

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Miyu Shimoji

Aba- Shimoji Miyu yariba- Kyuya,nn-na yurushikudo-! This is the dialect of my beloved Miyako Island. It means: "I am Miyu Shimoji. Thank you for your time today." I was born and raised on Miyakojima - from nursery school until the end of high school. Since there are not many people from Miyako Island at Okinawa Christian University, many teachers remember where I come from. They often talk to me about Miyako, for example asking about coronavirus on Miyako. Or they say, I've been to Miyako many times! I am always very happy to talk about my home. Miyako has countless beautiful beaches such as "Maehama ", " Toguchi ", and "Sawada ". Culturally, it is also interesting. There are also many different dialects spoken in the villages. My favorite dialect is 'apparagi'. This means beautiful. Elderly people in Miyako are called apparagi by children. If you hear this word, let's be happy.

My grandmother is from Nanjo City, just a few kilometres from here, and my grandfather is from Irapu, a remote island off Miyako. When my grandparents decided to get married, the mainland Okinawan people and the Miyako Island people didn't get along very well. My grandmother's father, my great-grandfather, was quite opposed to her marriage. This is because many people on Okinawa at that time regarded Miyakojima as an uncivilized place. If it was known that her husband was from Miyako, he couldn't even get a contract for an apartment in mainland Okinawa, and some shops refused to serve Miyako people. I was shocked when I heard that. When I decided to attend the open campus here, my grandma told me to hide the fact that I'm from Miyako. I got angry with her and said, "Why do I have to be ashamed of my hometown! There isn't any discrimination these days. Times have changed!" I was proud of the island I grew up on, so I didn't intend to hide that fact when I attended the open campus.

When I arrived here, many senior students welcomed me. The other High School students often came with friends from their school, but since I was alone, the seniors took care of me and asked me where I was from. They were confused by my uniform because they hadn't seen the Miyako High School uniform before! But two seniors looked at each other when I talked about my High School and then they didn't talk to me after that. I felt lonely when I saw them talking to other students. I'm not sure if those seniors stopped talking to me because I'm from Miyako or maybe it was my misunderstanding and they just wanted to talk to other people. But I was a bit confused because this happened was just after I heard my grandmother's story.

What is discrimination? Rejecting or attacking someone because they have different values, a different race, gender, or character are all forms of discrimination. I wondered is it possible that people from the same Okinawa discriminate against their neighbours just because someone has a different dialect or accent. Well, everyone look at me now. – I'm from Miyako Island. Do I look different from you? I certainly accept that there are many people who are strong-willed in Miyako. But everyone is also very kind. So maybe we are not so different – you, the people from Okinawa honto, and us, the Miyako people. I will let you decide. In any case, I will continue to be proud of being from Miyakojima! Tandiga-tandi! Thank you for listening.