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Musical communication between Okinawans and Micronesians in Nanyo under the Japanese administration (1914-1945)

Panel: Past and Future of Okinawa Music and Art

It was in the beginning of the 20th century when the musical instrument called *sanshin*, a long neck lute with three strings, gradually disseminated among Okinawan ordinary folks. Before then, it was a musical instrument only for the former ruling class called *samure*, and even in the beginning of 1920s, given a lesson by an authorized master was very expensive. As a result, a descendant of *samure*, a wealth farmer or a prostitute, could play the “classical” Okinawan music, while ordinary folks enjoyed folk songs accompanied by *sanshin* and dancing.

After 1925, when a steady income had been secured by the first wave of immigrants, many *sanshin* including famed instruments were brought to Nanyo. A Japanese tourist wrote in his essay that Okinawan immigrants enjoyed singing and dancing with *sanshin* and that sound of *sanshin* entertained by a prostitute could be listened to in the downtown of Saipan. In the 1930s, a *sanshin* school for classical Okinawan music was opened, and Okinawan theaters were established in Saipan and in Tinian. Thus, the various styles of *sanshin* music gathered in Nanyo.

Micronesians also remind of *sanshin* and the sound, however, they did not adopt an element of Okinawan music, while so-called “marching dance”, an entertainment for Carolinians in Saipan was spread all over Micronesia, Okinawa and other parts of Japan. Then, it is discussed why an interactive musical communication between Okinawans and Micronesians was not realized in Nanyo.