

HUMAN SEASCAPE

Terue Yamauchi

The “DIARY” is an ongoing series kept since 2011 through the course of my exploration of maritime culture and traditional free-diving fishery in the waters of Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. Being inspired by the hypothesis of possible ancestral connection in ancient maritime people and their historical journey carried through the seas in East and Southeast Asian regions, the work is intended to speak to its viewer as a visual storyteller of an alternative world view seen from the seas, with both macrocosmic and microcosmic insights into the human seascape so to imaginatively travel beyond time and space.

Keywords: Ama, Jamusu, Haenyeo, Japan, Korea

Over the past five years, I have been exploring the life culture of female free-divers known as *Ama* in Japan and *Jamusu* or *Haenyeo* in Jeju Island in Korea. For me, they are one of the most inspiring living examples of ways of being human that extends our idea of what human is with their very presence beyond existing restrictions we tend to impose on ourselves in contemporary society, a fertile color spectrum that provides me a conceptual compass to explore human experience. I have produced and internationally exhibited a series of works that stemmed from my deep engagement with specific woman divers I encountered with through the course of my exploration.

It all started about six years ago as I came across an old photo depicting two female divers standing and gazing out to sea. I totally gravitated to the way two human beings seemed totally being harmonized with the surrounding natural environment, with their exposed flesh being just as natural as a stone surface under their feet and their presence filled with the strength of female dignity, instinct, or vitality.

At the time, I only thought of female free diving as a longer practised ancient fishery, only remaining as a tourist attraction in Honshu. Yet, as I carried out further research, I came across the writings of Japanese author Morisaki Kazue, through which I learned that one of the fishing villages in

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my hometown Fukuoka called Kanezaki is where ancestors of many of the Ama divers based in Western Japan and Kyushu originated from, including Hegura Island and Wajima. (According to Morisaki's book, such villages existed all the way up to Hokkaido.) I was totally amazed by the story that such an important site is in my hometown Fukuoka. Soon I visited Kanezaki and found out that the female free-diving fishery is still alive even in Fukuoka and practised by two remaining female divers among 10 or more male divers.

Since 2011, I have continuously visited Kanezaki (Fukuoka), Magari (Tsushima Island), Sasuna (Tsushima Island), Yeongdo (Busan, Korea), Hadori (Jeju Island, Korea), Gwideockri (Jeju Island), and Udo (Jeju Island). As I spent more time in Kanezaki, I got to know about old stories of exchange and contact between divers in Kanezaki and Jeju. One of them tells of a Jeju diver who married a Kanezaki fisherman, came to Kanezaki, and taught diving techniques to local women.

Between May and September 2013, I was in Jeju Island, home-staying at one of the homes of local grandmother divers while attending Hanspul Haenyeo School in Hallim as a 6th year student, as a way to pursue my exploration. Then I came across an essay by C.N. Zayas entitled "Ama (women divers) culture as a relic linking maritime Philippine culture" in a booklet for "The 5th International Symposium on Haenyeo" in Jeju which was given to me by a curator I interviewed at Jeju Haenyeo Museum. [see article by Zayas in this issue]

I went back to this essay many times. This imaginative essay linking Philippine maritime culture with Ama has greatly encouraged me to expand my focal point of the fishery tradition into something being part of much wider current of maritime human practice beyond the strait between Korean and Japan, and has inspired me to envision a grand seascape that may unfold as an imaginative trail of [women's] journey all the way to the Southern sea.

The ancestors from Kanezaki are in fact being called *Kanezaki Kaijin*, which means the sea people of Kanezaki in Japanese; they are the ones mentioned [by Zayas] as 'Ama' who crossed the sea in Eiroku era. At about the same time, I also came across a concept of 'Japonesia,' a term coined by Japanese author Toshio Shimao, introduced around the time of Okinawan Reversion to Japanese control in the 1960s and the 1970s. The idea derived from his experience of living in Amami Island with his wife, a local islander, and being exposed to Amami's unique indigenous culture, in contrast to that of Tohoku region where Shimao is originally from. He suggests a way of understanding Japanese cultural identity in terms of its links with the islands of the Pacific, beyond more conventional terms as an extension of continental

Asia: to see Japan not as a ‘nation’ with a uniform culture, but as an archipelago stretched in the shape of a bow, consisting of regions and islands, and with its own life culture and tradition with outside influence unique to its geographic and historical position – not to name it Japonesia, like ‘Indonesia’ or ‘Micronesia.’

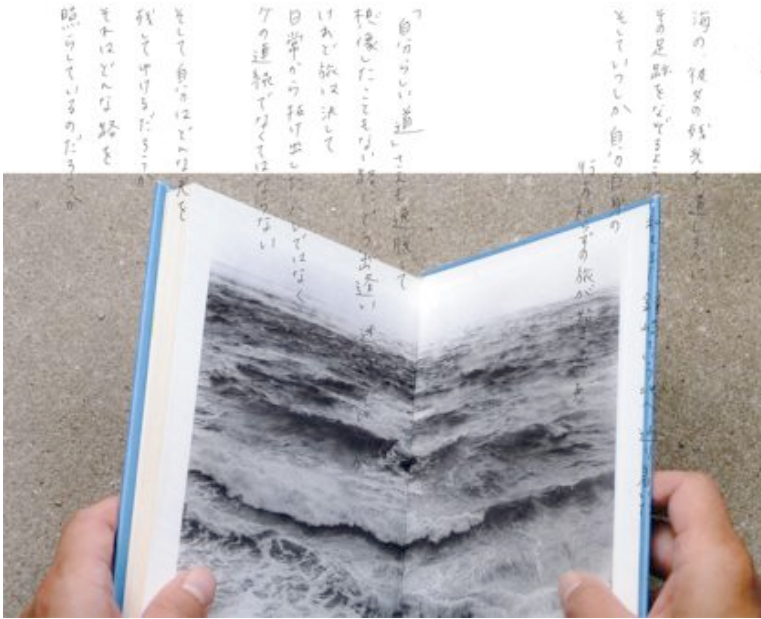
As soon as I learnt the concept of Japonesia, it immediately linked to the essay [by Zayas] in my mind, as well as my view on the divers as a living embodiment of the life culture nurtured by the sea, carried by tides and currents beyond restriction of borders. To me, what is suggested in the concept of Japonesia, as well as Zayas’s essay, is a worldview seen from the sea.

There have been arguments over which country/where is the true origin of the female free-diving fishery. To me, the origin of such an ancient and simple form of human practice is the sea itself. It has no borders as it is nurtured by the sea, practised and inherited by people who live with the sea, and carried or shared by currents possibly all the way from or to the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

As Zayas wrote in her essay, one origin of the ancestors of ancient Japanese might be the maritime people from the Pacific or Southeast Asia. I strongly believe that such worldview, or even to imagine it, is becoming more significant in the present day, with our viewpoint becoming more fixated to lands defined by human-made borders, geopolitics, and territorialization. The divers, in their everyday lives and workings, embody tolerance and visceral human experience, as if transmitting ancient memory through their body – what Zayas might have described as ‘knowledge heritage’ in her essay.

I am greatly interested to visit more regions in Southeast Asia and the waters of Kuroshio current, where maritime people live by traditional small-scale fisheries, to observe their everyday living and working if possible, to pursue my new phase of exploration further which started off in early 2015 by visiting the remote paradisaical island of Ayoke in Surigao del Sur, as well as the Matina Aplaya Bajau community in Davao City, both in the Philippines.

From the Artist’s Talk at the exhibit “Human Seascape” during the 37th UGAT Annual Conference/7th PGS National Conference, “*Dagat ug Kinabuhi/Maritime Cultures, Places, and Networks,*” Silliman Library, Dumaguete City, 2015. The exhibit was supported by The Japan Foundation.



Kazue Morisaki¹ traveled from south to north along the Japan Sea, on the trail of folklore about an Ama diver who lived for 800 years.

Whenever I open her novel, *By Sea Afterglow*, I smell sea and feel sea breeze.

Having her afterglow as a guiding light as if following her footsteps, I too reached a village called Kanezaki² and before I knew it, my own journey began without knowing its destination, just like hers.

How can I depart, even from 'my way' and find myself getting lost in a path that I never imagined before? But the journey itself should never depart from everyday reality; it should be happening as a continuation of one's daily life.

Then what kind of light can I leave for the coming generation, and what would it be shining upon?

¹ Kazue Morisaki is a Japanese female author.

² Kanezaki is a fishing village by the Genkainada Sea in Munakata City, where many Ama divers on the Japan Sea side and Kyushu, such as Tsushima and Wajima, were believed to have migrated from at least since the 14th century.



dear tenderness
dear severity



A house of Auntie, who moved from her home village of Magari,³ was right beside the shore of Sasuna.

Worthy of being active, her storytelling of the sea, which started in the early morning, never stopped until lunchtime.

“I brought you an old photo of mine...” said Auntie.

I became speechless as soon as I realized the photo inside the frame was the very image of human seascape I had seen many years ago that gravitated me into exploring the living culture of Ama divers in the first place. The origination of my life work was there, in the hands of the person herself, 60 years after the photo was taken.

Seeing me being too overwhelmed to eat, she broke the silence saying “Having Udon noodles together and spending time in such way, we must have been meant to meet like this, but only we ourselves did not know until just now.”

Her words echo like “A” in the sound of “AOUEI” that moves the Universe. “A” for the beginning of everything, where I reached after taking long way round.

I look into where I come from. I see a tidal wave coming towards me.

³ Magari historically was the only Ama village in the entire Tsushima Island. Ancestors of the Ama divers are said to have originated from Kanazaki by crossing the Genkainada Sea.



To exist beyond time.



Every time I went near my *halmang*,⁴ she held my arm close with maternal warmth as if she was holding my whole presence. Then her entire life spent in the ocean rushed into my body, like a blood stream of living organism.

⁴ Halmang: grandmother, or that which refers to the Solumdae Halmang, the creator of the islands, valleys, hills, and rivers on Chenju Island in Korea.



I crossed the ocean from Jeju Island to Yeong Island located on the edge of central Busan, just like most of what the Haenyeo divers here had done in search of better life.

My broken Jeju dialect that I had just learned opened their heart to me like a magical spell, and they too allowed me to be with them in their home sea.



If we called this planet differently instead of Planet “Earth,” since about 71% of its surface is covered by seawater, would the world be different by now?

Out in the sea, there were no such lines. There was only the absolute presence of living organism we call “sea” because human mind is the only place where those border lines exist.

I tried to see through the Genkainada Sea from wherever I am, with my gaze guided by the flow of the Kuroshio current.



Accompanied a team of three young fishermen for the first time for their free-diving fishery from a remote paradisiacal island in Surigao del Sur. From here towards the east, the Pacific Ocean is stretching to the American continent. Imagining that, I was overwhelmed by a sudden burst of loneliness, and followed their back as fast as I could so as not to be left alone.

Sigfred stopped swimming forward as he spotted something on the seabed. Seconds later, I heard a whistling-like sound that immediately brought back my memories of the seaside of Jeju Island where I used to hear this very sound of what they call “Sumbisori”⁵ anywhere I go.

Later in the evening, I invited the people of the island to see the footage of Jeju divers using the exact same breathing technique. Every time the whistling sound echoed from the footage, they gave a shout of joy. I felt like I was able to share with them the joy and excitement of discovering such an amazing maritime connection.

⁵ Sumbisori: literally means *breath sound*, slowed down exhalation; a curious whistling sound that divers produce when they break the surface of the water.



Sunlight falls between the clouds over Davao Gulf, through the sea surface, and shines onto the skin tanned by the sun and the sea breeze.

Suddenly, an ancient sea person I have dreamed of in my imagination appeared in front of me.

Ancient people of the sea, who are said to be the ancestors of Ama divers, had sneak scale pattern tattooed on their body as a talisman and charm.

I felt my entire body cells rising like waves, not knowing if it is a dream or reality.

Wearing the tattoo of light, Edgie looked like a people of the sea existing beyond time and space.

After finishing up the fishing, I felt something strange on my feet stretched out from the edge of banca. I quickly looked into the water and yelled immediately as I saw a sea snake with black-and-white stripes crawling over my foot.



A shaman is said to be the archetype of medium who gives voice to a world without entity.

Amongst over 22,000 genes in my body, if there is any, that carries ancestral memories of the great journey across the oceans, I must find a way to catch its voice that moves me to pursue further work and become its best medium to inherit by breathing it, pronouncing it, and living it in my own way.

***Terue Yamauchi** lives and works in Fukuoka, Japan. She received her BA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London (2006). In 2013, she graduated from Jeju Hansupul Haenyeo School in Korea where she learned traditional free-diving fishery for her art project. In the Philippines, she has carried out two research projects on maritime culture, funded by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan (2015) and the Japan Foundation Asia Center (2016). She has had two solo exhibitions here, at Silliman University (2015) and the University of the Philippines Diliman (2016), and just launched an exhibition at a Bajau community in Davao City. Email: terueyamauchi@gmail.com*