



# ‘Knot-working’ of traditional music across the globe: A case study of African drumming in Ioujima Island, Japan



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## KEYWORDS

West Africa;  
Ioujima;  
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**Abstract** The paper explains how a West African drum called *djembe* has been introduced and settled in Ioujima, a small island in Kagoshima, Japan. The drum and its music were brought in the island by Mamady Keita, who is a world famous *djembe* drummer from Guinea, in 1990's. There has been established an international *djembe* school named ‘Mishima *Djembe* School’ in the island, and it attracts the musicians domestically and internationally. The music is contributing to revitalize the depopulating and aging island community.

There are several reasons why the island has accepted the music from opposite side of the earth and the music has become an important part of the islanders both culturally and economically. One reason relates to the unique history of *djembe* music. Another reason is the way the island has accepted and made the best use of the cultural resource to vitalize its social-economy. The events regarding *djembe* in the island used to be solely managed by the municipal office. However, the music became a joint project of the municipality and a music-related company. What the two stories explain is that transformation from ‘net-working’ to ‘knot-working’ has happened in the music and the islanders’ way of accepting it.

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## Introduction

Most of the remote islands in Japan have severe social-economic problems caused by decreasing and aging population. The islanders are struggling to solve the issue. One possible way is to make the use of cultural power such as music, arts and sports. There have already been several successful cases. The paper explains how a West African drum

called *djembe* has been introduced and settled in Ioujima, a small island in Kagoshima, Japan (Fig. 1). The paper tries to figure out the process of success with an approach of ‘knot-working’.

Ioujima is located 110 km south of Kagoshima city. Along with Takeshima and Kuroshima, it makes up Mishima village which literally means ‘three islands village’. The area of the island is 11.65 square kilometers. Its length is 5.5 km from east to west and 4.0 km from north to south.

The paper firstly explains how *djembe* was accepted and became an important icon in the island focusing on the history.

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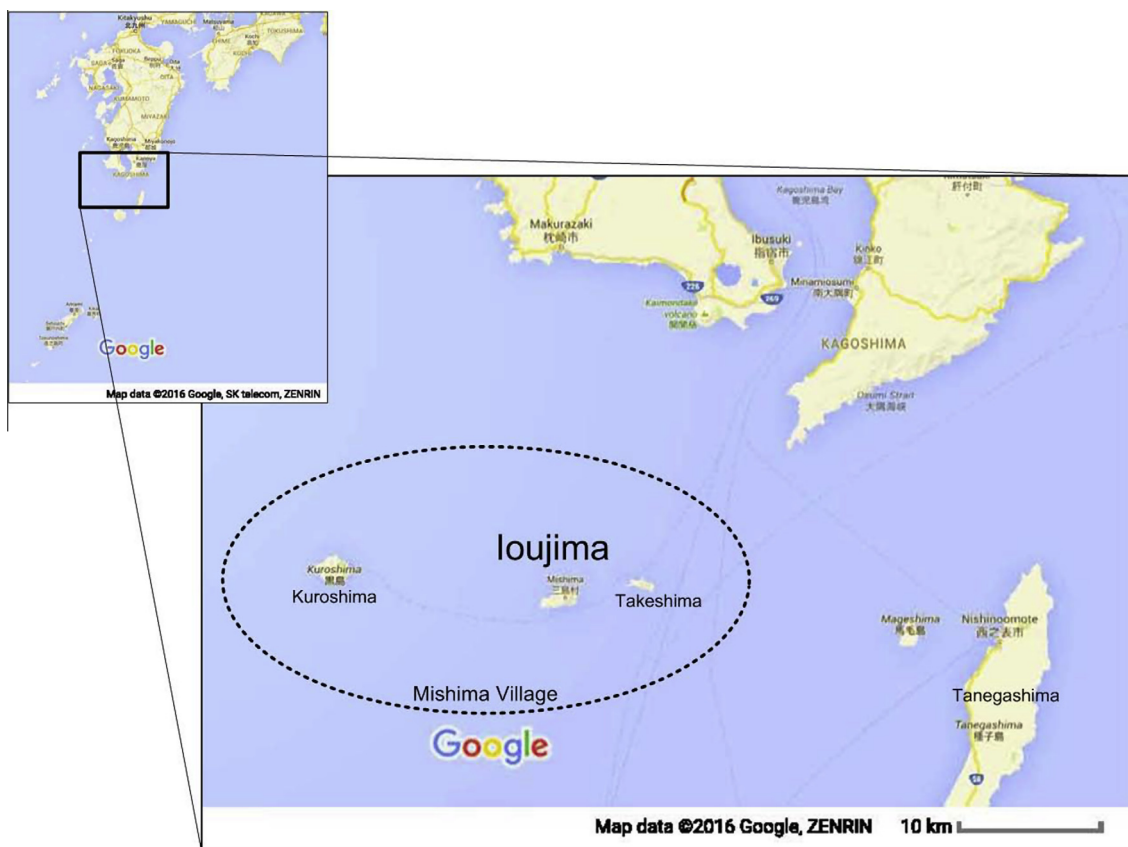


Fig. 1 Map of Ioujima Island.

It secondly discusses why *djembe*, a traditional West African drum, was successful in contributing to the development of the island focusing on the process of nationalization and globalization of *djembe* and its ensemble music. It finally analyzes the reason behind its success history using the concept of ‘knot-working’.

#### How *djembe* music was accepted in a small Japanese island?

Ioujima used to be much more populated when there was a mining industry since 1868–1964. According to the village web site, its population in 1960 was 604 compared to 124 in 2006 as Fig. 2 shows (Website of Mishima village, 2016). During the period of rapid economic growth in Japan, Yamaha Resort built a resort hotel named ‘Ryoso Ashizuri’ in the island. However, it was closed in 1983. Thanks to the resort hotel, the population was slightly increased from 1970 to 1980 as Fig. 2 shows (Website of Mishima village, 2016). Since then until mid-2000’s, the population has been continuously decreasing. Aging population is also a serious problem as well as decreasing population in the island. The percentage of the population over 65 was only 6.5% and that in 2006 jumped to 34.8% as Fig. 3 (Website of Mishima village, 2016) shows. The economy of the island used to be dependent on and driven by the capitals outside the island. The islanders were forced to figure out their own way of economic development. Since 1990, the municipal government of Mishima village started to utilize culture and sports to attract immigrants and tourists. It started a yacht race named ‘Mishima Cup’ in 1990 which has

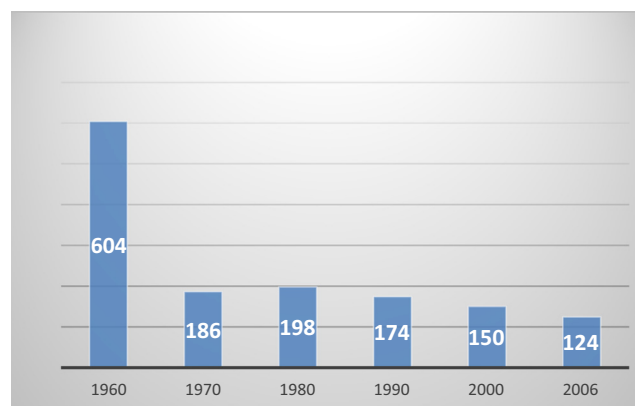


Fig. 2 Population of Ioujima from 1960 to 2006. Source: Webpage of Mishima village.

been held once a year in summer until this year. In 1994, it invited Mamady Keita, who is a world famous *djembe* player, and his band ‘Sewakan’. He came to Ioujima to teach the children in Mishima village how to play *djembe*. He is coming to the island almost every year. There also held kabuki shows in the island at the natural rock stage beside the sea in 1996 and 2011. The shows were performed by Kankuro, who is one of the most famous kabuki actors in Japan. Although all the three islands are involved in the events, Ioujima plays the most important role especially in the yacht races and *djembe* relating activities, for the events are mainly held in the island.

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