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It's Magic: Art and the Power of Transformation
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Transformation in Okinawan Rituals

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Glossary of terms in Okinawan religion

Izaiho (ee-zai-HOH) – An initiation ceremony for women held on Kudaka Island every twelve years, last performed in 1978.

Kaminchu (kah-min-CHOO) – General term for ritual specialists; literally “god people.”

Kikoeōgimi (kee-koh-eh-OH-gee-mee) – The chief priestess of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Niiya (NEE-yah) – literally “root house,” the founding house of a community.

- **Nichu** (NEE-choo) – The most senior male member of the founding house. Oversees the community’s secular affairs.
- **Niigan** (NEE-gahn) – The most senior female member of the founding house. Oversees the ritual affairs of a community.

Nirai Kanai (nee-RAI kah-NAI) – A utopia “over the sea,” believed to be the source of blessings and good tidings in Okinawan cosmology, where deities come from.

Noro (NOH-roh) – Village-level priestesses

Ryukyu (RYOO-kyoo) **Kingdom** – The historical kingdom and cultural region encompassing presentday Okinawa Prefecture.

Seji (SEH-jee) – “spiritual force”

Uganju (oo-GAHN-joo) – A general name for a sacred site or ritual space.

- **Utaki** (oo-TAH-kee) – “sacred grove.” A particular kind of uganju.

Timeline of the Ryukyu Kingdom / Okinawa Prefecture (Prehistory–Present)

ca. 30,000 BCE	Earliest human remains (Yamashita-chō, Minatogawa) show Paleolithic habitation.
1200-1300 CE	<i>Gusuku</i> period. Construction of massive fortifications. Rise of regional lords (aji)
14th century	Okinawa is divided into three principalities (the Sanzan period): Hokuzan (north), Chūzan (central), and Nanzan (south).
1429	Shō Hashi unifies the island by conquering Hokuzan and Nanzan, establishing the First Shō Dynasty and the Ryukyu Kingdom with its capital at Shuri.
1470	Shō En establishes the Second Shō Dynasty.
1477–1526	Reign of Shō Shin
1609	Satsuma (Tokugawa Japan’s southernmost fief) invades the Ryukyu Kingdom.
1879	The Meiji government formally annexes the kingdom, incorporating it as Okinawa
1945	The Battle of Okinawa

Suggestions for further reading

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