

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

Uchinanchu Club Akisamiyo!

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＜連載企画 コミュニティネットワークー第1回ー＞ Uchinanchu Club *Akisamiyo!*

Rinda YAMASHIRO

It has been three years since our first public appearance in 2003, and I am very proud that *Akisamiyo* continues to this day, functioning as a support group, a place to learn about Okinawa and each other, and to develop participants' leadership skills. I am very grateful to have been given an opportunity to share about our group to you. In this report, I would like to introduce how *Akisamiyo* was formed, what we do, why it's important for us, and what difficulties we face as a group.

Origin of *Akisamiyo*

As the name indicates, Uchinanchu Club *Akisamiyo!* is an Uchinanchu club we have formed in Hawai'i. Most of our members are students and scholars from Okinawa who now live in Hawai'i or Uchinanchu from Hawai'i. We are also open to non-Uchinanchu who are interested in learning about Okinawa. Our name '*Akisamiyo*' is a very common Okinawan expression used in our daily lives which can be translated as "oh my goodness" in English. When we were deciding our name, we had many choices in our list but none seemed to fit the image of how we wanted our group to be. When one of the founding members Sakihara Masashi, said "how about *Akisamiyo*??," we all felt that was a perfect name. We did not choose this name to make our group sound funny, but it was a clicked with all of us. We followed our hearts and decided to call our group '*Akisamiyo!*' I think each of our members have a different ideas on how to interpret our name. Some may think '*Akisamiyo*' means 'akisamiyo, we did not even know about this?', 'akisamiyo, we were able to do all this,' or 'akisamiyo, we are so great!'

Akisamiyo was formed by students from Okinawa who were studying at UH (University of Hawai'i) in late 2002. It was first created in January 31st, 2003 for students to participate in an annual cultural event called International Night, organized by International Student Association at the University. At the event, we had a cultural booth to present information on Okinawa and to introduce our history, culture, and current issues. We also had a chance to sing two Okinawa songs, *Bashofu* and *Asadoya Yunta*, on stage with sanshin. We had about twenty members on stage with *Akisamiyo* t-shirt on which we made for the event. I still remember the audiences' reaction when the curtain went up and we appeared. They seemed to be impressed with a large group of people on stage with same t-shirt. I saw many people taking picture of us and felt like we became celebrities!! Our first event as *Akisamiyo* was a success. It was not only a success because we did well at the International Night, but also it was a success because members spent their precious time and shared their talent in preparing for the event as well.

What we do...

After our first event in January 2003, we decided to continue to have our group for social and educational purposes. We would meet every week at noon for about one hour to discuss whatever topic for the week while having our lunch. The reason we started to have these informal study sessions was because many of us realized how much we do not know about our history and culture which is an important part of our identity. Fortunately, there were a lot of scholars and students from Okinawa and elsewhere who were studying about Okinawa. We took that advantage to learn and discuss about Okinawa on various topics such as economy, history, politics, environment, culture and so on. Our weekly meetings also functioned as a place for the members to practice their presentations.

We also have a lot of parties! We take advantage of all kinds of reasons to have parties. Our regular parties are welcome, farewell parties. We also had birthday parties, *bonnenkai* or end of the year party, end of the semester party, and more. At most of our gatherings, we have live music with sanshin! We also have awamori at our gatherings. It is amazing to see how privileged we are to enjoy our time together with good music, good liquor and good company. If you have a chance to visit Hawai'i, you may want to find out when we are planning to have a party so that you can arrange your trip in accordance with our gathering schedule!! This Spring break, we are planning to go camping, which is our first sleep over gathering.

Importance of *Akisamiyo*

A beauty of *Akisamiyo* is that it provides a social space to allow us to discuss various issues. It is a great opportunity for us to expand our knowledge on Okinawa, but more important is it helps to further develop our ideas and beliefs; it helps to widen our perspectives which I believe is an essential element in understanding oneself. The learning process not only takes place at the weekly meetings and the events we participate in, it also take place at our social functions as well.

In January 2006, we had an opportunity to have a meeting to reflect on our activities over the years. Although we met on weekend, many of our long term members and great supporters of *Akisamiyo* came to share their thoughts on *Akisamiyo*. One of the member emphasized that importance of having *Akisamiyo* is its function as a support group especially for those who had just moved to Hawai'i. It doesn't matter whether they need or seek help or not, just knowing there is a group that one can get help from provides great comfort, he said. I never had seen *Akisamiyo* from that angle and I realized what *Akisamiyo* can provide is beyond my imagination.

Difficulties we face

The most difficult thing for the group is to balancing individual and group activities. Coordinating activities take time, energy and commitment. Therefore, it is vital to have

volunteers who are willing to invest their time to sustain the group. Many of *Akisamiyo* members only stay in Hawai'i for one to two years. Some only stay less than that. It is difficult to have volunteers because they need to get used to their new environment before they can spare time for *Akisamiyo*, and by the time they manage to get control of their lives, they either enter a stage where their research become the priority, or it is time for them to leave. Although many of the members realize how worthwhile it is to get involve with the group, it is difficult to balance all the balls they had to juggle at the time.

More Akisamiyos

Some of the students who were actively involved in *Akisamiyo* during their stay in Hawai'i organized *Akisamiyo* in Okinawa. I had a chance to share our activities at the youth program which took place as part of an event to celebrate centennial Okinawan immigration to Peru this part January, and the youth in Peru showed interest in starting *Akisamiyo* in Peru! It does not have to be exactly what we do in Hawai'i, but I hope there will be a lot of *Akisamiyo* all over the world, where younger generations of Uchinanchu can have free space to exchange thoughts and knowledge on Okinawa and where they can realize what a wonderful heritage we Uchinanchu have.

On this occasion, I would like to thank Mr. Robert Nakasone who had always showed great support to *Akisamiyo* and Prof. Muhehiro Machida who took the initiative to start our weekly meetings at East West Center. I also want to thank all our members in Hawai'i, in Okinawa and elsewhere who have shared their talents and supported *Akisamiyo* in every way. Thanks to every one of you, we are able to go into our fourth year. I hope you will all support us the years to come.

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うちなんちゅクラブあきさみよ～！

山城 莉乃

このレポートは、2002年末にハワイ在住の沖縄県出身留学生、研究者を中心に作られた沖縄クラブ“うちなんちゅクラブあきさみよー！”の活動報告です。2003年に初めてあきさみよーとしてイベントに参加してから3年が経ちます。その後もあきさみよーは、留学生の支援、沖縄のこと、お互いのことを学ぶ場、そしてリーダーシップを培う場として活動を続けてきました。会発足の過程、活動内容、会の重要性、そして、抱える問題などを紹介します。

(やましる りんだ・ハワイ大学マノア校大学院・社会学専攻修士課程)