserved and tend to preserve their unique cultural practices. Okinawans, a minority group within Japan itself, present another dilemma. Okinawans were perhaps more willing to accept and integrate into Cuban culture than other Japanese immigrants who arrived on the island. Beyond these complexities, Tsang's work provides an excellent framework for analyzing the syncretism and cross-fertilization of cultures.

Kathleen López focuses on the Chinese, and her research has shed light on contemporary Chinese-Cuban cultural revival efforts. Tsang and López's approaches are useful when studying Japanese and Okinawans in Cuba, especially since the economic shift from sugar to tourism, the social and cultural dynamic "preserved" by the descendants of these minorities has changed. Also, López argues that projects of cultural restoration organized by "mixed" descendants of the Chinese "have left the aging native Chinese – who are actually commodified as part of the tourist circuit – as

mere observers" (197). She claims that the government's attempt to promote international tourism has been criticized for being more of an economic than a cultural enterprise (López 197). Although the Japanese and Okinawan attempts at cultural revival are nowhere near as advanced as those of the Chinese community in Cuba, they may encounter the same setbacks. As cultural activities become more attractive to international tourists, the risk of commodification will increase. However, a counterargument can also be presented where funds from the tourism industry may aid the revival of these traditions.

López further argues that "[e]ven third-generation descendants of Chinese in Cuba have created imaginative ties to an ancestral homeland" (166). Based on Sánchez Fujishiro's book and Hispanic Orientalist theories, it is certain that the same has occurred with those of Japanese and Okinawan descent. Unlike the Chinese, when using this argument for Japanese and Okinawans, a careful distinction should be made between migrants from the main Japanese island and those from the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa). The literature talks about Japanese paintings, but which part of Japan exactly?

Masaaki Yokota's use of transculturation already implies that a give-and-take of cultural exchanges has occurred between the Japanese/Okinawans and Cubans. However, it is worth exploring what specific cultural exchanges have taken place. Masaaki Yokota also reinforces how the Japanese/Okinawans – although much smaller in number than other migrants – contributed to the multicultural and multiracial mix. Though there are some publications about Chinese participation in the Cuban Independence Wars, Masaaki's article is the first one that directly mentions Japanese/Okinawans. This contribution is significant because participation in the Independence Wars has been referenced extensively to negotiate Cuban citizenship, implying that if one is a patriot, then one is automatically Cuban. His essay highlights how overlooked the contribution of this ethnic group to the island's history has been. Works like those of Martin Tsang, Masaaki Yokota, and Kathleen López have engaged and challenged discourses of citizenship. They have demystified the character of "otherness" and Orientalizing narrative surrounding East Asian minorities in Cuba.

Another major problem arises with the commodification of culture, as people begin to redefine themselves to take advantage of the economic opportunities provided by these growing cultural enterprises. As López explains, the "native Chinese are only seen as an incidental economic

benefit," but the revival of these cultural endeavors and their economic advantages have become pull factors to draw descendants and individuals with prior Chinese identity (López 169). Undoubtedly, the same risks are present with Japanese and Okinawan descendants in their attempt to revitalize their culture. Even if not ideal, efforts to re-inculcate culture and identity will serve to re-connect the descendants with native Japanese still alive and Japanese/Okinawans abroad. Unfortunately, no first-generation Okinawan is alive today in Cuba (Masaaki Yokota 102). Nonetheless, the connection with associations in both Japan and Okinawa can positively influence the native-descendants relationship, resulting in increased tourism, which, in turn, could also propel the funding and expansions of their descendants' cultural activities in Cuba.

The Emergence of the *Otaku* (Geeks) and Future Research

Using Tsang and López's approaches to address the cross-fertilization of cultures, the inclusion of Asian minorities, and Cuban ideals of citizenship, my future studies will explore how Japanese and Okinawan minorities are key components in Ortiz's *ajiaco* from an anthropological theoretical framework.[3] Overall, this analysis will provide a structure to address cultural diversity and inclusion from the perspective of the theoretical debates mentioned above and the relevant literature available. It will also reinforce an understanding that Japanese, Okinawans, and their descendants are not disconnected from Cuba but are essential contributors to the Cuban identity.

Another phenomenon that deserves attention is the emergence of *otaku* (Japanese for "geek") festivals in Havana, Cuba. Better access to the Internet and the opening of the country have allowed the Cuban youth to be exposed to the Japanese pop culture of manga and anime. The *Japan Times* reported that more than 1,000 fans of this fantasy world gathered in Havana to flaunt their cosplay of popular anime/manga characters. The article mentions that the *otaku* community is growing daily thanks to Cubans' access to Japanese television and media. "El Paquete," literally, "the package," is a service of recorded programs on a USB stick that can be acquired for a fee and is available weekly. The Cuban *otaku* have begun to

[3] Keeping in mind the Orientalizing quality of the narrative established in the primary sources, I refrain from fetishizing cultural practices as much as possible by providing a detailed description of what I observe when I conduct fieldwork.

adopt the cosplay traditions so characteristic of Japanese pop culture and have even created a community event to show their enthusiasm. As the Internet becomes more widely available and the era of smartphones and computers progresses, Japanese/Okinawan-Cuban interconnectedness becomes more complex.

On the one hand, tourism may increase due to the revival of Japanese/Okinawan cultural traditions, or cultural traditions may be commodified to yield to the touristic demands. On the other hand, Japanese pop culture has influenced Cuban youth in an unexpected turn of events, and now festivals are held annually. Hence, the apparent emergence of these trends provides numerous opportunities for new scholarship in the social sciences. As Cuba becomes more open to global trends and embraces cultural diversity, future research will show significant changes over the years.

The research involving minorities' role in the formation of culture has continued to boom as our world becomes more and more globalized. Ortiz's transculturation or "mutual cultural fashioning" revolutionized the study of the clash of cultures. Specifically addressing the Cuban case, Ortiz compared the mixture of cultures to an *ajiaco* to describe not only its diversity but also its complexity. Ortiz, however, limited this cross-fertilization of cultures to the blending of the European, African, and Indigenous roots, leaving out the Asian ingredient in the creation of the Cuban idiosyncrasy. Asian immigrants and their descendants have generally been depicted as challengers of the status quo, never as an essential part of the creation of Cuban culture. As I have shown, the concept of transculturation is continuous and somewhat complex, and it is not easy to separate from the Orientalizing narrative surrounding Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants. Thus, when studying these concepts by overserving "traditional" festivals, there is an inevitable risk of reification of Orientalism. Establishing transculturation will further challenge ideals of race and citizenship, and by including this minority as an essential component of Ortiz's *ajiaco*, the constructs of *cubanidad* will also change.

Although the degree of transculturation is difficult to measure due to the complexities established earlier, my encounters in Havana with Japanese and Okinawan descendants demonstrated that the exchange of cultures is still very present in their everyday lives. For instance, while meeting with a family of second-generation Okinawans, the wife mentioned that she still uses Japanese cooking techniques to the best of her abilities. They also made clear their Okinawan ancestry instead of generalizing it as

Japanese. The Japanese in Isla de Pinos also utilize farming techniques they brought from Japan and are recognized for the success of their crops. Therefore, the focus on Japanese/Okinawans and their descendants as integral parts of Cuban culture through the study of traditional festivals and elements of fusion amongst both cultures may provide an unexplored but rich field of research.

In reviewing the most recent scholarship on the Japanese/Okinawan diaspora in Cuba, my future study plans to fill in the gap in the current social sciences literature addressing the Japanese/Okinawans-Cubans and shed light on the important contributions of Asian minorities. Most of the research today is on the Chinese due to the large number of immigrants in Cuba. At the same time, the Japanese presence in Cuba has been opaque in the literature and more so in the social sciences. This study, then, will assert the importance of analyzing how the preservation of traditionand the recent emergence of *otaku* festivals are not completely divorced from one another but an indication of continuity. With more access to the Internet than ever before, young Cubans have felt compelled to adopt contemporary Japanese pop culture festivals, while older generations continue to uphold the traditional celebrations. This cultural revival may increase tourism; however, traditions might also be commodified to please such touristic demands. By highlighting the impact of these emerging traditions and what they represent to Japanese/Okinawan descendants in Cuba, my future studies will emphasize the dynamics of traditional and contemporary culture, particularly the influence of these forces in the everyday lives of Japanese/Okinawans and Cubans alike, as they present opportunities for these festivals to create a sense of respect and pride that reinforces Japanese and Okinawan cultural identity in Cuba.

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