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# Musical Histories of *Nisei* Singers, Featuring Chiyoko Ida Aoyagi of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra

By Yukari Nakahara

## 1. Karaoke in Hawai‘i and the *Nikkei Nisei*

On April 20, 2014, a song concert titled “Niji no Yume” (Rainbow Dream) was held at a hotel in Honolulu. The concert continued the whole day, with 24 songs in the morning, and another 27 in the afternoon after a break for lunch. The program featured Japanese popular songs such as “Ai Sansan” (“Love Rushing In” composed by Kei Ogura) and “Nada Sōsō” (“Tears Flowing Down” composed by BEGIN), sung on stage to karaoke accompaniment by aficionados of Japanese songs in Hawai‘i. The venue was filled with an audience of about 200 people, most of whom were local residents, born and raised in Hawai‘i, interspersed with some *shin-issei* (lit., new first-generation immigrants) who had immigrated to Hawai‘i from Japan since World War II. Performers were seated at the tables with their invited friends and family members. Whenever someone finished performing, loud cheers rang out from the singer’s table.

In Honolulu, this type of karaoke show and karaoke parties are held more or less on a monthly basis by amateur singers of Japanese songs. In some cases, karaoke schools organize shows in which their own students perform, and in other cases, local karaoke fans hold events joined by groups of Japanese karaoke lovers visiting Hawai‘i. There are also cases where individuals organize an event, recruiting performers from several groups of karaoke singers or individual karaoke fans they know. In any event, if you want to learn Japanese songs in Hawai‘i, it is essential to take advantage of these occasions to listen to many songs, find the ones that you like, and get to know as many other Japanese song aficionados as possible. By so doing, one can gather information about karaoke parties and concerts or new songs, and obtain sound sources and Japanese lyrics written out in roman letters. Stated another way, Hawai‘i is not necessarily flooded with Japanese songs; it requires a lot of effort for Japanese-song lovers in Hawai‘i whose mother tongue is English to sing Japanese songs. That is all the more reason

that local singers of Japanese songs are keen to develop lateral networks of their interest—a rather American trait.

Participants in *Niji no Yume* included some karaoke contest award winners and others who had honed their skills while enjoying singing in karaoke groups that they had organized together with sympathetic friends. There were performers who appeared in custom-tailored dresses, and some even excited the audience with their unique costumes or comical gestures that suited the content of the songs. Many delivered short speeches on stage before performing. For instance, a fourth-generation Japanese American woman publicized her upcoming recital to be held in a week. She was the first-prize winner of a karaoke contest sponsored by Japanese language radio station KZOO, and said that she was going to Japan to study singing with the proceeds from her recital.

The ages of the participants in *Niji no Yume* ranged widely from their 20s through 90s, which is characteristic of Hawai'i's karaoke culture in which singers with large differences in age socialize casually as friends brought together by karaoke. The oldest participant on that day was a 91-year-old Japanese *nisei* (offspring of immigrants) woman, Chiyoko Ida Aoyagi, who sang at the end of the morning program. She was dressed in a simple costume—flower-printed blouse and long black skirt—yet her appearance on stage itself was enough to exude an aura of glamour, drawing applause from the audience. With her face aglow with the joy of singing, her ageless voice rich, sweet, and beautiful, and her dignified mannerisms on stage, she exhibited the caliber of a star performer. The song she selected for this concert was “Haha” (“Mother” composed by Minoru Endō). When she sang as if speaking to individuals, the entire audience quieted down, and just as she finished singing, huge applause erupted.

The way one hears and perceives a song varies depending on the individual. So, some may have been drawn to Chiyoko's singing because of her excellent musicality, whereas some others—if they were close to her—might have been reminiscing about personal events in her past. As for me, I was thinking of Chiyoko's mother upon whom she would touch in a casual fashion from time to time. Her parents were both *issei* (first-generation Japanese emigrants) who came to Hawai'i from Gunma Prefecture. Her father passed away early, so her mother struggled to raise her children by herself. Perhaps partly because I was seated with her family members, including her husband, her son and his wife, at the same table listening to Chiyoko's singing, I felt as if the span of time from the period of the *issei* through the present was condensed into her song. In any case, quite a few people present must have been thrilled by the fact that Chiyoko, now past the age of 90, sang a song about mother.

The karaoke machine was introduced to Hawai'i from Japan in the mid 1980s coinciding

with the period when many *nisei* entered retirement. The *nisei* took up karaoke as a favorite pastime, and a number of karaoke schools sprang up. Eventually, karaoke spread among the younger generations as well. Chiyoko also came to enjoy karaoke with her husband, Daniel Haruo Aoyagi. In their youth, the couple had flourished as singers with the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. It was a time when the war was over and Japanese songs were finally allowed to be sung again, and performances of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra delighted many *issei* and *nisei* Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i.

News of the marriage of Chiyoko and Haruo was posted in an article in a *nikkei* (persons of Japanese descent) newspaper (*Hawaii Times*, Aug. 24, 1950), revealing that they were stars in the *nikkei* community. Back then, quite a few *nisei* orchestras were active besides the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra, but all disappeared after a short 4-5 years in their prime. Later, though, the advent of karaoke brought about the revival of *natsumero* (oldies), by which younger generations of karaoke-goers were exposed to the era of *nisei* orchestras represented by the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra.

Now that many *nisei* have already passed on, the number of *nisei* singing in karaoke shows has dwindled drastically. I began my fieldwork in Hawai‘i in the summer of 1997, and until several years ago, I had seen George Shimabukuro (1930–2012)—an Okinawan *nisei*—emceeding karaoke shows using a good command of English and Japanese. Shimabukuro lived in Japan in his youth and scored a hit as a singer with “Japanese Rumba” (composed by Gerald F. Miller) while there. In the *nikkei* events, other frequent performers were the Taisho Boys—an oldies choral group comprised of *nisei* males who were born during the Taishō period (1912–26 on the traditional Japanese calendar). The Taisho Boys were led by Harry Urata (1918–2009), who had taught Japanese songs at his Honolulu music school for over 50 years. Urata is also known to have revived “Hole-hole Bushi,” a tune which used to be sung by Japanese *issei* plantation workers in the cane fields (Nakahara 2012a; 2012b).

The *nisei*’s formative years from childhood through puberty and adolescence coincided with the pre- through post-World War II period—a turbulent era for Japanese American communities in Hawai‘i. During that time, they realized even more clearly that they belonged to the US and their parents’ homeland was Japan. Since an early age, the *nisei* had been immersed in Japanese language and music at home, while receiving public education in English and socializing with a wide range of people other than Japanese Americans, thereby becoming familiar with Hawaiian and American music as well. Today, events involving Japanese songs in Hawai‘i also draw people of other ethnicities, *shin-issei*, and temporary residents from the mainland US and Japan. A shared love of Japanese songs makes it possible to connect with others beyond

ethnic or national borders. The show title, “Rainbow Dream” perhaps symbolizes and expresses such connectedness.

In what follows, this article introduces the musical lives of *nisei* Japanese-music aficionados in Hawai‘i, tracing Chiyoko Ida Aoyagi’s musical path as its particular focus. Parenthetically, I would like to add that I first met Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi in August 2000, since which time I have interviewed them repeatedly while accompanying them on various occasions including family parties, karaoke singing, and traveling to the neighbor islands in Hawai‘i and to Japan.

## 2. Musical Experience in Childhood: Becoming Fond of Japanese Songs

Chiyoko was born in 1923 in Kalihi on the Hawaiian island of O‘ahu, as the fifth of eight siblings. The family moved to Kaneohe, then to Kailua. Her full name then was Chiyoko Ida. Many call her Edith, the name given to her by her elementary-school homeroom teacher, who said that everyone would need to have an English name from that time on and gave English names to all the students who didn’t have one. Chiyoko’s parents were *issei* from Gunma Prefecture. Her mother came to Hawai‘i as a picture bride. Chiyoko’s father passed away when she was still a child, and Chiyoko has strong memories of her mother working as a housemaid

for a *haole* (a Hawaiian word meaning “foreign white”; casually used to refer to Caucasian ethnicity) family to raise her kids. Chiyoko also helped with housework from the time she was little, and all the siblings helped one another.

Chiyoko’s family lived in Kailua, a suburb of Honolulu. There was a radio in the house, and Chiyoko loved listening to it, especially to songs. Radio broadcasting began in Hawai‘i in 1922 (Tasaka 1985: 36), and in 1928, a Japanese broadcast began airing once a week for 30 minutes, after which the time allotted for airing Japanese programs increased each year, providing pleasure to the immigrants with dramas in Japanese language and perfor-



Photo 1: Chiyoko’s mother Ume and father Eijirō as newlyweds

mances of *koto*, *shakuhachi*, and songs by Hawai‘i residents, as well as audio recordings from Japan (Furuya 1964: 510–11). In those days, general stores in Honolulu offered a lineup of gramophones and records from Japan, and movie houses screened Japanese films as well. During intermission, recordings of Japanese popular songs were played occasionally, or at other times, *nisei*—still in their youth—sang Japanese children’s songs.<sup>1)</sup> Other than listening to the radio at home, Chiyoko’s favorite pastime as a child was making occasional trips to Honolulu. There, a street called Honolulu Ginza bustled with sweets shops, restaurants, tailor’s shops, and whatnot, with signs in Japanese displayed out front.

Her school curriculum didn’t offer music classes, but a Hawaiian teacher made the rounds at several schools to teach Hawaiian folk songs. The teacher used no instrument, but instead, taught each melody by singing without accompaniment, and had the students repeat it to learn the song. Chiyoko came to sing those Hawaiian songs she learned at school and Japanese and English songs she heard on the radio at home, which made her aware that she loved singing. Incidentally, in my interviews with *nisei*, many said that they liked only Japanese songs and didn’t sing songs in English at all, regardless of whether or not they spoke Japanese. When I asked the reason, a predominantly high number replied that they didn’t know why but when it came to music, they were drawn solely to Japanese songs, or that they didn’t sing English songs because they could not produce standard English pronunciation. However, even now at the age of over 90, Chiyoko likes singing both English and Hawaiian songs, along with the Japanese songs that make up her main repertoire. She said that since she was a child, she often sang



Photo 2: Chiyoko and her siblings at her silver wedding anniversary

along with English or Hawaiian songs on the radio and that's how she became fond of those songs with no discomfort. Her siblings credit her competence in standard English pronunciation to having lived when they were small in an area with a high concentration of *haole* people in Kailua.

On December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese naval and air forces, Chiyoko was still under age. At that time, 159,534 Japanese Americans accounted for 34.2% of the entire population of Hawai'i. About 1% of those who were Japanese community leaders—including the priests at Japanese American Buddhist temples, teachers at Japanese language schools, and people associated with Japanese-language newspapers—were arrested and sent to internment camps. Religious activities and events by Japanese Americans were halted with the detention of monks and the banning of meetings. Thus, the *nikkei*'s daily lives suffered, unable to sing or even listen to Japanese songs. Like many *nisei*, Chiyoko also related that during the war, speaking Japanese or singing Japanese songs was prohibited so she sang only English songs.

On the other hand, the government honored the courageous fighting of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team comprised of *nisei* who pledged allegiance to the United States. When the team made a triumphant return to the US in June 1946, the year following the end of World War II, President Truman awarded them the Medal of Honor. Chiyoko's brother was a member of the 442<sup>nd</sup>. This brought her family multihued feelings and emotions. In 1946, events and cultural activities in the Japanese American communities resumed. Amateur performance contests and film showings were revived, and more than 40 *nisei* amateur music bands were formed across Hawai'i, performing Japanese popular songs at events and parties held by *nikkei*. Now that the war was over, they were finally able to enjoy Japanese songs again.

### 3. The Vernal Years of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra: *Nisei* Orchestras in the Post-war Period

By the end of World War II, Chiyoko had already reached adulthood. She drove to work at a company office daily, which she was to keep doing for more than 40 years. She wanted to study singing—her passion from an early age—so, for a couple of years beginning around 1946, she took lessons from Dick Aoyagi (Toshiyuki Aoyagi) in classical vocal music and English and Japanese popular songs. Dick Aoyagi was from the island of Hawai'i, and his father was an *issei* from Fukuoka Prefecture in Japan, while his mother was a Hawai'i-born *nisei* whose parents came from Kumamoto Prefecture. Dick had studied piano since childhood and moved to Honolulu where he worked before the war; he also became one of the original members of

the Club Nisei Orchestra after the war. Together with the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra, the Club Nisei Orchestra was the most popular and active music group in the post-war *nikkei* communities. Dick studied classical music at the Lamont School of Music on the US mainland, and until immediately before his death in 1994, he taught western-style singing and piano, American popular songs, as well as Japanese popular and children's songs in Honolulu. Today, some of his former students operate karaoke schools in Honolulu.

Through studying with Dick Aoyagi, Chiyoko met his younger brother Haruo who was to become her husband. Haruo was born on the island of Hawai'i in 1923, and since his childhood had enjoyed listening to records by singers such as Bin Uehara and Tarō Shōji on the gramophone in his house, and on Japanese radio broadcasts. He was particularly drawn to Japanese songs, to the extent that as a high-school student he even sang in a Japanese radio program on Hawai'i Island. Haruo moved to Honolulu in 1940, at the suggestion of his brother Dick who lived there, and in 1946, he won a prize in the first big *nikkei*-community amateur contest after the war, held at the Kōen Gekijō in Honolulu (*Hawaii Times*, Nov. 30, Dec. 2, and 5, 1946), followed by another prize won the next year in an amateur contest at the Kokusai Gekijō (*Hawaii Times*, Feb. 8, 1947).



Photo 3: Awardees of the amateur song contest at Kokusai Gekijō  
[Daniel Haruo Aoyagi, second from the right, and Doris Taketa, fourth from the right]

Around 1947, when she had begun taking voice lessons, Chiyoko had an opportunity to sing at her friend's wedding; this led her to join a music group. A member of Ginza Gakudan (Ginza Orchestra) who was also at the wedding encouraged her to sing with his orchestra. Ginza Gakudan was performing Japanese songs at parties and movie theaters in *nikkei* communities. Chiyoko joined the orchestra with Haruo and the two started to perform under the stage names, Chiyoko Ida, and Haruo Aoyagi, respectively. Soon after, they had an offer to join a bigger orchestra, the Club Nisei Orchestra, which they accepted. However, the Club Nisei Orchestra had grown too big already, so it was decided that some members branch out to form another group, Tsubomi Gakudan (lit., Buds Orchestra). Since Haruo's brother Dick was a leading member of the Club Nisei Orchestra, Haruo and Chiyoko transferred to Tsubomi Gakudan on this occasion in order to avoid too much concentration of the same family members and students of Dick's studio.

In 1948, after singing with Tsubomi Gakudan for a while, they moved to the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra, at the suggestion of its manager, Masaji Uyehara.<sup>2)</sup> Uyehara and the leader of the orchestra, Francis Zanami, were Okinawan *nisei*. Since before the war, they had been performing in music groups such as the ones belonging to chambers for Okinawan youth. After the

war ended, they formed the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra, aiming at creating a large-scale music group that would represent not only Okinawans but all *nikkei*. Zanami was born in 1914 on O'ahu and studied guitar with Tōru Nishikara and composition with Itsurō Hattori (Raymond Hattori) as a high-school student in Honolulu. Hattori is generally known as a composer who was active in the popular song world in Japan, but before the war, when he was 24 or 25, he lived in Hawai'i, working as a journalist for a Japanese-language newspaper and also teaching at a Japanese middle school (Hattori 1965: 47–8; 124–8): he was thus



Photo 4: Dick (right) and Daniel Aoyagi

acquainted with the *nisei* as well. Nishikawa was the leader of the Nippon Orchestra—Hawai‘i’s first orchestra formed by Japanese Americans—and also ran a harmonica studio.

Zanami arranged and composed music, and publicized it in the stage shows of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra as well as on SP records (from Honolulu’s Bell Records and Uyehara’s Tropic Label). Most of the repertoire was Japanese popular songs from pre- and postwar-periods which Zanami arranged, but it also contained Zanami’s own compositions. Among his original songs, “Wakare no Isochidori” (Eng. title, “Parting Song”) became a big hit with Hawai‘i’s *nikkei* society; in fact, it would not be going too far to say that there was no *nisei* who couldn’t sing this song. For several years from 1997, when I started to visit Hawai‘i repeatedly, there were still many *nisei* active, and anytime that someone began to sing this song, all the *nisei* present joined in. “Wakare no Isochidori” was also sung by a number of singers in other *nisei* orchestras, and the song became the sole number to appear in juke boxes in Hawai‘i from among the original songs composed by *nisei* orchestras (*Hawaii Times*, Mar. 5, 1947). Zanami passed away at a young age in 1949, but his “Wakare no Isochidori” was introduced to Japan and enjoyed popularity there first in 1952, sung by Toshirō Ōmi, then again in 1961 in Hiroshi Inoue’s version.

The two years between 1948 and 1949—immediately after Chiyoko and Haruo joined the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra—were the prime time for the group, during which the Orchestra produced its highest number of stage shows and audio recordings. Flowers and gifts were delivered to the now-star singer Chiyoko’s dressing room. Also, in those couple of years, *nikkei* performance contests were divided into separate sections for professionals and amateurs; thus, singers who were already performing with the *nisei* orchestras entered in the division for professionals. Chiyoko won first prize in the professional division of the contest held at Nippon Gekijō on November 23, 1948 (*Hawaii Times*, Nov. 26, 1948). On that day, the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra happened to have a stage show as well, so Chiyoko had to move quickly after the contest to be up on stage with the Orchestra.

Chiyoko’s popularity seemed to be attributable not only to her great skill in singing but also to her stage costumes, which she made herself to suit the image of her songs. For example, when she sang “Ame no Hi no Romance” (“Rainy-Day Romance” composed by Itsurō Hattori), she sang while holding a pretty umbrella she made that matched the costume, and for singing “Boku no Ginza” (“My Ginza” composed by Shinobu Katō), she appeared on stage in boyish pants. In the performance of “Hé Rì Jūn Zài Lái” (“When Will You Come Back Again” composed by Liu Xue’an), she adorned herself in a gorgeous Mandarin gown that she made from her mother’s formal *maru-obi* sash in the image of her favorite actress, Yoshiko Yamagu-



Photo 5:  
Costume for "Ame no Hi no Romance"



Photo 6:  
Costume for "Boku no Ginza"

chi. For the Hawaiian song, “Beyond the Reef” (comp. Jack Pitman), Chiyoko danced a hula she choreographed herself, in a sarong hula costume and basked in applause. In those days, the grass hula skirt was made with cellophane which produced a nice glittering effect in the stage lighting. Chiyoko had once studied hula with a Hawaiian teacher in the vicinity of where she lived, which perhaps helped her in designing hula costumes. In addition to the examples I mention here, there seem to have been several other costumes that stand out in the audience’s memory. The records released with her singing are many, including “Kosame no Oka,” (“Light Rain on the Hill” composed by Ryōichi Hattori), “Aoi Sanmyaku” (“Blue Mountain Range” also by Hattori), and others.

Chiyoko, Doris (Teruko) Taketa, and Grace (Tatsuko) Amemiya were together known as “The three girls of Hawaii Shochiku.” The three stood out as singers in the show, and their closeness in daily life naturally revealed itself on stage, creating a favorable impression on the audience. Doris Taketa was born in 1926 as a *nisei* in Waipahu on O‘ahu. Her parents immigrated from Kumamoto Prefecture and Doris moved from O‘ahu to Hawai‘i and Maui, following her father—a Japanese-language school teacher—who was transferred, and in the course of that, she grew fond of singing through listening to the radio.<sup>3)</sup> During the war, along with her father and other members of her family, Doris was relocated to the internment camps in Jerome, Arkansas and Tule Lake, California, where she said she learned Japanese songs as well. After the war, she lived in Honolulu and took voice lessons from a German teacher. She won prizes in both the first large-scale amateur contest after the war, held at Kōen Gekijō in 1946, and another amateur contest held at Kokusai Gekijō in 1947 which led her to join the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. As noted earlier, Haruo Aoyagi also received prizes in these contests.

Many of the songs Doris recorded as a member of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra are classical songs, such as “Ryoshū” (“The Loneliness of a Traveler” composed by John P. Ordway) and “Hamabe no Uta” (“Song of the Seashore” composed by Tamezō Narita). In 1950, she got married and left the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra to focus on homemaking, but around 1960, when her children were older, she joined a choral group in Hawai‘i, in which for several decades she kept singing songs from various genres including classical, Hawaiian, and Korean songs. Since karaoke became popular, she has been presenting her forte in Japanese-language chansons and English musical numbers.

Amemiya was born in 1928 on the island of Hawai‘i to a father who was an *issei* immigrant from Yamanashi Prefecture and a *nisei* mother. The family moved to Kemo‘o on O‘ahu when she was a child.<sup>4)</sup> She used to listen to Japanese-language radio programs, in which she was particularly attracted to songs sung by Bin Uehara. When she was an elementary through



Photo 7: The three girls of Hawaii Shochiku  
[From far right: Doris Taketa, Grace Amemiya, and Chiyoko Ida]

junior-high school student, she won first prize in amateur performance contests held at Haleiwa Theater and by Honolulu radio station KGU. During the war, perhaps because she was interned in a camp where there were a large number of Filipino Americans, she remembers having sung some Japanese songs between the Filipino numbers on occasions like Christmas. After the war, she first sang in the Akebono Orchestra in Wahiawa, and then joined the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. Among her recordings with Hawaii Shochiku, “Aikoku no Hana” (“Flower of Our Country” composed by Yūji Koseki) was the best-seller. In 1951, she went to Japan to work at a job on a military base, and recorded English versions of the Korean folk song “Arirang” and the Japanese folk song “Tankō Bushi” at the suggestion of Itsurō Hattori. Soon after that, she got married and moved to Los Angeles, distancing herself from singing. After retirement, however, she returned to singing in a karaoke group. More than 60 years have passed since the activities of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra came to an end, but the three girls kept in touch with each other and gathered from time to time. They had literally become life-long friends.

The SP records released by the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra are currently reproduced in CD format.<sup>5)</sup> The Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra presented a number of stage shows centering around Honolulu and toured the neighbor islands as well. In particular, their three grandest concerts

drew sell-out crowds of 1,200 people—the full capacity of the McKinley High School Auditorium—which resulted in extending the concert runs for many days. The programs of the first and second of the three concerts, held in March and November 1948, respectively, centered around Francis Zanami’s compositions “AJA Kōshinkyoku” (“AJA March”) and “Itoshi no Kadode” (“My Darling’s Time Away”). To fit the content of the songs, the shows were presented in the form of a musical drama that depicted a story about *nisei* men who went off to war during World War II, and their family and friends (*Hawaii Times*, Nov. 20 and 23, 1948; Honda 1956:112). The third concert incorporated the publicity surrounding Tōru Nishikawa’s new song, “Gunjin Hanayome” (“War Bride”). To tie in to the theme of the song, this concert was also presented in the style of a musical drama, describing the story of a *nisei* GI and a Japanese woman, from their first encounter in Japan to their wedding in Hawai’i (*Hawaii Times*, January 15, 19, and 20, 1949).



Photo 8: “Koi no Nagare Boshi” (“Shooting Star of Love” composed by Ryōichi Hattori; sung by Chiyoko) Tropic Record, SP.



Photo 9: “Uraru o Koete” (“Getting Over the Ural Mountains” composed by Itsurō Hattori; sung by Haruo) Tropic Record, SP.



Photo 10: “Koi wa Basha ni Notte” (“Love is Riding a Horse-Drawn Carriage” composed by Ryōichi Hattori; sung by Chiyoko and Haruo) Tropic Record, SP.

Detailed examination of concert documentation and record releases by the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra reveals that members of other orchestras were also involved in their activities. For instance, the Shojo Orchestra—a group comprised of young girls—and the mixed group Kotobuki Orchestra appeared in the above-mentioned stage show in March 1948, and in the November show, some *nisei* soldiers who had actually participated in the war as members of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Combat Team marched on stage in military uniforms, in a scene of the troops fighting in Italy. “Gunjin Hanayome” was composed by Tōru Nishikawa of the Nippon Orchestra, and he sang with Grace Amemiya in stage shows and on recordings under another name, Tōru Higashi. Also, the script for the musical drama of “Gunjin Hanayome” was written by Harry Urata (also known as Minoru Urata) who founded the Shinko Orchestra. Later, Urata would go to Japan and study music for two years while working for the GHQ of occupation forces and other businesses there, but, right up until then, he served as emcee for all the shows of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. In a like manner, the names of the singers in the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra appear in other music groups’ concert programs and recordings. The activities of the respective musical groups were, thus, pursued partially through the support and fluid participation of outside talent thanks to friendship and family ties. In other words, musicians were connected by their love of singing and music, beyond their particular affiliations or competitive spirit.

#### 4. An Oldies Comeback in the Karaoke Era: The Period of *Nisei* Orchestras Inscribed in History

In 1950, Chiyoko and Haruo got married, and, with the birth of their first son, they left the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. By that time, partly due to complaints from the local musicians’

union about amateur orchestras charging for their activities, the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra and other *nisei* music groups had largely stopped putting on concerts and producing records. Several *nisei* orchestra members joined the musicians' union individually and continued performing Japanese songs in venues such as *nikkei* night clubs and at weddings, but this too declined in the 1970s, because audiences increasingly favored American popular songs over Japanese songs. It appeared that Japanese songs were going to disappear from Hawai'i (Nakahara 2014:119–37). However, in the 1980s when the karaoke machine was introduced from Japan, both retired *nisei* and the younger generations grew interested in Japanese songs. In Honolulu, Japanese songs were taught at two private music schools operated by Dick Aoyagi and Harry Urata, respectively, and no sooner had karaoke become popular than they were filled with students. Japanese Buddhist temples, adult schools, and individuals followed suit, offering karaoke classes throughout Hawai'i, and karaoke contests—large and small—were organized.



Photo 11: Chiyoko and Haruo's wedding reception



Photo 12: Chiyoko in a Japanese bridal costume.<sup>6)</sup>

After they resigned from the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra, Chiyoko and Haruo were long away from singing, with no opportunities to sing in front of people. But when they recovered some leeway in life upon retirement, they were inclined to enjoy karaoke, so they went to the karaoke school of Haruo’s brother, Dick Aoyagi, for two years and expanded their song repertoire. In addition, they joined a karaoke group and started to take pleasure in karaoke with their friends—former colleagues in the *nisei* orchestras, as well as from younger generations who loved singing. In the nearly two decades since I met Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi, I have witnessed them relishing a weekly karaoke gathering, bringing lunch and snacks, from 9 am to 5 pm, together with about 10 to 20 members of their group in Honolulu. As a group that favored Japanese songs, most of the repertoire I heard were Japanese sentimental ballads called *enka*, and they kept on trying out new songs with the aid of romanized Japanese lyrics. At times, the main repertoire was interspersed with songs from other genres that they had learned in their youth, such as Japanese *shōka* (songs authorized by the Ministry of Education after the Meiji Restoration) and children’s songs, as well as American popular songs and Hawaiian songs.

Members of karaoke groups casually invite their friends or families, or even guests from Japan at times, and introduce them to other members and enjoy singing. In this way, they can

be exposed to more songs and information. In addition, they help each other by obtaining tickets to karaoke parties or concerts, and introduce their friends to others at places they visit as well. Their lateral relationships thus keep developing by means of their shared hobby, karaoke.

Additionally, Hawai‘i is often visited by *enka* singers, lyricists, and composers from Japan, which creates many opportunities for parties and gatherings hosted for them. For karaoke lovers in Hawai‘i, attending such functions and talking with the Japanese artists there in person is an experience that they cherish. Chiyoko and Haruo also participated in those events, and that led them to sing “Furusato no Shiki o Utau” (“Four Seasons in My Hometown” composed by



Photo 13: Program of The Third Nihon Taishū Ongaku Bunka Guranpuri

Minoru Endō) at the Third Nihon Taishū Ongaku Bunka Guranpuri (Japanese Popular Music Culture Grand Prix) in 1997 at Pacifico Yokohama, hosted by the Japan Association of Culture on Common Music (director, Minoru Endō) with the backing of the Cultural Affairs Agency, for which they received the Foreign Minister's Commendation.

From approximately 2000 through 2003, Hawai'i experienced a brief revival of the *natsumero* (oldie songs) from the period of the *nisei* orchestras, and SP records from those days were re-released in CD format (Nakahara 2014:141–78). Though already advanced in years, former singers with the *nisei* orchestras were invited as guests to oldies-song concerts and karaoke contests of various scales, where they stood on stage. In particular, their appearance as guests at the 2001 KZOO Radio Karaoke Contest impressed the entire *nikkei* karaoke community who realized that the former singers of the *nisei* orchestras had once flourished as star entertainers, because the KZOO Contest is the largest karaoke contest in Hawai'i, routinely inviting guest singers from Japan.



Photo 14: Chiyoko and Haruo singing in the Nihon Taishū Ongaku Bunka Guranpuri

Both Chiyoko and Haruo were invited to *natsumero* concerts and karaoke contests to appear on stage as former vocalists with the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra. I was myself in the audience several times when Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi sang on stage as guests at karaoke shows held in Honolulu or on the island of Hawai'i. With their years of experience, they projected a relaxed and dignified air on stage. More than anything else, they drew on a great foundation of human relationships built over many years. When Chiyoko and Haruo sang, flash bulbs flared throughout the hall, and applause and acclaim rang out. The Japanese-song community in Hawai'i is a small world; one may run into many acquaintances no matter which karaoke show one attends. This environment provides opportunities for people who sing on stage not only to share their talent but also to enjoy their circle of friends and renown.



Photo 15: Chiyoko and Haruo singing in a *natsumero* concert

Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi have taken good care of many Japanese song lovers, including karaoke beginners and Japanese people who moved to Hawai‘i. They understood not only their contemporaries but also the novel ideas of young people, and they kept providing warm support to people who were involved in Japanese songs in many ways in Hawai‘i, including producers and *min’yō* singers from Japan. Their extensive encouragement has brought forth numerous people who respect and love the couple. When organizing a new show, some consult them about whether or not a plan would work out or who would be appropriate to include

in the show. Since karaoke-style singing became a popular form of entertainment among local people, there were often requests that the couple open a karaoke school. However, they have instead committed themselves to supporting the *nikkei* music community enormously in their own ways.



Photo 16: Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi with their sons and grandchildren at their golden wedding anniversary



Photo 17: Mr. and Mrs. Aoyagi, their grandson and great-grandchildren

In this paper, I have discussed the status of *nikkei* music communities in Hawai‘i experienced by the *nisei* generation, with a focus on the singer Chiyoko Ida Aoyagi. The revival of oldies in the early 2000s made it known among younger karaoke fans that the history of Japanese songs in Hawai‘i included an era of *nisei* orchestras. Along with that, the complexity of the lives of *nisei*—born in Hawai‘i as offspring of Japanese immigrants and who experienced World War II as such—came to be discussed more vigorously as supplying the backbone of the *nisei* orchestras’ prosperity. Perhaps the *nisei* represent a generation who shared an atypical experience—World War II—which made them particularly conscious of being *nikkei* and *nisei* as well. Nevertheless, as we have seen in this paper, they didn’t fall into narrow-mindedness, trying to exclude people other than *nisei* or *nikkei*. Instead, they have strived to build open relationships which connect people through a love of songs and music regardless of their generation or ethnicity. In the multi-ethnic society of Hawai‘i, *nisei* singers such as Chiyoko encountered various cultures beyond the fields of language and music, and have played an important role in mediating the diverse relationships between Hawai‘i, Japan, and the US which transcend period, generation, and space.

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This article is based on my own research, including fieldwork in Hawai‘i conducted since 1997. Chiyoko Ida Aoyagi, Daniel Haruo Aoyagi, and many others graciously accepted my

requests for interviews, and let me accompany them on countless occasions such as karaoke gatherings, various events, parties, and their trips to neighbor islands or Japan. I sincerely thank those who extended their kind support to me and all music lovers in Hawai'i.

On a sad, final note: after completing this manuscript, I received word that Mr. Daniel Haruo Aoyagi passed away in April 2017. My deepest condolences go to his family and friends. Although his passing was very sad, Chiyoko stood on stage and sang two months later with her usual bright smile. Seeing her sing was a moving experience and gave everyone—her family members, the audience, and myself—tremendous courage to move forward.



Photo 18: Chiyoko Aoyagi, her family, and the author, June 2017

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**Notes**

- 1) From my interviews with Harry Urata and Jane Itai. More than 20 interviews with Urata were conducted from 1997 through 2005 at his studio, in cafes, and elsewhere. My interview with Itai was held at her house on August 20, 2001.
- 2) The Japanese name of the Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra appears in several versions, including 布哇松竹音楽団, ハワイ松竹楽団, and ハワイ松竹オーケストラ. My interviews with Masaji Uyehara were conducted on several occasions from July 23, 2000, at a cafe in Honolulu.
- 3) My interview with Doris Taketa (or Doris Kimura at the time of the interview) took place at her house on November 29, 2000.
- 4) My interview with Grace Amemiya (Grace Sakai at the time of the interview) took place on August 11, 2001, at Doris Kimura's house.
- 5) There are 2 CD reproductions of Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra SP records as follows:  
*Honor Bound: Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra*, Cord International HOCD 51000 (CD), 2003.  
*Paradise Honolulu: Hawaii Shochiku Orchestra*, Cord International HOCD 43000 (CD), 2001.  
Other than the above, there are also 2 reproductions of recordings by Club Nisei Orchestra in the CD format, as follows:  
*Club Nisei: Japanese Music of Hawaii*, Cord International HOCD 37000 (CD), 2000.  
*Club Nisei: Encore!*, Cord International HOCD 41000 (CD), 2001.
- 6) This photo was taken in Hawai'i, but it somehow ended up being displayed at a photo shop in Tokyo. It was retrieved by Chiyoko's friend who saw it there. It is still a mystery why the photo was in Tokyo.