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Okinawan Studies
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

10 Years of Japanese Studies

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A UH Mānoa Center for Japanese Studies in-person seminar co-sponsored with the UH Mānoa Center for Okinawan Studies

The oink in Okinawa
Rooting through changes in Okinawa's heirloom pigs and cuisine

#RyukyuKingdom #Okinawa #history #HeirloomPigs #AguPork #PigHusbandry #OkinawanCuisine #CulturalHeritage

Monday, April 22, 2024
10:30a - 12:00p
Moore Hall 258

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A rich culture of rearing and eating pigs emerged during the independent Ryukyu Kingdom. As Japan colonized Ryukyu and renamed it Okinawa Prefecture, pigs persisted as a resilient and distinct characteristic of Okinawan society. This presentation develops the idea of a companion breed to explore the unique relationship between Okinawans and their heirloom pigs. Here, we explore how this special partnership enabled unique socio-ecological formations to emerge and evolve. Historically called "island pigs" (shima buta) and today widely called "Agu," Okinawa's oldest heirloom pig breed is a small black pot-bellied pig that likely first arrived in the latter part of the 14th century but only thrived after the introduction of sweet potatoes in the early 17th century. This presentation focuses on local responses to three changes in sovereign administration. The first change is the interwar effort by the Japanese government to introduce Western bacon-type breeds like the Berkshire to replace island pigs. The second change is the postwar effort by the US government to disseminate Western pig breeds and industrialize pig husbandry. The third change is the post-reversion effort of Japanese industries to market value-added "Agu" pork as heirloom pig from Okinawa. These changes elicited a range of responses in Okinawa as relations to heirloom pigs and cuisine have continued to evolve.