

# MAPPING THE COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY OF NAHA'S *MACHIGWĀ*:

Culture, gender, commerce and community in Okinawa's  
urban market ecosystems

[Received January 22nd 2026; accepted March 2nd 2026 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.280]

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the multifaceted role of urban markets in post-War Okinawan society, arguing that these commercial spaces have been functioning as critical nodes of community cohesion, cultural transmission and collective resilience that extend far beyond their economic purpose. Through an interdisciplinary lens incorporating ethnographic methodology, oral history, archival research and visual and sound mapping of the communicative ecology of *machigwā* (small markets) in the Okinawan capital, Naha, this study demonstrates how Okinawan markets exemplify the concept of 'social infrastructure'—physical spaces that facilitate social interaction and community building. The research draws on these methods to trace the evolution of the *machigwā* from its establishment as black market in the post-war era through contemporary challenges posed by tourism commodification, the COVID-19 pandemic, generational shifts and urban development. The findings reveal that *machigwā* has historically operated and continues to do so as embedded social ecosystems where economic transactions have been mediated by gender, kinship networks, reciprocal relationships and shared historical trauma. However, these communal functions are facing significant threats from tourism-driven spatial reorganisation and disrupted intergenerational knowledge transfer that risk bypassing community needs. Despite these challenges, the *machigwā*'s evolution shows that it has the capacity to maintain aspects of its social infrastructure while adapting to contemporary pressures, at least for now.

**KEYWORDS:** Okinawa, market ecosystems, *machigwā*, social infrastructure, gender and island resilience

*When I was a child, visiting Makishi Market with my grandmother or mother was always a special occasion. It was never with a male figure unless he was a little boy. We went there for ancestral events or to purchase a kimono<sup>1</sup> for Shichi-Go-San.<sup>2</sup> The market had everything—from daily necessities to rare cultural items used for household altars, from traditional foods to be offered to ancestors to beautifully crafted, upscale kimonos. It truly was, and still is, the heart of Okinawan cultural tradition. My grandmother and I would take local buses from our southern city, transferring along the way, and we would both dress up nicely, as going to Makishi Market itself felt like an event. The market was always lively, filled with cheerful conversations, laughter, and the scent of local foods. I remember it being mostly women who filled the narrow aisles—just as it is today—but back then, there were hardly any tourists, only locals who carried on the rhythms of everyday Okinawan life. (Ayano Ginoza)*

*My first encounter with Naha's machigwā began in 2017, when I slipped through a narrow side entrance off Kokusai-dōri. The arcade was dimmer and quieter than the main street, its pace set by small clothing shops tended by elderly women who greeted me with gentle nods. I drifted slowly through their carefully arranged racks, feeling as if I had stepped into a more intimate, local rhythm of the city. As I walked deeper, the atmosphere shifted. Subdued murmurs gave way to the louder hum leading toward Makishi fish market—tourists, camera flashes, vendors' calls, the twang of the sanshin (a three string Okinawan lute), a saturation of colour. The contrast struck me: quiet domestic spaces dissolving into exuberant public spectacle. Since then, I have returned countless times, forming small acquaintances through regular greetings and that slow-building familiarity unique to small islands—simply being present. Perhaps what draws me back is island fellowship, echoing my own memories of Mediterranean island markets: the casual intimacy between vendors and regulars, the way life condenses into narrow passages. Over eight years, I have watched the market transform rapidly, especially post-pandemic. The elderly women's clothing shops that once welcomed me have quietly disappeared, replaced by bars catering to tourists. These shifts remind me that the market is not just a setting for my observations but a living, changing environment—one in which my own narrative is now subtly entangled. (Evangelina Papoutsaki)*

*My first visit to Makishi Public Market was on a family trip in 2003. At this famous tourist spot, we were amazed by the colourful tropical fish in red, blue, and yellow, as well as the pig's face skins that we had never seen at a market in Japan. I remember the smoky smell when the fish we bought on the first floor was cooked on the second floor. Since I started living in Okinawa in 2013, I no longer went to the market as a tourist, and I did not engage in everyday shopping either. When I visited the market again in 2025, the vibrant and lively sounds of the market brought me back to the 1970s' physical experience of the market in Osaka, where I went with my mother. It was filled with the voices,*

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<sup>1</sup> In Okinawa, the word *kimono* generally refers to the traditional Japanese garment. Indigenous Okinawan clothing was formerly known as *uchin sugaai*, although today the term *ryūsō* is more commonly used, often in contrast to *wasō* (Japanese dress).

<sup>2</sup> *Shichi-Go-San* is a Japanese tradition celebrating children's growth and health at ages three, five, and seven. Families visit a shrine in November to pray for the child's well-being and future happiness.

sounds, and enticing smells of foods: the fishmonger's unique low-toned voice, the dried food vendor briskly scraping *katsuobushi*, and the smiling butcher frying croquettes with a sizzle. After a long time away, the market had transformed into a supermarket with little physical communication. The sounds of Makishi Public Market not only remind me of the nostalgic soundscape but also made me aware of the uniqueness: they reflected Okinawa Island's centripetal appeal and the functional essence of a market being located in a crossing space between surrounding islands. (Junko Konishi)

## Introduction

Markets have long occupied a central role in the social fabric of small islands, serving not only as hubs of economic exchange but also as vibrant platforms for cultural expression and community engagement. Naha's *machigwā* ('small market' in Okinawan language<sup>3</sup>), represents a unique case study in postwar urban development, commercial evolution and cultural adaptation while navigating the complexities of foreign military occupation and the impact of mainland Japan's reversion to sovereignty. In this article, we argue that Naha's *machigwā* represents a form of social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018) that has been integral to island resilience, cultural continuation and collective identity expression in the post-War period. By examining these spaces through the lens of social infrastructure, our analysis reveals how the *machigwā* functions as a multidimensional island-based social institution while simultaneously serving as contested microcosms of broader societal change.

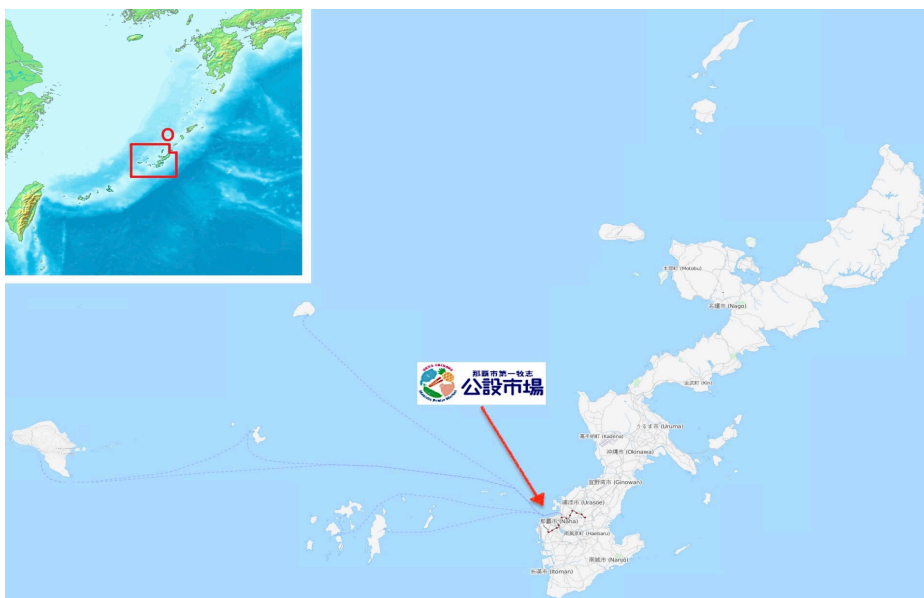


Figure 1a [inset] - Okinawa's position in southern Japan; 1b - Okinawa island (arrow pointing at Machigwā's location in Naha City) ([https://welcome.okinawa.jp/db/en/okinawaguidemap\\_en\\_min.pdf](https://welcome.okinawa.jp/db/en/okinawaguidemap_en_min.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> *Machi* meaning market and *gwā*, as a diminutive suffix, expressing smallness, intimacy and affection.



Figure 2 – Machigwā’s location in Naha City  
 ([https://welcome.okinawa.jp/db/en/okinawaguidemap\\_en\\_min.pdf](https://welcome.okinawa.jp/db/en/okinawaguidemap_en_min.pdf))

Our research addresses a gap in scholarship on Naha's most famous and largest *machigwā*, home to the iconic Makishi Public Market, the 'Kitchen of the Prefecture.' Naha's *machigwā* is difficult to define precisely. It could be understood as a single market, a complex of covered market streets developed around the historical Makishi fish market, a network of shopping arcades (*shōtengai*) with independently run shopping associations, or a shopping district covering a large urban area that opens on one end to Naha's popular Kokusai-dōri tourist district and on the other to the Tsuboya pottery district. While the area is also referred to as the market (*ichiba* or *shōtengai* in the vernacular), locals predominantly use *machigwā*—a term officially adopted by the market's newsletter (see Image 1 below) that provides historical continuity linking today's marketplace to its origins in the small shops and stalls of the post-war black market selling whatever was available. In this article, we have chosen the term *machigwā* to represent this complex of shops, arcades, and independently operated market associations that together constitute what residents of the area recognise as a cohesive yet multifaceted commercial and social space.



Figure 3 - The Market's free newsletter published by the *Machigwā* General Information Center, headlined 'Naha Festival Event Special & Machigwa Useful Information' (Volume 23, 2025).

Our central question focuses on how island urban markets like Naha's *machigwā* function as social infrastructure, and how they have navigated historical and contemporary pressures. We explore how people, spaces, and island histories interact to shape everyday commerce, including communication sources, channels, flows and networks connecting vendors, customers, and stakeholders. The study considers how oral histories and collective narratives inform both the market's postwar and present-day practices and broader understandings of the island's socio-economic development. Our observations have pointed to the importance of women, directing our attention to gender's role in shaping experiences, interactions, and power dynamics in the market. As the market sits in Naha's busiest tourist zone on Kokusai-dōri (International Street), we examine tourism's impact on the market's evolution, including how tourists and locals interact within this shared space, especially in its post-pandemic recovery context.

## Methodology

We have employed an interdisciplinary approach combining ethnographic fieldwork and oral histories with archival research to understand how market communities have evolved. Ongoing ethnographic observations since 2017 have added a longitudinal dimension, capturing pre- and post-COVID changes, tourism impacts, and the arrival of foreign migrant workers and I-turns (internal migrants from mainland Japan in this case) who are increasingly becoming a visible part of the market ecosystem. Our positionality as researchers is reflected in the author's auto-ethnographic narratives at the start of the article. We focus on the voices of female market vendors and heads of arcade associations, whose oral histories illuminate community building, gender roles and cultural identity through commercial practice. These oral histories provide a bottom-up perspective on Okinawa's post-war history, revealing how markets weathered economic and social transformations under military occupation and post-reversion to Japan. We combine oral history with narrative analysis to identify themes, processing extensive data that has revealed multiple interpretations of reality. This thematic analysis has enabled us to explore lived experiences by identifying underlying structures of meaning (Gibbs, 2007). We acknowledge the inherent challenges, as academic analysis can sometimes unintentionally distort authentic voices in the process of deriving meaning.

The Island Communicative Ecology (ICE) and Soundwalk approaches supported our methodological framework for mapping the marketplace communicative ecosystem. ICE in this study includes the diverse forms, networks, systems, activities, interconnections, resources, flows, and issues characteristic of these island markets (see Papoutsaki and Kuwahara, 2018, 2024, 2025; Konishi and Papoutsaki, 2020). It refers to the environment in which communication processes take place, involving people interacting within their market networks, and encompasses participant identities, the focus of their conversations, and the modes through which communication occurs. Communicative ecology is also understood as a milieu of agents (i.e. female vendors, heads of associations) linked in multiple ways through various exchanges of communication. Attention has been given to the physical layout to understand its impact on social interactions and economic activities.

The marketscape is multi-sensory, comprising interconnected layers of tangible and intangible experiences—from the sounds of human interaction and the tactile experience of crowded pathways to music, food, smells, and a distinctive sense of place unique to the island. The Soundwalk methodology complemented this mapping of the communicative ecology, capturing the sensory elements characteristic of this market. Building on established soundscape research demonstrating how acoustic environments reflect social life and cultural identity (Schafer, 1986; Takahashi and Shiokawa, 1996-2000; Kreutzfeldt, 2006), we conducted "listening walks" and "sound walks" at different times of day and week, immersing ourselves in the shopping street's visual and soundscape—capturing vendors' calls, *sanshin* music, tourist chatter, the clatter of food preparation, and the ambient hum of arcade life. Unlike previous soundscape studies focusing solely on current acoustic conditions, we examined both present soundscapes and past auditory environments remembered by shop owners through oral surveys. This temporal approach revealed how arcade installation fostered community relationships and transformed lives, particularly for women vendors, while creating distinctive auditory environments that continue to evolve. The ongoing soundscape analysis will be explored in depth in a subsequent publication.



Figure 4 – Tourist map of the *machigwā* area showing fieldwork coverage, centered on Makishi Fish Market. The images depict iconic scenes of the market. The bottom left captions read: a 15-minute walk from the Prefectural Office Monorail Station, 10 minutes from Miebashi Monorail Station, 9 minutes from Makishi Monorail Station, 5 minutes from the Tsuboya Pottery Museum, 2 minutes from the Mutsumi Bridge intersection, and 3 minutes from the Heiwa Street entrance. <sup>4</sup>

### Island Markets as Social Ecosystems

Island markets function as crucial sites where cultural heritage, economic activity, and social life converge. They sustain local economies through vital income streams for producers, artisans, and vendors while serving as community gathering spaces that foster social cohesion and reflect broader socio-economic and historical developments, including gender dynamics. As critical hubs within local food systems, they also ensure access to fresh produce and support food security.

Japanese *shōtengai* (shopping arcades) represent traditional commercial formats that have faced significant challenges in contemporary urban contexts. The unique value of *shōtengai* lies in their collective networks, where individual shop owners contribute personal connections and narratives that cannot be experienced in large-scale retailers. These covered shopping streets have experienced decline due to competition from modern shopping malls,

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.makishi--public--market-jp.translate.google/access/?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=ja&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=ja&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=wapp](https://www.makishi--public--market-jp.translate.google/access/?_x_tr_sl=ja&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=ja&_x_tr_pto=wapp)

representing a pattern of unplanned obsolescence similar to that observed in Western cities (Balsas, 2016). However, some *shōtengai* demonstrate remarkable resilience and cultural sustainability. Research on Tokyo's traditional shopping streets reveals how community culture and elderly residents serve as key drivers in maintaining these spaces as ageing-friendly communities, with low-rise, small-scale *shōtengai* thriving for centuries through bottom-up initiatives (To and Chong, 2017).

Feminist geographers emphasise how space is gendered and gender relations are spatially constituted (Massey, 2005)—particularly relevant in island contexts where insularity creates distinct spatial conditions. Research across island contexts reveals complex patterns of women's market participation. In the Caribbean, market trading has historically provided women with economic autonomy and social status within patriarchal societies (Barrow, 1998). Female trader networks like Jamaica's *higglers* simultaneously challenge traditional gender hierarchies while reinforcing cultural expectations about women's roles in provisioning and community care. Pacific Island research reveals complex gendered market patterns shaped by distinct cultural frameworks. Women's market participation varies significantly across communities—between Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijians (Leckie, 2002), and in how colonial transformations altered traditional roles in Vanuatu (Jolly, 1991). Market spatial organisation frequently reflects gendered divisions, with specific areas associated with male or female vendors. Studies in the Philippines (Illo, 1995) and Madagascar (Tekere, 2000) reveal persistent tensions: while women dominate food retail sectors, they often operate within broader systems of male control over land ownership and credit access. Nevertheless, market participation provides pathways for women to accumulate economic resources and social influence.

Island public markets serve crucial functions in maintaining social cohesion and island identity within bounded communities, functioning as community spaces, information exchange centres, and sites where island identity is continuously negotiated (Baldacchino, 2007). Markets balance internal community needs with external economic pressures, maintaining cultural traditions while accommodating tourism (Peckham, 2003). Beyond commercial exchange, markets facilitate cultural transmission and complex social networks. Market interactions enable sharing of knowledge about traditional foods, preparation methods, and island-specific practices, with women's networks serving as channels for maintaining traditional ecological knowledge (Pollock, 1992). Markets function as nodes in extended credit systems, mutual aid networks, and reciprocal obligations characteristic of Caribbean informal economies (Hosseini, 2018). The bounded nature of island communities intensifies these network effects, with market relationships interweaving with kinship networks to create dense webs of mutual obligation and support (Bell, Caplan and MacDonald, 1993).

Comparative research across island regions demonstrates distinct patterns shaped by cultural traditions and colonial histories. Caribbean markets serve as spaces where African, European, and indigenous influences combine to create distinctive cultural forms (Momsen, 1993), while Pacific markets reflect traditional status hierarchies alongside spaces for social mobility (Besnier, 2011). European island markets navigate between serving local communities and accommodating tourist expectations, requiring complex negotiations about cultural authenticity (Poort et al, 2021). Tourism impacts island markets in complex ways, creating economic opportunities while potentially commodifying cultural practices and altering traditional market relationships (Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002; Pattullo, 2005). Globalisation pressures affect island markets through implications for both gender roles and community cohesion, as improved transportation and communication links

provide new opportunities while subjecting local markets to increased competition from imported goods (Connell and Conway, 2000). Structural adjustment policies and trade liberalisation have altered market dynamics with differential effects on male and female vendors (Potter and Phillips, 2006).

### The historical context of Naha's markets: From black market origins to contemporary commerce

The history of Naha's market district encapsulates broader narratives of Okinawan post-War recovery, American occupation and reintegration into Japan, revealing community resilience, adaptive informal economies, and the profound impact of geopolitical forces on everyday life. Local publications like *Mikyurukyuru* (meaning 'looking around with amusement') document this layered history against the tide of urban change.<sup>5</sup> Pre-War commercial patterns established the foundation of the market, with Higashimachi area hosting 'Naha's Great Market'—a gathering point where agricultural goods met urban consumers (Hitotsuyanagi, 2023). This tradition of centralised, community-oriented trade would prove resilient through catastrophic change. U.S. occupation directly influenced urban fabric through large-scale land confiscations, disrupting traditional commercial centres and displacing communities.

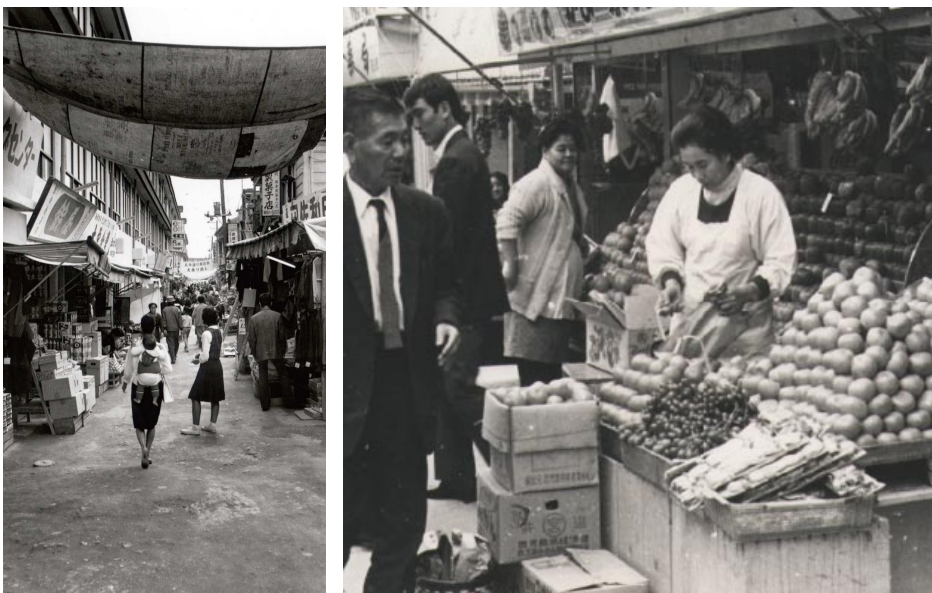
The genesis of Naha's market district is intrinsically linked to wartime devastation. The area surrounding the Gābu River emerged as the site of spontaneous black market activity in the immediate postwar period—not merely commercial opportunism but a vital survival mechanism for a population facing severe scarcity (Hashimoto, 2023). The market emerged organically, with street vendors initially lining the riverbanks (CATCHY, 2023). Makeshift *suijō tempo*, or ('above water shops') built over the Gābu River operated in legal grey areas during the 1950s, representing adaptive survival mechanisms (*Mikyurukyuru*, Vol. 4). Frequent flooding eventually necessitated infrastructural intervention: authorities "blocked the river, made it into a culvert, and built a building called *Suijō tempo* on top of it" (Hashimoto, 2023). This structure, predating the formal public market, represents one of the earliest attempts to organise chaotic commercial activity.

The market's significance extended beyond Naha itself. As Hashimoto notes, "the black market that was born in this area is a place that supported Okinawa's postwar reconstruction," with shoppers traveling from across the prefecture during times of scarcity, creating crowds so dense "it was difficult to walk straight" (Hashimoto, 2023, unpaginated preface). Critically, the market attracted entrepreneurs from throughout Okinawa, consolidating diverse island communities in one commercial space. The transition from unregulated black market to formal municipal market occurred when Naha City authorities intervened to regularise commercial activities. The problematic nature of continued black market operations—particularly regarding property rights and public health—necessitated official oversight, leading authorities to group stores selling fresh food together as the 'Makishi Public Market' (Hashimoto, 2023). However, this formalisation created a complex urban landscape. The public market became one component of a larger commercial ecosystem including the older Mizukamiten building and numerous privately owned

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<sup>5</sup> For more historical information visit the sites of various shopping arcade associations: <https://www.makishi-public-market.jp/about/history/>, <https://www.ichibachuodori.com/>, <https://www.mutsumibashidori.com/>, <https://sunrise-naha.com/>, <https://www.ichibahondori.com/>

structures. The arcade system that eventually covered market streets exemplifies this complexity as it was installed by street associations rather than municipal authorities, demonstrating continued merchant self-organisation (Hashimoto, 2023).



Figures 5 & 6 - Images of Naha's *machigwā* circa 1950s  
(<https://www.mutsumibashidori.com/>)

During American occupation (1945-1972), Okinawan markets incorporated American cultural elements alongside traditional and mainland Japanese influences. This period of *champuru*—the Okinawan term for cultural mixing—created a distinctive commercial environment. As Hashimoto observes:

*During the postwar period under US military rule, American culture was also adopted. Such champuru is not a historical event, but is still occurring today.*  
(Hashimoto, 2023, unpaginated preface).

The market district attracted merchants from across Okinawa Prefecture, consolidating its position as 'the Kitchen of the Prefecture.'; The physical organisation reflected spontaneous origins, with *machigwā* developing as "maze-like alleys and countless shops" rather than through formal urban planning (Hashimoto, 2023, unpaginated preface).

Reversion to Japanese administration in 1972 marked another major turning point, initiating infrastructure development and formalisation. The completion of the iconic First Makishi Public Market building in 1972 symbolises this transition from ad-hoc recovery to structured modernity (*Mikyurukyuru*, Vol. 7). By 2010, the market became a registered hub of 131 businesses, featuring a system called *mochiage* ('bring up') service where customers could buy ingredients on the first floor and have them cooked in second-floor restaurants, marking gradual shift from primarily serving local shoppers to incorporating tourism as significant economic component (Makishi Public Market).

Reversion also accelerated trends marginalising traditional markets. The influx of Japanese capital and new urban planning policies favoured large-scale, modern retail. Suburban malls and regional redevelopment projects gradually drew consumers away from central shopping streets (*Mikyurukyuru*, Vol. 8). While First Makishi Market thrived and evolved into a premier tourist destination, many other public markets could not adapt. Markets such as Tsuji, Shinwashi, and Tajima closed, their buildings repurposed, demolished, or replaced by parking lots (Hitotsuyanagi, 2023). A key turning point came in 2014 with the opening of *Adachiya*, a bar introducing Tokyo-style tavern culture, marking the beginning of transformation where "the number of drinking establishments has increased, and now some people mistake it for a drinking district" (Hashimoto, 2023). Major reconstruction of Makishi market beginning in June 2019 represented the first comprehensive rebuilding in half a century (Hashimoto, 2023). The temporary market opened on July 1, 2019, while reconstruction proceeded over approximately four years.

This reconstruction period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, creating unprecedented challenges. However, the crisis revealed the market's resilience: "I heard many stories in the Naha market area that 'it was locals who supported us during the COVID-19 pandemic'" (Hashimoto, 2023). The contemporary period has witnessed continued *champuru*: "in recent years, some of the new shopkeepers who have opened new shops in *machigwā* are from outside the prefecture and some from overseas, bringing a new wind" (Hashimoto, 2023, unpaginated preface). This ongoing transformation raises fundamental questions about authenticity, preservation, and the appropriate balance between serving local needs and attracting tourist revenue.

## Findings and discussion: Market resilience, gendered labour, and contested futures

The analysis of data concerning Naha's *machigwā* area paints a complex landscape of post-War recovery, enduring women's presence and resilience, precarious generational continuity, and contested transformation driven by tourism, the pandemic, and wider urban changes. Drawing on formal and informal conversations conducted between February and July 2025, supplemented by ongoing ethnographic observations since 2017, we examine how these markets function as social infrastructure, with physical spaces facilitating social interaction and community building. Our findings reveal how *machigwā* navigates tensions between preservation and adaptation, local identity and global forces, collective memory and contemporary pressures, situating these empirical observations within broader scholarly debates about peripheral economies, gendered labour systems, postcolonial island spaces, and urban transformation in small island contexts.

## Self-Organised Social Infrastructure: Collective Governance and Mutual Aid

The marketscape is organised around three principal arteries traversing *machigwā* from Kokusai-dōri's front entrances to the Tsuboya pottery district boundary. These main corridors, administered by eight distinct arcade associations, are interconnected by numerous smaller passages and alleyways functioning like veins within a single market organism (see Figure 7). Makishi Fish Market sits at the heart, co-existing symbiotically with the surrounding *izakaya* district. The market's structure evidences organic development over decades, originating around Makishi and expanding outward in roughly parallel lines.

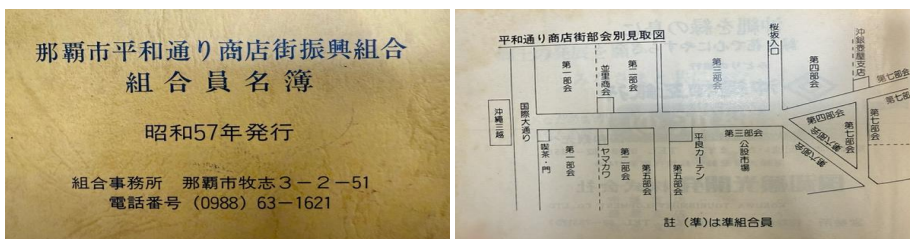


Figure 7 - The main *machigwā* Arcades complex and corresponding Arcade Associations - Heiwa, Mutsumi-bashi, Market main street, Makishi, Shintenchi, Taihei, Market Chuouou Centre.

Arcade associations operate through horizontal self-management characterised by collective governance and mutual support, exemplifying what Ostrom (1990) identified as successful commons governance—community-managed resources operating without state regulation. The monthly fee system (¥3,000-5,000 per shop) functions as informal taxation for public goods provision through what Ostrom (1990) terms "polycentric governance"—self-organised community management of common-pool resources. Shop owners' pooled fees fund shared infrastructure maintenance: cleaning, lighting, utilities, and arcade repairs. These associations also administer informal support systems for members experiencing financial hardship, functioning as community-based safety nets in the absence of formal institutional assistance.

As one vendor described the arcade's origins: "the arcade roof cover is illegal, but shop owners pool money from monthly fees to repair it." This DIY infrastructure resulted from necessity, as the market's semi-legal status meant vendors couldn't access municipal infrastructure funding. The Taihei Association head explained: "the old department store had residences upstairs and was first to build the arcade, then others built from that end until both sides connected." This ethos of cooperation was deemed essential for survival: "in the end, it's about people—whether they cooperate determines if this town thrives," stated an elderly woman from the Residents' Association. This bonding capital proved essential for survival in contexts of institutional neglect, aligning with what Scott (1998) calls "local knowledge" (*metis*)—practical problem-solving operating outside formal planning systems. The arcade's successful persistence for over 60 years demonstrates that informal institutions can achieve stability comparable to formal ones when supported by robust social networks. The recent formation of a Residents' Association exemplifies the market's continuing capacity for self-organisation and adaptive governance, maintaining decades-long traditions of collective action while accommodating contemporary demographic and commercial transformations.

Central to the market's economic organisation was the *moai* system, a traditional Okinawan rotating savings and credit association functioning as grassroots microfinance.<sup>6</sup> An elderly café customer described its scale and risk: "in *moai*, one would contribute one or half a million yen regularly, and if the leader fails to pay, they lose everything." *Moai* operated through what Putnam (2000) terms "bonding social capital"—dense, trust-based networks enabling collective action. However, unlike Putnam's focus on Western civic associations, *moai* emerged from material necessity in contexts of resource scarcity and institutional exclusion (Christy, 1993). The rotating credit mechanism required sophisticated social coordination, with social ostracism serving as primary enforcement—contrasting sharply with Western microfinance models relying on contractual obligations (Yunus, 2007; Toguchi 2025).



Figures 8a, 8b - Heiwa Dori Arcade Association, Membership Booklet, 1988 (Heiwa arcade was completed in 1982)

*Moai's* decline among younger generations reflects what Harvey (2005) terms "accumulation by dispossession"—the erosion of commons-based social relations through capitalist expansion and individualisation. As one interviewee observed, "*moai* is unique to Okinawa, but people don't do it anymore, and certainly no one expects younger people to understand its value." As formal banking became accessible and social ties weakened through urbanisation, *moai's* comparative advantages—trust-based lending without collateral requirements—diminished, a pattern evident across the Pacific where traditional mutual aid systems have declined as formal financial institutions expanded (Connell and Conway, 2000).

Multiple respondents described market relationships using familial metaphors. An elderly former weaver stated: "everyone got along like family." The Gābu Association representative elaborated: "children were watched by the whole town—the community is amazing." Yet these bonds showed signs of strain. A Residents' Association representative noted declining participation: "now we can't gather people like we used to—hardly anyone remains." Post-COVID dynamics accelerated this decline, with fewer vendors attending association meetings and reduced communal activities, though the philosophical foundation of collective action remained present in discourse if not always in practice.

The early post-War arcade organisation reflected internal migration patterns, with vendors from outer islands of Okinawa prefecture relocating to Naha seeking economic opportunities. These migrants established commercial enclaves specialising in specific trades while maintaining distinct island dialects and cultural practices. The market functioned as a

<sup>6</sup> *Moai* is a system equivalent to the *Tanomoshi-kō* of mainland Japan that still remains in Okinawa and the Amami Islands.

microcosm of the Ryukyuan archipelago, with entire arcade sections operated by vendors from particular outer islands. These island-based commercial enclaves preserved their cultural distinctiveness through continued celebration of island-specific festivals and maintenance of linguistic practices within the market space, transforming *machigwā* into a representation of Ryukyuan diversity in miniature—what we term ‘islandscapes’—fostering collective awareness of inter-island cultural variation during American military occupation. This pattern demonstrates how internal migration shaped both the market's commercial structure and its role as repository of archipelagic cultural diversity (and in contrast to a more recent internal migration wave of I-turns from mainland Japan this time that is now changing the market's ecosystem).

### Women's economic power and the gendered architecture of resilience

A striking and consistent finding was the centrality of women to Okinawa's market economy, both historically and presently. This pattern reflects deeper traditions of *onna no shōbai*, (‘women's business’) that predate the post-War period:

*In Okinawa, women have traditionally been responsible for buying and selling at markets and for peddling goods even before the war. Women who had experience in peddling sold a wide variety of items, from agricultural products and daily necessities taken from U.S. military bases to everyday goods made from airplane wreckage. (The Educational Committee at Okinawa Prefecture, 2016 p. 368.)*

One café customer whose mother was a successful market entrepreneur explained: "women in Okinawa have been working since pre-war times, and commerce started with women selling goods." Multiple respondents emphasised women's economic agency: "women have power because they work and earn their own money." The Educational Committee at Okinawa Prefecture has identified that:

*Sewing and dressmaking were also important means for women to make a living. It became common to see women carrying children on their backs, spreading cloths on the ground, and selling homemade clothes. This marked the beginning of the Shintenchī market, which focused on clothing. Many of the sellers were war widows, and from around 1950, people who had been displaced due to the expansion and establishment of U.S. military bases also joined in. These women helped shape the postwar Shintenchī market. (The Educational Committee at Okinawa Prefecture, 2016 p. 369)*

The centrality of women to Okinawa's market economy challenges dominant Island Studies narratives that marginalise women's economic contributions or frame them as supplementary to male-dominated industries (Baldacchino, 2006a; Royle, 2001). Our findings demonstrate that Okinawan women's commercial dominance predates modern economic development, rooted in Ryukyu Kingdom matrilineal traditions where women controlled household finances (Kerr, 2000). Karides (2021) advocates for an island feminist approach exploring how gender intersects with other social forces shaping islanders' lives and islands' cultural and socio-economic conditions—a framework particularly relevant here.

The post-War period crystallised these roles out of necessity. As the Gābu Association representative noted, "80% were women—unmarried women and war widows who had children but lost their husbands in the war and had to survive." This demographic reality transformed women from supplementary economic actors into primary breadwinners and market builders. In WWII's aftermath, women rebuilt the market economy from the ground up, engaging in barter, sewing, doing laundry for U.S. forces, and other informal trades, demonstrating immense resilience. Okinawan women's economic agency emerged not from feminist consciousness but from pragmatic necessity shaped by militarisation, male out-migration, and war's devastating demographic impacts (Tanji, 2006).

Despite women's centrality, their labour remained systematically undervalued—what feminist economists term "reproductive labour" sustaining communities without formal recognition (Federici, 2004). Women's market work was framed as somehow 'natural' rather than entrepreneurial, reflecting broader patriarchal structures that naturalise women's labour as domestic duty extensions, enabling male-dominated industries to extract value from women's unpaid work (Mies, 1986). An elderly woman articulated this tension: "without women, events and celebrations in Heiwa-Dori wouldn't happen—men might decide, but women's effort is essential to execute them." This invisible labour extended beyond commerce to include community organising, conflict mediation, and cultural preservation. Women simultaneously managed businesses, raised children, and maintained community bonds. As one respondent reflected on her survival strategy: "seeing my children's sleeping faces made me forget hardships—each day was a fresh start." Women's roles in organising festivals, mediating conflicts, and maintaining social bonds constitute what Tronto (1993) terms "caring labour"—relational work sustaining communities but remaining undervalued in capitalist economies. These gendered networks functioned as informal social safety nets where formal welfare systems remained weak or absent, constituting what Katz (2001) calls "counter topographies of globalisation"—local solidarities buffering communities against market volatility.

The market's communicative ecology mapping revealed women's persistent presence across multiple contexts and generations: elderly vendors in their 80s and 90s maintaining stalls in smaller arcades and alleyways, multi-generational family enterprises, retired women recently opening shops seeking *ikigai* (purpose in life), octogenarian and nonagenarian vendors pushing vegetable carts around Makishi, and young migrant Asian women employed in hospitality establishments. Signs of younger local female entrepreneurship are emerging, exemplified by the Makishi doughnut vendor who innovatively developed a beverage from *awamori*<sup>7</sup> production byproducts, and the proprietor of a fresh juice stand in the main market arcade.

Within the communicative ecology framework—understood as a milieu of agents linked through various communication exchanges (Papoutsaki and Kuwahara, 2018, 2021; Konishi and Papoutsaki, 2020)—market women function as critical agents and storytellers who have shaped the market's narratives for decades. Their conversations, business practices, and informal networks constitute the communicative infrastructure through which market knowledge, cultural practices and collective memory are transmitted and negotiated. Despite massive transformations driven by tourism, generational shifts, and urban development, women remain a constant presence across the market's evolution.

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<sup>7</sup> A type of Okinawan liquor distilled after alcohol fermentation using black *koji* mould from Thai rice as the raw material.

### *Ikigai* (purpose in life): Aging, and the market as social architecture

One vendor in her 80s, seen across from Makishi market grating vegetables, rises at 4am to push her cart despite visible physical strain from decades of labour. When asked why she continues, she explained:

*What else am I going to do? If I stay at home I will move from bed to sofa. Here at least I see people and time passes.*

Similarly, a shop owner in her nineties described her daily presence in a side arcade as "catching up with friends, passing time." Having spent her entire life in this space, she shares collective memory with other elderly vendors: one sewing traditional ceremonial Okinawan costumes, another selling flowers and vegetables, and a third—in her fifties—sporadically maintaining her grandmother's stall selling *daikon* (radishes). These women gather at a small café between transactions, sustaining connections to both collective and individual histories.

The concept of *ikigai*—purpose in life—illuminates elderly vendors' continued market participation beyond economic necessity. Hasegawa has defined *ikigai* as the "individual consciousness that motivates us to live" (Hasegawa et.al. 2003: 390-396). For octogenarian and nonagenarian vendors, the market functions less as economic infrastructure than as social architecture enabling continued community participation, temporal structure, and biographical continuity in advanced age— i.e., a social infrastructure facilitating social interaction and community building that is particularly important for aging populations. Beyond those maintaining longstanding market positions, women in their sixties and seventies have opened new shops following retirement through an earlier Hall market revitalisation lottery program (see Haha City Hall, Nahamachi Promotion Division). One vendor who purchased an existing stall explained, half-jokingly, that she sought cognitive engagement to "fend dementia away." Another described opening a handmade souvenir shop with her husband as a response to navigating menopause and life transitions. A third vendor contextualised her decision within shifting intergenerational dynamics:

*In the old days children used to look after their parents, but now all this has changed. My daughter married an American and left, so I run this shop to have something to do with my life.*

These narratives reveal how the market functions as adaptive infrastructure accommodating demographic shifts, changing family structures, and the prolonged search for meaningful activity across the life course—particularly relevant in contexts of extended longevity and nuclear family structures replacing extended kinship networks.

### War memory, trauma and postcolonial legacies

The Battle of Okinawa, which resulted in the deaths of approximately one-quarter of Okinawa's civilian population during the US invasion in 1945, remained a profound, often silent, presence in market narratives. When asked about wartime experiences, one participant in her 90s responded: "I don't want to talk about it—when friends gather and that topic starts, someone always ends up crying." This silence wasn't absence but protective strategy. She noted the loss: "my youngest brother and father died in the war as soldiers, and

my mother, aunt, and four family members were killed." Yet detailed discussions remained taboo within families, suggesting trauma's intergenerational transmission through deliberate non-transmission that continues to resonate across generations. The pervasive silence surrounding Battle of Okinawa experiences reflects what Caruth (1996) theorises as trauma's essential characteristic—its resistance to narrative integration. This silence has specific historical and political dimensions in Okinawa, where war experiences diverge sharply from dominant Japanese narratives emphasising atomic bombings and national victimhood while marginalising peripheral suffering (Tanji, 2006). However, markets provided distinct spaces where war trauma can be acknowledged among peers sharing similar losses. Unlike domestic spaces where silence protected younger generations from painful memories, markets enabled elderly vendors to share grief with contemporaries understanding its weight without explicit articulation. This selective disclosure—silence at home, shared understanding in the market—allowed survivors to process trauma within bounded communities of experience.

Post-War economic survival relied heavily on improvised relationships with American occupation forces, relationships that concealed within the market's daily operations the war trauma that was ever present but not spoken about in interactions with the foreign occupying army. An elderly vendor described early commerce: "we did various things—took laundry from the military, washed it." The informal economy ranged from legitimate services to black market trade of military surplus goods. The Gābu Association representative contextualised market origins:

*After the war, when people returned to Naha, they couldn't enter certain areas, and with 90% burnt to the ground, people settled temporarily in Tsuboya. Eight hundred people formed an association to build this—it was the first organisation here.*

The gendered dimensions of war trauma warrant particular attention. Women survivors bore multiple burdens: sexual violence by Japanese and American forces (Tanji, 2006; Angst, 2003), loss of male relatives, and responsibility for rebuilding households and communities. The finding that 80% of postwar market founders were war widows underscores how trauma and resilience were inextricably linked - survival required both carrying unbearable memories and channelling them into productive reconstruction.

The markets thrived during this period, particularly as they traded in U.S. dollars that made it possible to bring in goods from mainland Japan, enabling many women to establish profitable businesses. The collective effort to rebuild the island's economy through market work represented an agentic act born of necessity that propelled survivors toward the future. The markets thus functioned as sites where grieving and reconstruction coexisted: spaces holding unspoken trauma while enabling forward movement through purposeful economic and social rebuilding that simultaneously sustained community bonds and individual livelihoods. This pragmatic reality was commented by one of the participants who mentioned that the market profited from the Vietnam War, selling uniforms, blankets and other military goods as U.S. forces used Okinawan bases to support their war activities. This created a profound moral paradox: war-traumatised women rebuilding their lives through economic relationships with the very military apparatus that had devastated their communities, and later profiting from another nation's conflict. This pattern persists in contemporary 'military tourism' visible in the market today where shops sell U.S. military memorabilia even as many Okinawans continue protesting base presence—a contradiction revealing how survival economies under occupation can normalise what might otherwise be

unbearable, transforming instruments of violence into commodities while political resistance and economic pragmatism operate in uneasy coexistence.

Understanding Okinawa's contemporary challenges requires recognising its colonial history—from independent Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1879), through peripheralised Japanese prefecture with forced assimilation, to WWII battleground, American occupation zone (1945-1972), and finally remilitarised Japanese territory hosting disproportionate U.S. military presence (Hook and Siddle, 2003; Christy, 1993). This trajectory exemplifies what Siddle (1998) terms Japan's "internal colonialism"—the subordination of peripheral territories and ethnic minorities within the nation-state. The markets can thus be read as postcolonial spaces where subaltern communities navigate multiple colonial legacies. Market women's economic strategies represent what Bhabha (1994) terms "hybrid practices"—cultural forms creatively adapted to constrained circumstances, navigating Japanese nationalism, American militarism, and global tourism capital simultaneously.

### Generational rupture and the crisis of cultural transmission

The markets are undergoing radical transformation driven by two powerful forces: the rise of mass tourism and generational disconnect from traditional practices. A pervasive concern across interviews was the growing disconnect between generations, manifesting in language, economic practices, and cultural transmission. A café customer noted linguistic alienation: "young people find dialects jarring," while acknowledging that "schools forbade dialects, though now there's a movement to revive them." The linguistic disconnection reflects what Bourdieu (1991) terms "symbolic violence," where dominated groups internalise devaluation of their cultural practices. Historical suppression of Ryukyuan languages through Japan's assimilationist education policies, particularly the *hōgen fuda* (dialect tag) system publicly shaming schoolchildren, constitutes what Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) identifies as "linguistic genocide" (Heinrich, 2004). The linguistic dimension extends beyond communication to encompass what Basso (1996) terms "wisdom sits in places"—the embeddedness of cultural knowledge in linguistic and spatial practice. When market elders described trading practices in *Uchināguchi* (Okinawan language), they invoked entire epistemological systems resisting translation into standard Japanese. Language loss thus represents not merely communicative change but erosion of place-based knowledge systems essential for island sustainability (Nakasone, 2009).

Economic impracticality drives much of this disconnection. When asked about succession, one *kimono*<sup>1</sup> vendor responded bluntly: "Do your children want to take over? No, they can't—this work doesn't pay enough." An elderly second-hand *kimono* shop owner expressed similar resignation: "this is now work for old people that can't sustain a living—young people just come to visit." This has led to a widespread succession crisis for family-run stalls. The finding that younger generations avoid traditional trades due to economic impracticality reflects what (2001) Polanyi termed the "great transformation"—the subordination of social relations to market logics. In Okinawa's markets, this manifests as shift from use-value (locally-oriented goods meeting community needs) to exchange-value (tourist-oriented souvenirs maximising profit), characteristic of what Baldacchino (2010) describes as "island enclaves"—bounded spaces where global tourism capital extracts value while local populations face declining opportunities in traditional sectors.

One arcade association head described how generational change reshaped the market: "people who had businesses here for decades are now in their second or third generation,

but traditional commerce doesn't work anymore, so after closing they become restaurants instead." This pattern reflects broader economic pressures. As an elderly property owner explained, "large-scale stores opened up, and gradually this area declined, but then about fifteen years ago tourism became very active, and the area has been prospering as a restaurant district." The crisis of succession reflects broader patterns in island communities globally, where younger generations migrate to urban centres or pursue education incompatible with traditional livelihoods (Baldacchino, 2006a; Connell, 2013). However, framing this simply as 'youth flight' obscures structural factors. Heritage occupation persistence depends on economic viability, social prestige, and institutional support—factors increasingly absent (Kerstetter and Bricker, 2009).

Yet the market's evolution reveals complex patterns of both continuity and transformation. Several long-standing vendors maintain their presence: a tempura stall at the market's rear, a confectionery in the main arcade, and a granddaughter in her fifties who sporadically opens her deceased grandmother's stall to preserve its memory. For these aging proprietors, retaining shops represents both sentimental attachment and pragmatic investment strategy, as prime real estate gains value amid expanding hospitality and tourist-oriented commerce. Meanwhile, *I-turn* migrants—young people from mainland Japan relocating to Okinawa—are driving new commercial developments, with small creative outlets targeting tourists selling jewellery, books, and designer apparel. These newcomers introduce fresh entrepreneurial energy while fundamentally altering the market's demographic composition and commercial character.

### Tourism's double-edged transformation and spatial reorganisation

Perhaps the most dramatic transformation described across interviews was the fundamental reorientation of market clientele from local residents to tourists. The vintage and used *kimono* vendor captured this shift with stark clarity: "fifty years ago, eighty percent of customers were Okinawans wearing *kimonos*—now all my customers are tourists." This transformation accelerated after Okinawa's 1972 reversion to Japan. Another elderly woman, a successful former café owner explained: "after reversion, businesses from mainland Japan flooded in, and local shops were overwhelmed by large-scale commerce."

The dramatic shift from 80% local clientele to nearly 100% tourist customers exemplifies what Britton (1982) termed "tourism dependency" in island peripheries—where external demand restructures local economies, creating vulnerability to global market fluctuations. This transformation aligns with broader patterns where tourism becomes what Baldacchino (2006b) call the "PROFIT" strategy—a development model prioritising external investment over local needs.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Personal considerations affecting citizenship, residence and employment rights; Resource management; Overseas engagement and ultra-national recognition; Finance and Transportation.



Figures 9a,9b,9c,9d - gentrification, vintage markets, and bars/restaurants taking over old shops (authors' photos 2025).

Tourism brought undeniable economic benefits, particularly in post-COVID recovery. As one market property owner observed: "tourists have returned—cruise ships, especially Taiwanese visitors." The Gābu Association representative described the commercial evolution: "what used to be local goods shifted due to tourists, and souvenir shops increased." However, this economic revival came at cultural cost. The representative at Nahamachi Promotion Division, Naha City articulated the tension: "the original purpose was to provide fresh ingredients to citizens, but that purpose has shifted toward tourism," warning of "Disneyfication" where authentic cultural practices are repackaged for tourist consumption (see Haha City Hall, Nahamachi Promotion Division). The official emphasised sustainability concerns: "the shopping district must also attract locals; otherwise, it won't be sustainable"—a recognition that sustainable tourism development requires maintaining local functionality alongside tourist appeal (Sharpley and Telfer, 2015). The tourism boom also introduced urban challenges. The Residents' Association head listed resident complaints: "The biggest problem is noise, especially from drunk people." Infrastructure couldn't keep pace: "Naha City permits all these restaurants and bars, especially those serving alcohol, even when there are no toilets—that's the biggest problem." This proliferation of bars and restaurants has created tension between tourist needs and local residents' quality of life, signalling what Dodds and Butler (2019) term "overtourism," where visitor numbers exceed destinations' social and physical carrying capacity—a vulnerability particularly acute for islands due to spatial constraints and limited infrastructure.

Field observations from July 2025 revealed accelerating physical transformation, particularly in the market's traditionally depressed rear section. Previously shuttered second-hand *kimono* shops and beauty parlours had been converted into bars, and restaurants, bringing new energy and lighting to areas that struggled before the pandemic. The most dramatic development was a 19-story residential condominium under construction at the market's edge. A beauty parlour shop owner across the street expressed hope that new residents would become potential customers and help sustain businesses. The physical transformations observed—conversion of second-hand *kimono* shops to bars, construction of luxury condominiums, proliferation of vintage boutiques and ethnic restaurants—exemplify what Smith (1996) termed "the new urban frontier." Yet gentrification operates differently in island contexts. Baldacchino (2006a) argues that islands lack the spatial "escape valve" available in larger urban systems—when gentrification displaces residents and businesses, they have fewer relocation options. Our ethnographic observations revealed spatial differentiation within the market, with tourist-facing 'front' sections becoming consumption zones while 'back' sections retained more local character—at least until recent development pressures—a pattern reflecting what Zukin (2010) terms "pacification by cappuccino."

Observations revealed an increasingly diverse commercial landscape, with notable growth in Indian, Nepalese, and Thai restaurants. A young Nepalese female worker at the Kyrgyz Bakery Store mentioned the formation of a Nepalese workers' association, suggesting emerging migrant social infrastructure. This ethnic diversification operates alongside vintage and antique shop proliferation at the back of the market, creating a hybrid nostalgia economy—spaces where global migration patterns intersected with aestheticised local history. New hostels with embedded co-working cafés further blur boundaries between residence, work, and consumption, attracting digital nomads and budget travellers who extend their market engagement beyond daytime shopping to evening socialisation. The market's evolution into hybrid space—combining long-term Okinawan vendors, mainland Japanese entrepreneurs, international migrants, tourists, and new residents—exemplifies what Massey (2005) calls "a global sense of place," where places are constituted through connections and flows rather than bounded, authentic essences. The emergence of Nepalese and Indian establishments reflects what Laguerre (1999) terms "minoritized space"—urban zones where ethnic minorities create social and economic infrastructure, serving multiple functions while creating transnational networks (Appadurai, 1996).

Yet these hybrid forms raise questions about whose place-making prevails. Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between "representations of space" (official planning discourses), "spatial practices" (everyday uses), and "spaces of representation" (lived, symbolic meanings) highlights the tensions where city planners' visions of heritage tourism, developers' luxury residential projects, migrant workers' transnational networks, and long-term vendors' daily routines constitute competing place-making projects operating simultaneously in shared space.

The proliferation of 'vintage' shops raises questions about authenticity. MacCannell's (1976) concept of "staged authenticity" describes how tourism operators create "frontstage" performances while concealing "backstage" realities. Cohen (1988) distinguishes between "contrived" authenticity (commercial fabrication), "staged" authenticity (genuine practices performed for tourists), and "emergent" authenticity (new practices acquiring genuine meaning). Our findings suggest Okinawan markets contain all three simultaneously.

The changes are also noted in the soundscape of the market. Once, the *machigwā* was a place where commerce and daily life were intertwined for women. While the shop-owning

mothers conducted their business with customers, the children played together in front of the shops, within the shops, or in the surrounding residential areas, and the sounds of their play echoed through the shopping arcade. In other words, the sounds of daily life and those of outsiders communicated with each other. However, as tourists became the main focus for the shopping district, the sounds of the shopping street evolved into an exotic soundscape to meet the tourists' expectations, reflecting what Henry Johnson calls "self-exotism" of Okinawans (Johnson, 2021). Meanwhile, the sounds of everyday women's lives, such as the old sewing machines by the elderly women who once played a central role at *machigwā* remains in the narrow alleys behind the main street, have disappeared.

The finding that war trauma remains largely silenced in market spaces while 'traditional Okinawan culture' is performed for tourists suggests hierarchies of memory, where marketable nostalgia displaces painful histories—what Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) term "dissonant heritage." While tourists seek picturesque tradition, long-term vendors remember hardship and loss; while city planners celebrate resilience and cultural continuity, war survivors carry unspeakable trauma.

### Cultural preservation and adaptive resistance

Underlying adaptation strategies was a distinctively Okinawan philosophy of resilience—*nankuru naisa* (it will work out). A café customer articulated it: "even after seven failures, an eighth comeback is possible." The Gābu Association representative explained: "*nankuru naisa* means living earnestly and believing things will work out." This wasn't passive acceptance but active improvisation—a pragmatic optimism forged through historical adversity.

A City Hall representative advocated for technological approaches to heritage: "the market's beauty lies in its history—the need to visually preserve this history for future generations and maintain its identity." Technological tools like QR codes can be leveraged to document and share the market's history, reflecting broader recognition that traditional intergenerational transmission was breaking down, requiring new mediating technologies. A Gābu Association representative emphasised oral history documentation:

*I love history—the stories from elders are incredible, and it's a waste to lose them. We collect materials—there's a vast archive, though even we don't know where everything is.*

During the market's peak active period, one could hear dialects spoken by various island communities who also performed their festivals and other cultural practices in the arcades. Yet business pragmatism often trumped cultural preservation: "for business, standard Japanese is preferred." The movement to revive *Uchināguchi* represents a concerted effort to preserve culture in response to historical marginalisation and contemporary globalisation, though the linguistic hierarchy persists in economic domains—what Heller and Duchêne (2012) term the "commodification of language."

## Conclusions

Our analysis paints Naha's *machigwā* as a site where historical trauma, economic transformation, gender dynamics, and cultural preservation converge in ongoing negotiation. These island markets resist simple categorisation as either declining relics or successful examples of adaptive reuse; rather, they constitute complex social ecosystems navigating multiple, often contradictory, pressures. Women's historical economic agency coexists with systematic undervaluation of their labour; tourism generates revenue while threatening local functionality; collective bonds endure amid growing individualism and generational disconnection; and war trauma continues shaping contemporary practice despite deliberate silence. Analytical understanding requires sustaining these tensions rather than prematurely resolving them into narratives of either loss or revitalisation.

The *machigwā* brings to attention critical dimensions of Okinawan postwar history, demonstrating how island communities construct informal commercial institutions in response to crisis and how such institutions evolve across shifting social and economic terrains. Originating as a spontaneous black market along the Gābu River, these spaces adapted through self-organised governance and collective financing during the American occupation, later confronting tourist commodification following reversion as economic policies and consumer practices transformed. Beyond their commercial functions, the market has operated as a repository of social memory and sites of community resilience—what we term social infrastructure essential to cultural continuity.

The market represents a site where a historically rooted, women-driven economy confronts the disruptive yet revitalising forces of tourism and generational shift. Throughout this transformation, a deeply ingrained ethos of community solidarity and resilience, forged in the shadows of war and trauma, provides both a foundation for adaptation and a compelling impetus for cultural continuation. Without tourism, the market might have declined like so many mainland *shōtengai*; yet tourism's revitalisation comes at significant cultural cost. What emerges is complex negotiation between local and global forces, resistance and adaptation operating simultaneously. In smaller arcades and narrow alleys, elderly women vendors—now in their 80s and 90s—maintain decades-long market communities with uncertain generational succession, embodying both resilience and precarity. The market has survived by serving tourists, their new clientele, but this survival raises fundamental questions about whose interests are served and what communal functions are preserved or lost in the process.

The market's physical transformation—from bustling riverbanks and vibrant public halls to tourist-oriented "island culture" consumption zones, and from other sites to vacant lots—materially narrates Okinawa's trajectory from wartime devastation through military occupation into its contested contemporary position within the Japanese state. The mapping of the market's communicative ecology reveals that despite radical spatial and economic reorganisation, women remain constant presences as critical agents and storytellers who continue shaping market narratives, transmitting cultural knowledge, and maintaining social bonds across generations and through historical ruptures.

This study contributes to broader scholarly conversations regarding post-conflict urban recovery, community formation under conditions of foreign occupation, and the persistence of localised identity within modernising contexts. It demonstrates the analytical value of examining markets not merely as economic spaces but as social infrastructure where gender, memory, language, and collective identity are continuously negotiated. The *machigwā*'s

capacity to simultaneously accommodate octogenarian vegetable vendors rising at 4am, retired women seeking *ikigai* through new entrepreneurship, migrant workers building transnational networks, and mainland *I-turn* entrepreneurs opening creative outlets reveals markets as dynamic sites of both cultural preservation and transformation—spaces where multiple temporalities, identities, and place-making projects coexist in uneasy tension. Future research should further examine specific dimensions that this overview has identified but not fully explored: the complex relationship between tourism development and community preservation; the soundscape as carrier of social memory and cultural identity; the spatial politics of gentrification in island contexts; and the ways language revitalisation movements intersect with commercial transformation. Each of these threads merits sustained attention through distinctive theoretical lenses that can illuminate how island markets navigate the fundamental tensions between serving local needs and accommodating global capital, between honouring traumatic pasts and imagining viable futures.

### Acknowledgments

This research was supported in part by a Japan Foundation Research Fellowship, which enabled Associate Professor Evangelia Papoutsaki to conduct fieldwork in 2025. Additional support was provided by the Research Institute for Islands and Sustainability at the University of the Ryukyus. We extend our gratitude to the market vendors, association heads, and members of Naha City Nahamachi Promotion Division for generously sharing their experiences and facilitating this research.

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