

AKN PROJECT

Human Pavilion - A Comedy



What Is The Human Pavilion?

In 1903, near the venue of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibitions held in Osaka, a sideshow calling itself the “Academic Human Pavilion” displayed people from various regions—including several individuals from the Ryukyu Islands—in what later became known as the “Human Pavilion Incident.” The Human Pavilion takes this incident as its motif, weaving together themes of imperial assimilation education, the Battle of Okinawa, U.S. military occupation, and the Vietnam War, and Okinawa’s so-called “reversion” to Japan, to portray the history of Ryukyus with biting satire. Premiered in 1976, the play went on to receive the Kishida Prize for Drama in 1978—often referred to as “the Akutagawa Prize of Japanese theater.”

Chinen Seishin (1941–2013)

Playwright. Born in Okinawa City. After graduating from Koza High School, Chinen entered Nishogakusha University in Tokyo but left before completing his degree. He later joined the Shōnen Geijutsu Gekijo (Youth Art Theater) as a research student, leaving in 1963 to return to Okinawa. There, he became an actor and director in the theater collective Sōzō (“Creation”), based in Koza. In 1972, he wrote Jetto-ki wa Minami no Sora wo (Jet Plane in the Southern Sky), marking the beginning of his career as a playwright. In 1976, he released his second play, Jinruikan (The Human Pavilion), which was staged by Sōzō. Taking the “Human Pavilion Incident” as its point of departure—an event arose from the so-called “Academic Human Pavilion” that displayed human beings near the venue of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibitions in Osaka in 1903—, this play interweaves Japanese language, Uchinaaguchi (Okinawan language), and Okinawa-Yamatoguchi (Okinawan Japanese), and incorporates boldly experimental shifts in scene and structure. It became a landmark work in the history of Okinawan theater. After its premiere, the script was published in Shin Okinawa Bungaku (New Okinawan Literature), and later appeared in the theater magazine Teatro in 1977. In 1978, Chinen became the first Okinawan writer to receive the Kishida Prize for Drama. He continued to produce numerous works exploring the themes and questions faced by “human beings” living in Okinawa.—among them the tragicomedies Koza-ban Donzoko and Koza-ban Godō, set in the U.S. base town of Koza; Inochi Kanpa, which reflects on endangered wildlife and environmental issues in Yanbaru (the northern region of Okinawa Island); and Maboroshi no X Chōsatai, set in the coal mines of Iriomote Island.

Scene Structure of The Human Pavilion

In a shabby hut whose time and place cannot be identified, the atmosphere feels as if “Yahatanchu (mainland Japanese)” have decorated it with their supposed knowledge about Okinawa. A sign reading “Ryūkyū and Chōsen (Korean) Not Admitted” is displayed, and a man and woman are “exhibited” there like objects. A man dressed like a circus animal trainer enters and begins introducing the “Human Pavilion.”

The man, holding a whip, describes the “physical characteristics” of the man and woman in the Ryūkyū Pavilion, then goes on to explain the housing and diet of the “Ryukyuan natives.” After finishing his lecture, the trainer exits toward the next pavilion.

The exhibited man begins to speak. He explains that he was deceived and brought here, that the Human Pavilion is worse than a prison, and that he and the woman are treated as slaves, lower even than convicts. Little by little, fragments of their past begin to emerge.

Suddenly, “Jashiki-bushi” begins to play, and the man and woman perform a scene from Okuyama no Botan, set in the Shuri Annya-Mura-Shido buraku no Ba. Hearing the commotion, the trainer-like man reappears, scolds the two, and forces them into silence.

When the man and woman return to the hut, the scene suddenly shifts to wartime Japan—an era when “all 100 million imperial subjects” were expected to unite against a national crisis. The trainer-like man declares that the foundation of “Japanese order and discipline” lies in the Japanese language itself, and he forbids the use of the Okinawa language. He then begins drilling the man and woman in proper Japanese pronunciation.

After the trainer leaves, the two start to argue. The man turns out to be much less intimidating than his words imply, and he is weaker than the woman.

The trainer returns and begins reciting the Imperial Rescript on Education, but his chanting is soon drowned out by other sounds.

As an elementary school bell rings, the scene abruptly turns into “lunchtime,” and the trainer gives the man and woman yams. The woman eats, but the man refuses.

Once the meal settles, the trainer lectures the woman, insisting that as “Japan’s bulwark,” she must offer herself sexually to foreigners so that “Japanese blood” will not be defiled. When the man sneezes, the trainer explodes in anger, shouting that even sneezing must be done in the Japanese way.

Before long, the trainer has transformed into a salaryman who drinks and complains that he has failed to be promoted in his company—because he is “Ryukyuan,” he says. The man and woman, who are supposed to be the ones on display, now find themselves comforting him instead. But when they offer him a yam and he refuses to eat it, the trainer once again flies into a rage.

The scene shifts into an interrogation room. The trainer becomes like a Special Higher Police officer, harshly forcing the man to confess. At first reluctant to speak, the man eventually opens his mouth and begins recounting memories of “mass suicide” during the Battle of Okinawa. The woman, in turn, narrates about the prostitution she was pushed into, serving American soldiers returning from the Vietnam War.

When the roar of a jet plane fills the air, the sound of drums begins to echo from somewhere, and the man and woman—almost as if possessed—start dancing Chondarā. The scene has now shifted to a psychiatric hospital in Okinawa during the Vietnam War era. The trainer, now assuming the role of a psychiatrist, introduces the “Okinawa Pavilion.” At that moment, an American soldier recently returned from the war throws firecrackers into the room.

A violent explosion rings out again, and the scene now shifts to the final stages of the Battle of Okinawa. The trainer becomes a Japanese soldier; the woman transforms from a member of the Himeyuri Nursing Corps to the Women’s Volunteer Corps; and the man shifts from a member of the Student Units of Blood and Iron for the Emperor to the Homeland Defense Corps. The soldier tests whether they are “true Japanese” or enemy spies by judging their pronunciation of Japanese. He kills the man. He then kills the baby the woman is carrying, complaining that its crying is too noisy.

The scene shifts yet again, without pause, and the three now become villagers fleeing through the forests of Yanbaru in northern Okinawa. The trainer is called Kamā, the man Kamī, and the woman Ushī. Kamā learns that his wife, Usa, has already died. With Kamā’s single hand grenade, the three decide they will die together.

The trainer shifts back into the role of a Japanese soldier. From outside, the voice of an American announces the end of the war. The soldier insists that he will never surrender—even if he is the last one left alive. The man and woman beg him to let them die with him.

In an abrupt turn, the trainer becomes a postwar educator, urging them not to die in vain but to work toward building a new Okinawa. The scene shifts to the period of the Okinawan “Reversion” movement, and the man and woman rush out to join a street demonstration. Left alone, the trainer picks up a yam lying on the ground. And then...

Yet the curtain of *The Human Pavilion* does not fall so easily. It is because, after all, history has a way of repeating itself...

Key Terms in The Human Pavilion

“Ryukyu and Korean Not Admitted”

From the 1920s onward, when many Okinawans began traveling to mainland Japan as migrant laborers, signs like this were posted at businesses, factories, and real estate agencies. Job notices and room-for-rent signs would read: “Workers Wanted / Rooms Available — Ryukyuan and Koreans Not Accepted.” Such discriminatory postings could still be seen into the 1960s.

“Academic Human Pavilion / The Human Pavilion Incident”

In 1903, near the site of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibitions in Osaka, an attraction calling itself the “Academic Human Pavilion” put human beings on display. Among the 26 people exhibited—including Ainu, Taiwanese, Indians, and people from Zanzibar—were two Okinawan women. Ota Chofu of the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper condemned this exhibition, though his criticism relied on another form of discrimination: he argued that Ryukyuan should not be equated with Taiwanese or Ainu. Following public outcry, the display of the two “Ryukyuan” women was eventually cancelled.

“Fundamental Human Rights”

These are the rights and freedoms that every person possesses by virtue of being human—indispensable for survival, guaranteed by the constitution, and not to be violated by the state.

However, because the understanding of human rights shifts with social conditions, the specific rights recognized and the systems that protect them differ across countries and historical periods.

“Amamikiyo Lineage”

Amamikiyo is a goddess in Ryukyuan mythology who is said to have created the land. In Omoro Soshi—a compilation of ancient songs—there is a myth in which two deities, Amamikiyo and Shinerikiyo, are commanded by the sun god to create the islands and humankind. In the earliest Ryukyuan historical chronicle, Chuzan Seikan (compiled in 1650), the creator deity appears as a single figure named Amamiku (Amamikiyo).

“Nora Nyorai, Kogome no Namagami”

A phrase from the famous tongue-twisting speech in Uiro-uri (The Uiro Salesman), one of the Eighteen Great Plays of Kabuki, first performed by the second Ichikawa Danjuro. To this day, this phrase is used for practicing Japanese articulation and pronunciation.

“The Yams and Bare Feet Theory”

This term refers to a position advocated by Nishime Junji during the 1968 election—the first time Okinawans directly elected the Chief Executive of the Ryukyu Government. Nishime argued that if Yara Chobyō, who campaigned on the immediate and unconditional removal of U.S. military bases, were to win, Okinawa would return to the “old days” of living on yams and going barefoot. Yara won the election, and Nishime later served three terms (12 years) starting in 1978 as governor of Okinawa after the islands reverted to Japan.

“Sotetsu (Sago Palm)”

During the late Taisho and early Showa periods, Okinawa faced such severe economic hardship that the era came to be known as the “Sotetsu Hell.” People were unable to secure staple foods such as sweet potatoes or rice and were forced to rely on sotetsu (cycad)—a plant that contains potent toxins and can cause fatal poisoning if not processed correctly—as their primary food source.

“Senka Agiya”

Literally “the one who brings back war spoils.” During the U.S. occupation of Okinawa, some people would sneak into American military warehouses and steal food and supplies, which were then sold on the black market. These stolen goods were referred to as senka (“war spoils”). Because these items were taken from the occupying forces and ended up in the hands of impoverished locals, the individuals who carried out such acts were sometimes regarded as folk heroes.

“Munjuru”

Munjuru means “barley straw.” In the latter half of the lyrics of the Ryukyuan folk song “Munjuru,” there are lines such as: “The tastiest yam is the karaimo; the most delicious rice is akajimai.”

“Mokiya”

Mokiya is a term carrying the nuance of “someone who gains a great deal of money by straying from the proper path.” In *The Human Pavilion*, it refers to a prostitute. The names Yoshihara, Jikkannji, Sakaemachi, Harbor View, Naminoue, Sakurazaka, Center, and Teruya were all red-light districts in Okinawa at the time.

“Maid Jibun (The Maid Days)”

During the period of U.S. military rule in Okinawa, as many as 14,000 women worked as maids for American military families at the peak. Through this work, they were among the first to experience American-style housing, food, and daily life—“American sheets” being one well-known example. Some women were treated almost like family, but many others suffered sexual abuse from men in the households where they were employed.

“Shinasaki nu kuchumi, ichimadin chimu ni umushimimiti…”

A line from *Okuyama no Botan*, one of the three great Okinawan musical dramas, written by Iraha Inkichi. In the story, Chira gives birth to the child of her lover, but because she was born into a discriminated caste, the two cannot be together. Years later, their son—now an adult—climbs into the mountains searching for his mother. Not wanting to hinder his future or stain the path he has carved for himself, she throws herself to her death.

“Jidai Shugi (Servility Toward Power)”

Originally, *jidai shugi* referred to a small nation showing deference and obedience to a more powerful one. Over time, the term came to describe a behavioral pattern of aligning oneself with the stronger side or submitting to authority. In *The Human Pavilion*, the trainer-like man berates the exhibited man and woman, shouting: “This is exactly why you people are called sycophants (*jidai shugi*)!”

“Osore ōku mo (With the Greatest Reverence…)”

Up until just before the Battle of Okinawa, the Imperial Rescript on Education was recited at school ceremonies and assemblies, and students were required to bow their heads while listening. When a teacher began a sentence with “Osore ōku mo” (“With the greatest reverence”), it was the cue that they were about to speak of the Emperor. Students were expected to immediately lower their heads and listen in a solemn, respectful posture.

“Sophisticated Cultural Anthropology”

The “human exhibition” held near the venue of the Fifth National Industrial Exhibitions in Osaka in 1903 was originally planned under the name “Human Pavilion.” Just before opening, however, the name was changed to “Academic Human Pavilion.” It is said that the involvement of Tsuboi Shōgorō—often called “the father of Japanese anthropology”—helped lend the event an air of academic legitimacy.

“Enduring the Unendurable and Suffering What is Insufferable…”

A famous line from Emperor Shōwa’s Imperial Rescript announcing the end of the war. In the original text, the subject is the Emperor himself, expressing: “It is according to the dictate of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable.”

“Dialect Tag”

A dialect tag was a wooden tag hung around a student’s neck as punishment for speaking in a local dialect instead of standard Japanese.

B child who received the tag had to wear it publicly until another student was caught using dialect, turning the practice into a tool of shame and discipline. Although similar systems existed in different regions of Japan, they were enforced with particular harshness in Okinawa, from the late Meiji period all the way into the post-World War II era.

“Tenno Heika—Banzaai!”

A little anecdote:

In a bar in a lively entertainment district, two men began to argue.

“Let me tell you—there’s no one in all of Okinawa whose hachuon (hatsuon=pronunciation) is as bad as yours.”

“What’re you talking about, hyaa? Your hachuon is worse than mine.”

“Fine then—try saying oranhoro (odanhodo=crosswalk).”

“What’s this oranhoro? If anything, it’s oranhoro.”

“(Laughing) You idiot—there’s no such word as oranhoro! (shouting) It’s ORANHORO!”

The other man replied, “You’re the idiot. I’m done with this conversation,” and left the bar humming to himself: “In Ginjaa (Ginza) at night — seven-colored neon lights.”

Only someone deeply familiar with Okinawan life—a true Okinawan—would find this story funny. Although few remain now, Okinawans of that generation were known for having quite “poor” pronunciation by mainland Japanese standards.

For example, “za” would become “ja,” and “da” would turn into “ra.” Even if not to that extreme today, the play *The Human Pavilion* was written with an audience close to that Okinawan-speaking generation in mind—people essentially of my own generation.

(Chinen Seishin, 2004)

“Imperial Rescript on Education”

Issued in 1890 by Emperor Meiji, this rescript laid out the fundamental principles of education in Japan. It claimed that the foundation of education lay in the country’s unique kokutai (“national polity”), created by the sun goddess Amaterasu and successive generations of emperors. The text listed the virtues that Japanese subjects were expected to embody—from filial piety to obedience to the law—and declared that, in times of national crisis, citizens must devote themselves to supporting the Emperor’s rule. After World War II, because the rescript conflicted with the new Constitution and the Basic Act on Education, the Diet formally confirmed its invalidation in 1948.

“Even Sneezing Should Be Done the Japanese Way”

This expression was used by Ota Chofu of the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper when he argued for assimilation with mainland Japan around the time of the “Human Pavilion Incident.” He claimed—“To take the argument to its extreme, even sneezing should be done in the same manner as people in the other prefectures.” Ota had studied in Tokyo in 1881 as Okinawa’s first government-sponsored student. After returning home, he helped found the Ryukyu Shimpo and later served as a member of the prefectural assembly and as mayor of Shuri.

U.S. Soldiers Returning from Vietnam

During the Cold War, Okinawa was considered a strategic “keystone” of U.S. military strength and became the largest American military hub in Asia. Throughout the Vietnam War, Okinawa served as a major launch point for U.S. operations in Vietnam. B-52 bombers were stationed at Kadena Air Base and conducted bombing missions to Vietnam daily.

“The Principal of Motobu National School”

In April 1945, Teruya Chuei, the principal of Motobu National School, set out to inform the Japanese military that U.S. forces had landed in Nago. Until just before this, he had been encouraging young men to embrace the spirit of suicidal military attack missions and sending boys out to the front lines—so he reportedly felt unable to remain idle. On his return, however, he was accused of being a spy and was shot dead by the Japanese military.

“Chondara (Kyotaro)”

Chondara literally means “Taro from Kyoto.” According to tradition, in the early modern period a man named Taro fled Kyoto with his son after his beautiful wife was taken by a local lord. Their group drifted to Okinawa, where the Ryukyu king granted them permission to travel freely, receive alms, and spread Buddhist teachings. This troupe of itinerant performers from the Japanese mainland eventually settled in Annya Village on the outskirts of Shuri, where they lived until the late Meiji period. During New Year’s celebrations and at harvest time for rice and barley, they traveled through nearby villages performing Harukoma and Hotoke-mawashi (a type of puppet show), chanting Buddhist prayers as they made their living.

“Japan’s postwar era cannot truly end without Okinawa’s reversion”

A statement by former Prime Minister Sato Eisaku (younger brother of Kishi Nobusuke). In August 1965, Sato became the first postwar Japanese prime minister to visit Okinawa, where he delivered a speech including this line.

For the United States, returning Okinawa to Japan reduced the costs of administering and maintaining the bases, while still guaranteeing unrestricted military use of those bases for

the Vietnam War. Sato and U.S. President Richard Nixon also concluded a secret agreement permitting the reintroduction of nuclear weapons into Okinawa if deemed necessary. In 1974, Satō was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Himeyuri Student Corps”

During the Battle of Okinawa, the Himeyuri Student Corps was formed from students of the Okinawa Prefectural First Girls’ High School and the Women’s Division of the Okinawa Normal School. They served as a nursing unit, tending to wounded soldiers while constantly facing death on the front lines. Of the 320 members involved, 170 were killed. In the city of Itoman, in the Ihara district, there remains a cave that functioned as their field hospital. At its entrance now stands the “Himeyuri-no-to Monument.”

“Iron and Blood Young Men’s Corps”

The Iron and Blood Young Men’s Corps was the first unit of boy soldiers mobilized in the history of the Japanese military, activated during the Battle of Okinawa. It was composed of 1,780 middle-school boys drafted for local defense. They were sent into combat, and roughly half of them were killed.

Among the dead were 567 boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Today, they are memorialized at the “Kenji-no-to Monument.

Yasukuni Shrine

Located in Kudanzaka, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Yasukuni Shrine traces its origins to the Tokyo Shokonsha, established in 1869 at the initiative of Emperor Meiji. It was renamed Yasukuni Shrine in 1879. The shrine enshrines those who died on the Emperor’s side in political conflicts and civil wars from 1853 onward, as well as military personnel and civilians who perished in Japan’s external wars.

Over time, it became a state institution that gathered and directed the emotions of bereaved families toward the nation.

“Women’s Volunteer Corps”

The Women’s Volunteer Corps was a wartime organization that forcibly mobilized women for labor. In September 1943, as part of measures to strengthen Japan’s domestic wartime system, unmarried, unemployed, and non-school-attending girls between the ages of 14 and 25 were organized into local units of the Women’s Volunteer Corps. From March 1944 onward, participation became mandatory, and in June, the minimum age was lowered to twelve. Members were mobilized for work in munitions factories and other military-related industries.

“Homeland Defense Corps”

The Homeland Defense Corps was a military group composed of local men mobilized for regional defense. During the Battle of Okinawa, between 22,000 and 25,000 men were drafted into these units, and approximately 13,000 were killed. Although less well known than groups such as the Iron and Blood Young Men’s Corps or the Himeyuri Student Corps, the Homeland Defense Corps exceeded both in the number of men mobilized and the number of lives lost.

“Never Live to Experience Shame as a Prisoner”

This phrase appears in the Senjinkun military code (The Instructions for the Battlefield), issued in 1941 under the name of Army Minister Tojo Hideki as Army Instruction No. 1. The full passage reads: “Never live to experience shame as a prisoner. By dying you will avoid leaving a stain on your honor.”

“Shima-gurumi (All Island Struggle)”

After World War II, opposition to the U.S. military’s forced land expropriations in Okinawa developed into what became known as the shima-gurumi toso—the “All Island Struggle.” In 1955, Ahagon Shoko of Iejima led local residents in peace marches across the main island to publicize the harsh realities of land seizures and the impact of U.S. bases on daily life. The Iejima movement expanded into the broader All Island Struggle beginning in 1956, which later led to the campaign for Okinawa’s reversion to Japan.

“Return Okinawa to Us”

A song widely sung at rallies and demonstrations during the movement for Okinawa’s reversion to Japan. It originated within the postwar “Utagoe Movement” of socially engaged singing: the Utagoe circle of the Fukuoka High Court branch of the All Judicial Workers’ Union wrote and composed the original version in 1956. Composer Araki Sakae, a musician and coal miner at the Miike Mine, later revised only the melody. The lyrics are as follows: Breaking through the hardened soil, the island burns with the rage of its people—Okinawa. Okinawa, nurtured and defended by the blood and sweat of us and our ancestors.

We cry out: Okinawa— it is ours.

Return Okinawa to us. Return Okinawa to us.

“Twenty-Seventh Parallel”

When the San Francisco Peace Treaty came into effect in 1952—and the Amami Islands were returned to Japan in 1953—the line at 27° North Latitude, between Cape Hedo in Okinawa and Yoronjima, became a new international border. From 1963 to 1969, “sea rallies” were held every year on April 28, the anniversary of the treaty’s enactment. Delegations from mainland Japan and Okinawa met directly on the waters along this line, jointly calling for the return of Okinawa. On April 28, 2022—the 50th anniversary of Okinawa’s reversion—the sea rally was reenacted.

“If I Go to Sea, I Shall be a Water-Soaked Corpse…”

This phrase means, “If duty takes me to the sea, I will not hesitate even if my body becomes a corpse soaked in water.” It comes from a family maxim of the Otomo clan, appearing in a long poem by Otomo no Yakamochi in the Manyōshū. It was in this context—declaring that one must never retreat, even if it meant dying in the mountains or at sea for the Emperor—that the poem was set to music and sung during World War II to boost morale.

“Totabi”

Originally meaning “a journey to To (China),” that is, a journey westward toward the setting sun. By extension, the term came to signify taking one’s own life.

References

Engeki Shūdan “Sōzō,” Dai 37 Kai (Chinen Seishin Tsuitō) Kōen Jinruikan, panfuretto, 2014.

Comments

Since the launch of AKN PROJECT in 2020, each new performance of the comedy Human Pavilion has given me more opportunities to hear from those who love my father’s work and to learn how deeply they cherish The Human Pavilion. As I listened to these voices, I began to feel that one of AKN PROJECT’s important roles might be to carry the feelings of everyone surrounding this play into the future.

This creation process began with the idea that, in order to pass on the history and future of The Human Pavilion, we would “not change a single word of the script, but share the ways we can convey it today.”

My co-director, Arakaki Nana, is more than a decade younger than I am, and at first she felt uneasy about handling a work so deeply rooted in Okinawan history. But I was moved by the care and precision with which she read the play, and without the slightest hesitation, I told her, “Your way of reading it is perfectly fine. I want to create our The Human Pavilion together.”

It has now been about a year and a half. Through countless “tea meetings”—our name for the many sessions of discussion and debate—we have continued reading the script with the utmost care.

At the same time, one by one, people captivated by the work joined us, and a wonderful team came together. Our creative process has been full of excitement, and with each meeting it grew richer and more fulfilling. Before we knew it, time had flown by.

The 2025 new production of our comedy The Human Pavilion, shaped by the dedication of my proud collaborators and the heartfelt support of all who have stood with us, is something we hope will be loved just as deeply as the original The Human Pavilion that my father created with his own companions.

Director: Akane Chine

Chinen Akane is a performer and music instructor born in Naha, Okinawa. Having studied music since early childhood, she has promoted classical music for many years as both a performer and teacher. In 2020, she launched the AKN Project to carry on the work of her father, Chinen Seishin, who passed away in 2013. Through theater plays, music, and literature, the project aims to create stages and events that Okinawa’s younger generation can enjoy. In 2021, during the Corona pandemic, Chinen produced “The Human Pavilion: A Comedy” (directed by Asao Uezu) as an online streaming performance. In 2022, the play was staged at the Naha Cultural Arts Theater NAHArt

(directed by Sato Naoko and Chinen Akane) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's reversion.

You know... this piece is heavy. Honestly, it feels almost impossible to handle. I used to think it had nothing to do with me—a play unrelated to someone like me who had been indifferent to Okinawa. And sure enough, even when I tried reading the script, I just couldn't get through it. I kept carrying that weight, and even now, I'm still carrying it. But as we continued the creative process, a kind of overflowing anger started rising up in me. And I began to think: aren't we placing too much on The Human Pavilion?

There are people who take away the play's freedom, people and circumstances that keep tying it down.

Hey... don't you think that sometimes we end up amplifying only the "pleasure of speaking about it"?

Please—don't stop imagination.

Let your shoulders relax, let your body sway just a little, and go to places you couldn't reach alone.

(And this is a bit of an aside, but recently I realized something: maybe, by forcing myself to "finish reading The Human Pavilion," I've been trying to satisfy some kind of moral hunger inside myself. I think I've been wanting credentials—the stamp that says I care about Okinawa, that I'm facing it, thinking about it, grappling with it.)

(See? It's dangerous, isn't it?)

Director: Nana Arakaki

Arakaki Nana is the leader of the theater group Tatara. She began acting in high school and formed the group in 2016. She has directed all of the group's plays to date. In 2024, she received the Encouragement Award at the Engeki Concourse competition. As an actress, Arakaki has appeared in numerous productions, including the Kyushu-Okinawa version of "Mikai no Gijo" ("Untamed Forum") (written by Kitagawa Daisuke), whose online performance in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic garnered much attention; "Ryukyu Kaidan" ("Ghost Stories from Ryukyu") (original story by Kohara Takeshi, directed by Kamisato Yudai) in 2021; and "The Human Voice" (original story by Jean Cocteau, directed by Wada Nagara), part of the Naha Cultural Arts Theater NAHArt's "Encounter Series 1" in 2023.

In the spring of 2024, I received a message from curator Nakamura Akane of Aichi 2025, expressing her wish to invite The Human Pavilion as a work that "examines Japan as a colonizer." This new production has been created over the past year and a half. The year of its staging marks 80 years since the end of the war. Osaka is once again hosting a World Expo, and Japan has inaugurated its first female prime minister. And yet, the opportunities to confront the violence embedded in history—or the discrimination and sacrifices that continue even now—remain far too scarce.

The playwright of The Human Pavilion, Chinen Seishin, was said to be fond of the words "pretend play" and "plot twist." Theater may be nothing more than pretend play, but in Japan and around the world, aren't we surrounded by immense, brutal forms of "pretend play" on a

societal scale? If so, then perhaps in the theater—a small society where people of different backgrounds gather, devote tremendous time to reading a single reality, a single script, and transform it into a new shape—we can search for the possibility of a “plot twist” of our own.

Together with the audience who gathers in the theater, we hope to recall the countless contradictions and dualities that history holds, to tilt reality through the “spirit of comedy,” and to shift it toward something more just.
Little by little, and again, and again.

Dramaturg: Tatsuki Hayashi

Hayashi Tatsuki is a theater researcher and translator. He currently heads planning and production at the Naha Cultural Arts Theater NAHArt. His translations include “No Light” by Elfriede Jelinek and “Postdramatic Theatre” by Hans-Thies Lehmann (both published by Hakusuisha). In 2012, he received the Odashima Yushi Drama Translation Award for his translations of Jelinek’s work. In 2005, he joined Akira Takayama’s theater group Port B, and in 2014 Chiaki Soma’s NPO Arts Commons Tokyo. Before assuming his current position at NAHArt in 2022, he was a special lecturer at Tokyo University of the Arts (2014–2017), program officer of the Okinawa Arts Council (2017–2019), and as the dramaturg of Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Germany (2019–2021).