

## **Melodic Expansion and Contraction in Okinawan Music**

### **: The Chikuten Song Group**

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Okinawa, the southernmost prefecture in Japan, has seen extensive cultural influence from Japan and the countries of East-Asia, while also developing its own distinctive cultural forms. In particular, recent research has emphasised the influence of Chinese music on the Okinawan classical tradition. A feature of several East-Asian musical systems is the metrical expansion and contraction of a given melody through the addition or removal of ornamentation. Concepts such as *fangman jihua* (making slow and adding flowers) in China, *irama* in Java, and *thǎw* in Thailand are examples of such processes.

This paper examines a group of songs in the Okinawan classical and folk music traditions, and investigates similarities between compositional processes used in these songs, and the East-Asian musical concepts mentioned above. The Okinawan classical tradition contains a number of pieces with the word ‘*chikuten*’ (rice production) in the title. Examples include *Chikuten bushi*, *Agī* [‘raised’]-*chikuten bushi*, *Hai* [‘fast’]-*chikuten bushi*, *Iju* [village name] *hai-chikuten bushi*, *Chū* [‘middle’]-*chikuten bushi*. The first of these (the title *Chikuten* refers to the production of rice) can be considered the ‘parent tune’ (analogous to the *muqu* – mother tune – in the Chinese tradition) from which the other tunes were derived.

In addition to comparing musical elements of the *Chikuten* tune group with East-Asian musical traditions, I refer to the ‘Tune Family’ theory developed by Bayard, Bronson and others in Western folk musical traditions. I conclude that the songs of the *Chikuten* tune family were created using a process similar to that used in other East-Asian countries. However it is also clear that the process of melodic expansion used in the Okinawan case is considerably freer than that used in other East-Asian traditions, and doesn’t exhibit the strict metrical expansion or contraction found in these traditions.