

## Harararude, a lullaby in Dunan (Yonaguni-Ryukyuan)

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Italy

Harararude, a non-lexical vocable that carries no meaning in itself, is the title of a lullaby that originates from Yonaguni Island, in the extreme southwest of the Ryukyu Islands in Japan. In Japanese folk song taxonomy, lullabies such as Harararude are part of *warabe-uta*, literally ‘child songs’.

Harararude is sung in Dunan, one of six endangered languages in the Ryukyuan Archipelago. Dunan has traditionally only been spoken on Yonaguni Island. It is severely endangered in its survival, and there are less than 100 speakers left on the island in 2023. The total population of Yonaguni Island stands currently at 1,600. Before the Japanese language started being spread on Yonaguni Island in 1885 through the school education system, Dunan was

Figure 1: The Ryukyuan languages of Japan

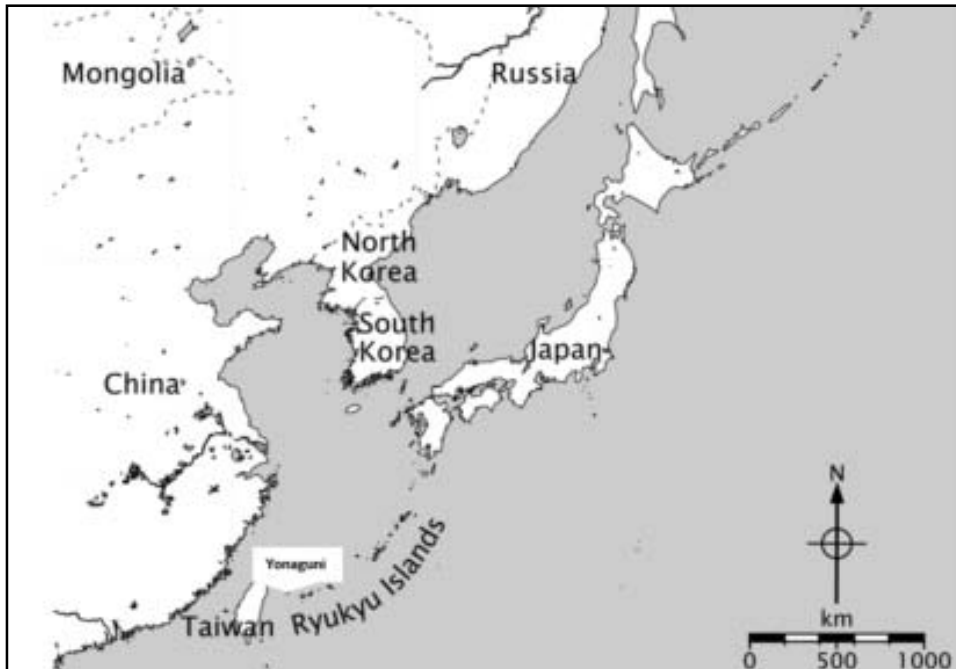


the only language spoken on the islands. Dunan is part of the Japonic language family which consists of Hachijo in the east of the Japanese Archipelago, Japanese in the central parts, and the Ryukyuan languages in the southwest. Dunan is not mutually intelligible with any other Japonic languages.<sup>1</sup>

Although there are efforts to document the language and revive it, its chances of survival are not very promising. Without a reversal of language uses from Japanese to Dunan in the family or the neighbourhood, without the restoration of natural intergenerational language transmission, or without the incorporation of Dunan in the local school curriculum, Dunan will become extinct by the mid-century. Dunan is rarely used today as most of its speakers are very old and rarely participate in community life.

The language survives today in two domains, one is in the local shamanism and the second is in local folk songs (*minyō*). In other words, Dunan is mostly used in prayers and in songs. Given that natural intergenerational language transmission was interrupted in Yonaguni in the mid-1960s, we can infer that

Figure 2: Yonaguni Island in East Asia



1. Masahiro Yamada, Thomas Pellard and Michinori Shimoji, “Dunan Grammar (Yonaguni Ryukyuan),” in : *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages*, eds. Patrick Heinrich, Shinsho Miyara, and Michinori Shimoji (Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015), 449-478.

Harararude stopped being sung as a lullaby also around this time. It is sung when music is performed in public today. Harararude is still remembered and sung by local singers in Yonaguni, of which there are several dozen.

Yonaguni is the most southwestern point of the Japanese Archipelago, and the island is located just 108 kilometers off the east coast of Taiwan. It is about 12 kilometers long and 5 kilometers large and has a total surface of 28 square kilometers. It has a tropical rainforest climate.

Yonaguni started to be permanently settled from around the tenth to the twelfth century by migrants skilled in wet-rice farming. These agricultural settlers arrived from the north. Yonaguni Islanders or *dunantu* in their own language probably first remained in the neighbouring Yaeyama Islands for several generations before reaching Yonaguni.

Dunan is most likely the last of the Ryukyuan languages to have formed. The island was once independent, and it was the last island to be incorporated into the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1879). Soon after the invasion of the Ryûkyû Kingdom economic hardship started for Yonaguni Islanders. Exploitation and poverty would characterize their life for the next 400 years. A crushing poll tax system (*taraduna*) was imposed on its inhabitants and every man between the age of 15 to 50 had to pay a set amount of taxes irrespective of whether he was healthy and capable to work.

The entire population of Yonaguni consisted of farmers (*hyagusu*) and there was no social stratification in the local community. Control over these farmers was so strict that musical instruments were banned from the island, as it was believed to distract them from devoting their entire energy to cultivating rice. Traditional songs on Yonaguni were performed by voice only. Arguably its best time after the loss of independence in 1522 was during the short-lived Japanese Empire (1895-1945) when Yonaguni was a satellite island to its mighty neighbor Taiwan. Taipei was now the closest urban center of the entire southern Ryûkyûs, and close economic ties were formed. Some 90% of Yonaguni trade was related to Taiwan during the days of the empire. After the war, Yonaguni literally became the ‘end of Japan’, and its existence as a border island coincided with its steady decline. The population of Yonaguni peaked in 1950 when there were about 6,000 residents on the island. It has steadily declined to the current 1,500.<sup>2</sup>

In their present form, Ryukyuan folk songs (*shimauta*) started to evolve in the seventeenth century. Many of these folk songs reflect the harsh living conditions and the economic hardship of the past, some are meant to encourage and shorten the time during the hard fieldwork, some are songs of prayers to be

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2. Patrick Heinrich (ed.), *Liminal Island: Essays on Yonaguni* (Rome: Quodlibet & Skinnerboox, 2021).

sung at special occasions such as harvest, other songs again engage with universal topics such as love, loss, and separation.<sup>3</sup> Together, these songs offer unique insights into Yonaguni Islanders' attitudes, sentiments, and outlook on the world. There are close to 100 original Yonaguni folk songs, and 24 of these songs were released in 2020 by Yonaguni native Yuu Yohana as a CD under the album title 'The windy Island Dunan: Songs from Yonaguni',<sup>4</sup> and in 2021 Yuu Yohana published with his wife Keiko Yohana and his sister Izumi Ota a second CD titled 'Harararude: Child songs from Yonaguni'.<sup>5</sup> It comprises altogether 30 child songs, among them also the song Harararude as the opening track.

Figure 3: Yonaguni native singer Yuu Yonaha



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3. Matt Gillan, *Songs from the Edge of Japan: Music-making in Yaeyama and Okinawa* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
  4. Yuu Yohana, *Kaze no fuku Dunan: Yonaguni no uta* (The windy Island Dunan: Songs from Yonaguni), 2020, compact disc.
  5. Yuu Yohana, Keiko Yohana, and Izumi Ota *Harararude: Yonaguni no warabe-uta* (Harararude: Child songs from Yonaguni), 2021, compact disc.

## Hararaude :

Harararude nkutiyayo harararude  
abuta ya den'nui nu hataginki  
unfuinde harararude nagun'nayo  
iya ya den'nui nu hataginki  
aharainde sunadeya iyanbigara  
akaminde harararude nagun'nayo  
abu ya iribarankin angbarankin  
hanadagite anmurashi ndana'ati  
kiihirunde harararude nagun'nayo  
ubuiya ya ubuhataginki ubaiyu  
suntendashi hamiwarunde  
harararude naganureyadu hamiwarudu  
harararude nagun'nayo harararude

Harararude little baby harararude  
your mother went to the Denuri fields  
to harvest potatoes harararude, don't cry  
your father went to the Denuri fields  
to cut some grass, and your brother  
followed him harararude, don't cry  
your grandma chose a name for you  
pure and strong like the first sake  
of the village harararude, don't cry  
your uncle went to the open sea  
and caught an enormous fish  
harararude you don't have to cry  
harararude, don't cry, harararude

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The current version of Harararude was recorded by Vittorio Mortarotti and Anush Hamzehian in Yonaguni in November 2019 in the house of the singer, Yuu Yonaha who was 33 years old at the time.<sup>6</sup> Yohana is one of the best-known singers from Yonaguni, and a well-known language activist who seeks to record and preserve knowledge of local folk songs. Yonaha has studied ethnomusicology at the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, and he has been singing and playing the *sanshin* since early childhood. The *sanshin*, literally 'three cords', is a Ryukyuan string instrument that is often likened to the banjo. It consists of a snakeskin-covered body, a neck, and three strings. In Dunan, the language of Yonaguni, *sanshin* is pronounced *santi*.

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6. The audio recording of the lullaby is included in the online media supplement of this international lullaby special issue of Akshar Wangmay.

Figure 4 : Ikema Nae (the author of the Dunan dictionary) shows a traditional cradle



Translating the lullaby from Dunan is not very difficult as there exists a Japanese translation that can be consulted. Local singers and *sanshin* teachers Reiko Yonaha and Otomi Sunagawa assisted me with the translation. Toponyms in Dunan have been registered and one can easily relate them to Japanese toponyms and locate them on the island, and we know that the Denuri fields are in the southeastern part of the island. However, we no longer know the origin of the term and it is not a traditional Dunan family name.<sup>7</sup> The sake in Yonaguni is the strongest in the entire Ryukyuan archipelago, and this is linked to the name of the child which serves to envisage the child's future (strong and pure). Not all details in the song are clear to singers or students of Yonaguni folk songs today. For instance, why would the grandmother choose a name for the child, why has it remained unnamed, or whether the uncle

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7. Nae Ikema, *Yonagunigo jiten [Yonaguni language dictionary]* (Kagoshima: Private Publication, 2003).

catching an ‘enormous fish’ for the child has any symbolic connotations? This notwithstanding, we understand that the child is soothed into sleep by being reassured that it is part of a social fabric where people care for and look after each other. While the Dunan language is disappearing and Harararude is no longer sung as a lullaby, this feature of Yonaguni society remains, though. Those who have remained on the island and the children growing up there continue to have a strong bond with each other, and with the island.

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### About Patrick Heinrich



Patrick Heinrich is Professor of Japanese Studies and Sociolinguistics at the Department of Asian and Mediterranean African Studies at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. Before joining Ca' Foscari he taught at universities in Germany (Duisburg-Essen University) and Japan (Dokkyo University) for many years.

His research interests focus on sociolinguistics, language endangerment, and communication in the city. Recently edited books in English include *The Routledge Handbook of Japanese Sociolinguistics* (with Yumiko Ohara; Routledge 2018) *Globalising Sociolinguistics* (with Dick Smakman; Routledge 2015), *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages* (with Shinsho Miyara and Michinori Shimoji; Mouton de Gruyter 2015); *Language Life in Japan* (with Christian Galan; Routledge 2011). He is the author of *The Making of Monolingual Japan* (Multilingual Matters 2012).

He has been awarded the annual research award by the Japanese Association of the Sociolinguistic Sciences in 2010 and is since 2014 an honorary member of the Foundation for Endangered Languages. He has been conducting fieldwork in the Ryukyus since 2004 and owes a lot to everybody who ever spoke and spent time with him there.

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\* A special acknowledgment goes to Dr. Patrick Heinrich for his invaluable contributions to our understanding of the Harararude lullaby. We extend our gratitude for providing the sound file and the 2009 video recording showcasing Ikema Nae, the author of the Dunan dictionary. In the video, Ikema Nae speaks in Dunan, explaining that the cradle was comfortable in summer due to the wind created by rocking and that the string was used for rocking the cradle. Both the authentic rendition of the lullaby and the video recording are included in the media supplement of this international lullaby special issue. Additionally, we appreciate the inclusion of a photograph featuring the talented Yonaguni native singer Yuu Yonaha. All these elements shared by Dr. Heinrich significantly enhance our exploration of the endangered Dunan language and its cultural treasures.

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