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Author(s)	Tamaki, Takeshi
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Formation of *Munchu* by Brothers in Modern Okinawa

TAMAKI Takeshi*

Introduction

This study examines the formative process of *Munchu* (agnatic kin group) in Okinawa, looking at brothers as focal agents¹⁾. Several anthropologists argue that patrilineal ideology has strengthened in the context of modernization, while at the same time, *munchu* organizations or village communities are being disrupted. I argue that *munchu* continue in the southern part of Okinawa in the community where I conducted research, and I emphasize the role of brothers in kin group formation, again in contrast to most existing studies on lineal genealogical relationship in Okinawan kinship.

Studies of siblingship offer an alternative to descent theory and can shed light on phenomena that descent theory leaves in the dark. Raymond Case Kelly correctly demonstrated this by reanalyzing the famous “Nuer paradox,” namely that some uterine descendants lived together in a localized “patrilineal segmentary lineage.” Kelly rejected the paradox and argued that the case instead highlights the importance of sibling bonds (Kelly, 1977, pp. 290–298). More generally, Michael Peletz, who reviewed kinship studies since 1970s, suggested that analyzing the relationships among living siblings as mediated by the dead or the ancestors is unnecessary. Rather, relationships should be analyzed as they manifest in given contexts (Peletz, 1995). Studies of siblingship contribute to replacing descent theory. We can see this in studies of Southeast Asia and Oceania (Burrige, 1959; Kelly, 1977; Marshall, 1981; Peletz, 1988; Schneider, 1981; Smith, 1983). I have also adopted this view in my study of Okinawan kinship (Tamaki, 2007).

In the community where my fieldwork was conducted, relationships among brothers are represented in the spatial arrangement of their houses. A geographer, Nakamatsu Yashu, suggested that the density of their arrangement is different from one community to another. Older communities tend to be more densely inhabited, while younger ones less so. This is because the number of branch houses differs. If a community has a longer history, the original immigrant houses are likely to have produced a greater number of branch houses than one with a shorter history (Nakamatsu, 1977, p. 87). Thus, it is pos-

* Associate Professor, Nara Prefectural University 奈良県立大学准教授

sible to understand the development of a community by looking at the spatial arrangements of the main houses and their branch houses, or of the branch houses themselves, as these arrangements reflect the relationships among brothers. From this perspective, I examine the processes of *munchu* formation and community building.

1. The formation of community “K”

The object of my study is community “K” located in the southern part of Okinawa Island. Community “K” was newly settled after the middle of the nineteenth century. Initially, it was sparsely inhabited, with only a few settlers. However, in the following years, its population and economy grew²⁾.

I confirmed the number of households in community “K” as 140 shortly before the devastation wrought by the Battle of Okinawa. These households were divided into several groups of *munchu* and *chuchode* (literally translated “a group of brothers”).

Table 1 The number of households right before 1945

<i>Munchu</i> or <i>Chuchode</i> (the gentry)	The number of households	<i>Munchu</i> or <i>Chuchode</i> (the commoner)	The number of households
A	19	K	22
B	12	L	22
C	11	M	2
D	6	N	3
E	5	O	2
F	4	P	4
G	3	Q	1
H	6	R	4
I	3	others	8
J	1		
others	2		
total	72	total	68
140			

Munchu: agnatic kin group

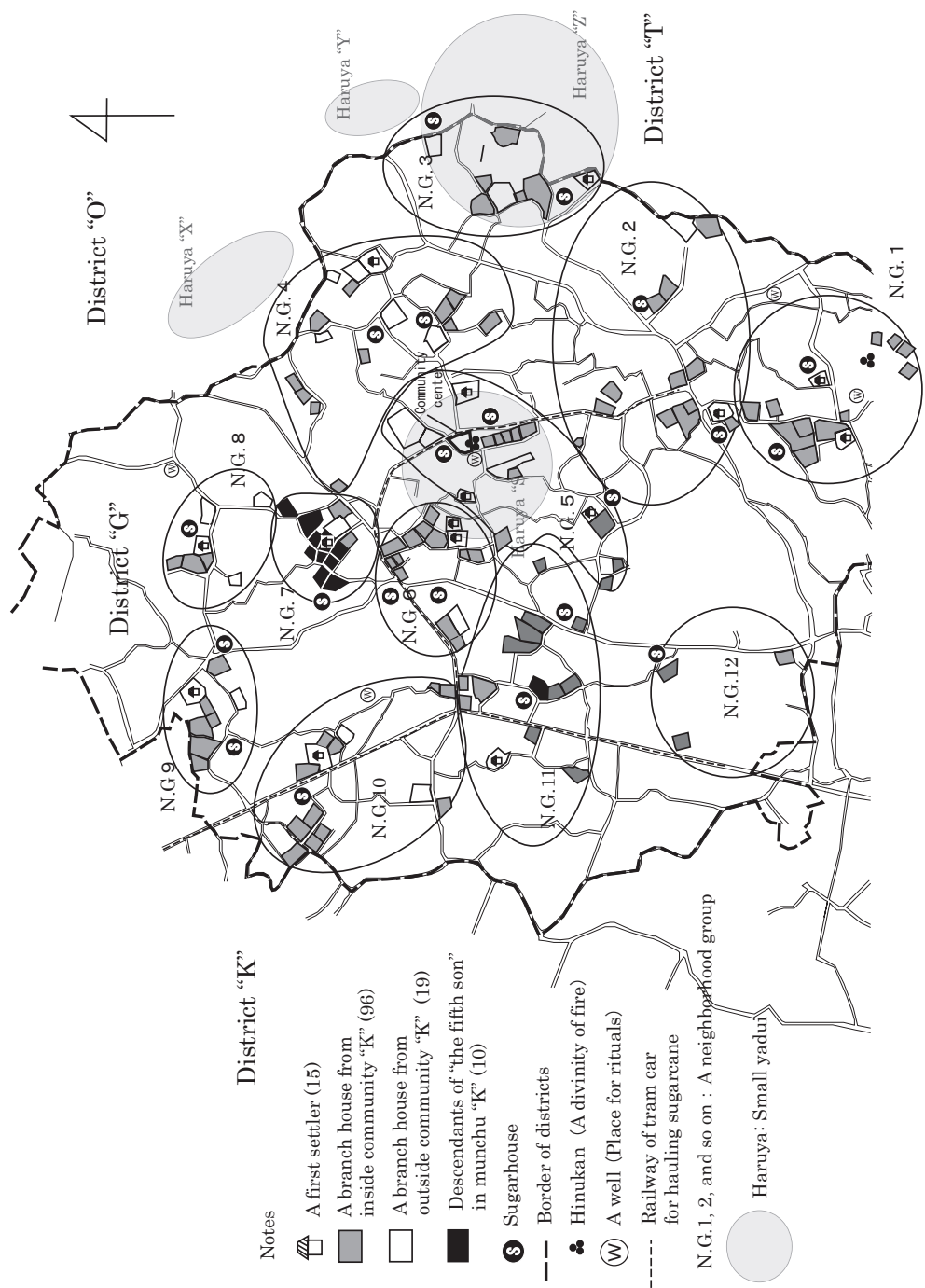
Chuchode: “a group of brothers”

Through analysis of their genealogies combined with interviews with descendants, I estimate the number of households at 45 when the Japanese government assimilated Ryukyū in 1879.

Table 2 The number of households around 1879

<i>Munchu</i> or <i>Chuchode</i>	Households	Previous Residence
A	5	Shuri
B	4	Shuri
C	5	Shuri → District “O”
D	2	Unclear
E	2	Chatan district
F	2	Unclear
G	1	Unclear
H	1	Shuri → District “K”
I	3	Shuri
K	4	Nishihara District → District “K”
L	6	District “T” → District “O” (1)
		District “T” (2)
		District “O” (2)
M	1	Nakagusuku district
N	1	Mawashi district
O	2	District “T”
P	1	Mawashi district
R	1	District “L”
Others	4	Mawashi district (1)
		District “K” (2)
		Unclear
Total	45	

The main factor responsible for the increase of households from 45 to 140 was the establishment of branch households. The period between 1879 and 1945 was when community “K” developed socially and economically, closely related to the burgeoning number of branch households.



Map 2 Community "K" right before 1945

District "K"

Notes

- A first settler (15)
- A branch house from inside community "K" (96)
- A branch house from outside community "K" (19)
- Descendants of "the fifth son" in munchu "K" (10)
- Sugarhouse
- Border of districts
- Hinukan (A divinity of fire)
- A well (Place for rituals)
- Railway of tram car for hauling sugarcane
- N.G.1, 2, and so on : A neighborhood group

Haruya: Small yadui

Formation of *Munchu* by Brothers in Modern Okinawa

By 1945, 12 neighborhood groups known as *han* (group) had been formed. In many of these groups, branch households (households of brothers) from the same natal household stood at the core. In all, 7 neighborhood groups—2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12—mostly consist of households of brothers; that is, more than half of their population was brothers. Brothers were inclined to live close to one another.

Table 3 Brothers who live close to one another

N.G.1		N.G.2*		N.G.3		N.G.4		N.G.5		N.G.6*	
<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The numbers of households	<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The number of households	<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The numbers of households	<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The numbers of households	<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The numbers of households	<i>Chuchode</i> or <i>Munchu</i>	The numbers of households
A	5	A	8	D	3	C	8	P	4	L	10
I	3	D	3	L	2	R	4	A	3	K	3
Others	2	C	1	F	2	G	2	O	2	Others	1
F	1	G	1	C	1	F	1	E	1	Total	14
J	1	Others	1	Total	8	L	1	C	1		
Others	1	Total	14			Others	1	Q	1		
Total	13					Total	17	L	1		
								B	1		
								others	1		
								others	1		
								Total	16		
N.G.7*		N.G.8*		N.G.9*		N.G.10		N.G.11*		N.G.12*	
K	10	L	4	K	5	H	6	B	7	A	3
L	3	N	3	B	2	B	2	E	3		
Total	13	Total	7	Others	1	K	2	K	2		
				Total	8	Others	2	L	1		
						E	1	Total	13		
						Others	1				
						Total	14				

*: More than half of the households in a neighborhood group belong to one agnatic kin group. They regarded themselves as a *chuchode*, “a group of brothers.”

Brothers living close to their natal households result from the custom of the bestowal or inheritance of land. Since before World War II, the cultural norm regulating household succession and land inheritance has been patrilineal. However, although the estates held by the father were thought to be inherited exclusively by the eldest son, the practice was in fact less stringent. I have confirmed many cases in which younger sons were given homesteads and cultivated land. In this way, gatherings of branch households began to appear.

It should also be emphasized that, in many cases, brothers lived together, cooperated in the production of sugarcane, and contributed to the development of their father’s

household for several years, even after marriage. In other words, they took the temporary form of an extended family at a certain stage of its developmental cycle. This does not accord well with the culturally ideal type of the Okinawan family (patrilineal stem family) that many anthropologists, including Tanaka Masako (1980), advocate.

2. Case study: The descendants of the fifth son in *munchu* “K” [Figure 2]

The history of *munchu* “K” allows us to trace the process by which an agnatic kin

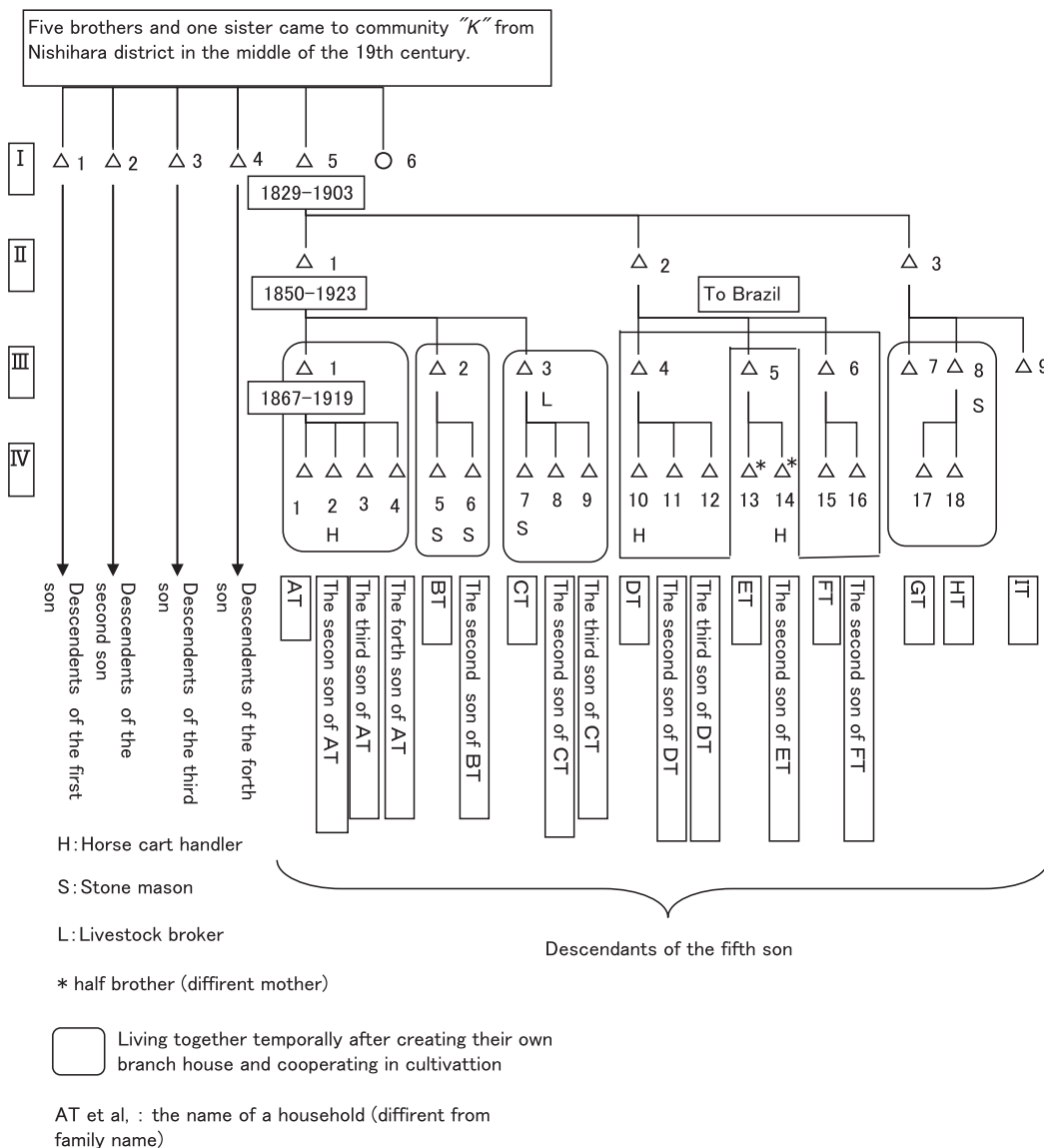


Figure 1 The genealogical relationship of *munchu* “K” (Commoners)

group came to be formed. By the middle of the nineteenth century, five brothers and a sister came to live in the location of the present-day community “K.” At present, their descendants have grown to form *munchu* “K,” their growth having been most prominent during the time of the third and fourth generation descendants in the early twentieth century.

2-1 Cooperation among brothers

After settling, the five brothers had day labor jobs and live-in jobs. *I-5* and his wife were hired as live-in workers by a wealthy house in Village “A,” where community “K” once belonged.

The descendants of *I-5* made a corporate kin group. Since they lived close, they also constituted a neighbor group (*N.G.7*). We could call it a localized brother group. We can see many similar cases in community “K.” More than the others, the neighbor-group 7 shows a typical density of branch households.

The descendants of *I-5* accomplished striking economic growth. Some brother groups were formed including relatives across four generations. Brothers lived together with their parents and worked together for several years even after they got married. During this time, they contributed to the development of their fathers’ household and prepared to create their own households. When they gained independence, their fathers gave them homesteads close to their own houses. After building these branch houses, the brothers continued to work together in sugar production and other kinds of wealth generation.

By the 1940s, the descendants of *I-5* came to be known as a wealthy kin group. The most outstanding households were *AT* and *DT*. Both of them had about two hectares of cultivated land, producing 8.64 tons of sugar each. House *AT* was a large house with clay tile roofing and a storage room upstairs, both rare features indicative of wealth. Members of house *AT* stockpiled sugar and waited to sell it until its price became reasonably high in the market. Although not to the same extent as *AT* and *DT*, *BT*, *CT*, and *GT* were also wealthy. They each had one hectare of cultivated land and produced 5.76 tons of sugar. According to the 1939 census, only 5% of farming households had more than two hectares of cultivated land, and 17.5% of them had more than one hectare in Okinawa Prefecture (Nakachi, 2007). While the first settler (*I-5*) started his life as a live-in-worker, his grandsons, *AT* and *DT*, achieved sufficient economic development to hire several live-in-workers themselves.

They said that their economic success was a result of “hard work.” For example, *III-4* worked for a livestock broker by day and cultivated his sugarcane by night. Besides *III-4*, there were many who had an additional job. *III-8*, *IV-5*, *IV-6*, and *IV-7* worked in stone masonry, such as stonewalls and gravestones. *IV-2*, *IV-10*, and *IV-14* hauled stone material by horse cart. These side jobs were usually practiced through cooperation among the brothers. Money acquired by their hard work was usually used to purchase more cultivated land. In this way, their sugar productivity increased.

2-2 The grave of *munchu* “K”

Munchu “K” as a whole, consisting of the descendants of the five brothers who first settled in the community, now has a large grave (figure 2). I suggest this grave was built in 1912, because the members of *munchu* “K” periodically hold the memorial rites of the grave: one cycle consists of the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, twenty-fifth, and thirty-third year. After the thirty-third year’s memorial, they again begin the first rite. In 2003, they held the twenty-fifth year’s memorial rite. If this rite had been the third occasion, the grave would have been built in 1912 ($2003 - 33 \times 2 + 25$). As already stated, the early twentieth century was the time when the grandsons of the settlers had accomplished significant economic development, and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the grave was built in 1912.

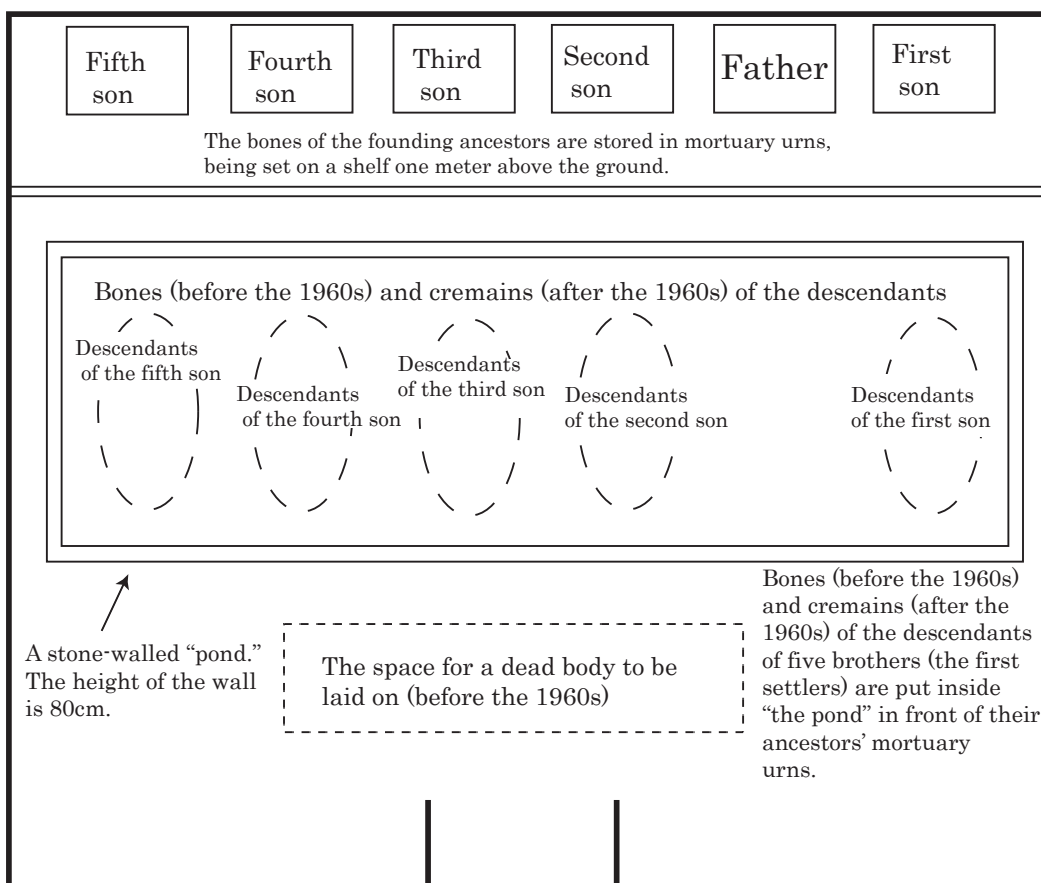


Figure 2 The grave of *munchu* “K”

2-3 The salient features of the case

We can now summarize the formation of kin group *munchu* “K” with regard to the

brothers and show the salient features of their development:

- (1) The five brothers were poor and started their lives as live-in workers.
- (2) The grandsons of the youngest among the first generation brothers (*AT* and *DT*) became rich enough to be able to hire several live-in workers themselves.
- (3) This economic development was achieved by their hard work and particularly through cooperation among the brothers of the fourth generation. They lived and worked together and formed temporary extended households after the younger brothers got married, until they established their own households.
- (4) I found many cases in which brothers were given homesteads close to their father's house when they set up their own households. Even after establishing their own households, they continued to work together. These brothers in fact formed localized agricultural task groups.
- (5) Most likely, the grave of *munchu* "K" was built in the early twentieth century. The descendants of each of the first set of five brothers, who had increased their wealth by cooperation in similar ways to the group that I have considered for detailed analysis, came to consolidate themselves under one common grave.

Conclusion: *Munchu* formation by brothers

The newly built community "K" was not clearly delineated to begin with. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, community "K" certainly came to take on the shape of a real community. The key factor in this development was cooperation among the brothers. The development of this agnatic group suggests a new view of Okinawan kinship and community.

Japanese anthropologists Kasahara Seiji and Oda Makoto advocated that what has been called *munchu*-ization has not been a process of social group formation on the ground but rather the enhancement of patrilineal ideology occurring along with the disruption of *munchu* as corporate groups or village communities in the context of modernization (Kasahara, 1975, pp. 37–38; Oda, 1987, pp. 369–370). Contrary to their assertions, I found that brothers in community "K" cooperated well and formed practical, localized task groups that resulted in the formation of a new *munchu* in the early twentieth century.

Tracing the history of the formation of *munchu* "K," we realize that the key factor in the process was not concern with the ancestors (lineal genealogical relationship). The first step was rather the formation of groups of brothers who combined their efforts for economic gain. It was only later, when the five groups of brothers descending from the first five settlers built a common grave, that they were integrated into one *munchu*. To look at *munchu* as an organization of the descendants from a focal ancestor is to take the ideological cultural norm (the patrilineal descent ideology) as preceding the social process (*munchu* formation), each functioning in harmony with the other. Such a static view is inadequate for analyzing social development in a rapidly changing society, as was Oki-

nawa after the late nineteenth century. In their *munchu* studies, Kasahara and Oda distinguished the concept of “descent” from the process of *munchu* formation, so their studies were fluid. Even so, I argue that they missed an important aspect of *munchu* formation because they placed too much emphasis on the ideological dimension of descent. Contrary to their arguments, I propose a focus on the roles of brothers, the key agents in *munchu* group formation.

This development took place within the period that is termed “modern.” Modernization was the important factor, at least for community “K” in achieving their development and autonomy. The efforts of the brothers in adapting to modern times resulted in the formation of their *munchu*.

Notes

- 1) The argument and the research material developed in this paper were partly published in English and Japanese (Tamaki, 2009, 2011). While Tamaki (2009) is a summary of a conference presentation at the Society for East Asian Anthropology (SEAA) at Taipei in 2008, I develop in full the discussion here. I already argued the process of community building and formation of kin groups (Tamaki, 2011); in addition, I show, in this paper, new material on one *munchu* grave and focus on the process of *munchu* formation by brothers.
- 2) Community “K” is called a *yadui*, a folk term that means a community of immigrants. Most *yadui* are thought to consist of people belonging to the gentry class who could not get their posts at the administration of Ryukyu Kingdom and had to search for a new place to live. This is how *yadui* is usually defined. But in community “K,” where my research was conducted, half of its population was comprised of commoner peasants. I focus on such people in this paper.

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近代沖縄における兄弟による門中形成

玉 城 毅

本稿の目的は、近代沖縄における門中（父系親族集団）形成のプロセスの特徴を、兄弟関係に着目することによって明らかにすることである。従来の沖縄の親族研究、とりわけ「門中化」研究では、位牌継承や家の相続における長男が優先される考え方は、実際の父系親族集団が形成される社会過程と結びついているのではなく、むしろ、組織としての親族集団や村落が衰退・解体している状況で表れていると指摘されている（笠原 1975: 37–38、小田 1987: 369–370）。これに反して、筆者が調査した沖縄島南部の集落では、近代的状況の中で親族組織としての門中が形成され続けていた。本稿では、系譜関係に着目してきた従来の視点からではなく、兄弟の動きを捉えることによって、近代的状況における門中形成のプロセスがよりよく理解できることを論証する。
