

## New song of *Shima-uta*!

YANAGAWA Hidetoshi

A song that always appears in student reports when talking about Amami *Shima-uta* in a lecture at Kagoshima University is the “Waido-Bushi.” Or rather, rarely have I seen any other songs in the student reports. Even students who don’t know about *Shima-uta* at all know “Waido-Bushi.”

“Waido-Bushi” is a song composed by TSUBOYAMA Yutaka based on the lyrics of NAKAMURA Tamiro and released in 1978. From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, the Amami tourism boom was at a tailwind, and there were many folk songs being actively produced. The lyricist NAKAMURA Tamiro also wrote the lyrics for new songs such as “Adan no Hana.” Therefore, “Waido-Bushi” is not exactly a *Shima-uta*, but rather a new *Shima-uta*. This song is now the representative *Shima-uta* for the today’s youth. The new *Shima-uta* has surpassed the original in terms of name recognition. I think that this is frankly a major issue.

Songs frequently sung in the new *Shima-uta* are not only the “Waido-Bushi.” Songs like “Oshima Tsumugi nu Urigyurasa” composed by ISHIHARA Hisako with lyrics by YAMADA Yonezo, and “Kikai ya Yoi Shima” composed and written by YASUDA Takahide are often sung as lively music at singing parties and banquets. Old *Shima-uta* are of course great, but new *Shima-uta* have a familiar melody and, above all, other people can easily sing along with the song.

It goes without saying that the term “*Shima-uta*” originated from Amami; however, most Japanese people think that the *Shima-uta* are folk songs from Okinawa. This may be due to the influence of “Shima Uta” by THE BOOM, but it is also because Okinawa has many new folk songs that are familiar. The folk singers in Okinawa are very talented in their songwriting and their advantage is that their scale is the Ryukyu scale, which is different from that of the mainland, so any song sounds like an Okinawan song. Furthermore, the listener just assumes that it is an old song.

The reason that there was not much resistance to Mr. TSUBOYAMA creating a new *Shima-uta* was because he was actively interacting with Okinawan singers and watching their activity up-close. There were many more opportunities for singers from Amami and Okinawa to do joint work than there are today. However, creating new *Shima-uta* in Amami does not work as well as it does in Okinawa because the music scale in Amami is the same as on the mainland. If not done properly, it would just sound like a folk song from the mainland. Whether to express the qualities of *Shima-uta* or Amami, is a difficult question.

Folk songs are activated by “putting new wine into old wineskins.” This is clear from the example of “Waido-Bushi” as well. Fortunately, *Shima-uta* has gained considerable popularity across the country, but rarely does one hear of new songs. Instead, there has been the arrival of *Shima-uta*-style pop music. There are some with the opinion that this kind of pop music

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should be thought of as the *Shima-uta* of today. However, pop music is pop music, and *Shima-uta* is *Shima-uta*. To activate the *Shima-uta* world of Amami, new *Shima-uta* is desirable.

It may be difficult to suddenly create a masterpiece like “Waido-Bushi.” However, it seems that there are quite a few young singers active today and likely to make one or two *Shima-uta*. What may be somewhat problematic is the lyrics. If the younger generation sings about unpretentious everyday life in the natural island style, perhaps they will be able to write good songs. If they feel uncomfortable writing the songs individually, then they can work together. *Shima-uta* is originally a song that was unknown to the singer, so it may be more in line with tradition than expected. They should play the songs for their friends for the time being, and if popular, try it out on a broader audience.

I may be scolded, “Don’t say such things so lightly.” However, the extent to which “Waido-Bushi” has contributed to, and has continued to contribute to, increasing the recognition of Amami *Shima-uta* to the world is clear from the student reports discussed earlier. I just wrote something irresponsible with the expectation of a second and third “Waido-Bushi.” Young singers, please don’t hesitate to give it a try. I am sure that you will be able to write good songs.



TSUBOYAMA Yutaka singing “Waido-Bushi”