Putting Okinawa at the Center
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Putting Okinawa at the Center

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Introduction

Most Americans know of Okinawa only as a forward Pacific outpost in the network of U.S. military bases that span the globe. Surprisingly, the situation is not all that different for the average Japanese, once we add an image of Okinawa as a "tropical" resort area filled with easy-going locals (a Japanese Hawaii, as it were) and a prolific producer of talented entertainers. Both Americans and Japanese mainlanders are taken aback when confronted with news reports of uncharacteristically prickly, and at times highly emotional, reactions by supposedly laid back Okinawans to such seemingly insignificant matters as how the Battle of Okinawa is portrayed in history textbooks, allegations of discrimination and second class status, and above all, the presence of the U.S. military bases on the island (ergo: that’s where they are and somebody has to host them so get real and do your part for the greater good!). Japanese mainlanders specifically are mystified by what at times seems like a sense of entitlement among Okinawans toward mainlanders’ hard-earned tax contributions that get channeled into Okinawa in the form of extra-generous public works, construction projects, central government subsidies, and so on that well exceed the norm on the mainland. A fundamental reason for these perplexities is that for Americans and mainland Japanese, Okinawa is peripheral and as such the situation of Okinawans and their distinctive concerns and perspectives are not well understood or taken account of when decisions are made that affect the vital interests of Okinawans. From the distant vantage point of most Americans and Japanese mainlanders it is difficult to see clearly the historical, geopolitical and sociological forces that are at work in Okinawa. As such it is difficult to imagine how differently things might appear from an Okinawan perspective and from there to conceive of truly just and effective resolutions to issues of mutual concern.

This apparent peripheral status, however, is deceiving. Although Okinawa might appear peripheral from an American and Japanese (one could also add, Chinese) perspective, it is in fact quite central from a geostrategic perspective due the fact that it is located at a point where the boundaries and interests of the great powers of East Asia and the Pacific intersect. It is precisely for this reason that throughout its history Okinawa has been regularly buffeted, and periodically overwhelmed, by the actions of the greater powers that are its neighbors, as the articles in this collection amply demonstrate. It is this centrality of Okinawa in the region, in short, that is the root cause of the contestation in the international arena, and the reason why minor developments in this seemingly minor peripheral entity can have such a profound global impact.

With these thoughts in mind, the following collection of essays from Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus “puts Okinawa at the center” and provides a vehicle through which to better understand how the world might look from an Okinawan perspective. The articles are grouped into three broad sections. First, the introduction provides a bird’s eye overview of Okinawa’s geography and its history from ancient times to the present. The next set of articles looks in more detail at specific developments in Ryukyuan/Okinawa history. The final six articles zero in on specific aspects of contemporary Okinawan society. It should be noted that most of the articles in the collection went through a substantial amount of editing in order to enhance the overall coherence of the reader as a whole, to eliminate duplicate content and to keep the collection at a manageable size. As such,
readers who seek a fuller discussion of the topics covered in the articles in the collection are encouraged to read the originals which are readily accessible on the Japan Focus web site. Additionally, it should be noted that there is minimal discussion in this course reader devoted specifically to the military base issue, a subject on which there is a tremendous amount of material in Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus. This omission was deliberate since it is anticipated that a course reader devoted to that topic will be compiled in the near future.
Introduction

Gavan McCormack and Satoko Norimatsu's broad survey of Okinawan geography and history is intended to provide a frame of reference for contextualizing the articles that follow. They begin by locating Okinawa in its East Asian geographic context, identifying the climatic, social and cultural factors that set Okinawa apart from mainland Japan. They follow with a historical overview, beginning with a discussion of what Okinawans today remember as the “glory days” of the Ryukyu Kingdom in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the monarchy held the island chain together and prospered as a commercial entrepot and trading power. They then discuss the first major historical transformation of Okinawa’s political status wrought by the unilateral actions of an external power, namely the 1609 invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom by Satsuma, the southern-most domain of feudalistic Edo Period Japan (1603-1867). The invasion set the stage for a peculiar dual vassalage arrangement in which the Kingdom maintained its formal status as an independent tributary state of the Chinese Empire while under the tight behind-the-scenes control of Satsuma, which benefited from maintaining the fiction that Okinawa was politically closer to China than to Japan. For MacCormack and Norimatsu, the 1609 political structure is the first instance of a recurring, “theatrical” pattern in which a staged outward equality of status very thinly veils a real structure of differential treatment and subordination. They go on to trace this pattern through its various manifestations in Okinawa’s subsequent history via a series of shobun (punishment or, alternatively, disposals): namely, (a) the original Ryukyu disposal of 1872-79, (b) the post-World War II “disposal” that began with the 1945 Battle of Okinawa and culminated in Japan’s ceding sovereignty over Okinawa to the United States, (c) the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan, and (d) the post-Cold War restructuring of the U.S. bases in Okinawa within the context of a redefined U.S.-Japan Security relationship. They thereby shed light on the sources of Okinawa’s “difference” from the rest of Japan and its ambiguous status of being simultaneously incorporated into, but never fully integrated with, mainstream contemporary Japanese society and culture.

It should be noted that the extensive discussion in McCormack and Norimatsu's original article of the anti-U.S. base resistance movement were edited out and readers interested in that topic are strongly urged to read the article in its original form.
Ryukyu/Okinawa, From Disposal to Resistance
Gavan McCormack and Satoko Norimatsu

In May 1972, following twenty-seven years of direct American military rule, the Ryukyu Islands reverted to being a Japanese prefecture under the name “Okinawa.” The year 2012 therefore marks its fortieth anniversary.

These islands have a complex history and every year is punctuated by anniversaries, many with painful associations. Okinawa today looks back upon a history as an independent kingdom, enjoying close affiliation with Ming and then Qing dynasty China (1372–1874); a semi-independent kingdom affiliated with both China and Japan but effectively ruled from Satsuma in southern Japan (1609–1874); a modern Japanese prefecture (1872–1945); a US military colony, first as conquered territory and from 1952 subject to the determination of the San Francisco treaty (1945–1972); and then, from 1972 to today, once again as a Japanese prefecture but still occupied by US forces. Before the recent and contemporary disputes that are at the center of the US-Japan relationship can be understood, something of this checkered history as a region alternately in and out of “Japan” has to be recounted.

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Okinawa’s chain of islands—around sixty of them inhabited and many more not—stretch for 1,100 kilometers (683 miles) along the Western Pacific between Japan’s Kagoshima
prefecture and Taiwan. The largest and most populated island is about one hundred kilometers long and between four and twenty-eight kilometers wide, and the islands as a whole are about one-seventh the area of Hawaii. Linked to the Asian continental landmass until a million or so years ago, the islands have long been separated from it by a gulf sufficiently deep and dangerous to have allowed the emergence in relative isolation of a rich and distinctive human as well as botanical and zoological environment. Today its people are both “Japanese,” speaking more-or-less standard Japanese and constituting part of the Japanese nation-state, but also “non-Japanese,” whose ancestors a century ago spoke languages distinct from Japanese, that is, separate languages rather than dialects, and five of which, still spoken today, especially on the outlying islands, are recognized by UNESCO as either “endangered” or “severely endangered.”

The islands enjoy a mild subtropical climate and good rainfall with a rich marine reef environment. From the fifteenth century a flourishing autonomous state, the Ryukyuan Kingdom, trading along the China coast and as far south as Vietnam and Siam, formed part of the East Asian tribute world centering on Ming China. Though virtually obliterated from conventional historical memory, premodern Okinawa was a vigorous, independent economic, cultural, and political system, flourishing on the frontiers of the early modern Asia-Pacific. Its music and performing arts and its crafts, including lacquerware, dyed textiles, and pottery, were widely known and appreciated. However, the island kingdom that flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was profoundly affected by major shifts in the global geopolitical balance starting in the late sixteenth century and continuing into the mid-twentieth century.

Both the early and then the mature phases of European maritime expansion, in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, opened new routes of commerce, spread new ideas and technologies, and helped dissolve and reform states. In the seventeenth century, as European capitalism and nationalism, underpinned by war and its technologies, despoiled Africa, colonized the Americas, and encroached on Asia, Japan, emerging from a long period of chronic civil war and failed attempts (in the 1590s) to subject Asia to Japanese rule, retreated to concentrate on developing its so-called closed country (sakoku) polity. But it first launched in 1609 one last expansionary thrust: an invasion force of three thousand musket-bearing samurai to conquer the Ryukyu Kingdom, punishing it for its recalcitrant attitude toward Hideyoshi’s grand continental invasion plan. Within days, the court submitted and King Sho Nei (1564–1620) and his entourage were carried off to Kagoshima.

The new order that was imposed was more “modern,” rationalized and bureaucratic than the shamanistic, ritual court world it displaced. It was also often harsh, with basic policy decided from Kagoshima (capital of the Satsuma domain), 660 kilometers away. The king and court continued, but the kings were no longer sovereign. Okinawa/Ryukyu became a Potemkin-like theater state: Okinawans had to hide the fact that they were incorporated into the Japanese system in order to sustain the tribute relationship to China, those
involved in missions to and from China were ordered to hide all things Japanese, and those on embassies to Edo (Tokyo) were required to wear distinctive, non-Japanese clothing. Thus the façade of independence was preserved, a trading window between Japan and China kept open through Japanese-controlled Ryukyuan tributary missions to China, and the prestige of the Bakufu heightened by the appearance of a foreign mission pledging fealty to it. Ryukyu became in effect Japan’s colony, its kings tied to the Japanese domain of Satsuma, and through it to the Edo Japanese state, while maintaining all the appearances of continuing attachment to the Chinese court in Beijing. Dual vassalage characterized the next several centuries. It meant that Okinawan officials were required to perform theater designed to conceal the locus and nature of political authority, and Shuri Castle, the site of the Ryukyu kings, was a carefully constructed stage.

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Images of Ryukyu Tributary relationship with China.

The curtain did not ring down on this peculiar state till the mid-nineteenth century. For a brief period then, the omens for Ryukyu seemed good. Left more than usual to its own devices as the crisis in the Japanese Edo order deepened, Ryukyu courts negotiated modern “opening” treaties, as an independent kingdom, with the Americans, French, and Dutch (in 1854, 1855, and 1850).³

Visitors were impressed. When the US Navy’s Commodore Perry sailed into what was known as the Loochoos on his Black Ships en route to open Japan in 1853, his scientific advisers reported on a fertile, friendly, and prosperous state, a “most rich and highly cultivated rural landscape,” with an agriculture more akin to horticulture, in a “system which could scarcely be improved” and its villages quite romantic, and more beautiful than any of like pretensions I have ever seen.”⁴

However, Ryukyu’s ambiguous, dual-sovereignty status was incompatible with the “new world order” of expansive, rapacious, and militarized modern states and competing empires. While the island elite debated possible responses to Commodore Perry on his
1853 visit and struggled to explain their island’s status as a dual attachment, the governing elite of the new modern Japanese nation-state in Tokyo adopted a strict modern, legalist view of the world, in which sovereignty was absolute and indivisible and frontiers had to be secured. The Japanese flag was first raised over the main island of the Ryukyus in 1872 and in 1873 over the outlying islands of Kume, Ishigaki, Miyako, Iriomote, and Yonaguni.

The Ryukyu court faced an impossible dilemma. The dual fiefdom status quo was unsustainable however much they clung to it. The Qing court could not come to their aid with the Chinese “world order” under siege from central Asia to Indochina and Korea and much of the country only slowly recovering from the calamity of the Taiping rebellion and civil war. Beijing viewed Ryukyu as of relatively minor significance, just a “small kingdom in the sea.” The Shuri court, after much agonizing, ended its feeble resistance in 1879.7 Submitting to the “punishment” from Tokyo over its lukewarm response to the new Meiji state order, in the first of the series of modern shobun or “disposals,” it handed over the castle and sent the king, Sho Tai (1843–1901), into exile. Its incorporation into the modern Japanese state is unique in having been accomplished as part of a punishment (shobun), “unilaterally and by force,” thus becoming an “unrecognized colony,” and its subsequent status within the state was marked by persistent suspicion, discrimination, and forced assimilation. According to one story, probably apocryphal, as King Sho Tai in 1879 surrendered Shuri Castle to the superior force of the Meiji government, he uttered the words “Life is precious” (nuchi du takara). These words later came to be understood as a core statement of Okinawan moral value, in the face of oppression, militarism, and colonialism the Okinawan people struggled to preserve the ideal of the supremacy of life over death, peace over war, the sanshin (samisen = a banjo-like musical instrument) over the gun.6

Thus Okinawa was incorporated in a subordinate status within the Japanese state. The new national government in Tokyo regarded the islands as crucial to state defense rather than as integral elements of any national community. This was clear from the readiness they showed, in negotiations with China from 1879, to split the islands into two, ceding the farthest islands, Miyako and Yaeyama, to China in return for the grant of “most favored nation” trading rights within China itself. China in response, proposed a three-way split, south to China, north to Japan, with a reinstated Ryukyu Kingdom in the main island. In the end, no agreement was reached.7 China only formally acknowledged Japanese sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands under the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, as part of the settlement of the Sino-Japanese War, which also ceded Taiwan to Japan.

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Belatedly incorporated within the modern Japanese state, Okinawans were pressed to follow a path of self-negation, casting aside their distinctive language and culture, their “Okinawan-ness,” in order to become “Japanese.” Less than seven decades after being launched on this process of identity change, in 1945 Okinawa was to be sacrificed in order to stave off attack on the “mainland” and preserve the emperor system in the cataclysmic Battle of Okinawa, when more than 120,000 Okinawans, between one-quarter and one-third of the population, died. These months, March to June 1945, marked the islands as nothing before or since has.
From the onset of the Battle of Okinawa in late March 1945, Okinawa and the surrounding (Nansei) islands were severed from Japan by order of the commander of the US Pacific Fleet, Admiral C. W. Nimitz. Months later, the thirtieth parallel was defined as the dividing line. Separated from Japan, when the catastrophe of the war ended, Okinawa was transformed into the American “Keystone of the Pacific.” The Japanese emperor himself, Hirohito (1901–1989), gave his blessing to the separation and long-term military occupation. In an arrangement thus blessed at the highest level, mainland Japan became a constitutional “peace state” and Okinawa a “war state,” both tied symbiotically within the US Pacific and Asian Cold War empire of bases. In mainland Japan, the US occupation ended in 1952; in Amami, the most northerly of the major Ryukyu Islands in December of the following year; but in Okinawa itself and its adjacent islands, and in Miyako and Yaeyama Islands, US occupation lasted until 1972.

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1832 Ryukyu mission to Edo

Perry’s ships in Naha, Ryukyus in 1853

As the islands reverted from direct American military control to Japanese administration, the curtain rose over a different kind of “theater state.” Nothing on stage was quite what it seemed. First, the reversion was not so much a “handing back,” as implied by the words, but actually a “purchase.” Second, the “return” was a “nonreturn” since the US military continued to occupy and enjoy free use of much of the most fertile agricultural lands and to control the seas and skies. And third, following this strange transaction in which roles of buyer and seller were reversed, Japan adopted as national policy the retention of a
substantial US military presence in Okinawa. To prevent any significant reduction of US forces ever taking place, it began to pay a sum that steadily increased over the years.

Okinawans had sought a reversion that would release them from the parameters of force, return their most fertile lands, and restore something of their ancient ideal of demilitarized, peaceful islands. The 1972 terms thus disappointed and angered many. On the actual day of the reversion ceremony, none of Okinawa’s seven recently elected members of the National Diet attended the Tokyo ceremony, and in Naha far more gathered in Yogi Park to protest the terms of reversion than attended the official ceremony. For them, May 15 was a day of humiliation.

The formal documents and instruments of power were therefore as deceptive and misleading as the Ryukyu expressions of tribute fealty to China and Japan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Post-1972 Okinawa performed Japanese sovereignty, constitutional pacifism, prefectural self-government, and regional autonomy while in reality sovereignty was only partially returned. The US-Japan security treaty continued to serve as Okinawa’s key charter, in effect transcending and negating the constitution, and all important decisions were reserved to Tokyo and Washington. Despite nominal incorporation in the constitutional pacifist Japanese state, the American military colony of Okinawa became the militarized, dual-colonial dependency of Japan and the United States.
Two decades after “reversion,” the Cold War ended. The enemy against whom the base structure had been directed collapsed, but the base complex remained. The bases did not just remain, but to the bitter disappointment of Okinawans, both governments insisted they be reinforced. In the Gulf, Iraq, and Afghan wars, the United States called on Japan to play a stepped-up military role, and governments in Tokyo did their best to comply, with Okinawa remaining pivotal. As of 2012, nearly 20 percent of the total area of Okinawa Island is occupied by US bases. Okinawa prefecture, which is only 0.6 percent of the total area of Japan, hosts 75 percent of the US military bases in Japan. This means that the density of US bases in Okinawa is about five hundred times that of the mainland.

Okinawans who aspired to a reversion that would transform their islands from the militarism of war and occupation to the peace-centered values of the constitution of Japan found that the role assigned them in the post–Cold War order was to be that of bastion for the projection of force to maintain a US-dictated order from the Western Pacific to Central Asia. As after the reversion in 1972 and after the end of the Cold War in 1990, the military relationship with the United States, not the constitution, was to be Okinawa’s key charter.

When mass discontent at these arrangements threatened to boil over, especially following the rape of a schoolgirl by three US servicemen in 1995, a new round of “reversion” was promised; but again deception was the keynote. Where “reversion” in 1972 meant retention (and purchase), so in 1996 it came to mean substitution, modernization, and expansion of US military bases. Of the dense web of bases across the main island of Okinawa, the return of none was more urgently sought than that of Futenma Marine Air Station, which sat uncomfortably in the midst of the bustling city of Ginowan. While the two governments sought to contain the 1995 crisis by promising Futenma’s return, they did so only by attaching the condition that an alternative facility would first be constructed. They assumed it would be possible to impose such a solution on the people of Okinawa. As the
nature of the process was obfuscated by calling it reversion, so its scale too was concealed by calling the projected new base a “heliport” and by using the expression seiri shukushō (base reduction) to try to convey the impression that overall that was what was happening. For the most part, clientelism and the Japanese state priority to military ties to the United States could be ignored by people in mainland Japan because it impinged little on their everyday lives; but in Okinawa it weighed heavily and was felt intolerable. While protest elsewhere was scattered and easily contained, in Okinawa it grew steadily.

Today, as in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the old order is again breaking down. The global coalition of US-led, militarized, and alliance-supported neoliberal states confront uneasily the crumbling of an order that once they believed to be unshakable. For Okinawa, geopolitical and economic flux constitutes threat and opportunity: to be swallowed again into an exploited and manipulated status, or to assert a distinctive role as a historical actor. Alternately “in” and “out” of Japan over four centuries, and an integral member of the China-centered “tribute world” for a similar period before that (and partly coinciding with it), Okinawans sense the opportunity encased in the present crisis: to formulate a way beyond nation-states and military blocs and to reconstitute itself at the center of the process of evolution of an East Asian or Northeast Asian community, as a bridge linking Japan, China, Korea, and the Asia-Pacific.

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Okinawans tend to look back and see the four hundred years of their troubled premodern and modern history in terms of successive shobun, or “disposals,” by superior, external forces depriving them of their subjectivity, with militarism their peculiar bane—under Satsuma from 1609, the modern Japanese state from 1879 to 1945, direct US military rule from 1945 to 1972, and nominal Japanese rule after 1972. Though helpless to avoid or resist past disposals, from 1996 the balance shifted. Okinawa gradually has come to play a major, if rarely acknowledged, role in the regional and global system. It became a state of resistance.
In the centuries before 1609, Okinawa’s smallness of scale and its relative geographic isolation from major powers were its strengths. After 1609, in the Westphalian era of nation-states contesting and prevailing by force, they became its weaknesses. The Japanese nation-state (and its American patron) continue today to see Okinawa’s location as crucial for the defense of “Japan proper” and for the regional and global projection of military force to advance their interests. Okinawans know from their history that armies do not defend people and that security in real terms depends on the forging of close, friendly, and cooperative ties with neighbor countries. To attain such security, Okinawa’s “war preparation” functions designed to secure American power throughout the Asia-Pacific have to be converted into “peace-building” functions. Okinawa’s geographical location and multicultural history suit it well to serve in the future as a peace center, a Sino-Japanese bridge, and an obvious candidate to house some of the core institutions of a Northeast Asian concert of states, as an Asian Luxemburg or Brussels.

Gavan McCormack is emeritus professor at the Australian National University and author of a number of studies of modern and contemporary East Asia. He is a graduate of the University of Melbourne (law) and University of London (Chinese), with a PhD from University of London in 1974. He has been a regular visitor to Japan over half a century since 1962 and has been a visiting professor at a number of Japanese universities. His most recent book, Client State: Japan in the American Embrace (2007), was translated and published in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.

Satoko Oka Norimatsu is director of the Peace Philosophy Centre (www.peacephilosophy.com), based in Vancouver, Canada. She is a graduate of Keio University (BA in literature, 1990) and the University of British Columbia (MBA, 2001). After teaching at UBC Centre for Intercultural Communication, she established her peace education organization in 2007. She writes, speaks, and teaches on issues such as the US military bases in Okinawa and the WWII history and memory, and coordinates peace study tours, including an annual North American and Japanese students’ trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (Twitter: @PeacePhilosophy; Facebook: Peace Philosophy Centre)

Both authors are coordinators of the Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, which in 2008 was awarded the Inaugural Ikemiyagi Shui Prize (by the Okinawan daily Ryukyu Shimpō) for the dissemination of issues surrounding Okinawa to the world.

2. The Ryukyu resistance was overwhelmed by superior force, especially forearms. Gregory Smits, “Examining the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism,” Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus (September 13, 2010), http://japanfocus.org/-Gregory-Smits/3409. After the initial hostilities and surrender, resistance ceased, but one prominent member of the Ryukyu nobility, Jana Teido (a.k.a. Jana Uekata Rizan) (1549–1611), was summarily executed in Kagoshima because of his refusal to swear allegiance to the new Satsuma overlord.
History is, in many ways, a product of the present, meaning that contemporary myths and circumstances have a way of shaping how we understand the past. As Gregory Smits makes clear, this is no less true of contemporary Okinawa than it is elsewhere. Both at home and abroad, a widely held image of Okinawa presents it as possessing a timeless “peace culture” that contrasts with the warrior culture-infused history of mainland Japan. Smits demonstrates that this is a myth, and that the establishment of the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1879), which united what had previously been separate island kingdoms, involved military violence. He reviews the evolution of the military aspect of governance of the Ryukyu Kingdom period. From there, he discusses what he sees as the roots of the pacifism myth, which he claims began with nineteenth century accounts by Western visitors to Okinawa. Smits’ debunking of the peace culture myth, in turn, highlights the effects on Okinawan discourse of the more recent experiences of war and subordination that are discussed in subsequent articles in this collection.
Examining the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism
Gregory Smits

Introduction
This paper has four interrelated goals. First, I survey the contemporary myth of Okinawan pacifism. Second, I explain the structure, weapons, and select battles of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s military forces, mainly to make it clear that the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism is indeed a myth. Next, I discuss the nineteenth and early twentieth-century development of this myth. Finally, I examine the recent and contemporary situation and draw some brief conclusions about Okinawa or Ryukyu as an imaginary construct. My basic argument is that Ryukyu has long functioned as a blank screen upon which to project fantasies and desires.

The Contemporary Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism
Searching the Web using combinations of terms pairing “Okinawa,” or “Ryukyu” with words such as “peace,” “weapons,” and “rape” reveals a large number of sites, whose topics include the problem of U.S. military bases, the infamous 1995 rape of a twelve-year-old girl, Okinawan martial arts, other Okinawan arts and crafts, and Okinawan history. The content of these sites ranges widely in quality, and some include essays by scholars or others claiming familiarity with some aspect of Okinawan history or culture. Despite diverse content, what many of these sites have in common is the perpetuation of a romantic myth of Okinawan or Ryukyuan pacifism, typically in the service of a contemporary political agenda.

Active or passive acceptance of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism is common even among historians and other scholars. The usual approach is to juxtapose an alleged pacificist past with a militarized present. For example, Gavan McCormack characterizes the 400-year period of 1609-2009, in terms of two sets of contradictions, one of which is “between Okinawan deep-seated peace orientation and the imposed priority to war and subjection by force.” One way in which this alleged deep-seated orientation toward peace manifested itself was this:

According to one story, probably apocryphal, as King Sho Nei in 1609 chose non-resistance to the superior force of Satsuma, he uttered the words Nuchi du takara. Whether or not he ever spoke them, these words have come to be understood as a statement of Okinawan value. Sho Nei’s submission did not mean surrender. Facing physically superior opponents, submission was unavoidable, but conscience and value were not to be appropriated by force.¹

The ascription of this utterance, meaning “Life is a treasure,” to Shō Nei (r. 1587-1620) is but one item in a rich apocryphal lore that has developed about certain events in Okinawan history. McCormack, like many other writers, suggests that peacefulness is an engrained characteristic of Okinawa, now or in centuries past. Let us consider, however, a very different account of Shō Nei’s surrender to Satsuma.

In a recent book on the 1609 war between Satsuma and Ryukyu, Stephen Turnbull explains that the Satsuma invasion force of 3,000 soldiers (plus 5,000 sailors and laborers)
performing very well, but the fighting was not without problems for the invaders. One reason was that:

\[ \ldots \text{only the island of Okinoerabujima surrendered meekly. Resistance on Amami-Oshima, Tokunoshima and Okinawa itself was fierce, but it was the Shimazu superiority in firearms, and their readiness to use both fire and sword in a ruthless manner against soldiers and non-combatants alike, that finally decided the matter.}\]
[members of the kingdom’s highest governing body], Jana Teidō, Nago Ryōhō, and Urasoe Chōshi, all of whom had fought bravely at Naha and Shuri, went voluntarily as hostages . . .³

When the Satsuma fleet tried to enter Naha Harbor, the Ryukyuan defenders repulsed it. Had the Ryukyuan military forces been able to perform a similar feat vis-à-vis the overland attack on Shuri Castle, the king might well have been able to negotiate an end to the war more favorable to Ryukyu. The key point here is that neither the king, nor his generals, nor his military forces “chose non-resistance.” They resisted vigorously until the invaders had fought their way to the king’s front door. Only at that point did the treasure of life become apparent to the kingdom’s top leadership.

As is well known, approximately one-fifth of the land of contemporary Okinawa consists of military bases, whose presence is a source of noise, other forms of environmental degradation, a variety of dangers including sexual assaults by military personnel, and other problems. When deployed skillfully, the juxtaposition of a peaceful Ryukyuan past versus a militarized Okinawan present suggests that, in addition to the obvious problems associated with the military bases, their presence violates the very spirit or soul of the peaceful Okinawan people. Among other functions, such a rhetorical strategy thereby enhances the poignancy of the image of Okinawans as victims. It is also appealing in a more general way to Okinawans and others who yearn for a more peaceful world and look to the past for some indication that a state based on peaceful foundations is possible. Indeed, as we will see, it was precisely such a yearning on the part of some Europeans in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars that created the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism.

Given Okinawa’s recent past, it is understandable that many of the island’s residents might find comfort in the image of their home as the center of a pacifistic kingdom. More substantially, the legacy of a peaceful Ryukyu Kingdom might contain lessons from which all of humanity might benefit. McCormack, for example, concludes his survey of Okinawa’s past four centuries by stating that in “the early 21st century, humanity’s best hope is for a recovery of Okinawa’s Nuchi du takara values. Okinawa’s anti-base and anti environmental destruction struggles are central to the global struggle for peace and sustainability.”⁴ There are problems, however, with this approach. First, it relies on questionable assumptions that Okinawa’s people are and have been a singular entity in terms of culture and viewpoint and that conditions obtaining in the rather distant past (the Ryukyu Kingdom ended in 1879) necessarily apply—or presumably should apply—in the present. Next, it is simply wrong. The Ryukyu Kingdom was a normal state in that it was based ultimately on coercive force—as we will see in some detail. Some might wonder whether, even if Ryukyu was not a pacifist state, what is the harm in presenting it as such? My simple answer is that if we are indeed to achieve a recovery of humanity along the lines McCormack suggests, then we need to be realistic about humanity’s capacity for violence and the inherent roles that coercive power has historically played in human societies.

While there are many good arguments for eliminating or reducing the U.S. military presence on Okinawa, the rhetorical strategy of invoking contrast with an allegedly peaceful kingdom of centuries past is not only based on dubious assumptions about the normative force of history and the social and cultural coherency of “Okinawa” across time,
but it is simply incorrect. The Ryukyuan state, like all states, relied ultimately on coercive force—or the threat of it—to maintain order. This coercive force not only unified the island of Okinawa, but through the conquest of other islands, it created the Ryukyu Kingdom. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ryukyu functioned as a small-scale empire. In consolidating its empire and maintaining it, the Okinawan polity in Shuri sometimes clashed militarily with southward-expanding polities based in the province of Satsuma. To the south, pirates often attacked Ryukyuan or Chinese ships engaged in trade or diplomacy, and pirates even attacked the port of Naha on occasion. In short, the Ryukyu kingdom did not lack police and military forces or occasions to use them.

Military Affairs in the Ryukyu Kingdom

Soon after military force placed Okinawa under one ruler in 1429, the conquest of the other Ryukyu Islands began. Let us consider the example of Amami-Ōshima and nearby Kikaijima. In 1450 (1451 in some accounts), six shipwrecked Koreans drifted to Gajashima, a small island in the Satsunan chain. They reported that the island was half under the control of Satsuma and half under the control of Okinawa. Later, four of these Koreans were taken to Sasari at the northern end of Amami-Ōshima. The local Okinawan military commander sent the Koreans on to Shuri, where they met with the king and other officials. From their account, we know that Amami-Ōshima was under Okinawan military control by that time but that the fight to control Kikaijima was still in progress. Several Korean accounts point to the 1440s as the time Okinawan forces conquered Amami-Ōshima. On nearby Kikaijima, residents resisted the Okinawan invaders vigorously, finally causing King Shō Toku personally to lead an invasion of the island in 1466.

The observations of the Koreans in 1450 are significant in several respects. Notice, for example, that at this time Okinawans controlled half of Gajashima, an island very close to Satsuma. The many islands between Satsuma and Okinawa served as potential objects of conflict between a northward-expanding Ryukyu Kingdom and the southward-expanding ambitions of some of the warlords who controlled Satsuma. Gajashima seems to have been the all-time northernmost limit of Shuri’s military control. The Chikama family, retainers of the Hōjō, controlled Satsuma at the turn of the fourteenth century, and they forged a network of trade routes throughout the northern Ryukyu Islands. In 1493, a force from Satsuma invaded Amami-Ōshima and clashed with an army under Shuri’s command. In a bloody battle, the Ryukyuans drove off the Satsuma invaders. In 1537, King Shō Shin (r. 1477-1527), often credited by modern myth-makers with creating the “peaceful kingdom” by confiscating and locking up all weapons, led an invasion force of Okinawan soldiers to quell a rebellious Amami-Ōshima. The Kyūyō, an official history, states that Shō Sei dispatched soldiers to Ōshima in 1538. Some accounts record King Shō Gen as leading an invasion of Amami-Ōshima in 1571, though there is some debate among historians regarding the veracity of the 1571 campaign. Invasions of Miyako, Yaeyama, and other islands also took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In short, the Ryukyu Kingdom became a small-scale empire, created, expanded, and sustained by the use of military force.

From the Koreans who drifted to Gajashima in 1450 we know that Ryukyuan firearms (hand cannon) at this time were of advanced design, “similar to those of our own country.”
The Koreans reported that they studied these weapons with the aid of a royal official charged with the oversight of firearms. Such firearms almost certainly came from China. Ming court records include a 1452 decree by the Board of Justice forbidding the practice by residents of the Fujian coast of conveying military hardware to Ryukyuans in private trade deals. The inhabitants of coastal areas of Fujian often stockpiled these weapons to repel wakō pirate attacks.7

Other shipwrecked military affairs in and detail in a 1462 account. perimeter of the castle duty, with a member of appointed to train and conscripts. The basic unit man group, several of When the king ventured contingent of mounted him. Within the castle, in five-day rotations forces and made Outside of Shuri, a local stone fortress in each of Korean account did not these fortresses, but of them in addition to

Koreans described around Shuri castle in The soldiers guarding the served yearly tours of the royal family oversee each year’s new of the army was a 100-whom guarded the castle. out, a 300-man soldiers accompanied about 100 people serving administered the military logistical arrangements. warlord administered a the nearby districts. The specify the number of other sources list sixteen Shuri.8

A Ming-vintage Chinese artillery piece (bottom) called a futsurōki in Japanese. Ryukyu was an early adopter of such weapons during fifteenth century.
This early system of military organization was almost certainly the direct predecessor of the hiki system established by Shō Shin, a pivotal monarch in Ryukyuan history. Throughout his long reign, he strove, with considerable success, to strengthen the power of the king vis-à-vis the hereditary warlords (aji), to enhance the ideological and symbolic authority of the king, and to build a centralized, efficient military system. It is therefore ironic that Shō Shin figures prominently in one strand of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism: the story of karate.

Because the king confiscated weapons and forbade their use, the basic story line goes, Okinawans became adept at fighting with their empty hands or using farm implements as weapons. Modern myth making notwithstanding, Shō Shin pursued two basic strategies with respect to military affairs. On the one hand, he sought to place all Ryukyuan military power under direct royal command. On the other, he sought to strengthen Ryukyu’s military by implementing a more efficient organization and improved infrastructure.

Shō Shin required all local warlords to reside in Shuri, bestowing great social prestige on them while eliminating their military power. To fill the local power gap thus created, the king implemented the so-called magiri-shima system. “Magiri” were local administrative districts, and the term “shima” refers to villages within the districts (probably relying on the metaphor of villages as “islands” within districts). Shō Shin and his successors appointed non-warlord officials to oversee the districts, and the former warlords involved themselves with the aristocratic society of the capital and central government politics. Significantly, references to local military forces in monuments erected between 1522 and 1554 used the term “magiri gun” (district forces) instead of aji gun (warlord forces). We do not know the details of the composition of these forces, but they were all under Shuri’s direct command by the end of Shō Shin’s reign.

The hiki system was the core of Shō Shin’s new military organization. Perhaps the easiest way to grasp the logic of this arrangement is to think of “hiki” rather literally as meaning “to pull together.” Each hiki pulled together various officials and military forces into networks capable of dealing with emergencies. The hiki combined in one organization both military and police functions, including guard duty, administration of government, and administration of trade. Ryukyuan ships were the governing metaphor of the hiki. The hiki were led by officials with the title sedo (O. shiido), a variant of sentō, ship’s captain.
The names of the *hiki* all ended with –*tomi*, which was also the suffix for the names of large ships (like –*maru* for Japanese vessels). This terminology is indicative of the central importance of oceanic trade, a royal monopoly, for Ryukyu's prosperity. Takara Kurayoshi has characterized the *hiki* as “overland ships” (*chijō no kaisen*) and ocean-going vessels as “floating *hiki*” (*umi ni ukanda hiki*). Not surprisingly, the *hiki* also provided shipboard military forces for Ryukyuan trade vessels, all of which were armed from 1421 onward. The *hiki* were grouped into three watches (*ban*), each of which contained four *hiki*. It is likely that the heads of these three watches evolved into the Sanshikan (O. Yoasutabe), the highest organ of government in Ryukyu from the sixteenth century until the end of the kingdom.\(^{11}\) In modern military terminology, one might characterize the *hiki* as rapid deployment forces.

In conjunction with these networks of rapid deployment forces, Shō Shin sought to strengthen the underlying infrastructure of the military, a policy continued by his immediate successors. A famous 1509 monument inscription at Urasoe tells of the king's storing weapons there to reduce the need to obtain them from outlying areas. It is this inscription that is typically cited in connection with claims that Ryukyu became a society without weapons because of Shō Shin’s policies. The king also walled in the northern face of Shuri Castle and in 1522 built a road for military use between Shuri and Naha. In 1546, Shō Sei extended the network of defensive walls around Shuri Castle and constructed Yarazamori Fortress to defend the entrance into Naha Harbor. Shō Shin also established an official to oversee artillery deployment and technology.\(^{12}\) As we will see, the combination of the Yarazamori Fortress and effective cannon served the kingdom very well when an invasion force from Satsuma attempted to enter Naha Harbor in 1609. It also helped repel major attacks by pirates in 1556 and 1606.
By the middle of the sixteenth century, Ryukyu’s military had reached its full development, and Figure 4 illustrates its basic organization. One general point reflected in this diagram is that Shō Shin designed his military reforms in part to focus the kingdom’s resources on guarding the central organs of state, namely the port of Naha and Shuri Castle. A network of fortresses and roads throughout the Shuri-Naha area supported this military organization. Yarazamori Fortress and Mie Fortress were on opposite sides of the narrow entrance to Naha Harbor. An iron chain boom could be drawn between the two castles to close off the entrance to ships. Large-bore artillery pieces were concentrated in this area as well.
Iō Fortress, nearby but further into the harbor, functioned as the main arsenal, distributing weapons to the hiki soldiers as they assembled at their defensive positions. Tomi Fortress, deep inside the harbor, was the command and control center. The Pearl Road, built explicitly for military purposes, connected these fortresses to each other and to Shuri Castle.  

In terms of the size of Ryukyuan armies, documents connected with Okinawan invasions of other Ryukyu Islands, mobilizations to defend against pirates, and the mobilization to defend against the Satsuma invasion of 1609 indicate a range of between 1000 and 3000 soldiers, with naval flotillas ranging in size from 46 to 100 ships. Ryukyu manufactured some of its own weapons and acquired others from China and Japan. There is abundant evidence that Ryukyuans traded in weapons between these places, most commonly bringing Japanese swords to Ming China, where they were in great demand. Ryukyuan swords and bows were of effective design. Small-bore personal firearms, however, while abundant, were not on a par with large-bore artillery pieces (shot with a diameter of 7-9 cm was most common). The hiki in Okinawa were able to muster an army of about 3,000 soldiers on relatively short notice.
Satsuma’s muskets. Superior muskets, and the concentration of Ryukyuan defense resources in the port of Naha contributed to the kingdom’s eventual defeat, as did the battle-hardened quality of the Satsuma invaders.

Although Ryukyu’s defeat by Satsuma is well known, there are surprisingly few details on battle statistics. We do know, however, that Satsuma’s attempt to enter Naha Harbor was a failure. The 3,000 defenders, the two castles, the boom across the harbor, and the Ryukyuan artillery inflicted damage on the Satsuma forces and caused them to retreat. Although the Naha port defenses were effective, the overland approaches to Shuri Castle were not well defended. After a Satsuma force broke through Ryukyuan defenses at Urasoe, it quickly surrounded Shuri Castle, cutting it off from the vast defense network that extended around Naha Harbor.

After 1609, Ryukyu came under Satsuma’s domination. The new political order undoubtedly resulted in changes to the kingdom’s military affairs, but many details of this period await further research. Overall, however, it is important to stress that post 1609 Ryukyu was not without armed military and police forces. Pirate attacks on Ryukyuan shipping remained a common problem, and Satsuma occasionally complained that Ryukyuan sailors did not defend their ships vigorously enough (Satsuma typically put up most of the capital for Ryukyu’s tribute trade after 1609). Ryukyuan ships sailing to China continued to be armed for their voyages and to need those arms. Seventeenth-century bureaucratic reforms reduced the status of the hiki but did not eliminate them. One document points out that in response to the appearance of a foreign ship at Yaeyama in 1640, “soldiers from Satsuma and several hundred Ryukyuan soldiers” were dispatched.

After 1609, Ryukyu’s tributary relations with China became crucially important for the kingdom’s political autonomy. Ryukyu’s greatest military challenge, therefore, was to ensure that tribute relations and trade took place without incident. Numerous accounts of Ryukyuan tribute ships battling pirates appear in the Kyūyō, an official history. An entry for 1672 describes Ryukyuan tribute ships surrounded by pirates who attacked with flaming arrows. After a “bloody battle,” the Ryukyuan ships broke through the ring of pirate boats, at a cost of six sailors killed and twenty-four wounded. In another incident during the reign of Shō On (r. 1795–1803), two Ryukyuan ships on their way to China fought a pitched overnight battle with three pirate ships. The Ryukyuan crew brandished weapons (heiki) and used “a new type of cannon” (ifu no teppō) in their defense, which was ultimately successful—at least according to the official version of events. Apparently, these same ships were attacked again near Fujian, and the Kyūyō explains that the Ryukyuans manned their battle stations and defended themselves with cannon and pikes. The pirates sent out smaller boats that surrounded the tribute ships, and the battle took many twists and turns before the damaged Ryukyuan ships were able to enter Fujian.

The importance of trade and diplomacy for the kingdom’s prosperity both before and after 1609 required it to maintain naval forces capable of repelling the pirate attacks that were endemic in the South China seas. Moreover, the post-1609 Ryukyu state sometimes wielded coercive force vis-à-vis internal dissenters. For example in 1632, King Shō Hō punished a number of allegedly derelict officials who oversaw the China trade by banishment to remote islands. One was even sentenced to death, but Satsuma intervened to
reduce that sentence to banishment.\textsuperscript{24} Other well-known cases include the execution of Heshikiya Chōbin, Tomoyose Anjō, and fifteen of their supporters in 1734, following a failed bid to topple Sai On's (1682-1761) administration, and the severe punishment of some prominent residents of Kumemura who protested the 1802 change in how Ryukyuan students sent to Beijing were selected (the \textit{kanshō sodō}). In short, even after 1609, Ryukyu was a normal country, and this normalcy included, for better or worse, state deployment of coercive force for political and economic ends.

**Origins and Development of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism**

One general point to bear in mind regarding the image of Ryukyu as a pacifist kingdom is that by the nineteenth century Ryukyuan officials had become extremely adept at manipulating the kingdom's image vis-à-vis outsiders. The most important group of outsiders was Chinese investiture envoys (\textit{sakuhōshi}).\textsuperscript{25} Let us consider the case of vice-envoy Li Dingyuan in 1800. In \textit{Shi Ryūkyū ki}, Li's detailed record of his stay in Ryukyu, he described with much enthusiasm the plot of the \textit{kumiodori} play \textit{Kōkō no maki} (Tale of filial piety) and concluded with an exclamation that heaven greatly rewards those who give their lives for filial piety.\textsuperscript{26} During the eighteenth century, Ryukyuan officials began the practice of entertaining Chinese envoys with \textit{kumiodori} designed to impress upon them the image of a refined and virtuous kingdom.\textit{Kōkō no maki}, based on a legend from the time of King Gihon (r. 1249-1259), features a daughter who offers her life for the good of society and her impoverished mother, only to be saved by miraculous cosmic intervention. She ends up marrying the king's son. The play was first shown to Chinese envoys in 1756.

In Li's case, just before his departure, royal envoys unexpectedly showed up with fans, incense, and other gifts. It was the birthday of his mother in China, but Li had not told anyone in Ryukyu about it. Ryukyuan officials had done their research well, and Li was most impressed by this display of filial consciousness on their part.\textsuperscript{27} My point in mentioning Li's experience in Ryukyu is simply to emphasize the skill with which Ryukyuan officials worked to portray positive images to foreign visitors. In classic Confucian values, a state governed by virtue would have little or no need for coercive force. Ryukyuan presented this same general image to European visitors as well as Chinese.

Starting in the early nineteenth century, European ships made their way to Naha with increasing frequency. These visits produced a variety of reports about the inhabitants of Okinawa and other Ryukyu Islands, some of which were published and reached an audience of armchair travelers. The relative obscurity of Ryukyu added to its exotic appeal in such contexts. According to a summary of these accounts by George H. Kerr, “The visitor was invariably struck by the absence of arms or incidents of violence, by the unfailing courtesy and friendliness of all classes, by the intelligence of the gentry, and by the absence of thievery among the common people.”\textsuperscript{28} Kerr's general history of Ryukyu, the only such work available in English, quotes these European writings at great length, without any serious critique of their contents. Because he did not read Japanese, Kerr depended on assistants to translate or summarize Japanese materials into English. His book, though well written and intelligent, did not reflect the state of Japanese or Ryukyuan scholarship on Ryukyu circa the 1950s. The \textit{hiki} system, for example, a foundational institution in premodern Ryukyu, receives no mention even though Iha Fuyū had already published an
analysis on this topic some two decades earlier. In short, Kerr seems to have had no knowledge of Ryukyuan military affairs and took the nineteenth-century European reports of a pacifist society at face value. I make these points not to criticize Kerr, who did a superb job given the limitations of his circumstances. His book, however, has been and continues to be, a prominent vehicle for perpetuating the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism.

A major development of myth of Ryukyu pacifism came from the visit to Naha in 1816 of two British ships, the Lyra and Alceste. The ships were on a mission to survey parts of the Korean coast and the Ryukyu Islands, and they stayed at Naha from September 15 through October 27. Several members of the crew noted their observations of Okinawa, but Basil Hall, captain of the Lyra, and John M’Leod, physician on board the Alceste wrote lengthy accounts that were later published and widely read. These accounts gushed with praise over the kindness, gentleness, and intelligence of the Okinawans, whose behavior compared especially well with the alleged boorishness and arrogance of “the Chinese.” According to Hall and M’Leod, Okinawa was a land of peace and serenity. Its residents bore no weapons and its people committed no crimes. According to Hall: “We never saw any punishment inflicted at Loochoo; a tap with a fan, or an angry look, was the severest chastisement ever resorted to, as far as we could discover.”

It is perfectly likely that Hall’s account is accurate as far as it goes. Why would Hall and the other crew members, whose movements were restricted to a small area, ever have had occasion to observe police and judicial activities during their short stay? Obviously, Hall was unaware of the kingdom’s law court, the hirajo or with the Ryukyu’s two detailed law codes. Likewise, he was unaware of the offenders against these laws, who had been arrested, tortured, fined, exiled, had their property confiscated, or faced the death penalty. It is hardly surprising that the accounts of Hall and M’Leod describing an idyllic Oriental land of peace and tranquility, free of the scourges of war, weapons and animosity, would have appealed to Europeans in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Interestingly, Hall discussed Okinawa with Napoleon himself when the Lyra put in at St. Helena, and reported in his account that:

Several circumstances . . . respecting the Loo-Choo people surprised even him a good deal; and I had the satisfaction of seeing him more than once completely perplexed, and unable to account for the phenomena I related. Nothing struck him so much as their having no arms. “Point d’armes!” he exclaimed; . . . “Mais, sans armes, comment se bat-on?”

I could only reply, that as far as we had been able to discover, they had never had any war, but remained in a state of internal and external peace. “No wars!” cried he, with a scornful and incredulous expression, as if the existence of any people under the sun without wars was a monstrous anomaly.

One striking thing about this passage is the implication of superior moral virtue for those who hold to a belief in Ryukyuan pacifism, in contrast to a rogue Napoleon who scoffed at it. In any case, given the degree of ignorance of Ryukyu and other parts of East Asia that prevailed in 1816, it is conceivable that even thoughtful or worldly people might have
believed Hall’s tale, though Napoleon did not. Certainly many of them would have wanted
to believe in a country without weapons. Similarly, after experiencing the harrowing Battle
of Okinawa in 1945 and decades of U.S. occupation thereafter, many contemporary
Okinawans would surely find the idea appealing.

At the end of the nineteenth century Basil Hall Chamberlain, a relative of Captain Hall and
noted authority on Japan, visited Okinawa Prefecture briefly and published a lengthy
analysis in The Geographic Journal. His account vigorously endorsed the myth of Ryukyuan
pacifism. Part of Chamberlain’s account of Ryukyuan history reads:

In some important respects the country really deserved the title bestowed upon it
by a Chinese emperor in 1579, and is still proudly inscribed on the gate of its capital
city, the title of “The Land of Propriety.” There were no lethal weapons in Luchu, no
feudal factions, few if any crimes of violence… Confucius’ ideal was carried out—a
government purely civil, at once absolute and patriarchal, resting not on any armed
force, but on the theory that subjects owe unqualified obedience to their rulers…32

Here, of course, Chamberlain takes the descriptions of Hall and M’Leod and explains them
in terms of classical Confucian values. In Chamberlain’s version, Ryukyu was not only a rare
or unique example of a society without war, weapons or aggression, but also a rare or
unique instance of a Confucian paradise.

Later in his account, Chamberlain restates the matter in terms of the prevailing tenets of
racial science. After discussing the physical qualities of Ryukyuans in some detail and
comparing them with the qualities of Japanese, Chamberlain states:

The most prominent race-characteristic of the Luchuans is not a physical, but a
moral one. It is their gentleness of spirit, their yielding and submissive disposition,
their hospitality and kindness, their aversion to violence and crime. Every visitor
has come away with the same favourable impression—Captain Broughton, whom
they treated so hospitably on the occasion of his shipwreck in 1797; Captain Basil
Hall, Dr McLeod, Dr, Guillemard—even the missionaries, poor as was their success,
and all the Japanese. For myself, I met with nothing but kindness from high and low
alike.33

Today’s advocates of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism similarly tend to speak of “the”
Okinawans as if they are and were a singular entity. Instead of relying on crude notions of
racial characteristics, of course, the contemporary preference is to rely on a romantic
version of history.

The famous scholar of Ryukyu Iha Fuyū (1876-1947) is the final link between more recent
conveyors of the pacifist myth like Kerr, Lebra, and Ōta and the original nineteenth century
European myth-makers. Iha is a more ambivalent figure in this respect because some of his
writing does acknowledge Ryukyu’s military past. For example, in the 1930s he analyzed
accounts of military affairs in the Omoro sōshi, discussing weapons, defense works, the
military character of the hiki, and related topics.34 Elsewhere, however, Iha argued that Shō
Shin enforced a policy of pacifism (hisen shugi) by confiscating weapons and prohibiting
their use. He did acknowledge, though, that these moves were also aimed at suppressing
internal rebellions and defending against pirates. As Uezato points out, in part owing to an
imprecise conception of key concepts such as “defense” or “pacifism” Iha’s exact stance is hard to discern.35

Conclusion

Among scholars of Ryukyuan history in the early twentieth century, there were explicit critics of the notion of a pacifist Ryukyu kingdom. Yokoyama Shigeru, for example, vigorously criticized Basil Hall’s assertion of a land without weapons. Among postwar scholars, Nakahara Zenchū criticized Iha’s portrayal of a pacifist Shō Shin, arguing that Shō Shin’s policies were moves intended to strengthen the kingdom’s military capabilities. Nakahara also argued that it was not the case that the Shimazu confiscated the kingdom’s weapons after 1609. In recent decades, scholars such as Takara Kurayoshi, Maehira Fusaaki, Teruya Masayoshi, Tomiyama Kazuyuki, and Uezato Takashi have confirmed and further developed the arguments of Yokoyama and Nakahara, shedding much light on the details of Ryukyuan military organization, equipment, and tactics.36

Abundant evidence of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s military and police structures and capabilities is available for anyone who cares to take a close look the academic literature. A glance at the headlines of the entries in the Kyūyō should be sufficient to dispel the notion that Ryukyu was a land without weapons, crime or conflict.

Why, then, does the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism find continue to find such fertile ground on which to thrive? There is no single or simple answer. Certain habits of thought that assume enduring qualities among groups of people over time facilitate uncritical extrapolating the prevailing anti-base, anti-military sentiment in Okinawa backward in time. The basic institutions, issues and events of Ryukyuan history prior to 1879 are not widely known among non-specialists. This situation means that relatively few people are able or willing to call the myth into question. More generally a lack of detailed knowledge of Ryukyuan history enables Ryukyu to function as a blank screen onto which contemporary people can project desires such as de-militarization. Perhaps the most important contributing factor is the trauma of Okinawa’s recent past. Although not necessarily accurate across large spans of time, McCormack’s characterization of Okinawa as a place that has suffered the imposition of war and violence upon it by outside forces is surely accurate from 1879 to the present. A large percentage of Okinawans yearn for a de-militarization of their island, and it is only natural to project this image onto past ages to provide inspiration and hope for the future.

If Orientalism is the process of Europeans projecting desires or fantasies onto distant “eastern” lands, then the nineteenth-century version of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism might accurately be regarded as a variety of Orientalism, albeit one abetted by Ryukyuan officials and researchers. Indeed, all parties were involved in conjuring up a Ryukyu that suited their purposes. The modern and contemporary manifestations of the myth now include a substantial number of residents of Okinawa among its proponents. The details of the Ryukyuan past are sufficiently remote that Ryukyu’s history can be molded to serve contemporary agendas with relative ease. Obviously, interpreting the past is always a contentious issue, and many aspects of Okinawa and Ryukyuan history remain the subject of scholarly debate and disagreement. That said, however, the effacing of all forms of coercive activity on the part of Ryukyuans throughout history goes beyond the usual
boundaries of academic debate. It is a remarkable propaganda accomplishment, one first seriously attempted by eighteenth-century Ryukyuan officials.

It is understandable, of course, that thoughtful people would be distressed by the propensity of humans to behave badly. The myth of Ryukyuan pacifism undoubtedly resonates with a deep and widespread desire among many of us to believe that human nature is potentially good enough that societies free of coercive force are possible, while also adding poignancy to the narrative of modern Okinawan suffering. This psychological mix is powerful enough to anesthetize the critical thinking function that should be part of any scholarly or journalistic endeavor. I am not convinced, however, that a fairy tale version of Ryukyuan history has much to offer by way of practical benefits. Insofar as the U.S. military presence has been a corrosive force in Okinawan society, then the relevant arguments for eliminating or correcting it should be made in the context of the present and recent past without recourse to an impossible version of history.

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Notes


2 For a thorough account the Ryukyu-Satsuma war, see Stephen Turnbull, The Samurai Capture a King: Okinawa 1609 (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2009). Despite being written for non-specialists, this book is based on a close reading of the relevant primary sources. The Ryukyuan military was an early adopter of firearms, possessing them prior to 1450. By 1609, however, Ryukyuan firearms, which were of Chinese design, were inferior to the European-style guns of the invaders.

3 Turnbull, The Samurai Capture a King, p. 45.


5 Ishigami, “Amami,” pp. 3-4, 9; and Uezato Takashi, “Ko-Ryūkyū no gunta to sono rekishiteki tenkai,” Ryūkyū Ajia shakai bunka kenkyūkai kiyō, no. 5 (October, 2002), pp. 113-114.
Regardless of the details, it seems clear that Amami-Ōshima resented Shuri’s control and often resisted with violence.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this narrative is Nagamine Shoshin, “Okinawan Karate and World Peace,” found at many web sites such as [this](as of 11-7-2009). Although rare, some martial arts writers acknowledge a more realistic interpretation of Shō Shin’s actions. For example: “Although it is documented that King Shoshin ordered his provincial lords, or aji, to live near his castle in Shuri, many historians no longer believe that he totally disarmed his ruling class. Although a famous stone monument, the Momo Urasoe Ran Kan No Mei, which is inscribed with the highlights of King Shoshin’s reign, tells of the King seizing the aji’s swords and how he amassed a supply of weapons in a warehouse near Shuri castle, some Okinawan historians believe that King Shoshin was actually building an armory to protect his ports and prepare for any potential invasion by wako, or pirates, not that he was stripping the Okinawan samurai or the general population of their weaponry” (found [here](as of 3-21-2006)).

These events are well documented in any general history of Okinawa. Uezato explains their significance in the context of military affairs with great clarity. See “Guntai,” pp. 110-112.

For a detailed analysis of the hiki, see Takara Kurayoshi, Ryūkyū ōkoku no kōzō (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1987), pp. 103-119. See also Uezato, “Guntai,” p. 112, 118-119.

Uezato, “Guntai,” p. 113; and Uezato “Ryūkyū no kaki,” p. 78.


Uezato, “Guntai,” pp. 120-121; and Uezato, “Ryūkyū no kaki,” p. 84.


For example, in 1670 pirates connected with Ming loyalist forces captured a Ryukyuan ship, and Satsuma criticized the Ryukyuans as “cowards in the extreme.” See, Tomiyama Kazuyuki, Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004), p. 80.


Entry #464. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, Kyūyō, p. 211.


24 Tomiyama, Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken, pp. 176-7.

25 Satsuma maintained only a small direct presence in Ryukyu precisely because Ryukyu’s relationship with China was crucial both for Satsuma and Ryukyu. With Satsuma support, Ryukyu devoted considerable resources to maintaining a good image vis-à-vis Chinese officials.

26 Li Dingyuan, Shi Ryūkyū ki, Harada Nobuo, trans., ed. (Gensōsha, 1985), pp. 335-337.

27 Li, Shi Ryūkyū ki, pp. 407-408. See also Kakazu Takeshi, “Rikuyu engi: Tei Junsoku ga fukkokushi fukyuu” Ryūkyū shinpō, 4-24-1993 (#17 in the series Ryūkyū kanshi no tabi).


29 Kerr, Okinawa, p. 255. For extensive excerpts from the crew members of these two ships, see pp. 249-260.

30 There are many accounts of Ryukyuan judicial proceedings and law codes. One excellent source is Okinawa no hankachō, which details criminal cases before the Hirajo in the 1860s and 70s. One case, for example, involves the investigation into the actions of police officials who tortured a suspect excessively, thus causing his death. See Higa Shunchō and Sakihama Shūmei, eds., trans., Okinawa no hankachō (Tōyō bunko 41) (Heibonsha, 1965), pp. 85-94. See also “Satsuma-han shihaika no saibanken,” Chapter 3 of Tomiyama, Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken, pp. 170-197.

31 Kerr, Okinawa, p. 259.


36 For a concise summary of these arguments and a listing of the key essays, see Uezato, “Guntai,” pp. 105-106. In English the most comprehensive work is Turnbull, The Samurai Capture a King.
Shuri Castle’s Other Histories
Tze M. Loo
October 12, 2009
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Tze_M-Loo/3232

Like Smits’ article, the following piece by Tze M. Loo reveals a “forgotten” aspect of Okinawan history; in this case the post-1879 history behind what is contemporary Okinawa’s most iconic architectural structure --the reconstructed Shuri Castle that was completed in 1992. Shuri, which is currently the eastern portion of the city of Naha, was the capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom and Shuri Castle its seat of government. Given this background, it is not surprising that the reconstructed castle, a “must see” item on every visitor’s checklist, has come to symbolize Okinawa’s past as an “independent” kingdom and a culture distinct from that of the mainland. Most Okinawans know that the castle was destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 but are unfamiliar with or have “forgotten” the castle’s convoluted trajectory in the wake of Okinawa’s absorption into Japan in 1879. As Loo shows, in contrast to its current association with Ryukyuan independence and distinctiveness, in the years preceding World War II, Shuri Castle was systematically incorporated into the Japanese Empire’s hierarchy of national symbols and placed in the service of Japanese nationalism. In this way, the “other histories” of the castle that Loo outlines reflect the process of Okinawa’s assimilation into the Japanese Empire from 1879 to 1945 and the ambiguous, liminal status of Okinawa that was its result.
Shuri Castle’s Other History: Architecture and Empire in Okinawa

Tze M. Loo

The Ryûkyû Kingdom Festival (Ryûkyû ōchô matsuri), organized and sponsored by the Shuri Promotion Association (Shuri shinkôkai), is a fixture on Okinawa Prefecture’s cultural and tourist calendar.

This one-day festival is one part of the larger Shuri Castle Festival (Shurijô sai); together, they celebrate the grandeur of the Ryûkyû Kingdom and its court traditions as a pure cultural past for the prefecture. Of pivotal importance to these events is Shuri Castle itself. Not merely the stage on which festivities unfold, Shuri Castle – with its vermilion architecture epitomized by its main hall (seiden) and Shurei Gate (Shurei mon), and its high, imposing ishigaki stone walls – is cast as the very heart of Ryûkyûan culture. While this representation of the castle celebrates local culture, it is difficult to ignore the role it plays in Japan’s continuing colonization of Okinawa. By suggesting that Ryûkyûan culture not only exists, but flourishes within the framework of the Japanese nation state, this representation plays an important part in a narrative that obfuscates the rupture of
Japanese colonization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom and naturalizes Okinawa’s inclusion into the modern Japanese nation state.²

Nowhere is the assimilative nature of cultural valuation more stark than in the Japanese state’s 1925 designation of Shuri Castle’s main hall as a “national treasure” (kokuhō) of Japan. This designation is often lauded in the postwar as a sign of the Japanese state’s early recognition of the value of Ryūkyūan culture, but it also deftly transformed a marker of a prior independence into a marker of inclusion. The official text explaining the designation reads:

This is the main hall of the former Shuri Castle, and it is the Ryūkyū’s most important and largest piece of architecture ... The current building was built in the 14th year of Kyōhō (1730) and underwent substantial repairs in the 3rd year of Kōka (1837). It has a very large, multilayered hip-and-gabled roof, a step canopy (kōhai) in the front [and demonstrates] unique Ryūkyūan form and techniques. Even though its large pillars and the decorative feature (fun) of the bargeboard (karahafū) resemble Chinese style (kan shiki), the frog-leg strut (kaerumata) and dragon carvings below the step canopy’s bargeboard carries the trace (obi) of the style of our Momoyama period [and is] extremely novel artisanship.³

Assimilation is performed in several ways here. First, Shuri Castle’s history is told in terms of Japanese reign names, mapping the castle’s history onto a regime of Japanese temporality even though the Ryūkyū Kingdom at this time was, for all intents and purposes, an independent political entity. Second, while the designation recognizes the uniqueness of Ryūkyūan form and techniques and even acknowledges its resonance with continental styles, the text – in the final analysis – folds these features into a narrative of Japanese architectural history. By discovering in these Ryūkyūan/continental features the “trace” of “our Momoyama” style, the designation skillfully sublimates any Ryūkyūan uniqueness into a larger, encompassing, and original Japanese cultural universe, diffusing the critical potential in these markers of difference.

There was, however, another way in which this designation appropriated and assimilated Shuri Castle into the Japanese national imaginary. In order for Shuri Castle’s main hall to be designated a national treasure in 1925, it was converted into the worshipper’s hall of Okinawa Shrine. This completed the layout for Okinawa Shrine, and Shuri Castle spent the period 1925 to 1945 as “Okinawa Shrine,” a functioning node in the ideological universe of State Shinto, put into the service of the emperor-centered Japanese nation state. This transformation occurred in part because Japanese heritage preservation laws until 1932 stipulated that only Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple buildings could be designated “specially protected buildings” to receive state protection and funding as “national treasures.” The problem is that the argument that the castle’s conversion was necessary for its preservation was privileged, both at the time as well as in our present, such that Shuri Castle’s tenure as a Shinto shrine is overlooked and its significance downplayed. This article traces Shuri Castle’s other history, to tell the story of its transformation into Okinawa Shrine in order to reveal the nakedness of the violence of Japanese colonialism as it is embedded in Shuri Castle.

The Silence around Okinawa Shrine
People have generally expressed surprise when I’ve posed the question, “Did you know that Shuri Castle used to be Okinawa Shrine?” This is not entirely surprising considering that histories of the castle – including the castle’s “official history” as it is told at the Shurijō Castle Park – do not reference its past as Okinawa Shrine. What is curious, however, is that the castle’s history as Okinawa Shrine is not exactly the object of a concerted campaign of silencing and obfuscation, with references to it readily available in the historical record. For instance, in prewar official inventories of national treasures compiled by the Home Ministry (Naimushō) which list all designated buildings and objects, Shuri Castle’s main hall is listed as “the worshipper’s hall of Okinawa Shrine” (Okinawa jinja haiden). In a relatively recent compilation by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) of national treasures lost to war and disaster in the prewar period, the entry for Shuri Castle’s main hall, razed to the ground as a result of American bombardment, was similarly listed as the worshipper’s hall. Thus as far as one version of the Japanese state’s official record is concerned, “Shuri Castle” does not actually exist in the period between 1925 and 1945, replaced instead by “Okinawa Shrine.”

Two different treatments of a photograph in a recent volume about Okinawa demonstrate what is at stake. The photograph in question dates from the 1920s and shows Yamazaki Masatada, a medical professor from Kyushu in front of Okinawa Shrine’s main sanctuary (honden).

Yamazaki Masatada in front of Okinawa Shrine’s main sanctuary. From Nonomura Takeo, Natsukashiki Okinawa

In a comment on the photograph, Nonomura Takao writes:

Considering the situation at the time, there was no other method of rescue except for the main hall to take on the name of Okinawa Shrine’s worshipper’s hall, thereby receiving financial aid from the state in the form of a repair budget. This was a turnaround for a building that was destined to be demolished, and there was the great repair in the early Shōwa period. This ingenious plan (myōan) was thought up
Putting Okinawa at the Center

by Itō Chūta, and was seen to extraordinary success by Sakatani Ryōnoshin. [The castle] was saved as Okinawa Shrine. As the worshipper’s hall attached to the main sanctuary, Shuri Castle’s main hall sidestepped the big wave of the time.6

While all this is certainly true, this treatment deftly sublimates Shuri Castle’s becoming Okinawa Shrine into the larger aim of preserving the main hall and effectively dismisses the transformation of the castle into the shrine as a significant event in its own right. By privileging a narrative of preservation, the meaning of the Shuri Castle’s transformation into Okinawa Shrine is strait-jacketed into an argument in which the end (preservation) justifies the means.

The second treatment of this photo is in an essay discussing the role of old photographs in the restoration of Ryūkyūan architecture.7 While the author acknowledges that the photograph is one of the few which exist of the shrine, he notes that the photograph’s value lies in what it tells us of the area around the main sanctuary. He is interested in the information the photograph provides, but ignores the existence of the shrine itself. The castle’s tenure as a Shinto shrine is present, even acknowledged when it surfaces, and yet those who come into contact with it seem able to ignore its existence and its implications. What was the reality of Okinawa Shrine, and what were the conditions of its emergence?

**Shuri Castle in the early Meiji period**

Until the early 15th century, the Ryūkyū Kingdom was divided into three competing power blocks, Hokuza, Chūza, and Nanzan. In 1429, Shō Hashi completed the unification of the kingdom and established Chuzan’s hegemony over the other centers. The seat of his power was Shuri Castle, which remained the kingdom’s political and sacerdotal center until 1879. Even before unification, the Ryūkyū Kingdom was already part of the Sinocentric world order as the lords of Hokuza, Chūza, and Nanzan sought political legitimacy and trading rights from the Ming emperor. Upon achieving unification, Shō Hashi received the Chinese court’s investiture as the “King of Ryūkyū” and the kingdom’s submission to the Chinese empire (while maintaining political autonomy) became a dominant factor in Ryūkyūan life. The tribute relation was not only political, but was also economically profitable and transformed kingdom into a prosperous linchpin in an “intra-Asia trade system” (Ajia ikinai kōei ken).8 The kingdom subscribed to Chinese influence in other ways too as Chinese Confucianism became the dominant framework that governed political, social and ethical life.9

In 1609, Tokugawa Japan’s southernmost fief, Satsuma, invaded the Ryūkyū Kingdom as it sought to appropriate the profits from the kingdom’s lucrative tribute trade. Satsuma could not impose its rule explicitly because it had to allow the kingdom to maintain an appearance of independence in order for that trade with China to continue. This resulted in the period of “dual tribute” – where the Ryūkyū Kingdom paid tribute to both China and Japan – which effectively reduced the kingdom to poverty.10 Despite its “non-explicit” overlordship, Satsuma’s invasion marked the beginning of Japan’s gradual colonization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom which culminated the Meiji state’s formal annexation in the 1870s. The Meiji state began this process in 1872 by unilaterally converting the kingdom into “Ryūkyū domain” (Ryūkyū han) and making Shō Tai (the last Ryūkyū king) into the “domain king” (han ō). In 1879, in what was termed the Ryūkyū Dispensation (Ryūkyū shobun), Meiji
Japan annexed the Ryūkyū Kingdom, turning it into Japan’s southernmost prefecture, Okinawa.

The imposition of Japanese colonial rule meant the absorption of the kingdom into Japan’s administrative structure, a process which entailed the neutralization of the Ryūkyūan king as a symbol of independence and autonomy. When the Meiji state formally annexed the kingdom in 1879, it evicted Shō Tai from Shuri Castle and installed him as a member of the Japanese aristocracy in Tokyo. The seat of his power was not exempt from similarly radical change. Immediately after the annexation, the castle was converted into barracks for the Kumamoto Garrison (Kumamoto chiindai bunkentai heiei), to become what Uemura Hideaki has called “Ryūkyū/Okinawa’s first foreign military base” in 1876. It suffered much damage in this conversion as it was a process of displacement which broke existing meanings and replaced them with new significations in both the physical and symbolic registers. Maps of Shuri Castle from the 1880s demonstrate the symbolic violence of this displacement in stark terms. The visual force in an 1893 map of the garrison, for instance, lies in its demonstration of the garrison’s complete takeover and redefinition of the site where even the buildings that were not in use were labeled “empty” (aki) or left shaded in the stripes as the building under use.

Map of the Garrison. From Okinawa hontō torishirabe sho (1893)

This conversion of the castle’s space to new uses coincided with its destruction as a palace. During his visit in 1882, the traveler F.H.H. Guillemand noted that he thought that the main hall was “a holy of holies” but upon entering,

[a] more dismal sight could hardly have been imagined. We wandered through room after room, through corridors, reception halls, women’s apartments, through the servant’s quarters, through a perfect labyrinth of buildings, which were in such a state of indescribable dilapidation. The place could not have been inhabited for years. Every article of ornament had been removed; the paintings on the frieze – a favorite decoration with the Japanese and the Liu-kiuans have been torn down, or
were invisible from dust and age ... In all directions the woodwork had been torn away for firewood, and an occasional ray of light from above showed that the roof was in no better condition than the rest of the building. From these damp and dismal memorials of past Liu-kiuan greatness it was a relief to emerge on an open terrace on the summit of one of the great walls ...\(^{13}\)

For Guillemard, the castle, along with any greatness of civilization it marked, was a thing of the past. His observation that “the place could not have been inhabited for years” establishes the scale of the dilapidation, but also removes Shuri Castle even further from the present. The castle’s physical decline was tactile proof that the castle, and by extension, the Ryūkyū Kingdom itself, belonged to a different time, out of sync with the present of Meiji Japan. The castle became a double wound on the Okinawan landscape: its dilapidated presence reminded Okinawans that the Ryūkyū Kingdom was now a thing of the past, and that the eclipse of past greatness constituted the reality of the present.\(^{14}\)

Shuri Castle’s physical decline created the conditions that broke the monopoly of meanings as a royal palace and opened it to redefinition, demonstrated in the calls for the palace site to be returned to the prefecture and converted into a site for popular pleasure. With the garrison’s departure in 1896, Okinawans called for the return of the castle to local civilian use. In 1899, Shuri ward petitioned the central government that notions of social progress called for the development leisure facilities in Shuri Ward for local use and to attract visitors from other prefectures, but Okinawa Prefecture had not achieved this.\(^{15}\) The solution, they proposed, lay with the castle site, arguing that it would be regrettable if the castle site – “the beauty of the Ryūkyū Kingdom for several hundreds of years” – was lost due to the current policy of abandonment.\(^{16}\) The petition asked the government to give the castle site and its buildings to Shuri ward without cost. Tokyo denied this request. Shuri ward tried again a year later, but this time requested the sale of the buildings which the Home Ministry approved but only allowed the use of the land for a thirty-year period.\(^{17}\) In 1909, Shuri ward petitioned the central government for the sale of the land and succeeded.\(^{18}\) In this way, ownership of Shuri Castle and its land was returned to the prefecture thirty years after Shō Tai’s eviction. Unfortunately the prefecture’s poor finances prevented any plans from coming to fruition. The castle’s main hall was so dilapidated that substantial and expensive restoration work would have been necessary simply to guarantee its structural integrity. Before the prefecture could raise the money, plans were already being made for the castle’s site to be used as the precincts of Okinawa Shrine.

**Okinawa Shrine**

Okinawa Prefecture first proposed the establishment of a prefectural shrine in April 1910 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Meiji emperor’s ascension.\(^{19}\) The proposed shrine would install Minamoto no Tametomo, Shunten, and Shō Tai as its resident deities, selected because they were important historical figures (\textit{san dai ijin}) for Okinawa Prefecture who “made clear” (\textit{meiryō naru}) Okinawa’s close relationship with mainland Japan.\(^{20}\) However, the idea was abandoned because of the death of the Meiji emperor in 1912. The motion to establish a prefectural shrine resurfaced in 1914 and 1915, but was denied on both occasions. The 1914 proposal, which suggested establishing the prefectural shrine within the grounds of Naminoue Shrine, was rejected as “impossible,” while the
1915 proposal was rejected because the deities the prefecture proposed – Amamiko and Shinireku, both of which were mythical figures in Ryūkyūan folk beliefs – were not recognized as part of the Shinto pantheon. The Home Ministry approved the establishment of “Okinawa Shrine” in March 31, 1923 for reasons that remain unclear and Shuri Castle was chosen as the site because it had been the historical center of Okinawa’s politics and was intimately connected with the prefecture’s “cultural enlightenment.”

It is also possible that the Shuri Castle site was selected for financial reasons. The 1915 proposal budgeted 10,000 yen for developing a 3,443 tsubo site (approximately 2.8 acres) in Mawashi-chō, out of which 4,250 yen was slated for roads and other infrastructural costs. By contrast, the Shuri Castle site was largely available, even though part of it was being used by the Shuri First Primary School and Shuri Girls’ Craft School. Construction began in September 1923, and the shrine’s main sanctuary was constructed behind the castle’s main hall. Given its poor condition, the decision was made to demolish the castle’s main hall so that a new worshipper’s hall could be built on its site in order to complete the spatial layout of Okinawa Shrine.

It is at this moment on the brink of physical erasure that Shuri Castle’s fortunes turned, almost entirely by chance. Kamakura Yoshitarō, a teacher who had spent some time in Okinawa, was visiting with friends in Tokyo one day in early 1924 when he noticed a newspaper article reporting the main hall’s demolition. Kamakura recounts that he rushed immediately to see Itō Chūta, the eminent architect with whom he was acquainted. Itō had never seen the castle itself, but knew that it was an important building. Itō in turn called on the Home Ministry and succeeded in halting the demolition. Concerned with securing both permanent protection for the main hall as well as official funding for its repair, Itō set out with Kamakura in the summer of 1924 on a month-long study trip to Okinawa.

In his account of his role in saving the main hall, Itō makes special mention of the main hall’s dilapidated condition. He notes that Okinawan authorities were keen to repair the building, even though the impoverished prefecture could not afford such a project. Unable to bear the loss of this “enormous building with deep pedigree,” efforts to raise funds for the building’s repairs continued even as the castle’s inner courtyard was slated to be given over to the new Okinawa Shrine. Itō’s account stoked the drama of the moment:

... it was a large sum of money, and there was no way to acquire it. With flowing tears, there was the realization that there was nothing else that could be done except to abandon (migoroshi suru) the main hall.

From a photograph of the main hall, Itō said that he knew that it was a “representative masterpiece of Ryūkyūan architecture,” and after succeeding in halting the demolition and saving it from the “brink of death” (kyūshi ni isshō), Itō took it upon himself to see what he could do to further preserve the main hall. He writes,
I had to think of a concrete plan of how to save this almost dead (hinshi) patient. Before doing anything, there was the urgent task (kyūmu) of diagnosing the patient’s condition. One aspect of my research in Ryūkyū was this important mission.30

Itō’s assessment of his position was twofold: “Aside from welcoming me as a researcher of Ryūkyū, many Okinawan officials and civilians also welcomed me as the doctor (ishi) of Shuri Castle’s main hall.”31 Itō’s account conveys the urgency of his mission in which saving the castle took top priority, but his claim that he was welcomed by Okinawa officials and civilians adds an important dimension by implying the approval and support for his plans of Okinawans.

At the end of his study, Itō proposed that Shuri Castle’s main hall be used as the worshipper’s hall of Okinawa Shrine, thereby qualifying it for permanent state protection under the 1897 Old Shrines and Temples Preservation Act. The local newspaper carried an article with the headline: “Shuri Castle’s Preservation, The main hall becoming the worshipper’s hall of Okinawa Shrine through the Shrine and Temple Preservation Law after receiving recognition as a prefectural shrine and receiving the Home Ministry’s support is a good plan in Professor Itō’s opinion.”32 The article noted that this was the best way for the main hall to receive the repairs it badly needed, and thanks to “Professor Itō’s efforts (rō),” Okinawa’s famous site would now be preserved. A photograph of the repaired main hall testifies to the castle’s new doubled reality: two plaques hang at the entrance to the hall, mark it as both a “national treasure” and “worshipper’s hall”.

![Photograph of Shuri Castle's main hall]

[Description of image: A photograph of Shuri Castle's main hall with two plaques marking it as a national treasure and a worshipper's hall.]
Detail, Showing "kokuhō" plaque on left, and "haiden" plaque on right.

The significance of Okinawa Shrine

As Itō's commentary and the treatments of the photograph with Yamazaki that I began this essay with demonstrate, there is a strong desire to apprehend the moment of the castle’s main hall’s designation in terms of its preservation while ignoring its incorporation as part of Okinawa Shrine. Through the use of medical tropes and the drama of the situation, Itō successfully conveys that he was most concerned with the preservation the castle’s buildings. My intention is not to challenge this; Itō certainly had a deep and abiding love for buildings and spent his career committed to their preservation. However, to neglect the transformation of the main hall into the shrine’s worshipper’s hall surely misses the point at best. At worst, it marks the success of erasure in which the ideological machinations that enable Shuri Castle’s transformation into Okinawa Shrine are misrecognized as unimportant and regarded as irrelevant.33 To focus only on the preservation aspect of the 1925 designation echoes the constitutive logic in colonial power that seeks to obfuscate the arbitrariness and violence of its rule. Here, the violence of transforming Shuri Castle into Okinawa Shrine achieves the perfect cover behind the lofty goals of heritage preservation.

How then to read the moment of the 1925 designation, against the hegemonic desire to render it a triumph for heritage preservation, in order to recover Okinawa Shrine as a site of violence? The context of prewar State Shinto provides an important starting point. By becoming a Shinto shrine, Shuri Castle’s space was absorbed into the ideological universe of State Shinto and disciplined by its particular logic. Following the Council of State’s (Dajōkan) declaration of “the unity of government and rites” (saisei icchi) on March 13, 1869, the Meiji state promulgated a decree stating that Shinto shrines “constitute[d] the rites of the state” (jinja wa kokka no sōshi nari) on May 14, 1871.34 These measures defined Shinto as the national religion and established Shinto shrines as privileged spaces in the political life of the Japanese nation state. The role that the Grand Shrine of Ise played in the prewar era exemplifies the effect of this configuration: worshipping at the specific site of Ise Shrine was a mode of conduct for loyal Japanese imperial subjects to contribute to maintaining the health of the national polity.35

One of the most prolific theoreticians of the role of shrines in State Shinto and their relationship to Japanese national identity was none other than Itō Chūta, the “savior” of Shuri Castle’s main hall. Beginning with his involvement in the construction of Heian Shrine in Kyoto to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of transferring the capital to Kyoto, Itō designed and built a significant number of imperial Japan’s most important Shintō shrines.36 Professionally, Itō was the Home Ministry's special consultant for constructing Shintō shrines from 1898, leading Maruyama Shigeru to observe that Itō’s official position in the bureaucracy was a way in which architecture was placed in the service of the nation state.37 Itō developed his ideas about Shintō shrines and their role in State Shinto in many articles, regarding shrines as the physical representations of the link between the imperial house and the Japanese nation state. He argued that while Shinto bore some similarities with Chinese Taoism or Central Asian religions, Shinto shrines were uniquely “Japanese” because they were for the worship of the Japanese imperial house and its imperial
ancestors. Shinto shrines were, in other words, spaces that referenced the emperor and by extension, the imperial Japanese nation state.

Far from being simply a staging ground of Shinto, shrine buildings could channel individual emotion and feeling to focus on the worship of the imperial house. Itō considered “ideal” (risō) shrine architecture to fulfill two different aims. The first, material aim was functional: buildings and structures had to be easy to use in a practical sense. More importantly however, was shrine architecture’s second, spiritual dimension, which referred to their ability to manifest the spirit that repaid one’s ancestors for their gratitude, to return people’s hearts to the past, and to return to the fundamentals of the country. Itō’s ideas about the relationship of architecture and national identity, as well as his position on Shinto shrines as a specific site of Japanese national identity means that he was not a politically neutral actor when it came to Shinto shrines. Itō’s actions brought the central cultural symbol of the Ryūkyū Kingdom into State Shinto. This must in turn, at the very least, raise questions about Itō’s intentions in proposing the transformation of Shuri Castle’s main hall, and destabilize the comfortable narrative of salvation and preservation that Itō and others have cast the process as.

The Home Ministry regulated Shinto shrines strictly: not only who could establish a shrine and when, but also the very shape and content of shrine precincts. These regulations applied to the top-ranking national and government shrines as well as the prefectural and village shrines at the bottom of the shrine hierarchy. The Home Ministry listed seven structures that a shrine would have to include: the main sanctuary (honden), its surrounding fence, a torii, a worshipper’s hall (haiden), hall for food offerings (shinsenjo), temizuya, and shrine offices. These specifications constitute a set of rules by the Japanese state to govern the space of Shinto shrines. Each of the seven structures served a specific function and shrines without them were not recognized as shrines. The radical alteration to Shuri Castle’s space that resulted from its use as Okinawa Shrine is illustrated in a map titled “Old Shuri Castle” (Kyū Shurijō) which shows the castle’s original buildings overlaid with the new shrine’s buildings, including the seven structures that the Home Ministry deemed necessary.
Seen this way, it becomes clear that Shuri Castle's transformation into a Shinto shrine was not simply about the transformation of its physical space, but rather the transposition of the castle into a spatial economy centered on the Japanese nation state.

This new configuration of space imposed a particular regime of bodily practices that regulated the conduct of those who entered it.

The main hall as Okinawa Shrine's worshipper's hall. From Shashinshu Okinawa
A torii at the northwest corner of the courtyard demarcated the shrine’s precincts, a line in the sand that marked the beginning of sacred space. In the courtyard, there was a small structure on the left, stone lanterns at the bottom of the stairs, an offering box at the entrance to the hall, and a braided rope above it. The small structure is the temizuya, where one washed one’s hands before approaching the worshipper’s hall. Going up the stairs, one stopped in front of the offering box and threw in a coin. One then performed the proper ritual combination of claps and bows to approach the gods deified in the main sanctuary. The braided rope above the offering box marked off the space it encloses as sacred, the hall and the area behind off limits to the profane masses.

Okinawa Shrine enshrined five deities: Minamoto no Tametomo, Shunten, Shō En, Shō Kei, and Shō Tai. As Torigoe has noted, the deification of Minamoto no Tametomo and his son Shunten emphasized Okinawa’s ethnic and blood proximity to mainland Japan and the legend of Tametomo and Shunten is worth recounting briefly here. After the Hōgen Rebellion, Tametomo – a direct descendent of the 56th emperor Seiwa – supposedly fled from the victorious Heike and escaped to the Ryūkyū Islands. There he fathered a son, Shunten, with the daughter of a local chief who rose to power as the island’s first king the 12th century. Scholars like Hagashionna Kanjun have shown that the Tametomo story (and Shunten’s reign, for that matter) have no documentary evidence, but note that they have a long history of circulation as legends. Scholars agree that the first mention of the legend is in the Buddhist monk Taichū’s Ryūkyū shintō ki (1605), but was established as part of the official record of the Ryūkyū Kingdom by Shō Shōken in his Chusan seikan (1650) and in turn popularized in Japan by Arai Hakuseki in his Nantō shi. The political potential of this narrative – that casts the Ryūkyū royal family and the institution of Ryūkyūan kingship as descendents of the Japanese imperial family – for assimilating Okinawa is obvious and it was reproduced frequently in novels, school textbooks, and studies of Okinawa history in the prewar period.

What Torigoe does not discuss, however, is that the deification of the three Ryūkyūan kings was a similarly powerful, politically inclusionary move on Japan’s part. Shō En (r. 1470-1476) founded the second Shō dynasty; under his rule the Ryūkyū Kingdom shifted from government by the individual monarch to an institutionally based rule which contributed to its longevity. Shō Kei (r. 1713-1751) oversaw a cultural golden age in which the kingdom’s best-known Confucian intellectual Sai On flourished. Shō Tai’s reign saw the Ryūkyū Kingdom enter into formal Japanese control, cast in the prewar as opening the way for the modernization of Okinawa. Taken together these five deities speak to the appropriation of both the Ryūkyū Kingdom’s legendary past (Minamoto and Shunten) and its recorded history represented by the other three: Shō En founded the Second Shō Dynasty in which Shō Kei’s reign marked its high point, with Shō Tai marking its end. The deification of these five figures folds the beginning and the end of the Ryūkyū Kingdom’s history into the frame of State Shinto, and by extension, into the frame of the Japanese nation state and national imaginary.

How important or effective was the Okinawa Shrine? Did it register in the minds of Okinawan people as a site of State Shinto and what might this have meant to them? On the one hand, a 1936 report by Shuri city noted that “the number of worshippers increased every year, such that the sense of respect [for the national polity] has now gradually
deepened.” On the other hand, Torigoe notes that worshippers were rarely seen at Okinawa Shrine, and he sees this as evidence of the forced nature of the Okinawa Shrine’s establishment and its disjuncture with what Okinawan popular religion. Okinawa Shrine’s relative unpopularity seems to be borne out by records in the Okinawaken jinja meisai cho, which lists the details of twelve shrines in Okinawa prefecture, including each shrine’s history, acreage, number of buildings, and the number of registered worshippers. Okinawa Shrine’s 4,914 ujiko households do not appear to be an insignificant number, especially when compared to Sueyoshi Shrine’s mere 160 ujiko households. However, Okinawa Shrine’s numbers pale in comparison to Yomochi Shrine’s 126,430 sūkeisha households. Given these numbers, it is likely that Okinawa Shrine was hardly the most popular and most-visited of shrines, demonstrating the distance that Okinawan people felt from State Shinto as a whole.

However, to assess Okinawa Shrine’s importance only in terms of the numbers of worshippers misses out on an important way in which spaces operate, and neglects how the particular space of the Shinto shrine functions. In particular, it misses how some spaces affect their environment simply by virtue of their presence, regardless of how resident populations feel about them. Overseas Shinto shrines (kaigai jinja), established in Japanese colonies (colonized Korea, Taiwan) as well as in locales with significant Japanese populations (Honolulu) illustrate this point. Overseas shrines were originally established for Japanese nationals in foreign lands as sites to connect ideologically and spiritually with the Japanese mainland, but many scholars have shown how overseas shrines also served as physical reminders of Japanese state power in the colonies for local populations. In addition to practices like compulsory visitations, which forced upon local populations a consciousness of the presence and function of the shrines, these shrines, often in geographically prominent sites (as in the case of Chosen Shrine, Taiwan Shrine, and Okinawa Shrine) were hard to ignore as sites on the landscape. A colonized population’s participation at shrines allows us to comment on the role these shrines played in people’s lives, but it is also important to pay attention to other reactions that local populations had to the space. These include non-participation at the shrines (except under duress) or their outright rejection of State Shinto, both of which do not necessarily render the shrines as unimportant or ineffective spaces.

Hildi Kang’s collection of oral histories from Korea under Japanese colonial rule includes accounts by people who talk about how they rejected State Shintō, but were forced to visit the shrines anyway. One of the most provocative vignettes however is a short account by a housewife who recalled: “The Pusan Shrine stood on top of the hill near the pier. We climbed up there many times, on holidays, but only for picnics. A beautiful view.” Even though this individual did not visit Pusan shrine to worship, she was clearly aware of how the space had been marked. Pusan Shrine existed as a place of worship even if people choose not to enter it or to use for other purposes, a space that local populations were forced to take into account, whether in confrontational ways or otherwise. In this sense, a lack of visitors or worshippers to Okinawa Shrine because of resistance to State Shinto or from indifference does not necessarily render the space ineffective. Okinawans’ failure to embrace the castle site as “Okinawa Shrine,” while signifying their lack of interest in
participating in State Shinto, also reflects the success of that project in alienating the castle as a site of meaning for Okinawan people.

**Conclusion**

Let me return to the photograph of the shrine’s main sanctuary with which I began this essay and the question that it raised: what might account for this condition which allows for one aspect of the photograph to be noticed and not the other? In other words, what determines how historical materials and its “facts” are used? One possible explanation is that this is another effect of the Battle of Okinawa, which resulted in the death of between a quarter and a third of Okinawa’s population and the total destruction of its capital, Naha and much of the built environment of southern and central Okinawa. In addition to the loss of life, many of the materials that constitute a historical archive were lost. The result has been a paucity of materials about Okinawa’s history, and this exerts a certain pressure on materials that do exist. While the prefectural and village governments, tertiary institutions, and libraries in Okinawa are involved in an ongoing effort to collect and inventory what remains, the paucity of materials is a stark reality. In this context, the value of existing materials increases because they are (possibly) some of the only surviving traces of an “original” Okinawa. Alongside attempts to preserve what remains, there is a significant preoccupation with recovering the Okinawan past that was lost as a result of the war. This desire to recapture what was lost affects the treatment of historical materials from the prewar period, and creates a tension that the project to rebuild Shuri Castle illustrates.

Calls for the castle’s rebuilding, which began in earnest in the 1970s, cast the rebuilding as the recovery of an important piece of Ryūkyūan cultural heritage as well as the repayment of a debt the mainland owed Okinawa for its sacrifices in WWII. Advocates for the rebuilding appropriated then-prime minister Sato Eisaku’s proclamation that “Japan’s postwar will not be over until Okinawa reverts to the mainland” and turned it into the slogan “Okinawa’s postwar will not be over until Shuri Castle is rebuilt.” This clever adaptation intended to demonstrate how important the rebuilding was to Okinawans by inserting Shuri Castle into a larger discussion about Okinawa’s relationship with mainland Japan and making the castle a symbol of that process. The push for the rebuilding gained official sanction in 1982 in the Second Okinawa Development Plan. In 1984, Okinawa Prefecture released the Shuri Castle Park Basic Plan (Shurijō kōen kihon keikaku) and a committee under the auspices of the National Okinawa Commemorative Park Office took charge of Shuri Castle’s rebuilding.

The committee’s first and most important task was the rebuilding of the castle’s main hall. According to one of the architects involved in the rebuilding, the committee had very little sense of what Shuri Castle looked like. The committee spent much of their first year gathering materials – including Kamakura Yoshitarō’s photographs and notes, and Tanabe Yasushi’s 1937 monograph Ryūkyū Kenchiku – and analyzing them in order to produce an accurate model of the main hall. A significant body of materials were the project reports from the castle’s/Okinawa Shrine’s 1932 restoration. Labeled “Worshipper’s Hall Okinawa Shrine” [figs. 7 and 8], these were extensive plans of the main/worshipper’s hall structural detail. As a way to express their intentions for the project, the committee coined the
following motto: “To regenerate the main hall that had been rebuilt in 1712 and designated a national treasure in 1925.”

This motto illustrates something of how present demands and desires to recover a lost past impacts the treatment of historical materials related to that past, for what would it mean to take this motto seriously? The committee intended the motto to signal their commitment to an authentic reconstruction of Shuri Castle – that is, the castle as it existed
since its last rebuilding in 1712 after a fire, the same one recognized by the Japanese state as culturally valuable in 1925. However, the motto actually exceeds these intentions because it gestures at much more than the castle itself by invoking Japan’s colonial encounter with the Ryūkyū Kingdom. The period from 1712 to 1925 in Ryūkyū-Japan relations is dominated by the story of Japanese colonialism and the Ryūkyū Kingdom’s loss of autonomy, first through the system of dual tribute and then through formal Japanese annexation that culminated in 1879. The nature of this relationship left its trace on Shuri Castle too: because the Ryūkyū Kingdom did not have enough materials due to its increased impoverishment, the 1712 rebuilding could proceed only after Satsuma fief presented the kingdom with over 19,000 logs of wood. Many of materials the committee used from the Meiji period and after – especially Kamakura’s photographs [figs. 9 and 10] – show not a glorious architectural structure but are rather visual proof of the castle’s decay and destruction. The materials from the restoration of “Okinawa Shrine’s Worshipper’s Hall,” labeled as such, have the potential to raise difficult questions about the transformation of the castle’s space into a Shinto shrine and the political aims this served. One need only scratch the surface for the materials to tell a story of Japanese colonialism and its damage to Shuri Castle. What is so interesting about this motto is that if we were to take it seriously – that is, to engage with it in all its implications as a principle to produce knowledge about Shuri Castle – is that it invites attention to the violence and arbitrariness of Japanese colonialism, the very things that need to be managed if the narrative of Okinawa’s inclusion into the Japanese nation state is to be cast as a natural, seamless, and beneficial one.
And yet, despite the motto’s potential to destabilize, the realities of the conditions of Shuri Castle’s existence in the period between 1712 and 1925 slip from the committee’s view as they made choices about what to recognize in the materials and what to ignore. Dominated by the desire to regenerate the castle, Shuri Castle’s multiple histories entered into a calculation where not all elements of the historical document are accorded equal value. Instead they are subject to a certain “political arithmetic” based on the demands of the present. The treatments of the photograph of Yamazaki and the shrine’s main sanctuary are examples of this: the photograph is valorized not for what it says about the shrine, but for the information that it provides of the area around it. This is, of course, a reasonable use of the photo, but in the process we see how Shuri Castle’s other history – which has the potential to destabilize comfortable narratives about the castle’s cultural value and raise questions about how the castle was used in schemes to naturalize Japanese colonialism – is quietly lost in the demands of the present.

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Notes

1 In 2005, the chairperson of the Shuri Castle Festival planning committee noted that “The Shuri Castle Festival is being fixed as the event that transmits (hasshin) the culture of the Ryūkyū Kingdom. [We would like] through colorful events, to deepen understanding towards Okinawan culture.” “Shurijō sai 10-gatsu 28-30 nichī ni kaisai kettei,” Ryūkyū shinpō, September 7, 2005.

2 This is similar to the observation that Laura Hein and Mark Selden make regarding the use of Shurei Gate on the 2000-yen banknote. They suggest that “by appropriating Shuri
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Castle as a symbol of Japanese nationhood suitable to grace the currency, Tokyo is again asserting control over Okinawans and subordinating them to the nation.” Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds.), *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) 12. Gerald Figal has recently shown how constructions of the Ryūkyūan past are part of a complicated recasting of Okinawa as a tourist destination. See his “Between War and Tropics: Heritage Tourism in Postwar Okinawa,” *The Public Historian* 30 (May 2008), 83-107.


9 Gregory Smits has traced the way that Ryūkyūan court cultivated increasingly “Chinese” and Confucian representations and practice of kingship of the sage king, which included the decoupling of the Ryūkyūan king’s power from its historical relationship with the powerful female priestesses in Ryūkyūan religion. Iyori Tsutomu has traced how the changes in the architecture of Shuri Castle’s main hall (specifically looking at the changes to the bargeboard above the main hall’s canopy) were part of this policy of suppression. Gregory Smits, “Ambiguous Boundaries: Redefining Royal Authority in the Kingdom of Ryukyu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 60 (June 2000), 89-123; Iyori Tsutomu, “Ryūkyū ōken no basho: Shurijō seiden karahafu no tanjō to sono kaishu ni tsuite,” *Kenchikushi gaku* 31 (1998), 4-6

10 George Kerr suggests that the Ryūkyū Kingdom saw its income reduced by more than half, from 200,000 koku to 80,000. George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1975), 179.


14 This is perhaps not dissimilar form Orhan Pamuk’s exploration of the the effect of Ottoman ruins as reminders of past greatness on Turks today and the melancholy (hüzün) that results from it. Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul Memories of the City* (New York: Knopf, 2006).


16 “We would like to use this land as a park, turn the buildings into a museum, establish an entertainment area displaying hundreds of things beginning with tropical plants that are
different from that of other prefectures, and historical treasures that are different from places whose development is different. This is in planning for public leisure, but at the same time, to encourage economic development through foreigners who visit, to start the development of [our] civilization.” “Kyu Shurijōseki nami kensetsu haraisage seigan no gi nitsuki ikensho.”

17 “Kanyūchi kariuke oyobi kensetsu haraisage no ken” in Ryūkyū shinpō, January 29, 1903. Also in Maehira, “Kindai no Shurijō,” 277. See also “Shurijō jisho taifu nami kensetsu haraisage no ken,” Rikugun sho dainikki meiji 38-nen, National Archives of Japan.

18 The land was sold for 1514 yen 15 sen. Maehira, “Kindai no Shurijō,” 278.

19 The information in this paragraph summarizes parts of Torigoe Kenzaburō’s Ryūkyū shūkyōshi no kenkyū (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1965), esp. 655-660.


21 Jinja kyōkai zasshi, 22:5 (1923), 34. Okinawa ken jinjya meisai chō, Okinawa Prefectural Library collection, publication date unknown.

22 Figures are given in Torigoe, Ryūkyū shūkyōshi no kenkyū, 659. He set the costs for the construction of the buildings at 5000 yen.

23 Torigoe notes that the prefecture’s attempt to raise funds from among Okinawans for the shrine in 1914 failed. He took this as an indicator of the shallowness of Okinawans’ civilization and cultural development (mindō), as well as a lack of interest in establishing the prefectural shrine. Torigoe, Ryūkyū shūkyōshi no kenkyū, 659.

24 Kamakura Yoshitarō, Okinawa bunka no ihō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), 61. Kamakura does not note the title of the article he saw, but it was likely “Okinawa ōchō no Shurijō wo torikowashi okinawa jinjya konryū,” Kagoshima mainichi shimbun, 25 March 1924. See also Itō Chūta, “Ryūkyū kikō,” in Kengaku kikō (Tokyo: Ryūgin sha, 1936), 31.

25 Kamakura’s account can be found in his Okinawa bunka no ihō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982).


27 He achieved this with an emergency provisional designation under the 1919 Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty, and Natural Monuments Preservation Law.


32 “Kensha no nintei wo etaru ato shajihozonhō ni yotte seiden wo okinawa jinjya no haiden tonashi naimushō no iji ni yoru no ga tokusaku Itō hakushi no iken,” Ryūkyū Shinpō, 9 August 1924. The text of this article is reproduced in Yoshiike Fumie, “Firudo noto dai 22 kan ryukyūi wo moto ni,” Masters thesis, Kyoto Institute of Technology, 2006, 177.

33 Ernesto Laclau’s observation that “[t]he ideological would not consist of the misrecognition of a positive essence, but exactly the opposite: it would consist of the non-recognition of the precarious nature of any possibility, of the impossibility of any ultimate suture” is theoretically instructive here. Ernesto Laclau, “The Impossibility of Society” in his New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Times (London: Verso, 1997), 92.


36 These included the rebuilding of the Grand Shrine of Ise (1899 and 1909), Yahiko Shrine (Niigata, 1916), Meiji Shrine (1920), the expansion of Atami Shrine (1922), various parts of Yasukuni Shrine including the Yūshūkan, and the expansion of the Grand Shrine of Izumo. Of these, Ise, Meiji, and Yasukuni shrines stand out as especially privileged sites as the nexus of sacral, imperial, and state power that State Shintō enabled. In addition, Itō was also responsible for the design and construction of Shintō shrines in the Japanese empire’s colonial possessions, beginning with the Grand Shrine of Taiwan in 1901, but also Karafuto Shrine (1912), and the Grand Shrine of Chosen (1925).


38 Itō, “Sekai kenchiku ni okeru nihon no shaji,”316-317

39 Itō, “Jinja kenchiku ni taisuru kōsatsu.”


42 These regulations start in the 1870s as the then Ministry of Doctrine (*Kyobushō*) issued regulations on the size the format of national and government shrines. See also Yamauchi Yasuaki, *Jinja kenchiku* (Tokyo: Jinja shinpōsha, 1972), 194-202 for some of these regulations.

43 Optional structures were also recommended. See Kodama Kuichi, *Jinja gyōsei* (Tokyo: Tokiwa shobō, 1934), 48.

44 Kodama, 54.

45 Torigoe, *Ryūkyū shūkyōshi no kenkyū*, 656. Also see note 37 above. George Kerr asks: “What better man to serve as a link between Okinawa and Japan than the legendary Minamoto Tametomo?” Kerr, *Okinawa*, 50.

46 Higashionna Kanjun, *Ryūkyū no rekishi* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1957), Textbooks on Okinawan history today trace the beginnings of political history to the 13th century, and treat the period of Shunten’s reign as myth. See for instance *Okinawaken kyoiku iinkai, Gaisetsu okinawa no rekishi to bunka* (Naha: Okinawaken kyoiku iinkai, 2000).

47 Shō Shōken was a pro-Japan, Ryūkyūan statesman who is credited with being the earliest proponent of the theory of common Ryūkyūan and Japanese ancestry (*nichi-ryū dōso ron*) who was writing from within a Ryūkyū Kingdom subdued by Satsuma.


51 “Shuri shi kinen shi” in *Naha shishi*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 374. Kaji Yorihito has also found newspaper reports on Okinawa Shrine’s vibrant and busy shrine days. Kaji, 100-101.

52 Torigoe, 660

53 Okinawa Prefectural Library collection. All the figures that follow come from this material.

54 *Ujiko* refers to the group of people reside in an area around a shrine and who are
registered with it. They are somewhat analogous to the notion of “parishioners” in terms of their relationship to the site of worship. Kokugakuin University’s online Shinto glossary defines ujiko this way: “Generally, a group from the land surrounding the areas dedicated to the belief in and worship of one shrine; or, the constituents of that group.” Sūkeisha also refers to a shrine’s worshippers and is often used interchangeably with ujiko. However, strictly speaking, where ujiko refers to worshippers who live within the shrine’s defined district, sūkeisha refers to worshippers from outside that area. Yomochi Shrine’s numbers are those for “Okinawa prefecture as a whole” (Okinawa ken ka ichien). Yomochi Shrine was nevertheless a popular shrine and seems to have enjoyed support from the local population, in part because its resident deities were Ryūkyūan heroes, rather than deities from the Shinto pantheon. For more on Yomochi Shrine, see Kaji Yorihito, Okinawa no jinja (Naha: Okinawa bunko, 2000), 106-111. See also Kadena City’s website on the shrine.


The efforts of the Okinawa Prefecture Committee for the Promotion of Culture (Okinawaken bunka shinkōkai) and the Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education (Okinawaken kyōiku inkai) to compile historical materials are exemplary. The latter’s Okinawaken shiryō (Okinawa Prefecture Historical Materials) series is an important collection of primary source material from the prewar. This is reflected in the mission of the Okinawa Prefectural Archives. In remarks commemorating the opening of the archives on August 1, 1995, the then director Miyagi Etsujirō commented that “because almost all [of Okinawa’s] prewar records were lost in this past war, it was a situation where we had to put postwar documents at the center [of our efforts],” Okinawa Prefectural Archives, ARCHIVES, vol. 1 (1996), 3. Photographs seem to receive special attention: Ryūkyū shinpō sha, ed., Mukashi okinawa: shashinshu (Naha: Ryūkyū shinpōsha, 1978), Shuritsu hawaidaigaku horeisokan henshu inkai, Bōkyō okinawa shashinshū (Tokyo: Honpō shoseki, 1981), Okinawa terebi hoso kabushiki gaisha, ed., Yomigaeru senzen no okinawa: shashinshū (Urasoe: Okinawa shuppan, 1995), Okinawa terebi hoso kabushiki gaisha, ed., Yomigaeru senzen no okinawa: shashinshū (Urasoe: Okinawa shuppan, 1995).
Shuri Castle was rebuilt three times after fires destroyed it in 1453, 1660, and 1709.
The Group Suicides (Coerced Group Deaths) of the Battle of Okinawa
Aniya Masaaki
January 6, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Aniya-Masaaki/2629

The nearly three-month long Battle of Okinawa (April-June 1945) saw what was arguably the most intense combat of the Asia-Pacific theater of World War II and marked the only battle of that war that unfolded on Japanese soil. It is estimated that one in three residents of Okinawa Island—mostly civilians-- lost their lives during the battle. It is readily understandable to outside observers why this experience might generate a strong streak of pacifism in contemporary Okinawan political culture. Less readily apparent to the uninformed observer is why the same experience would generate resentment against the Japanese military that was ostensibly defending compatriots from the American attack. Yet the battle not only did so but has also become a source of recurrent conflict among Okinawans themselves, and between Okinawans and the mainland government. Okinawa International University professor emeritus Aniya Masaaki elucidates the historical reasons behind the controversy by describing the circumstances surrounding the “group suicides” of Okinawan civilians that occurred in various parts of the prefecture during the battle and a ground-level account of one such group suicide. It deserves note that this article was written just when controversy was coming to a head in 2007 over the depiction of these “group suicides” in Japan’s high school history textbooks. The article helps the reader make sense of the lingering emotional resentment toward the mainland government that many Okinawans still harbor today.

This article was originally translated by the late Kyoko Selden and then modified by the editor for this collection.
The Group Suicides (Coerced Group Deaths) of the Battle of Okinawa
Aniya Masaaki

Textbook Review Denies Historical Truth

On March 30, 2008, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Monbukagaskushō, hereafter Ministry of Education) announced the results of its review of approved high school textbooks to be used beginning in the 2008-2009 school year. With respect to passages in history textbooks (7 different books published by 5 companies) on “group suicides” (shūdan jiketsu) during the Battle of Okinawa, it issued a judgment asking for revisions of “statements purporting that there were Japanese military orders and coercion [of civilians] to commit suicide.” The gist of the Ministry of Education’s assessment was as follows: “It cannot be concluded that there were suicide orders from the Japanese military. To say that [civilians] were driven by the Japanese military to commit suicide invites misunderstanding of the Battle of Okinawa.” The people of Okinawa responded very critically and protested that [the judgment] “distorts the truth about the Battle of Okinawa.” The Okinawa Prefectural Assembly and every municipal assembly in the prefecture objected to the deletion of [passages regarding] the military’s involvement in “group suicides” during the textbook review and passed resolutions by unanimous votes demanding a retraction of the judgment. However, the Ministry of Education rejected the demands of Okinawan citizens and ignored their general will, stating merely that “such was the decision of the textbook review council.”
Okinawan sculptor Kinjo Minoru’s relief depicting the horror of the Battle of Okinawa, during which many Okinawans were killed or forced to commit suicide after seeking refuge in the island’s caves.

There are ongoing efforts in various parts of the country to distort the truth with respect to the victimization of local residents during the Battle of Okinawa and to lead historical understanding in a mistaken direction. One instance of these is the case of “group suicides” on the islands of Tokashiki, Zamami and Kerama in the Kerama Islands group.

The Japanese forces garrisoned in the Kerama Islands consisted of a main force of 300 special attack boats and a roughly 300-member marine attack corps, along with an attached base force that included about 600 special marine labor corps (Korean workers). A locally-drafted defense corps and volunteer corps were also incorporated into the islands’ defense force. The Kerama Island marine attack corps was an Army marine special attack force that was to man small one-person boats loaded with 120 kilograms of depth charges and destroy enemy vessels by smashing into them. Their effectiveness had been the subject of exaggerated reports, and the local population met the “Army special marine attack corps” with skepticism and doubt.

American forces began landing on the Kerama Islands on March 26, 1945, with the support of artillery fire from both air and sea. By the 29th they had gained control of virtually the entire Kerama Island group. Not a single marine attack boat attack had been launched. The Japanese Army had itself blown them up.
It was amid this fighting that horrendous “mass deaths” by local residents who had been driven to suicide as a result of coercion and incitement by the Japanese Army occurred on Kerama, Zamami and Tokashiki Island. Against this, the commanders of the troops garrisoned in these islands, contended that “there was no military order.” In fact, the surviving families of Colonel Akamatsu Yoshitsugu, the leader of the forces on Tokashiki Island, and Major Umezawa Yutaka, the leader of the troops on Zamami Island, launched a
law suit in the Osaka district court against [the writer] Ōe Kenzaburo and his publisher Iwanami Shoten, claiming that in his book Okinawa Notes [in which he reported on these incidents] Ōe had “disparaged their reputations” and demanded compensation for damages. Attaching the label “Okinawa Group Suicide Libel Suit” to the trial, they are [currently] denouncing Ōe and Iwanami. The plaintiffs argue that “the group suicides on the part of residents of Tokashiki Island and Zamami Island were not the result of a military order but rather of their choosing death in a sublime spirit of self-sacrifice.”

What we have here is not just an instance of “libel,” but a historical revisionist scheme to legitimate a war of aggression and to excuse atrocities committed by the Imperial (the Emperor’s) Army. Adding to the obfuscation are the statements of local Okinawan ex-soldiers and government officials who are jumping on the bandwagon of the Liberal Historical Perspectives Research Association. One can only conclude that in the recent textbook review judgment the statements of the troop commanders that there were no military orders was accepted without verification. It would appear that that the testimony of island residents that family members were forced to kill one another was dismissed as unreliable and the commanding officers’ testimony accepted as credible. It is preposterous that a textbook review decision has been issued based on the claims of Messrs. Akamatsu and Umezawa and the group associated with them in the midst of litigation in Osaka District Court.

**Staking the National Polity on the Battle of Okinawa**

The Battle of Okinawa, the last ground combat between Japan and the US in the Pacific War, was fought with the understanding that Japan’s defeat was inevitable. Maintaining the national polity by preserving the Imperial institution was the Imperial government’s highest priority objective and gaining time to prepare for a decisive battle on the mainland and to negotiate a conclusion of the war were considered crucial for this purpose.

On January 14, 1945, shortly before the Battle of Okinawa, former prime minister Konoe Fumimaro memorialized to the emperor that the war had reached a critical juncture:

> Regrettably, defeat in the war is now virtually inevitable . . . . Defeat will bring shame to the national polity (kokutai). However, opinion in England and the US has not yet reached the point where they are requiring a change (henkaku) of national polity . . . I therefore do not think that we need to be concerned about the effect of defeat itself on the national polity . . . What we do need to be concerned about from the standpoint of preserving the national polity is not defeat but the communist revolution that will accompany defeat . . . I am therefore convinced that we need to find a way to end the war as soon as possible in order to preserve the national polity. (Hosokawa Diary)

Former Prime Minister Konoe’s memorial is remarkable in that a member of Japan’s ruling strata openly discussed before the Emperor the reason why the war needed to be brought to an end. But the key point is that he was more concerned about the disintegration of the structure of Imperial rule than he was about defeat. The Emperor responded to Konoe’s recommendation by saying, “I do not think that that will work unless we achieve another
victory in the war." This shows how the Emperor remained committed to continuing the war even at this late stage.

The Battle of Okinawa was thus a "battle on which the national polity was staked" and one in which defeat was taken for granted. It is often said that "Okinawa was a pawn sacrificed in order to defend the mainland," but in fact it was a battle to buy time to prepare for the battle on the mainland and to negotiate an end to the war. It was not a battle to protect the people but instead the precursor of a battle in which the lives of the entire nation were to be sacrificed.

The Japanese imperial government intensified its total war mobilization system in preparation for the last stand battle on the mainland. On May 22, 1945, the Wartime Education Ordinance (senji kyōiku rei) was made public. Under it even elementary schools and schools for the blind, deaf and dumb were ordered to organize students into military units. On June 23, the day that the forces defending Okinawa (the 32nd Battalion) disintegrated and organized resistance came to an end, a Volunteer Military Service Law was promulgated and women, too, were now ordered to serve in national volunteer combat units. On July 8, 1945, the paramilitary units of the Okinawa Normal School and the Okinawan Prefectural First Middle School were honored in absentia in a ceremony in Tokyo. Minister of Education Ōta Kōzō urged students throughout the country to follow the example of Okinawa’s student military units and give their lives in the defense of the national polity. (*Asahi Shinbun* July 9, 1945)

Maintenance of the national polity was the central concern when the Japanese imperial government accepted the Potsdam Declaration. Atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, destroying these cities. The Japanese leadership, however, was more concerned about the threat posed by the Soviet Union’s entry into the war than with the destructiveness of the atomic bombs. The Soviet Union renounced the USSR-Japan neutrality pact and declared war against Japan on August 8. It then attacked Manchuria, Sakhalin, and North Korea. Confronted with these developments, it was brought home to the Japanese ruling strata that the fate of the imperial institution now hung in the balance. They resolved to bring the war to a conclusion.

An Imperial conference was called in the middle of the night on August 9. At 2:30 a.m. on the 10th the decision was made to accept the Potsdam Declaration on the condition that the national polity be maintained. This was labeled a “sacred decision” (*seidan*), that is, a pronouncement of the son of heaven. Army minister Anami Korechika wrote in his diary:

> The Japanese government accepts the three countries’ combined declaration dated from the 26th of last month with the understanding that the conditions stated in do not include the demand to change the Emperor’s prerogative to state rule.

There are Japanese politicians who say that Japan’s defeat was hastened by the dropping the atomic bombs and thus unavoidable [the reference is to former Defense Min. Kyuma Fumio. Tr.] but this is an unreflective statement by someone who is subservient to US policy and ignorant of the suffering of the citizenry.
Consider why and how the US dropped the atomic bombs. Young people who have studied the reality of the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki offer the following clear explanation.

1. The US wanted to carry out attacks on the cities to test the bomb’s power: its ability to destroy with shock waves and ultra-high heat, the effect of radiation on the human body and the environment, the secondary effects of exposure on internal organs (the bomb’s effect is not just that which occurs at that moment). It was not just Japanese who were subjected to the bombings, as there were also Koreans and Chinese forced laborers as well as allied POWs present.

2. Anticipating the postwar US-Soviet conflict, they wanted to demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb to the Soviet leadership.

3. The B-29 which set out from Tinian in Micronesia at 2:49 a.m. on August 9 dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki at 11:02. That aircraft landed at Bolo Airport in Yomitan on the main Okinawan island at 1:00 pm on the 9th. After refueling, it returned to Tinian at 10:55 pm on the 9th. By that time, US forces in Okinawa had set up an airfield with a 2,000 meter runway that could accommodate B29s.
Memorial for the Korean victims of atomic bombing in Hiroshima

“Coerced Group Deaths” Under Imperial Army Compulsion and Incitement

The Okinawa Defense Force (the 32nd Battalion), addressing the citizens of Okinawa, proclaimed that “the Army, government and civilians live and die as one.” And saying “every single tree and blades of grass will be used to fight the battle,” they mobilized everyone including the young, the old, women and children.

The military and paramilitary forces recruited locally in Okinawa numbered more than 25,000, and included active duty soldiers, newly drafted soldiers, defense units, student units and volunteer units. It is important to stress that one fourth of the Okinawa Defense Force was composed of “Japanese soldiers” coming out of Okinawa prefecture. Thus it is a mistake to assume that the Japanese forces in the Battle of Okinawa were exclusively officers and men from the mainland (Yamato troops).

During the last stages of the Battle of Okinawa between June and July, the American forces, in an exercise they called “Jap hunting,” indiscriminately attacked Japanese soldiers and local civilians in the caves where they were hiding. The Imperial Army drove residents from the caves in which they had taken shelter, took their food, prohibited them from surrendering, tortured and slaughtered them when they were suspected of spying, forced family members to kill each other, and left the sick and handicapped on the battlefield. The number of civilians who perished in the Battle of Okinawa is estimated at more than 150,000.
What stands out among the various ways in which civilians were victimized during the Battle of Okinawa is what has been called *shūdan jiketsu* or “group suicides.” First we must clarify what is meant by the term. Normally, *jiketsu* (which is made up of the characters for “self” and “decision”) presumes individual choice and voluntariness on the part of those who choose to die. Consequently it is not possible for infants and toddlers to engage in *jiketsu* nor do people of their own accord choose to kill family members. Mutual killings of close relatives—meaning that “parents killed young children, children killed parents, big brothers killed little brothers and sisters, and husbands killed their wives”—occurred on battlefields where Imperial Army soldiers and citizens intermingled.

The book, *Army Strategies in the Okinawa Area* compiled by the War History Office of the Ministry of Defense writes as follows: “They served the Empire in a sacrificial spirit by engaging in *shūdan jiketsu* and dying for the Empire so that they could alleviate the complications that combat personnel faced.” But such a claim goes against the facts. Citizens on the battlefield did not choose death of their own accord. While there were a number of interrelated factors involved, basically close relatives were compelled to kill one another because the Imperial Army and local leaders who followed the Imperial Army coerced them into doing so. To have compelled families to kill one another is tantamount to the Imperial Army itself killing citizens. One cannot call the death of people who “were forced” or “cornered” *shūdan jiketsu*. In fact, it is wrong to call what happened *shūdan jiketsu*, and doing so hinders the accurate conveying of reality and invites misunderstanding and confusion. The term itself has been used since the 1950s and some argue that it is now an established one. But using the term *shūdan jiketsu* without explaining the reality behind it encourages misconception and mystification. It needs to be re-emphasized that the true meaning of the term *shūdan jiketsu* is “en mass deaths of local residents as a consequence of Imperial Army coercion and inducement.”

Behind the “residents’ mass deaths” in the Battle of Okinawa was the *kōminka* or imperial subject education system [i.e., education to make everyone a loyal subject of the Emperor] which pitched the act of dying for the Emperor as the most sublime expression of national morality. The concept of “military, government, and civilians living and dying together as one” bred “a sense of solidarity in death” that was repeatedly emphasized during the battle. The role of local Okinawan leaders, including those in the Association of Reservists, the Support Group of Adult Men, police and military affairs, and chiefs of local and municipal government, was most important. The islands’ leaders thought it to be perfectly natural that they would be given hand grenades so that all residents could be killed if the situation demanded it. However, we cannot consider this a case of “spontaneous and voluntary” *shūdan jiketsu*, for this was a time when it was not possible to refuse to carry out “deaths” ordered by the Imperial Army.

The extreme fear of “the American and British brutes,” cultivated by the Japanese military, became a factor that compelled people to choose death. The Japanese Army’s slaughter of Chinese on the continent following the “Manchurian Incident” was widely discussed; and people were in a state of despair as they anticipated plunder, assaults and massacres carried out by Americans, which they accepted as their fate now that they were losing the
There were returned emigrants who did not believe that the Americans would kill civilians but they could not openly express such an opinion because returnees were suspected to be spies. To make such a statement was to court being labeled a spy and slaughtered. There were people who came to the twisted conclusion that it was an act of love for them to kill their female siblings and wives with their own hands in order to spare them from the shame of being abused and killed by the American and British brutes.

Fear of the Imperial Army’s spy hunts increased the level of despair among local civilians. It was Imperial Army policy to never allow residents who had been exposed to military secrets to be taken by the enemy. Those taken under the protection of the US military were regarded as spies. Being trapped between the Japanese and American military under these extreme conditions pushed local civilians to their deaths. One other reason for their “rush to death” was their loss of hope in their chances of surviving the shelling of an island from which there was no way to escape and their picturing of their own deaths under the most pitiful of circumstances. The “en masse deaths of residents” took place as these various elements joined together, causing mass panics that led people to kill one another as a communal activity. Fear and madness overtook the villages.

Thousands of protesters in Ginowan, Okinawa, demanded that Japanese government drop plans to remove references in textbooks to the coerced mass suicides on their island in 1945.

“Group Deaths” in an Encircled Area
By the time the Battle of Okinawa began, control of sea and air in the area of the Southwest [Ryukyu] Islands was entirely in the hands of the US military. Communication and transportation with Kyushu and Taiwan were cut off and the islands were under siege. The Okinawa Defense Force gave orders even on matters that were the jurisdiction of the prefectural and local governments and through this they imposed the concept of the “army, government and civilians living and dying as one.” There was no civil government. All activities of prefectural residents were regulated by the commanders of the garrisoned forces. The military referred to combat zones of this kind as ごいちiki or “encircled areas.” Encircled areas were established through a “declaration of martial law” (かい根令) whenever there was an encirclement of or an attack on an area.

In an encircled area the rule was that ranking military personnel of the garrisoned forces would be granted supreme authority. The Constitution would be suspended and all or part of legislative, administrative and judicial authority would be exercised by the military. Martial law was not declared during the Battle of Okinawa, but the entire Southwest Islands area was a de facto encirclement area. This was the situation that led to the administrative authority of the prefectural governor and village mayors being ignored and the garrisoned forces issuing orders at will. Directives and orders to local residents were received as “military orders” even when they were conveyed by town and village governments and local leaders.

[To take two examples,] On Tokashiki Island of the Keramas, Colonel Akamatsu Yoshitsugu wielded total authority. On Zamami Island, Major Umezawa Yutaka held complete authority. Village administration was placed under the control of the military; there was no civil administration. Under this type of military rule, it was the military affairs directors of the village offices who played the critical role of communicating military orders.

These military affairs directors were the local officials who were in charge of matters related to the military such as updating and confirming rosters of draft-age men and their whereabouts, handling draft deferrals, transmitting orders to draftees to report for duty, and providing assistance to families of the war dead and wounded soldiers. During the Battle of Okinawa, the primary duty of village military affairs directors was to round up and deliver requested draftees to local military units, and to transmit to local residents military orders for the supply of labor power, evacuation, assembly and eviction.

Tōyama Majun, who was the chief of military affairs of the village of Tokashiki, testified that:

1. On March 20, 1945, there was a message from the Akamastu Squad to the village military affairs director Tōyama Majun ordering him to assemble the residents of Tokashiki hamlet in the village office. In accordance with this order he assembled youths under age 18 and village office workers in the front garden of the village office.

2. At that time, a lower ranking non-commissioned office known as the weapons sergeant had a subordinate bring two boxes of grenades. The weapons sergeant distributed two hand grenades each to the twenty-plus people gather there and instructed them as follows: “It is now certain that US Forces will land and that
everyone on Tokashiki Island will die an honorable death (gyokusai). If you
encounter the enemy toss one of these at the enemy. When it appears that you might
become a prisoner use the other one to kill yourself.”

3. There was a “group death” incident on March 28 at Fijiga located along the upper
reaches of the Onna River. On this occasion members of the Defense Force brought
hand grenades and induced residents to “commit suicide.”

This testimony of a military affairs director conveys vividly the situation on the ground at
the time of “group deaths.” One can see that the military affairs directors who conveyed
military orders in an encirclement area bore a crucial responsibility. Japanese citizens were
taught that a military order was “an order from the Emperor.” Also people believed that
“choosing death” rather than becoming a POWs was “the way of an imperial subject.” They
were thus compelled, under the direction of local leaders, to put into practice the provision
in the Field Service Code (Senjikun) that instructs one “not to suffer the humiliation of
becoming a prisoner of war.”

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Border-Crossers and Resistance to U.S. Military Rule in the Ryukyus, 1945-1953
Matthew R. Augustine
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http://www.japanfocus.org/-matthew_r-augustine/2906

Okinawa was administered by the United States military between the end of the Battle of Okinawa in June 1945 and its reversion to Japan in May 1972. Matthew R. Augustine’s article covers the period stretching from the start of American military planning prior to the Battle of Okinawa to the return of the Amami Islands, the northernmost portion of the occupied Ryukyu Islands, in 1953. The article outlines the consequences of the American decision to administratively separate the Ryukyu Islands from Japan proper, and allow the military to run it as a military colony, along with the social and political currents that were set in motion as a result. As Augustine explains, this involved not only isolating Okinawa from Japan, but also the different islands of the Ryukyus from one another, in the process disrupting the economic, social, and political networks that had earlier sustained Okinawa’s economy and society. However, as he details in the section that follows, Okinawans did not accept these conditions passively, and in their struggle for survival revived earlier links with Japan to the north and neighboring countries to the south through illicit smuggling networks. From there, Augustine discusses how the Cold War confrontation of the late 1940s led to a partial re-establishment of economic links with the mainland while rigorously continuing (or perhaps more accurately systematically monitoring) political separation.

Augustine concludes by explaining how the San Francisco Peace Treaty of September 1951, by restoring sovereignty to a newly democratized Japan while authorizing a potentially permanent foreign occupation of the Ryuku Islands, made Okinawans conscious of the way in which the American occupation was frustrating their aspirations for full democratic rights and economic opportunity. Their frustration about this divergence of fates spurred a movement that championed Okinawa’s reversion to Japan. Fueled by various incidents that generated grievances against American rule and by the counterexample of mainland Japan’s economic prosperity in the late 1950s and 1960s, the movement intensified to such a degree that American officials themselves were convinced by the latter half of the 1960s that their interests would be better served by allowing reversion to happen. The U.S. military continued to maintain bases on Okinawa, however.
Border-Crossers and Resistance to US Military Rule in the Ryukyus, 1945-1953
Matthew R. Augustine

Sixty-six years after Japan’s annexation of the former Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879, in the waning months of the Asia-Pacific War, the American military partitioned the Ryukyu Islands from Japan. The replacement of Okinawa Prefecture by US military rule in the Ryukyus from 1945 had profound implications, for residents of the occupied islands. A major repercussion of the military government’s separation of the Ryukyus was the enforced isolation of the four main island groups from occupied Japan. The Ryukyu-Japanese border severed long-standing administrative and economic links, while restrictive border controls prohibited free travel and interaction between the two sides. Another consequence of this imposed barrier was the socio-economic problem of how to provide for the livelihood and welfare of the island residents, who thereby became entirely dependent on the military government. These problems were compounded by the massive destruction, loss of life, and overall displacement of residents in the wake of war, especially in Okinawa.

Residents of the Ryukyus responded by developing a thriving smuggling trade that extended southwest from Okinawa to the Miyako and Yaeyama Islands, as well as to the Amami Islands and Japan in the other direction. The illicit smuggling trade became so rampant that in 1948 the military government responded by implementing measures to promote economic integration among the four main island groups. Trade barriers with Japan were relaxed in 1950, but the San Francisco Peace Treaty signed in 1951 reaffirmed that the Ryukyus would remain under US military rule, divided from Japan. By this time, the increasing cross-border interconnections between residents in the Ryukyus and Okinawan and Amamian residents in Japan had already given rise to an organized movement calling for reversion to Japanese sovereignty.

How did the establishment of the military government and new postwar borders actually affect the movement of residents within and outside of the Ryukyu Islands? Conversely, to what extent did the resistance of residents in the Ryukyus and their effort to overcome their division and isolation influence the military government’s border controls and related occupation policies? Most studies of migration and border controls focus exclusively on the role of the nation-state in answering such questions, although some recent scholarship attempts to emphasize the agency of the migrants. I argue that what happened at the territorial boundary between Japan and the Ryukyus was shaped by the interplay between the national politics of border controls and the actions of those who transcended these borders. This relationship was in turn strongly influenced by the emergence of the Cold War conflict in Northeast Asia. This article will therefore examine the interplay between these domestic and international forces.

A transnational history of border-crossings can best reveal the interlinked relationship between the various movements of people and the border politics of the US-occupied Ryukyu Islands. Weaving together the US occupation of the Ryukyus with that of Japan proper will also help break down the barriers of national history, which have largely ignored the Okinawan experience, beyond the realm of geopolitical issues relating to the large-scale US military presence. The politics of drawing and redrawing postwar borders as
Augustine: Border Crossers and Resistance to U.S. Military Rule in the Ryukyus

well as the cross-border networks within and beyond the Ryukyus developed in a relatively short period of time. This study therefore focuses on the most fluid stage of US military rule in the Ryukyus, from the landing of Army forces on Okinawa in April 1945 until the reversion of the Amami Islands in December 1953.

Borders, Divisions, and the Isolation of the Ryukyus

Why were Okinawans arrested for illegal entry when they crossed into Japan after 1945? This question cannot be answered without considering, briefly, how Okinawa Prefecture was divided from Japan and renamed the Ryukyu Islands during the Asia-Pacific War. Examining the wartime origins of Okinawa’s division from Japan in turn reveals the historical background behind the incorporation of the Ryukyus as a Japanese prefecture. The US State Department first conceived the idea of separating Okinawa from Japan while drafting the terms for Japan’s surrender. In advance of the Cairo Conference in July 1943, the Territorial Subcommittee prepared a series of policy studies on various island groups surrounding Japan, mapping out the territorial boundaries for postimperial Japan. The policy document on Okinawa began by stating that the “postwar territorial adjustments in the Far East will involve the question of the possible detachment of the Liuchiu Islands from the Japanese Empire.” Consciously referring to Okinawa by its ancient Chinese name, Liuchiu, the document reminded the reader that the Ryukyus were stripped of sovereignty when Japan forcibly annexed the islands in 1879. Considering the future disposition of the Ryukyus, the document ended by outlining policy proposals primarily aimed at preventing Japan from using these islands again for imperial expansion.

While the State Department continued to shape American policy towards the Ryukyus, the US military began producing detailed studies about the islands in preparation for occupying and using them as stepping-stones in the military conquest of Japan. On June 1, 1944 the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) published a 147-page intelligence report entitled The Okinawas of the Loochoo Islands: A Minority Group in Japan. This report found that, while the Japanese government implemented a heavy-handed assimilation policy, Okinawans were simultaneously discriminated against for not being fully Japanese. Consistently emphasizing the cleavage between the Japanese and Okinawans, the OSS report suggested that US forces might utilize this in psychological warfare and in the postwar occupation of Okinawa.

Recognizing the geostrategic importance of the Ryukyus as a military base, the US Navy employed this logic of differentiating between Japanese and Okinawans as a convenient justification for advocating the separation of the islands. On November 15 the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations produced a longer report entitled Civil Affairs Handbook: Ryukyu (Loochoo) Islands. Although this 334-page report differed from the OSS report in methodological approach and sources consulted, both concluded that the Ryukyu Islands and its people were not innately part of Japan. Both texts also restored the former name, “Loo Choo” or “Ryukyu” in their titles, further emphasizing the identity gap between the Ryukyus and Japan. Based on the premise that imperial Japan had forcibly assimilated Okinawans, the two sources together raised the possibility of de-assimilation to justify the separation and military rule over the Ryukyus.
Dismantling the Japanese ruling structure—politically and culturally—in the Ryukyus emerged as one of the main objectives of the US military invasion and occupation. On March 1, 1945 on the eve of the Battle of Okinawa, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet, issued a political and economic directive for the prospective military government in the Ryukyus. This detailed directive plainly spelled out that military occupation of the Ryukyus was necessary to destroy “Japan’s power of aggression and the military class which controls the Japanese Empire.” The directive granted the military governor the power to remove from office all high ranking or policymaking officials, and to dissolve all Japanese patriotic or secret societies. Then on April 1, 1945 Admiral Nimitz issued “United States Navy Military Government Proclamation No. 1,” as the US Tenth Army combat units landed on Okinawa Island. Declaring that “all powers of the Government of the Japanese Empire are hereby suspended,” the so-called Nimitz Proclamation signaled the administrative detachment of the Ryukyus from Japan. The newly established Military Government of the Ryukyu Islands thus replaced imperial Japan’s control over Okinawa in what would subsequently be referred to as the “disappearance of Okinawa Prefecture.”

The separation and military occupation of the Ryukyu Islands marked the beginning of a historical transformation from what Okinawans called the “Yamato (Japanese) period” to the “American period.” The dawning of the American period represented not only a psychological separation from Japan but also the subordination of the Ryukyus to the US military. As soon as US military forces arrived in Okinawa, they began referring to Okinawans as “Ryukyuans” to discourage the islanders from identifying themselves with Japan. Then on July 3, 1945, the day after the Japanese surrender in Okinawa, Col. Charles I. Murray became the Deputy Commander for military command and began immediately cementing Okinawa’s political subordination. In a symbolic statement on the new status of the Ryukyus, the military government formed the Okinawa Advisory Council on August 15, the same day that Emperor Hirohito announced Japan’s surrender. The Council was the first political organization entirely consisting of Okinawans, thus breaking from the prewar Japanese system of denying the local population political representation. Murray quickly made it clear, however, that the fifteen members of the Council would be limited to assisting and advising military government officials. 

While the Ryukyus were denied the far-reaching democratic reforms implemented in Japan, Murray recognized the value of a limited form of self-government to win Okinawan acquiescence to US military rule. As a result, on September 20, 1945 the military government held elections for mayors and assemblymen in the sixteen military government districts. Another major event in the political rehabilitation of the Ryukyus was achieved on April 24, 1946 when Shikiya Kōshin, a respected local educator, was appointed civilian governor—a post denied to Okinawans under Japanese rule. Governor Shikiya expressed the hopes of many Okinawans when he stated in his inaugural speech that, “in striving to build a better Okinawa than before, we will achieve the golden age for Okinawa with our hands.” Such reform measures, however, masked the fact that mayors, assemblymen, and governors in the Ryukyus were directly under the control of the US military government. The limits of political power in the Ryukyus were apparent in contrast to occupied Japan, where the local, regional, and central government exercised greater authority in interactions with US occupation officials.
Figure 1. Map of the Nansei Islands
The Yamato period was thus giving way to the American period, but where did the territorial boundaries of the Ryukyus end and those of Japan's begin? The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo, pushed for the 30° North Latitude as the line of territorial demarcation between the two occupations in Japan and the Ryukyus. This proposed border, however, was highly problematic for geopolitical and socioeconomic reasons. Most importantly, the establishment of the 30th parallel border meant that territory in addition to Okinawa, specifically the Amami Islands and part of the Tokara Islands, would be separated from Japan. Although the US Navy’s command in the Ryukyus was interested in taking over the Japanese naval base in Amami Oshima, these islands continued politically and economically to function as an integral part of Kagoshima Prefecture after Japan’s military defeat. The Amami Islands since the Meiji period had been sending elected representatives to the prefectural assembly in Kagoshima, where offices and records of all departments of local government were located. The public finance system there also correlated with and was dependent upon the larger financial structures in Kagoshima and in Tokyo. Furthermore, not only were family registries (koseki) and other official records of residents kept in Kagoshima, but Amamians strongly identified with Japan, rather than with the Ryukyus.

Despite such considerations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the highest echelon in the US military command, decided in late December 1945 that an expanded command in the Ryukyu Islands could better secure Okinawa. The JCS was also interested in Koniya Bay in the Oshima Straits, where the former Japanese Navy had set up a deep-water base as a safe retreat in battle and from typhoons. Rear Admiral John D. Price, who replaced Col. Murray as the chief military government officer in September, initially resisted this decision, emphasizing the high cost of administering the Amami and Tokara Islands. However, Price ultimately agreed to incorporate these islands into the Ryukyus in exchange for additional personnel, civilian and military supplies, and improvements in communication and transportation facilities. Having secured Price’s consent, on January 29, 1946 SCAP sent a directive to the Japanese government, officially separating the Amami and Tokara Islands from Japan and adding them as a part of the Northern Ryukyus.

The newly expanded Ryukyu Islands was initially marked by internal borders that administratively separated Okinawa from Amami and the other island groups. After military government teams from Okinawa assumed control of the Miyako and Yaeyama Islands in December 1945 and the Amami Islands in March 1946, autonomous governing bodies were formed in each of the island groups. Like the Okinawa Advisory Council, however, these so-called “provisional governments” were powerless and strictly controlled by the military governments set up in each of these island groups. The military government in Okinawa thus consciously divided the Ryukyu Islands geographically and politically into four provisional governments, as can be seen in Figure 2: one in the Northern Ryukyus (Amami Islands), one in Okinawa, and two in the Southern Ryukyus (Miyako and Yaeyama Islands). Under close guidance by the military government, these four separate island districts established autonomous political structures as well as autonomous economies. Furthermore, in an archipelago noted for its diversity of distinctive languages and cultures, the postwar divisions reinforced a strong sense of island and island group identities that distinguished, for example, the Amamians from the Okinawans. These four island groups,
collectively renamed the Ryukyu Islands, were thus marked by multiple lines of division, from Japan and from each other.\textsuperscript{17}

As a result of the multiple divisions that characterized the Ryukyu Islands, residents began their lives in the immediate postwar years cut off from long-established economic, cultural, and kinship bonds within the Ryukyus and beyond. The political and economic isolation, which proved disastrous for many\textsuperscript{18}, was intensified by the social isolation that resulted from the imposition of stringent travel restrictions in Okinawa, then applied later to the other island groups. Such restrictions against population movements were first implemented during the Battle of Okinawa when the Tenth Army herded local residents into refugee camps. By the end of hostilities, most of the 320,000 Okinawans who survived the war found themselves confined within one of twelve such district camps on the island. Although the military government initiated the resettlement program in October 1945, in reality, much of Okinawa was still occupied by US Army units. Tens of thousands of Okinawans were forced to relocate to one or more camps and to live in tents for months and even years. In the face of US military bases with ubiquitous signs that read “OFF LIMITS,” the number of civilians authorized to cross into and out of designated districts was limited to a minimum.\textsuperscript{19} When permission was granted, Okinawans had to register and carry with them special identification passes so that the military government could closely monitor their movements. Okinawa had thus become an island off limits to its own native inhabitants.\textsuperscript{20}

Population control under American military rule extended to the rest of the Ryukyus which, unlike Okinawa, had experienced neither a ground invasion nor forced seizures of land for use as military bases. The residents of Amami Oshima therefore were dismayed when rigid travel restrictions were suddenly imposed. On February 4, 1946, the military government
ordered what amounted to a naval blockade of the Amami Islands, terminating all interaction between Amami and mainland Japan. Specifically, this directive entailed that: 1) unrestricted travel between Japan and Amami would no longer be permitted; 2) people who desired to travel between Japan and Amami would be limited to those intending to establish permanent domicile (eiijū) in either place; 3) those granted permission to travel had to follow provisions set up for the planned repatriation program. Shortly thereafter, the free export and import of goods to and from Japan was also banned. Although Amami was now reincorporated into the Ryukyus, similar restrictions applied to all forms of interactions with Okinawa. This was the beginning of what has been referred to as the isolation period in Amami’s postwar history.

The division and isolation of the Ryukyu Islands from Japan was enforced by the military government’s strict border control policies. In the Ryukyus, as in Japan, the only border-crossings permitted by the military government was the voluntary repatriation of people displaced by the war. Thus, while the military government and SCAP both strongly encouraged the two-way flow of homeward-bound repatriation, all other forms of unauthorized immigration and emigration were deemed illegal. In July 1946, the Army replaced the Navy in charge of the military government, and the newly reorganized Ryukyus Command (RYCOM) improved joint border control measures with the Army command in Japan. For example, ships seized for unauthorized entry into Japan were returned to the Ryukyus under escort of the US Eighth Army. Once deported to the Ryukyus, the military government tried the crew, passengers, and owners of the confiscated vessels in appropriate courts for unauthorized exit or illegal trafficking. Such restrictive border control measures were thus instituted by occupation authorities on either side of the 30th parallel in large part to reinforce the separation of the Ryukyus from Japan.

**Intra-Ryukyuan Smuggling and the “Yamato Trade”**

The establishment of stringent border controls fundamentally transformed the socio-economic foundations of the Ryukyu Islands, which had historically relied on maintaining contact with the outside world. In modern times, one of the most prominent characteristics of Okinawa Prefecture until the end of the Pacific War was large-scale international and domestic migration. In the prewar period, between 40-60 percent of the average income of Okinawans derived from remittances sent by international migrants. Through such remittances, return migration, and by sending foreign-born children to be educated in their native villages, Okinawan immigrants established what Edith Kaneshiro has called “transnational families.” Networks of families and friends also spread to the major industrial centers in Japan, from where temporary migrants returned with their savings. This system of transnational and domestic networks, however, ceased to function in the wake of the Battle of Okinawa and remained suspended throughout the initial years of US military rule. By limiting contact with the outside world, the border controls of the military government thus severely disrupted everyday life within the Ryukyus.

The isolation of the US-occupied Ryukyu Islands compounded the residents’ daily struggle for survival in the desolation left behind by the recent war. For example, food shortage quickly emerged as an acute problem on Okinawa Island, where the bombardment of heavy artillery reduced agricultural and fishing production to a bare minimum. Commercial
livestock such as hogs, chickens and goats, constituting an integral part of the Okinawan diet, had also been mostly slaughtered. Such total devastation left Okinawan residents in refugee camps completely dependent upon the US military for food as well as clothing and shelter. In July 1945 the military government was feeding an average of 295,000 Okinawans every day, and by September seventy-five percent of the food supplied was covered by rations. The military government was unable to support the growing demand for imported rations, leading to a reduction in the rations allotted to each individual. Hungry Okinawans rummaged through cans of leftover food near US military bases, watering down the collected contents to eat as soup. Desperate to supplement their food with cooking oils and fats, some Okinawans were even known to have used automobile oil to deep-fry what was commonly referred to by locals as “Mobil tempura.”

Okinawans continued to rely on rations even after they left the refugee camps, although many also turned to the emerging black markets. The military government set up local rationing boards in every community to receive all available agricultural products for redistribution on the basis of need. By early 1946, however, the communally grown food and supplemental goods were no longer rationed for free but began to be sold as a part of postwar Okinawa’s transition back into a money economy. In May the military government introduced a new monetary system, exchanging Japanese yen currency still in circulation to the equivalent amount in Type “B” yen, a form of Occupation script printed by the US military. This controlled economy, however, did little to prevent a virtual state of bankruptcy from unfolding in the face of a growing black market trade. Stolen rations and supplies from US military depots that flowed into the black markets were bartered or sold with commodities smuggled into Okinawa to compensate for the shortage of sundries. A “double currency” thus emerged between the official price and the black market price, resulting in rampant inflation that plagued the entire Ryukyuan economy.

While black markets became a ubiquitous part of everyday life throughout the Ryukyu Islands, those in Okinawa boasted an abundance of US military supplies. In the waning months of war, the US Tenth Army had unloaded large quantities of surplus goods in Okinawa that could enable over a half-year of sustained battle against Japan. Since the anticipated ground warfare in mainland Japan did not materialize, these items were left stockpiled inside the base camps. Okinawans employed by the military government to work inside the bases as construction workers, drivers, cooks, and housemaids discovered bountiful goods that were denied to them. Inside the barb-wire fencing, they found everything from non-rationed foods such as meat, fish, canned fruit, and milk, to durable clothing such as military fatigues, dress uniforms (HBTs), and shoes, as well as prized tools such as nails, hammers, and shovels. Many Okinawans who had access inside the military bases began taking small amounts of these surplus supplies, calling them senka, literally meaning “fruits of war.” Before long, pilfering goods from US military depots became a widely practiced trade referred to as “winning senka,” as if they were engaging in a battle for survival. In fact, winning senka was so common at the time that there was a saying, “men search for senka while women engage in prostitution,” reflecting local survival strategies in response to the dire conditions in immediate postwar Okinawa.

The appropriation of surplus supplies from US military depots was followed by its redistribution in Okinawan society, usually through the black markets, but also through
kinship networks. Okinawan employees at military bases often shared their hard-won *senka* with their friends and family, but they sold the bulk of their goods to black market brokers who traded them with other smuggled commodities for a profit. A popular Ryukyuan poem captures the distribution of labor in this underground trade, reflecting social conditions in Okinawa at the time: “best pickings at the top, black markets in the middle, we at the bottom must win *senka*.” In other words, the upper class clung to the US military for access to power and prestige, the middle class could secure a decent living by trading black market goods, so the lower class was left to fend for themselves in pursuit of *senka*. In general, most of the *senka* was supplied by those who worked inside or lived nearby the major military bases in central Okinawa, then flowed into the thriving black markets in southern Okinawa. The emergence of new social classes in postwar Okinawa thus developed simultaneously with the geographical distribution of the US military bases and black markets.

The black market economy in Okinawa could not be contained within the artificial borders set up by the military government, but extended to other parts of the Ryukyus and beyond. According to Uehara Jingorō, a native of Itoman in southern Okinawa who was involved in the thriving black market trade, three main smuggling routes linked the Ryukyus to the rest of the region. One was the Taiwan route that spread from Miyako and Yaeyama, using Yonaguni Island as a relay station. The Hong Kong route was a large-scale extension of this Taiwan route. The third was the Japan route, otherwise known as the “Yamato trade,” spreading from Amami and Tokara with Kuchinoshima Island as its main base. In other
words, Yonaguni, located on the southern border with Taiwan, and Kuchinoshima to the north along the 30th parallel border with Japan, prospered as the north-south relay stations for smuggling in the Ryukyus. In defiance of the military government, residents of the Ryukyus were thus re-inventing new domestic and transnational networks of regional trade, this time based on a black market economy.

Before long a specialization of smuggled goods emerged in the Ryukyu Islands according to the three main routes. Uehara Jingorō’s colorful description of the variety of goods bartered and sold along these routes provides a glimpse into the regional scale of the increasingly well-organized networks of underground economic interaction. Uehara maintained that the Taiwan route involving Miyako and Yaeyama islanders smuggled in large quantities of rice, sugar, and saccharine products. Sometimes foodstuff was supplemented by precious materials such as tires and rubber tubing used for bicycles that were otherwise unavailable in the Ryukyus. These goods were exchanged for senka such as military uniforms, wool blankets, and rations of canned foods.

While civil war raged in neighboring China, the Hong Kong route involved exporting another form of senka – munitions such as cartridge cases, as well as motors, engine oil and gasoline – that were recycled for use on the battlefield. In exchange, British-made shoes, hats, suits, as well as Hong Kong dollars were imported into the Ryukyus. Finally, American medical supplies, especially new antibiotics like streptomycin for tuberculosis, sulfa drugs, and morphine were in high demand on the Japan route. These were bartered for Japanese-made pots and pans, crockery, carpentry tools, and lumber for building houses. As Uehara pointed out, the specialization of commodities traded along these routes reflected the early postwar conditions in each of these places. The industriousness of the residents in the Ryukyus can be observed here by their ability to turn senka, entirely consisting of the US military imports to the islands, into a valuable export commodity.

The biggest reason that cross-border smuggling was a thriving business through the early 1950s was precisely because the Ryukyus were cut off and isolated, both from the outside world and from each other. As a result, smuggling during this period can be broadly distinguished between what might be called “international” smuggling involving Taiwan, Hong Kong and even Japan, and “intra-Ryukyuan” smuggling involving the four main island groups. The latter in particular acted as a catalyst that helped economically reintegrate the Ryukus at a time when inter-island trade was treated more like foreign trade. Those who participated in the intra-Ryukyuan operations, such as Ibusuki Kenshichi from Tokunoshima of the Amami Islands, believed they were promoting free trade, not smuggling. Ibusuki was twenty-one years of age when he began buying goods from black marketers in Amami and reselling them for a profit in Okinawa, among other places. On several occasions, Ibusuki arranged with his friends who were employed as the crew aboard the official ferry liner to assist him in loading on board black market goods that he was sneaking into and out of Okinawa. Ibusuki claims that smugglers like himself “supported and reinvigorated the Amamian economy in the immediate postwar years.”

Intra-Ryukyuan smuggling became so widespread that the military government introduced a series of reform measures in 1948 to deal with the poor state of the economy. One of the main tasks was to fight rampant inflation, caused in part by large amounts of Japanese yen
smuggled back into the Ryukyus by repatriates, thus further fueling the black markets. In May the military government established the Bank of the Ryukyus, functioning as the central bank for the four main island groups and thus better regulating the flow of money. Then in July the B-Yen currency became the unitary legal tender throughout the Ryukyus, and all Japanese yen still in circulation was converted into this military scrip. In October military government officials finally began to re-introduce a free enterprise system in the Ryukyus. This meant eliminating price controls and rationing “in an attempt to transform the black markets into a white market.” It also meant that businesses were permitted to engage in free trade, to a limited degree, and inter-island trade within the Ryukyus was slowly reactivated. The material needs that drove so many residents to join the vast and growing smuggling networks at last convinced American authorities to dismantle some of the internal barriers that debilitated the Ryukyuan economy.

Meanwhile, the international smuggling trade continued to expand through the development of tight-knit island networks. One outstanding example of such a smuggling network was the Itoman fishing industry based on the southern tip of Okinawa. Before the war, the Itoman fishermen were well known for establishing wide-ranging fishing communities as far north as Izu in Japan and the Ogasawara Islands, and as far south as the Philippines, Micronesian islands, and Singapore. The Itoman fishermen utilized these prewar networks to build smuggling bases not only within the Ryukyus but all along the Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan routes. Using profits made from the lucrative Hong Kong route, the Itoman fishermen expanded their smuggling activities to Kikaijima in the Amami Islands en route to Kagoshima, where they could obtain Japanese goods. In Kagoshima, the Itoman community managed inconspicuous inns near the harbor for accommodating fellow islanders, thus evading the watchful eyes of Japanese police. With money earned from rent, the Itoman residents of Kagoshima obtained second-hand fishing boats that could be used as smuggling ships. Kagoshima thus became the front gate of the so-called Yamato trade, which quickly extended to other major Japanese harbor cities such as Osaka, Kobe, Hamamatsu, and Yokohama.

The large profits made by those engaged in the Yamato trade highlight the stark contrast between occupied Japan and the Ryukyu Islands in their respective economies. An Asahi Shinbun article dated December 31, 1949 reported that incidents of smuggling and the monetary value involved in the Hanshin area that year reached the highest levels since the end of the war. The goods seized included rubber, drugs, sugar, and machine parts worth an estimated total of 73 million yen at market price, but which could have been sold on the black market for as high as 500 million yen. Even though the overall pace of postwar recovery was still sluggish at this point, Japan remained the land of economic opportunity in the region, attracting smugglers from nearby territories. In contrast, the division and isolation of the Ryukyus, and US preoccupation with the islands as a military base, had left the entire archipelago a neglected wasteland with little prospect of economic growth. Four years after the US military invasion the islands had not approached self-sufficiency in food production, and the rationing system continued to feed a large portion of the population. The efforts of many residents to escape from such wretched circumstances lured them into the profitable Yamato trade, thus building underground networks that linked them back to Japan again.
Okinawa: ‘Keystone of the Pacific’ and America’s Cold War Boundaries

After years of apathy and neglect that earned US-occupied Okinawa the nickname, the “forgotten island,” the Cold War unfolding in the Asia-Pacific region helped determine the future political disposition of the Ryukyu Islands. US policy towards the Ryukyus was overhauled in October 1948 when the National Security Council (NSC) decided to develop the archipelago as a strategic base for containing the spread of communism in the region. This fateful decision meant that the Ryukyus were soon included in the American defense perimeter, thus militarily linking the islands to Japan. In March 1949 General MacArthur referred to the Asia-Pacific as “an Anglo-Saxon lake” in which the US line of defense “starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu archipelago . . . then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian island chain to Alaska.” The delineation of America’s new Cold War boundaries in the region also signaled an end to the isolation of the Ryukyus and the beginning of militarization there. Nowhere was this more dramatically effected than in Okinawa, which was transformed into a huge military base complex that would soon be dubbed the “Keystone of the Pacific.”

The internal and external boundaries of the Ryukyus had to be reconfigured after the NSC in early May 1949 called for maximizing political and economic security in the islands. Maj. Gen. Joseph R. Sheetz began spearheading a comprehensive set of reform measures as soon as he arrived in Okinawa as the new Commanding General of RYCOM. On October 1, Sheetz issued a directive to establish a centralized Ryukyuan government in order to reduce the autonomous power of local civilian governments in the four main island groups. The Provisional Government Assembly called for in this directive eventually paved the way for the federal system embodied in the Government of the Ryukyu Islands, which gathered representatives from the four gunto [island group] governments. Sheetz also called for a reorganization of the military government along the lines of SCAP’s “indirect” administration in Japan, so that American civil administrators could operate through Ryukyuan governmental authorities. As a result, when the United States Civil Administration for the Ryukyus (USCAR) replaced the military government in December 1950, it provided counterparts for subordinate departments in the Ryukyuan government. Furthermore, Sheetz implemented new economic regulations aimed at stabilizing inflation and eliminating smuggling and black market activities. In February 1950 the Ryukyu-Japan Commercial Trade Agreement was signed, resulting in the lawful circulation of daily convenience goods and thus decreasing the significance of smuggling among residents.

Although residents of the Ryukyus welcomed what they called “the just governance of Sheetz” (Shiitsu zensei), in reality the groundwork for the development of a military base economy in Okinawa was being laid. Starting with Sheetz, to the extent that American policies were directed toward economic growth and welfare, they pivoted on the construction of US military bases and their related industries. Americans first began pouring money into Okinawa shortly after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949. Not only did Okinawa receive the Pentagon’s $58 million program for strengthening its military reservations but also increased appropriations authorized by the US Congress in the Government and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) funds. The newly brokered Ryukyu-Japan Commercial Trade Agreement secured the GARIOA funds for the
construction of military bases in Okinawa, much of which was spent on importing large amounts of Japanese products. This carefully crafted appropriation of government funds was dubbed the “double usage of the dollar,” aimed at boosting both Okinawa’s and Japan’s recovery, with Japanese industry providing the engine of growth.50

The outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950 accelerated the militarization of Okinawa and the re-integration of the Ryukyu Islands into the Japanese economy, two policies that went hand-in-hand. Both the Ryukyus and Japan immediately became an integral part of the American war effort as forward deployment bases for B-29 bombers and new F-61s and F-80s taking off for the Korean peninsula. Although both occupied areas also provided goods and services called tokujū (“special procurements”) for US military forces, economic recovery based on the resulting war boom developed unevenly in each place. Most industrial sectors in Japan greatly benefited from American dollars spent on these tokujū, such as manufactured metal products and finished textile goods, as well as services such as repairs on US tanks and aircraft.51 This accounted for what were called the “textile industry boom” and the “metal industry boom” in Japan where standards of living gradually increased.

The Ryukyu Islands also experienced a war boom, especially in the form of a “construction boom,” albeit with a catch. Construction of US military bases in Okinawa was mostly contracted out to mainland Japanese companies as well as those from the United States. The Japanese government aggressively financed Japanese construction companies, which accounted for more than half of those doing the construction, reaping great profits. The local population primarily benefited from the construction boom beginning in November 1951, when thousands of Okinawan laborers were hired for construction projects.52 The low cost of local labor was the most valuable commodity in the Ryukyus as far as the American military was concerned. By one measure, Japanese laborers on US military bases in Okinawa earned, at a minimum, five times more than Okinawan laborers.53 In contrast to the revival of the Japanese economic powerhouse, Okinawa was thus being rebuilt within the framework of an economy centered and dependent on the US military bases.

Besides their labor power, Okinawans had one other distinctive commodity for export – scrap metal – which accounted for the so-called “scrap boom.” The Battle of Okinawa, otherwise known as the “storm of steel,” had left behind the rusting skeletons of countless American tanks, jeeps, combat planes, and half-sunken vessels.54 RYCOM initially offered Nationalist China these rusted relics of war machines so that they could be recycled and used against the Communists in the Chinese civil war. Enterprising Okinawans profited from smuggling out their share of scrap metals through the Hong Kong route. The Korean War then replaced the Chinese civil war as a greater source of profit, as Japanese industries were willing to pay a high price for scrap that could be converted into their own tokujū industry.55 Before long, entire families of Okinawans left home together to gather this valuable commodity, this time smuggling it via the Japan route. Although USCAR strictly prohibited smuggling what they claimed was the property of the US military, residents continued to dig up scrap metal wherever they could find it and sold it on the black market.56

The US military redoubled its efforts to stamp out smuggling during the Korean War,
especially after valuable scrap metals and even senka such as pistols, machine guns, and grenades began to be stolen and smuggled out of Okinawa. Just four days after the outbreak of the Korean War, the military government announced new regulations against local residents leaving the Ryukyu Islands without permission. The announcement reflected US concerns that non-ferrous metals such as bombshells and other ammunition smuggled out of their military bases might end up in enemy hands. On August 31, 1950 the military government ordered all local newspapers such as the Uruma Shimpō (later, the Ryukyu Shimpō) to publish warnings against smugglers, illegal entrants, and owners and crew of unregistered ships. In addition, the US Navy periodically mobilized landing ships (LSTs) – pilot ships of over 15,000-ton class – for apprehending smugglers. The defense perimeter of these ships covered Kuchinoshima to the north to the shores of Yonaguni to the south. In fact, maintaining strict control over these islands on the northern and southern borders of the Ryukyu Islands emerged as a top priority for the military government during the Korean War.

From about 1948, military government and SCAP officials alike became increasingly concerned with another element in illegal border-crossings; namely, what they perceived to be “communist infiltration” into their respective zones of occupation. SCAP’s Civil Intelligence Section, established in early 1948, functioned like the CIA in occupied Japan. The primary responsibility of its Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) was to identify and monitor “subversive elements” who might commit “acts prejudicial to the Occupation.” The CIC in the Ryukyu Islands was under the control of RYCOM. Like the Far East Command based in Japan, RYCOM was thoroughly committed to the containment of “communism” while preventing political activists from infiltrating its command. According to Kinjō Ryōan, who was employed by the CIC, “the CIC was not interested in smuggling per se. Instead, it was concerned with people who entered [the Ryukyus] from the outside, since spies were using smuggling ships to move about.” The military government lent the four Guntō police patrol cruisers to apprehend smugglers, while replacing ineffective civilian police with American Military Police and CIC personnel. As a result of these stepped-up measures, an Okinawa Times article quoted official figures of captured smuggling vessels jumping from 19 in 1949 to 109 ships just through August of 1950.

In the midst of growing concern over “communist infiltration,” a new set of travel regulations euphemistically called the “passport system” replaced repatriation between Japan and the Ryukyu Islands. Allegedly granting special permission to a limited number of temporary visitors “for compassionate reasons,” in reality SCAP and military government authorities began screening out political activists branded as agitators. Starting in August 1949 travel from Japan to the Ryukyus was permitted to individuals who were not deemed a security risk, based on lengthy investigations into their backgrounds. In order to obtain a travel permit, a police report had to be filed to determine whether or not the applicant had any political affiliations deemed detrimental to American interests. Upon receiving the security clearance, applicants were required to sign an oath swearing that they were entering the Ryukyus for legitimate purposes such as visiting family members. In order to emphasize this point, travelers were warned that they would be under constant surveillance, and that any violations would receive immediate punishment. Similar
regulations were adopted in December 1949 for residents of the Ryukyus requesting special permission to travel to Japan.

The passport system highlighted unresolved questions regarding the legal status of residents in the Ryukyus. When Okinawan and Amamian residents of Japan traveled to their home islands, they were required to go through immigration procedures. A Ryukyuan immigration official inspected their passports issued by the Japanese government, which listed them as Japanese nationals. On the other hand, when Ryukyuan residents traveled to Japan, they carried passports issued by USCAR that listed each individual as a “Resident of the Ryukyus,” without reference to their nationality. Although the Japanese government pushed to have residents in the Ryukyus recognized as Japanese nationals, SCAP and USCAR avoided addressing complicated legal questions surrounding nationality and citizenship. Furthermore, CIC agents monitoring immigration procedures were more concerned about the political orientation and activities of border-crossers, including those who espoused reversion of the Ryukyus to Japan.

Cross-Border Reversion Movements in Okinawa and Amami

The incorporation of the Ryukyu Islands into America’s Cold War boundaries meant closer ties and greater access to Japan, but the border at the 30th parallel still separated the two sides. The possibility of the Ryukyus’ return to Japanese sovereignty was anathema to the US military, which aimed to retain the chain of islands as a valuable strategic asset. In the immediate postwar years, most residents in the Ryukyus were too preoccupied with rebuilding their lives to give much thought to political issues, and the few who did endorsed autonomy and independence from Japan. Nevertheless, by the early 1950s the reversion issue rapidly emerged to the forefront of public debate in Okinawa, and those who had journeyed to Japan, legally or otherwise, helped spur on this process. Some of the earliest border-crossers were actually political activists who later became influential figures in the reversion movement. Yoshida Shien, for example, was working for the Okinawa Prefectural Office in Fukuoka, Japan, when he illegally entered Okinawa in late July 1946. The Prefectural Office entrusted Yoshida to embark on a secret mission to investigate postwar conditions in Okinawa, since little information was available in Japan about what had transpired since the Battle of Okinawa. Entering Okinawa aboard a small steam-engine boat disguised as a fishing vessel, Yoshida attempted to meet Shikiya Kōshin, his prewar colleague and then-Governor of Okinawa. Although Shikiya declined to be seen publicly with a “stowaway” like Yoshida, other Okinawan officials secretly exchanged information about existing conditions in Okinawa and Japan. Upon his return to Japan, Yoshida was appointed as the new director of the Tokyo Office of Okinawa Prefecture. Having witnessed firsthand the devastation and poor living conditions in Okinawa under US military rule, Yoshida soon became an enthusiastic supporter of reversion to Japan.

Yoshida Shien was one of the few Okinawan residents in Japan who advocated reversion in the early postwar years, but hardly any individual or organization within the Ryukyu Islands did so. Instead, the Navy’s initial policy of dismantling Japanese institutions won the support of many Okinawans, as reflected in Governor Shikiya’s inaugural address promising to replace Japanese rule by building a “golden age for Okinawa.” However, as Okinawans eager for self-government began to criticize Shikiya for failing to deliver on this
promise, the growing opposition against him led to the formation of the first political parties in 1947. On June 15, Nakasone Genwa founded the Okinawa Democratic Alliance (Minshū Dōmei), advocating greater autonomy for Okinawa, independent from Japan. On July 20, Senaga Kamejirō founded the Okinawa People’s Party (Jinmintō), which was even more explicit about the need to “destroy Japan’s military clique,” “establish popular government,” and “liberate the Okinawan race.” These and other political parties initially shunned Japan while welcoming American-style democracy, although their quest for autonomy would later put them on a collision course with the military government.

The repatriation of progressive Okinawans who were politically active in Japan proved instrumental in the formation of opposition parties. In particular, members of the League of Okinawans (Okinawajin Renmei) in Japan who repatriated after mid-1946 lent organizational experience to emerging local political figures like Nakasone Genwa in forming the Democratic Alliance. The League was formed on November 11, 1945 to protect the livelihood of Okinawan residents throughout Japan, and soon espoused political independence for Okinawa. The League was also closely associated with the Japan Communist Party (JCP), which was reemerging as a powerful political force under the leadership of Tokuda Kyūichi, himself an Okinawan who supported independence. At Tokuda’s initiative, in February 1946 the JCP sent a message to the League of Okinawans in Tokyo celebrating the detachment of the Ryukyus from Japan. Okinawans who either worked together with Tokuda or were otherwise involved in the socialist movement and union activism in prewar Japan also repatriated to Okinawa. Many joined forces with Senaga Kamejirō and the People’s Party. As a result, CIC officials subjected the People’s Party to constant surveillance, although no evidence was uncovered at the time that directly linked the Party to the JCP.

Repatriation produced even more direct political links between progressive forces in the Amami Islands and Japan, leading to Amamian support for reversion long before any political organization did so in Okinawa. In December 1946, for example, JCP member and Amami native Kuru Gizō repatriated from Japan, after receiving Tokuda Kyūichi’s blessing to establish a communist party in Amami. The following April Kuru formed the underground Amami Communist Party (ACP) with the help of Nakamura Yasutarō, editor of Amami Times and a Marxist who had endured years of incarceration for his beliefs in prewar Japan. Nakamura subsequently managed to smuggle in official publications of the JCP, such as Zen’ei and Akahata, aboard repatriation ships coming into Amami. Although the JCP officially advocated independence for Okinawa and Amami, the ACP came out in support of reversion, due to the strong sense of identification with Japan it shared with the majority of fellow islanders. In response to the news of a possible early peace treaty between the Allied Powers and Japan in mid-1947, an ACP-affiliated youth organization helped organize a public rally where many endorsed Amami’s return to Japan.

Several years later, the ACP joined other political and social organizations in Amami that pushed forward the reversion issue to the forefront of their common agenda. Popular resistance against the military government’s empty promises of democratization, coupled with poor economic conditions, led to protests in 1948-49 that evolved into the reversion movement of the early 1950s. In August 1948, for example, Okinawa dockworkers at the US Navy port in Naha organized a general strike to protest against
harsh labor conditions and low wages. When RYCOM responded by closing all community ration stores and threatened to cut off food rations, the labor strike quickly transformed into a food ration struggle (shokuryō tōsō) throughout Okinawa. Although the ration stores were eventually reopened, RYCOM announced in January 1949 that the price of rationed food would be increased by three times in order to reign in chronic inflation. Nakasone Genwa and Senaga Kamejirō immediately formed a popular front, organizing mass meetings and circulating petitions. They ultimately convinced all twenty-three members of the Okinawa Assembly to resign in protest. The resulting food price crisis transcended not only class and politics but also geographical boundaries among the four main island groups, affecting residents throughout the Ryukyus. In Amami Oshima, public officials who could no longer afford to live off of their low salaries resigned and joined the black market, and some police officers even reportedly walked off of their job to become captains of smuggling boats.

While the majority of those who engaged in smuggling were motivated by economic reasons, increasing numbers did so as a form of political and social protest. For example, the military government’s neglect of basic educational needs drove teachers to join the Yamato trade route to smuggle in teaching materials. In Amami Oshima, an incident involving two schoolteachers who smuggled back Japanese textbooks in October 1948 received an outpouring of public sympathy when they were fired from their jobs for illegally entering Japan. Then in December 1949, a member of the Okinawa Youth Alliance in Japan smuggled into Okinawa sixty copies of Iha Fuyū’s Okinawa Rekishi Monogatari (The Tale of Okinawan History). Known as the “father of Okinawans studies,” this book was the culmination of Iha’s lifelong work on Okinawa. At a time when Okinawa lay in ruins and under US military rule, these smuggled books served as history textbooks for teachers and a source of pride and inspiration for Okinawan activists. Often becoming teachers upon illegally entering Okinawa, members of the Youth Alliance and the League of Okinawans smuggled in copies of the new pacifist and democratic Constitution of Japan. Thus finding a way to keep one another informed, schoolteachers soon emerged as central figures in the reversion movement.

As Okinawan sociologist Ishihara Masaie demonstrated in his seminal work on senka and smuggling, the Yamato trade evolved into social and political networks between residents in the Ryukyus and Okinawan residents in Japan. Countering the censorship imposed by U.S. military authorities on either side of the 30th parallel, Okinawan smugglers brought back uncensored information about Japan, both in print and by word of mouth. These returning border-crossers spread the news, based on their first-hand accounts, of SCAP’s democratization as well as the economic recovery of Japan that benefited Okinawan residents there but which was denied in the Ryukyus under US military rule. They particularly noted the booming Japanese economy during the Korean War, making Okinawans aware of the widening gap between Japan proper and the Ryukyuan economy. Once local residents recognized that US policy towards the Ryukyus was centered overwhelmingly on protecting its military assets, they began voicing their desire for reversion in order to gain political rights and economic aid from the Japanese government.

Although a few individuals in Japan had been advocating the return of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan, Amamian organizations were the first to lead a sustained reversion movement. As
soon as news broke in late 1949 that the Allied powers were engaged in peace treaty negotiations with the Japanese government, Amami residents and those in Japan began organizing to support reversion. Shortly after an Amami youth group in Miyazaki Prefecture publicly appealed for reversion in mid-February 1950, a student association in Tokyo and a youth group in Naze, Amami Oshima responded by holding similar rallies. These groups also initiated petition drives that were soon adopted by the Zenkoku Amami Rengō Sōhōnbu (Federation of Amami Islanders’ Association), or Amami Rengō. On November 15 the Amami Rengō sent a four-page petition to General MacArthur explaining that Amamians were Japanese nationals, not Ryukyuans, and that they opposed the indefinite continuation of US military rule. The Amami Ōshima Nihon Fukki Kyōgikai (Amami Oshima Reversion Council), or Fukkyō, formed on February 14, 1951, immediately began collecting signatures of all residents over the age of fourteen calling for the return of the islands to Japan. By April 10, Fukkyō had collected 139,348 signatures, or 99.8 percent of Amamians, who supported the early return to Japan.

Just as the underground flow of people and information between Japan and Amami helped unite the cross-border reversion movement, a similar strategy was soon adopted in Okinawa. More than a month after the Fukkyō was formed in Amami, the first organized reversion movement was launched in Okinawa on March 29 with the formation of the Okinawa Nihon Fukki Sokushin Kiseikai (Association for the Promotion of Reversion to Japan), or Fukki Kiseikai. Following the example set by Fukkyō in Amami, the Fukki Kiseikai circulated petitions throughout Okinawa calling for reversion to Japan. By July 1951, 199,000 people, roughly 72 percent of the electorate in Okinawa had signed these petitions, which were sent to Japanese and American delegates attending the San Francisco Peace Conference.

Although Okinawan activists harnessed their own cross-border networks with pro-reversion forces in Japan, they were also spurred on by the surging momentum of the reversion movement in neighboring Amami. News of the latest developments in Amami was readily accessible, since as many as 50,000 Amamians entered Okinawa between 1950 and 1953 to work as laborers on the expanding US military bases. Political activists from Amami as well as from Japan often disguised themselves as military base laborers in order to enter Okinawa, thus helping to spread the reversion movement throughout the Ryukyus. The defiant act of crossing the 30th parallel border once again served an important role in the Amami reversion movement after the radio broadcast on July 10, 1951 detailed the final draft of the Peace Treaty. According to Article 3 of the draft, the United States sought the right to place the Ryukyu Islands under American trusteeship, implying that the islands’ executive, legislative, and judiciary powers could indefinitely be controlled by the US. Upon organizing two large-scale citizen rallies, Fukkyō began conducting island-wide hunger strikes and decided to send delegates to Japan to make one final appeal for reversion directly to Prime Minister Yoshida. On August 10, eleven Fukkyō delegates from Amami illegally entered Japan to join hands with Amami Rengō, capturing national attention at this critical stage in the reversion movement. One group was arrested and imprisoned for illegal entry, while the others managed to reach the Fukkyō office in Kagoshima, from where they found safe passage through Osaka before arriving at the Amami Rengō’s Tokyo headquarters. In the meantime, members of the Fukkyō and
Amami Rengō contacted major Japanese news agencies such as Asahi and Mainichi, which gave extensive and sympathetic coverage to these delegates.87 Riding a wave of increasing public support, the delegates from Amami were able to meet with Prime Minister Yoshida, Japanese Diet members, and SCAP officials, making a strong case for the reversion of their islands when Japan regained its sovereignty.

Conclusions: The Ryukyu Islands Re-divided

The San Francisco Peace Treaty signed on September 8, 1951 spelled the end of the Allied Occupation of Japan, and its Article 3 legitimated the division between postwar Japan and the Ryukyu Islands. Although most residents of the Ryukyus were disillusioned by the prospects of indefinite American military rule, the reversion movement in Amami Oshima only intensified as a result. In fact, the on-going Amami reversion movement was receiving such sympathetic media coverage in Japan and abroad that it prompted the US government to conduct two investigative studies of the Amami Islands. The first was a public opinion survey compiled by USCAR's Civil Information and Education (CI&E) office, which found that the overwhelming support for reversion was due to a combination of: a) feelings of close affinity and identification with the Japanese people and culture; b) a tendency to dissociate Amami from Okinawa and other Guntos; c) a belief that a trusteeship administration for Amami Oshima would be unsatisfactory. The survey concluded that favorable attitudes toward reversion "seem to be too intense and deep-seated to be changed overnight by any feasible information program."88 Instead of launching a propaganda campaign in favor of trusteeship, the second investigative report compiled by anthropologist Douglas Haring recommended returning the islands to Japan. Detailing his findings that the people of the Amami Islands were "culturally more Japanese than Okinawans," Haring suggested that the reunion of the islands to Japan could help win back the hearts and minds of Amamians.89 Unbeknownst to Amamians at the time, these reports would soon convince US policymakers to readjust the territorial boundaries of the Ryukyus.

Seven and a half years after the detachment of the Amami Islands from Kagoshima Prefecture, the US government in August 1953 declared its intention to return the island group to Japan. By then the Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that the Northern Ryukyus were of minor strategic value, especially in contrast to Okinawa, the "keystone of the Pacific." The US military’s initial interest in the deep-water base at Koniya Bay in the Oshima Straits was ultimately deemed irrelevant. On the other hand, RYCOM from late 1949 put more value in the airfields that were being developed in central and southern Okinawa. The fact that the rugged and mountainous terrain of Amami Oshima was unsuitable for airfields made it easier for the US military to dispense with the territory. When the Amami Islands finally reverted to Japan on December 25, 1953, the external boundary of the Ryukyu Islands retracted to the archipelago south of 27° North Latitude.90 The Amami Islands were thus transferred across the new borderline and back to Japan, while the Ryukyus remained under American military rule. Although the US military’s strategic and security policies were paramount, the Amami reversion movement was nevertheless one of the most successful sociopolitical movements in postwar Japan.91

The effectiveness of the Amami reversion movement can be characterized by its unwavering dedication, high level of organization and, most importantly, the strong
identification with Japan and the cross-border unity with Amami residents in Japan. These traits rested on firm historical ties between Amami and Japan, as well as cultural bonds that simultaneously distanced Amamians from Okinawans. Douglas Haring found that Amamians themselves were often “too close to the issues to see them in perspective, but there is no question about their basic loyalties and complete psychological identification with Japan.” Haring also observed that throughout the prewar period, Amamians seeking social mobility moved to Kagoshima and beyond until nearly every Amami family was said to have a close relative living in Japan. In the early 1950s, the Amami residents in Japan, estimated at a population of 200,000, was nearly the same size as the 219,000 people residing in the Amami Islands. These large and active Amami communities in Kagoshima, Hanshin, and Tokyo succeeded in linking their reversion movement with the one unfolding within Amami. In this process, those conducting hunger strikes in Amami also received strong support from the authorities in Kagoshima Prefecture, which lobbied the central government for Amami’s re-incorporation into Japan.

In contrast to Amami, US military authorities exploited Okinawa’s ambivalent identification with Japan in its reversion movement. While support for reversion was strong in Okinawa, those with bitter memories of Japanese prejudice and discriminatory treatment towards them had mixed feelings. For example, a newspaper report on public opinion concerning reversion captures this ambivalence. As one Okinawan explained, “those who oppose American rule talk about racial prejudice and other related problems, but I believe that such things will be much worse under the Japanese.” Ever since the OSS report in 1944 recommended utilizing cleavages between Okinawans and Japanese in psychological warfare, the military government attempted to foster a “Ryukyuan” identity to justify the separation and military rule in the islands. Although most residents may not have perceived themselves as “Ryukyuan,” the promise of American-style democracy and self-government in the immediate aftermath of war contributed to the wavering identity of Okinawans. The Democratic Alliance thus continued to champion independence while the Socialist Party called for an American trusteeship going into the elections in March 1951. Even the pro-reversion coalition in Okinawa, the Fukki Kiseikai, split up shortly after the signing of the Peace Treaty in September, as the movement came to a standstill at a time when it was gaining momentum in Amami.

The fact that the reversion movement did not emerge in either Okinawa or Amami until the early 1950s demonstrates that questions of identity alone fail to capture the full range of motivations behind its supporters. Residents in the Ryukyu Islands expected and actively demanded greater political autonomy only to be disillusioned by details of the peace treaty negotiations, which revealed that the United States planned to continue its military occupation. The petitions circulated throughout the Ryukyus in 1951 were essentially a referendum against US military rule and its draconian ordinances, which convinced residents that indefinite occupation was actually akin to colonial rule. Reversion to Japan, on the other hand, promised democratic rights enshrined in the new Japanese Constitution, as well as the full benefits of citizenship. Pragmatic considerations of how to access Japanese health insurance, postal savings, pensions, and old-age benefits – all of which residents of the former Okinawa Prefecture were legally entitled to before 1945 – were crucial for supporters of the reversion movement.
Economic considerations also motivated residents in the Ryukyu Islands to support reversion, as many hoped to reap the benefits of the resurgent Japanese economy rather than remain a ward of the US military base economy. The political and economic barriers erected by the military government after the Pacific War suffocated the island economy, at least until the emergence of the intra-Ryukyuan smuggling trade. Against all odds, isolated islanders transformed a fledgling barter trade into a thriving cross-border black market trade, spurring economic interaction among the four island groups. The military government was forced to respond by introducing economic reform measures in 1948 and 1949 that included re-introducing a free enterprise system and inter-island trade. On the other hand, those engaged in the Yamato smuggling trade returned with news of just how much the Japanese economy was benefiting from the Korean War, as evidenced by the large profits some of them made in Japan. The widening gap between the burgeoning Japanese economy and the military base economy in Okinawa, in turn, led many residents to support reversion. As one Okinawan economist bluntly explained, instead of advocating reversion because “Okinawans are Japanese,” he supported reversion because “economic rehabilitation in Okinawa can be sped up by uniting with Japan.”

The Yamato trade route between the Ryukyu Islands and Japan once dominated by smuggling thus began to share the scene with the cross-border reversion movement that began in the early 1950s. This indicated that the local residents’ economic struggle for survival through smuggling was replaced by a socio-political resistance manifested by the unfolding reversion movement. Political activists were now illegally traveling between Japan and Okinawa, and between Japan and Amami, often on the same route and same boats as those who were smuggling black market goods. Just as smugglers in the Ryukyus utilized their contacts with the Okinawan and Amamian communities in Japan, those residents in Japan also sneaked into the Ryukyus to investigate conditions in their home islands. This two-way flow of people, goods, and information enabled reversion activists in Japan and in Okinawa/Amami to coordinate their activities. Smuggling and the reversion movement were two forms of resistance against USCAR’s tight border controls and travel restrictions, as well as an overall resistance against the policy of separation between Japan and the Ryukyus.

Even after the reversion of the Amami Islands in 1953, residents in the Ryukyus continued to challenge the external boundaries that denied them free passage into Japan. Ishihara Masaie has keenly observed that the annual “4.28 rally at sea” (4.28 kaijō shūkai) held during the height of the Okinawa reversion movement in the 1960s was reminiscent of earlier smuggling operations.
Boats carrying Okinawan and Japanese activists convened at sea on the 27th parallel on April 28, the “day of humiliation,” when Japan regained its sovereignty, divided from Okinawa. Many of these activists also protested the continuing US military presence in Japan and Okinawa, both of which served as forward deployment bases for the American-led war that was then raging in Vietnam. These actions at sea can be seen as an extension of the earlier period of economic and political resistance. The demonstrations at sea symbolized their rejection of the border, the division from Japan, and continuing US military rule in the Ryukyus.

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Notes


2 Separate policy studies were prepared for such Japanese-held island territories as the Kurile Islands, Bonin Islands, and the Spratly Islands.


4 The report ended by considering three policy proposals for the Ryukyu Islands: 1) transfer to China; 2) international administration; and 3) conditional retention by Japan. For further details, see Ota Masahide, “The U.S. Occupation of Okinawa and Postwar Reforms in Japan Proper.” In Robert E. Ward and Sakamoto Yoshikazu (eds.), Democratizing Japan: The Allied Occupation (University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 296-297.

5 The OSS, which was the predecessor of what later became the CIA, had been conducting ethnographic research on the large immigrant Okinawan community in Hawaii since the spring of 1944. A copy of the final report by the OSS can be found in Okinawa kenritsu toshokan shiryōhenshūhitsu (ed.), Okinawa kenshi shiryō hen 2, The Okinawas of the Loo Choo Islands (Yūgen gaisha san insatsu, 1996).

6 According to the OSS report, “Psychological Warfare in its various aspects might well be brought to bear upon the cleavage … between the two Japanese groups, each with its own physical type, its own history, its own dynasties, mores and attitudes.” The Okinawas of the Loo Choo Islands, p. 122.


8 The directive also stated that all property belonging to the Japanese government and military was to be treated as public property and controlled as military requirements dictated. Directive from CINCPAC-CINCPAO to CG Tenth U.S. Field Army, subject: “Political, Economic and Financial Directive for Military Government in the Occupied Islands of the Nansei Shoto and Adjacent Waters,” March 1, 1945. A copy of this directive can be found in Arnold G. Fisch, Jr., Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, 1945-1950 (Center of Military History, United States Army, 1987), pp. 262-271.

9 This is the title of a book written by Urasaki Jun, who was an official employed by Okinawa Prefecture. Urasaki Jun, Kieta Okinawaken (Okinawa jiji shuppansha, 1965). The division between Japan and the Ryukyus was actually formalized on July 2, 1945 when Japanese military officials signed surrender documents at Kadena, Okinawa.

10 Okinawans hardly ever referred to themselves as “Ryukyuan,” many having seen through the US military’s adoption of this name as part of a heavy-handed effort to separate them from Japan. Furthermore, Okinawans were disinclined to identify themselves as “Ryukyuan” because mainland Japanese since the prewar era had used the name, Ryukyu-jin, as a pejorative term implying that they were inferior to the Japanese. The indigenous name for Okinawans is Uchinaachu, a term that was discouraged from usage by those who advocated assimilation to Japan before the war, but is used today by Okinawans who are proud of their distinctive identity. I would like to thank Steve Rabson for this clarification.

11 Okinawan men and women over twenty-five years of age were eligible to vote, a
historical event that preceded universal suffrage in Japan by three months, as enfranchised women turned out to vote in high numbers.


13 Geographically speaking, as shown in Figure 1, Okinawa and Amami Oshima are the two largest islands among what the Japanese refer to as the Nansei Islands; the former belongs to the subgroup called Okinawa Islands while the latter are referred to as the Satsunan Islands. The Nansei Islands consist of the entire island chain southwest of Kagoshima Prefecture in Kyushu, Japan. The Amami Islands are located approximately halfway between Kagoshima and Okinawa, while the Tokara Islands are closer to Kagoshima than they are to the Amami Islands.

14 In fact, the Amami and Tokara Islands had not been a part of the Ryukyus since 1609. As a result of a military expedition led by Shimazu Iehisa against the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1609, the Amami and Tokara Islands were incorporated into the Satsuma domain. From 1609 until shortly after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Amami and Tokara Islands remained a part of the Satsuma domain, which also dominated the Ryukyu Kingdom. When the Meiji government established modern-day prefectures in 1871, the Amami and Tokara Islands were included in Kagoshima Prefecture while the Ryukyu Islands south of 27° North Latitude became known as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879.

15 This SCAP directive, “Governmental and Administrative Separation of Certain Outlying Areas from Japan” (SCAPIN 677), formally separated the Ryukyus, the Ogasawaras and other former Japanese territories.


18 Following the Nimitz Proclamation that administratively separated the Ryukyus from Japan, Navy Military Government Proclamation No. 4 prohibited foreign trade and financial transactions.

19 The free movement of residents in Okinawa during daytime was first permitted in March 1947, and the curfew at night was finally lifted in March 1948. Until then, even local residents traveling to a neighboring district without permission from the police were arrested for trespassing. Miyagi Etsujirō, *Okinawa senryō no 27-nenkan: Amerika gunsei to bunka no hen'yō* (Iwanami Shoten, 1992), pp. 11-17.

20 According to Wakabayashi Chiyo, the expression “off-limits” held two meanings in symbolizing the American occupation of Okinawa. One was an Okinawa under the exclusive control of the US military, cut off from international society. Another aspect referred to the internal manifestations of this condition by which people were driven out and swept out of their villages, and which became off-limits in their own native island. See Wakabayashi Chiyo, “‘Ofu-rimittsu’ no shima,” *Gendai shisō*, March edition (Seidosha, 1999), p. 24.


23 SCAP explicitly prohibited unauthorized immigration and directed the Japanese
government to mobilize its police force to be on guard against illegal border-crossers. SCAPIN 244, November 8, 1945.

24 According to Arnold Fisch, by early 1946 the Navy found that the anchorages in Buckner Bay, Okinawa, were “not as desirable as originally thought,” and subsequently “lost interest in the Ryukyus except as a location for minor facilities.” Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, p. 174. On January 1, 1947, the Army’s command in the Pacific was reorganized as the Far East Command (FECom). RYCOM was placed under the jurisdiction of the general headquarters of FECom in Tokyo.


27 Wakabayashi Chiyo convincingly argues that one of the major transformations of postwar Okinawan society was that residents were prevented from maintaining such transnational links with overseas Okinawans. Wakabayashi Chiyo, “Jeepu to sajin: senryōshoki okinawa shakai no henyō to hen’i,” Okinawa bunka kenkyū, vol. 29 (March 2003), pp. 244-45, 254.

28 The amount of rations authorized to Okinawans was initially set at 1990 calories per day, but was later reduced to 1530 calories per day due to food shortage. From the Deputy Commander for Military Government to the Commander, NOB Okinawa and Chief MG Officer, “Final Report of Military Government Activities for Period from 1 April 1945 to 1 July 1946.” Dated July 1, 1946. Found in Military Archives Division, National Archives and Records Service, RG 260, Box 25.


30 For a short time after the war this currency was used simultaneously with the new yen being circulated in Japan proper. From 1948, however, the circulation of the new Japanese yen was prohibited and the B yen became the only legal currency used in Okinawa.

31 Okuno Shūji, Natsuko: Okinawa mitsubōeki no jō’ō (Bungei shunjū, 2005), pp. 138-139. Trafficking senka was so common that from February to September 1946, 1200 out of the 1260 cases handled by the Okinawa civil courts involved senka and trespassing. Namihira, “Amerika gunseika no sengo fukkō,” p. 221.

32 This Ryukyuan poem, or Ryūka, and its explanation can be found in Yakabi Osamu, “Ekkyō suru okinawa: Amerikanizumu to bunka hen’yō,” Kindai nihon no bunka-shi, vol. 9 (Iwanami Shoten, 2002). p. 249.


34 By the time the Chinese Communists drove the Nationalists into Taiwan in 1949, the smuggling activities in the Taiwan and Hong Kong routes gradually came to a halt, replaced by the Japan route via Kuchinoshima. Yakabi Osamu, “Kokkyō no kengen: Okinawa yonaguni no mitsubōeki shūsoku no haikei,” Gendai shisō, vol. 31, no. 11 (September 2003), pp. 187-188.

35 Okinawa Taimusu, Okinawa no shōgen, pp. 205-206.
37 Military Government Special Proclamations No. 29 and 30, dated July 21, 1948, stipulated that Japanese yen had to be converted to the Type “B” military yen under penalty of law.
38 Fisch, Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, pp. 149-150.
39 For more details, see Itoman City’s official website, “The Development of Itoman’s Fishing Industry.”
40 Ishihara Masae, Kūhaku no okinawa shakai-shi: senka to mitsubōeki no jidai (Banseisha, 2000), p. 239. Itoman residents in Kagoshima often came in contact with Amami residents, who had an equally well-organized base for their smuggling network.
41 Asahi shinbun, December 31, 1949. The editorial section of the Asahi shinbun on March 18, 1950 carried another article describing a high-profile arrest of nineteen people involved in the Ryukyus-Japan trade based in the Hanshin area. The authorities in this case estimated that the total amount of trade was worth anywhere between 200 to 500 million yen.
42 The apathy and neglect that characterized U.S. military rule helped Okinawa earn the nickname, the “forgotten island,” during the early postwar years. This nickname was coined by journalist Frank Gibney after his visit to Okinawa in 1949. See Frank Gibney, “Forgotten Island,” Time. November 28, 1949.
45 The four guntō, literally meaning island group) governments, with directly elected governors and assemblymen, were inaugurated in November 1950. The Provisional Government Assembly, made up of representatives hand-picked by U.S. authorities from throughout the Ryukyus, was inaugurated in April 1951. Both were replaced by the establishment of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands in April 1952.
46 For further details, see Fisch, Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, p. 128.
51 John Dower provides a more detailed list of these tokujū, which he estimates brought an estimated $2.3 billion into Japan between June 1950 and the end of 1953. See John W. Dower, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Aftermath of World War II (W. W. Norton: New Press, 1999), pp. 541-542.
52 Fisch, Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, pp. 144-145; 164-165.
53 Another figure showed that Japanese laborers at military bases earned, at the minimum, $0.83 (99.6), which was eight to nine times more than Okinawan laborers who earned $0.10 (11.0). Obermiller, “The U.S. Occupation of Okinawa,” pp. 216-217.
54 Further destruction caused by strong typhoons as well as other war-damaged military vehicles from the Far East Command dumped in Okinawa resulted in an estimated 2.5 million metric tons of available scrap iron, copper, brass, and other non-ferrous metals.
55 Ishihara, Kūhaku no okinawa shakai-shi, pp. 234-235.
56 In the meantime RYCOM’s export of scrap metals increased dramatically until it surpassed sugar as the number one export from Okinawa in 1951. Okuno, Natsuko, pp. 337-338.
57 American G.I.’s also sold military-issued supplies to civilians on the black market. The Military Police were on guard against such illicit transactions, especially when they involved the loss of US munitions.
59 Ishihara, Kūhaku no okinawa shakai-shi, pp. 236-238.
60 SCAP’s Civil Intelligence Section included the Public Safety Division, the Civil Censorship Detachment, and the 441st Counter-Intelligence Corps. See Takemae, Inside GHQ, p. 167.
61 Okuno, Natsuko, pp. 87-88.
63 Violators were imprisoned or fined 30,000 Yen. For further details, see Edith Kaneshiro, “For Compassionate Reasons’: Okinawan Repatriations during American Occupation of Japan.” In Ryukyu University, Kenkyū seika hōkokusho, sengo okinawa to amerika: ibunka sesshoku no sōgōteki kenkyū (Ryukyu University, 2005), pp. 330-331.
64 The Japanese government’s ordinance (seirei) no. 85 issued on April 27, 1947 recognized the family registries (koseki) in Okinawa as Japanese family registries. The possession of a Japanese family registry has been the basis for Japanese citizenship both in the prewar and postwar eras.
65 Yoshida Shien was a public official for Okinawa Prefectural Government before the war. With the “disappearance of Okinawa Prefecture” after the war, he was employed by the Okinawa Prefectural Office in Fukuoka.
66 Governor Shikiya did not meet with Yoshida out of fear of potential repercussions if the military government discovered that Yoshida had illegally entered Okinawa. Matayoshi Hirokazu, the Vice Governor, was among seven or eight people who met with Yoshida Shien. This episode of illegal entry into Okinawa was retold by Zukemura Tomonobu, who accompanied Yoshida Shien on the journey. See “Hikiagesha no kikan to mikko,” Yonabaru-chōshi, shiryō-hen, 1, Imin (Yonabaru-chō kyōiku iinkai, 2006), pp. 217-228.
67 One exception was Nakayoshi Ryōkō, former mayor of Shuri, who submitted a petition to the military government on August 4, 1945, requesting that Okinawa be reunited with Japan. Realizing that his repeated appeals were falling on deaf ears, however, he left Okinawa on July 23, 1946 and moved to Tokyo where he took his case directly to SCAP and the Japanese government.
69 Yamashiro Zenkō and Kuwae Chōkō, for example, were a part of the League’s leadership before repatriating from Tokyo, and soon thereafter became actively involved in the Democratic Alliance.
70 Aharen Yukitomo, for example, was a labor union organizer and member of the leftist Okinawan organization called the Sekiryūkai in the Kansai region in the 1920s. He repatriated to Okinawa in 1946 and was subsequently selected as a central committee member of the People’s Party.
71 Kuru returned to Japan in June to become a liaison between the ACP and the JCP headquarters in Tokyo. For further details, see Kato Tetsuro, “Aratani hakken sareta
'Okinawa/Amami higohō kyōsantō bunshō' ni tsuite,” Okinawa no higohō kyōsantō shiryō (Fuji shuppan, 2004).

72 In August 1948 Nakamura was arrested for being in possession of Communist Party journals and other materials that had been smuggled into Amami Oshima. See Nakamura Yasutaro, Sokoku e no michi: Kōbei 8 nen Amami no fukki undōshi (Tosho shuppan, 1984). pp. 164-176.

73 Tokuda Toyomi was one of Nakamura Yasutarō’s former students and a member of the youth organization who made a speech at the rally calling for reversion. See Nankai Nichinichi Shimbun (ed.), Gojūnenshi, p. 117. Cited in Robert D. Eldridge, The Return of the Amami Islands: The Reversion Movement and U.S.-Japan Relations (Lexington Books, 2004), p. 35.

74 As David Obermiller argues, the protest movements that preceded the reversion movement reveals the core impulse that propelled the reversion movement; namely, “popular resistance to foreign occupation and Okinawa’s neo-colonial status.” See Obermiller, “The U.S. Occupation of Okinawa,” p. 201.

75 Miyume Tanji, Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa (Routledge, 2006), p. 58.

76 After the Okinawa Assembly resigned en masse on March 2, 1949, Senaga and Nakasone conducted a public meeting on May 1, 1949. At the May Day demonstration, the popular front adopted the following three slogans aimed at obtaining greater democracy and economic relief: 1) direct elections for governor and assemblymen; 2) rollback of the 1948 income taxes; and 3) increase rations of supplementary military goods. For more details, see Obermiller, “The U.S. Occupation of Okinawa,” pp. 226-235.


78 Fukasa Genzō and Morita Tadamitsu entered Japan by sneaking aboard the Kanato Maru, a ferry liner which was to be docked in Kobe for repairs from June 1948. For a full treatment of this incident, see Satake, “Kanato Maru to kyokasho mikkō jiken,” pp. 87-133.

79 The Okinawa Youth Alliance published the original version of this book in November 1946. Shinmon Minoru, a full-time member of the Okinawan Youth Alliance in Kanagawa Prefecture, smuggled in Iha Fuyū’s books. Ishihara, Kūhaku no Okinawa shakai-shi, pp. 219-228.

80 See Ishihara, Kūhaku no Okinawa shakai-shi, pp. 218.

81 Based on his groundbreaking book, Kūhaku no Okinawa shakai-shi, I was able to confirm with Ishihara Masaie that the Ryukyuan residents’ economic struggle for survival through smuggling in the early postwar years was later replaced by a more socio-political resistance as witnessed by the reversion movement. Author’s interview with Ishihara Masaie, September 26, 2006.

82 Nankai Nichinichi Shimbun (ed.), Gojūnenshi, p. 125. For further details, see Eldridge, The Return of the Amami Islands, p. 41.

83 Murayama, Amami fukkishi, p. 248. According to Eldridge, while this figure was probably exaggerated, it nevertheless shows the residents’ overwhelming support for returning the islands to Japan. Eldridge, The Return of the Amami Islands, p. 71, footnote 88.

84 In addition, 88 percent of those in Miyako signed similar petitions. See Takemae, Inside GHQ, p. 514.

85 One such activist was Hayashi Yoshimi, an Amami native and member of the underground Amami Communist Party, who entered Okinawa in March 1952 as a laborer
while mobilizing Okinawan laborers to form a united front in the reversion movement. For a comprehensive treatment on Hayashi’s underground political activities in Okinawa, see Mori Yoshio, “Ekkyō no zen’ei, Hayashi Yoshimi to ‘fukki undō no rekishi,” in Nishi Masahiko and Hara Takehiko (eds.), Fukusū no okinawa: Diaspora kara kibō e (Jinbun shoin, 2003), pp. 311-347.

86 After the announcement on July 10 that the trusteeship clause in Article 3 could indefinitely isolate the Ryukyus from Japan, over 200 households are said to have similarly departed illegally from the Amami Islands between August 1 – 20. See Satake, Gunseika amami no mikkō mitsubōeki, pp. 137-144.

87 As a result of the deluge of appeals that poured in from the Japanese public, the police eventually released the arrested men, who were allowed to join the rest of the Amami delegates in Tokyo. Satake, Gunseika amami no mikkō mitsubōeki, pp. 144-145.

88 USCAR, CI&E Department, “The Reversion Movement on Amami Oshima, Final Report,” Scientific Investigations in the Ryukyu Islands (SIRI), March 1952. Copy of this report is available in the Amami Branch of the Kagoshima Prefectural Library in Naze City.


90 USCAR Proclamation No. 27, dated December 25, 1953, subject: “Geographical Boundaries of the Ryukyu Islands.”

91 Robert Eldridge demonstrates that the Amami reversion movement not only exercised “a clear influence on the policies of the Japanese government, but also had a significant impact on the decision making process of the US government . . .” The Return of the Amami Islands, p. 31.

92 Haring, “The Island of Amami Oshima in the Northern Ryukyus,” pp. 17-18. The CI&E Department’s public opinion survey found that 89 percent of respondents never identified themselves as Ryukyuan because Amami was historically an integral part of Kagoshima Prefecture. CI&E Department, “The Reversion Movement on Amami Oshima, Final Report,” p. 8.

[93] Eldridge argues that the support and lobbying that the Governor of Kagoshima Prefecture, Shigenari Kaku, undertook would prove critical in raising awareness of the issue throughout the prefecture and Japan. Eldridge, The Return of the Amami Islands, p. 32.

94 “Kizoku mondai meguri machi no koe wo kiku,” Uruma shimpō, dated April 23, 1951. Cited from Naha shishi: Shiryō-hen, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 435-437. This quotation is evidence that the Japanese military’s enforcement of collective suicide and false accusations of Okinawans as “spies” during the Battle of Okinawa weighed heavily on the minds of ordinary people when thinking about their future political disposition.

95 Koji Taira has argued that the U.S. effort to force Okinawans to choose a semi-colonial, marginalized Ryukyuan identity over a Japanese identity was “a thinly veiled racist contempt for Okinawans as an inferior people.” For further details, see Koji Taira, “Troubled National Identity: The Ryukyuans/Okinawans,” in Michael Weiner (ed.), Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity (Routledge, 1997), pp. 160-161.

96 This quotation from Okinawan economist, Takamine Akitada, can be found in Ikemiyagusuku Shūi, Okinawa hankotsu no jyānarisuto: Ikemiyagusuku Shūi serekushon (Niraisha, 1996), p. 22.

97 Ishihara, Kūhaku no Okinawa shakai-shi, p. 243.
The Limits of Sovereignty and Post-War Migrants in Bolivia
Pedro Iacobelli
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Pedro Iacobelli’s essay also elucidates some of the less immediately obvious consequences of the U.S.’s administration of Okinawa, in his case focusing on Okinawa’s international legal status during the American occupation. As he details, under the terms of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan in theory retained "residual sovereignty" over Okinawa’s population. Iacobelli, after discussing in some detail the historical circumstances that gave rise to this status, traces its practical consequences for a Ryukyu Government-sponsored emigration program to South America.

On May 15, 1972 Okinawa formally reverted to its presurrender status as the forty-seventh prefecture of Japan. At that point full Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa was restored, thereby eliminating the ambiguous nationality status on the part of Okinawans that Iacobelli describes. Taken together, the articles by Augustine and Iacobelli highlight how between 1945 and 1972 Okinawa and mainland Japan evolved along different economic and political trajectories, and help the reader understand not only why many Okinawans today believe that they were abandoned by Japan, but also why their political and economic institutions differ significantly. The effective integration of the Okinawan and mainland economies was a critical topic at the time of reversion and a number of special economic programs were set up then with the ostensible goal of helping Okinawa “catch up” to the mainland. These programs clearly did not attain this goal, as even today Okinawa lags behind the mainland economically. As Japan’s poorest prefecture, Okinawa continues to be subject to special economic development programs.
The Limits of Sovereignty and Post-War Okinawan Migrants in Bolivia

Pedro Iacobelli

The post-war United States occupation and administration of the Ryukyu Islands posed a series of questions regarding both Japanese sovereignty of its former prefecture and the legal status of the Okinawan people abroad. The U.S. military administratively severed the islands from mainland Japan during the U.S. led post-war occupation of Japan (1945-1952) while garrisoning the islands. As former enemy territory and the main military hub for U.S. forces in the Western Pacific, the U.S. military government closely watched the Ryukyu Islands territory and discouraged border crossing.

The flow of migration to South America, once buoyant, became an option that only a few people could afford. In the penurious time of post-war Okinawa, international migration was only possible for those who had been “called” by relatives to join them in South America (yobiyose) and could pay the fees involved. The San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951) did not substantially change the daily circumstances of people living in Okinawa. Unlike the rest of Japan, the islands remained under direct U.S. control. However, the prospects for migration did change; from 1954 Okinawans without family members abroad could migrate via one of the state-led migration programs to South America, one of the few regions in the world to accept Japanese migrants after the war. First Bolivia, next Brazil, and finally Argentina became host nations for post-war Okinawan migrants. Between 1954 and 1967 over fourteen thousand Okinawans migrated to the Americas, including three thousand people who went to Bolivia.

In this article, I show that the legal situation of overseas Okinawan individuals was left unresolved by the creators of the peace treaty, led by John Foster Dulles. As a result, the international status of Ryukyuans in South America was subject to regional power plays involving Japan and the U.S., rather than the rules of international law. In particular, I evaluate the role of the Japanese state in overseeing Ryukyuan migrants in the 1950s. I argue that the Japanese government had sufficient legal grounds to claim that the Okinawan people were Japanese nationals and were thus entitled to the Japanese passport and Japanese consular protection. However, due to pressure from the U.S., the Japanese government did not honor its obligations toward Okinawan migrants. This is clear in the case of the post-war Okinawan community in Santa Cruz, Bolivia where a Ryukyuan colony was established in 1954 and became a site of great symbolic production of the political pressures at play in the region. Since the Japanese government encouraged emigration to Bolivia, it had the responsibility to look after both emigré communities: those that originated in mainland Japanese and those from the Ryukyu Islands. But due to U.S. pressures, it failed to assist the latter. In other words, the case of the Okinawan emigration to Bolivia, the first U.S.-endorsed emigration program in the Ryukyu Islands, highlights the asymmetries of power between Japan and the U.S. in a non-Asian regional context.

I begin this article by contextualizing U.S. post-war control of Okinawa Prefecture. I will then present the position of Japanese scholars who eloquently expressed concerns about the legal position of Okinawa under international law. Next, I will analyze the presentations on the “Okinawan problem” at the Annual Conference of Japanese International Law Scholars in 1954. Finally, I will examine the consequences of the SFPT for Okinawan
communities living outside of Japan. In order to do this I will use the case of the “protection problem” (hogo mondai) and the Ryukyuans in the Department of Santa Cruz in east Bolivia.

**From enemy territory to “our territory”**

Japan lost control of Okinawan prefecture when United States forces captured the islands in June 1945. The Battle of Okinawa, the bloodiest battle fought in the Pacific, marked the end of Japan’s direct control over the Ryukyu Islands and initiated long-term U.S. administration of Okinawa.

Like mainland Japan, the Ryukyu Islands remained ‘occupied enemy territory’ from the end of hostilities until the peace treaty came into operation in April 1952. This meant that Okinawa and its destiny would be determined by the wartime agreements. The Cairo Communique (1943) had stated that Japan would be “expelled from all other territory which she has taken by violence or greed”. This cast a cloud of uncertainty over the future of the Ryukyus. Similarly, the Potsdam Declaration (1945) failed to state whether Okinawa was to be included in the territory that Japan would keep. Indeed, the wartime agreements inconclusively referred to the status of the Ryukyu Islands. The American government, particularly the State Department, wished to avoid violating the U.S. declared principle of “no territorial aggrandizement” (Atlantic Charter, 1941). In the end, the future of the U.S. position in the Ryukyus (and that of the Okinawan people) would be determined by the terms of a peace treaty between Japan and the Allies.

Okinawa was an important part of the U.S. defense line in the Pacific. It was from the beginning placed under U.S. military government. While mainland Japan, with its pacifist constitution, was (in theory at least) made a zone of “peace”, Okinawa was explicitly transformed into a zone of “war”. As result, the U.S. State Department concurred with the Defense Department on the necessity to secure long-term control of the islands. The future of Okinawa and its people was thus defined by its strategic location. The U.S. National Security Council (NSC), the highest defense entity in the U.S., framed U.S. national policy with regard to the possession of Okinawa in memorandum NSC 13/3 of 1949. In these documents the NSC emphasized that any peace treaty with Japan had to include certain security requirements. Among them, NSC 13/3 stated that the U.S. had to “retain on a long-term basis the facilities at Okinawa and such other facilities as are deemed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be necessary in the Ryukyu Islands [...] the military bases at or near Okinawa should be developed accordingly.” From the American perspective, Okinawa had to remain under U.S. control after a peace treaty with Japan was signed. NSC 49 and the September 1950 NSC 60/1 complemented the objectives of NSC 13/3 by expressing the view that any future treaty with Japan must guarantee the U.S “exclusive strategic control of the Ryukyus”.

**Trust the Trusteeship System**

The retention of Okinawa became one of the main issues during the peace treaty negotiations. John F. Dulles (1888 – 1959), Consultant to the Secretary of State, had the difficult task of putting together numerous interests, including the NSC plan for de facto military appropriation of the Ryukyu Islands, into the peace treaty. In Japan, Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru’s calculated efforts to work a deal with the U.S. to reduce as much as
possible the duration and scope of the U.S. presence in the Ryukyus were systematically crushed by American officials. In addition, Japanese authorities, including the Showa emperor, expressed in private their willingness to exchange Okinawa for U.S. protection. Some of the Allied Powers such as New Zealand and Canada supported the idea of full U.S. dominion in the Ryukyu Islands. However, annexation would violate the U.S. declaration that it would not seek aggrandizement and risked provoking the opposition of the other Allied Powers and United Nations members generally. Thus, Dulles sought a system that would facilitate U.S. control without annexation.

John Foster Dulles decided to obtain in the peace treaty with Japan an option to seek trusteeship if desired by the U.S., but in the meantime the U.S. would retain full control of Okinawa. This meant that the U.S. military could remain in the island and avoid international scrutiny. As Senator Howard Alexander Smith noted in a meeting with Dulles in the Far East Sub-Committee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the draft would “permit the United States to retain control of the Ryukyu indefinitely if a trusteeship were not secured” and inquired whether this “would not lay us open to charges of imperialism”. Dulles reportedly suggested that “the provision be allowed to stand until the attitude of other countries could be ascertained”.

In order to retain Okinawa, as required in the NSC documents, the U.S. opted for a formula that separated the sovereign from the administrator. Article 3 of the Treaty of San Francisco stipulated that “Japan will accept any proposal to put the Ryukyu Islands under the U.N. trusteeship system”. Furthermore it stated the following:

*Pending the making of such a proposal and affirmative action thereon, the United States will have the right to exercise all and any power of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of these islands, including their territorial waters.*

Okinawa remained under Japanese sovereignty since it was not severed by the SFPT but the United States controlled all rights of its administration. Before and during the 1951 Peace Conference John Foster Dulles clarified the meaning of the legal wording. He explained that although the U.S. had the rights of administration, Japan exercised “residual sovereignty” (zanryūshuken) over the territory. The Office of Legal Adviser of the Department of State explained that:

*The phrase [residual sovereignty] expresses the idea that, far from being a cession of sovereignty, Article 3 of the Peace Treaty contains provision only for the broad exercise of the rights and powers of sovereignty by the United States. Thus the United States has not annexed the islands or claimed sovereignty over them; sovereignty remains in Japan – even though in a latent or residual form. But the right to exercise the rights and powers usually associated with sovereignty has been given to the United States.*

The wording and explanation given for Article 3 served U.S. strategic interests in the region, but did little to make it comprehensible. The American control was Janus-faced; on the one hand it sought to control population, territory and military bases; on the other, it sought to avoid specifying the precise nature of U.S. power in the Ryukyus in the peace covenant.
Indeed, it obscured the legal position of the Ryukyu Islands, puzzling both American and Japanese legal experts.

Making sense of Article 3: How the SFPT was interpreted?

Olcott H. Deming, U.S. Consul General to Okinawa (1957-1959), said that then-Secretary of State Dulles once asked him “what problems” he was having there. Deming responded that “the biggest one was continually trying to explain [to the locals] what residual sovereignty means”. Article 3 and the concept of ‘residual sovereignty’ triggered a series of debates on different aspects of U.S.-Ryukyu and Japan-Ryukyu legal relations. The legal conundrum around the sovereignty of Okinawa increased as it became clear that the U.S. had no intention of making any proposal to put the Ryukyus under the Trusteeship System.

U.S. political advisors noted the issues not addressed in the Article 3. For example, Niles W. Bond concluded in 1952 that, “as a beginning, it is believed that the legal status of the islands should be clarified, if feasible by formal recognition of the sovereignty of Japan and the Japanese nationality of the inhabitants”. However, these problems were left unresolved by U.S. government authorities. On the contrary, courts and judges settled disputes related to the legal position of Okinawa. For instance, a tort involving a car accident in Okinawa in 1951 raised the question of whether Okinawa was a foreign territory or not. An American, employed by a contractor engaged in military construction in Okinawa, sought compensation from the federal government in a Court District in California. The appellant alleged that the accident resulted from the negligence of an unknown employee of the U.S. in leaving an unlighted crane parked on the road after dark. The judge in this case, before admitting to have no concluding answer, stated: “it cannot be said that the loss of sovereignty over the island by Japan vests the ‘de jure sovereignty’ in the traditional sense, in the native Okinawa” but since “the will of the United States is in fact the supreme will on Okinawa, the United States has therefore acquired what may be termed a ‘de facto sovereignty’”. Similarly, the question of whether or not native Okinawans were nationals of the U.S. was brought to court in 1954. An Okinawan resident in Hawaii claimed that since Okinawa was a possession of the U.S. he was not an alien but a national of the U.S. The court had to define where the sovereignty of Okinawa resided. It finally concluded that “Japan, and not the United States, having the ‘de jure sovereignty’ over Okinawa (...) the defendant [the Okinawan man] is not a national of the United States”.

These examples illustrate how Article 3 of the SFPT temporarily blurred the limits of Japanese/American sovereignty and confused the understanding of citizenship in the Ryukyu Islands. Furthermore, it allowed legal organs of the U.S. to have a privileged position to interpret matters of jurisdiction as they saw fit since the administration of the islands remained under U.S. military administration.

The Japanese juridical understanding of the Status of Okinawa

In Japan, jurists and academics from the country’s most prestigious universities met in Kyoto at the autumn 1954 conference of the Society of International Law. Professor Yamada Saburō (1869-1965) pointed out the aim of the Kyoto conference was to clarify the international position of Okinawa. They analyzed the “Okinawan problem” from three
perspectives: history, international law, and international economy. The conference’s proceedings were published in a special edition of the Journal of International Law and Diplomacy. Their views on the Okinawan problem allow us to highlight how the situation was perceived in mainland Japan and to identify the legal, if not necessarily political, limits of Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa after the SFPT.

For the Japanese jurists, it was important to confirm that Japan was entitled to claim full sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands in the future. This concern was triggered by the obscure wording of the war covenants (e.g. Cairo Commissiqué; Potsdam Declaration) as seen above. It was also influenced by the ongoing process of emancipation and nation-state building in several regions of the world (e.g. India, Indonesia, Philippines). The Ryukyu Kingdom had controlled most of the area of Okinawan prefecture prior to its incorporation within the modern Japanese state in 1879.46 For the Japanese jurists there was a possibility that the territory under U.S. military control could be permanently severed from Japan. Consequently, some Japanese scholars considered it necessary to stress the legality of Japanese control over Okinawa from a historical point of view. For instance, Akiho Ichirō (1900-1988) emphasized that the Ryukyu kingdom’s almost three hundred years old relationship with the Satsuma daimyo (vassals of the bakufu in Edo) was fundamental to justifying Japanese ownership of Okinawa. “The status of the Ryukyus is one of the most important matters. This problem could be clarified in the analysis of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s status in relation to the Satsuma daimyo”.47 Similarly, Hanabusa Naoshi (1902-1994) vindicated the Japanese position in Okinawa vis-à-vis the Chinese tributary state status of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Hanabusa noted that in ultimate terms the government in Tokyo had legally incorporated the Ryukyu Kingdom into the Okinawan prefecture in its 1879 annexation.48 For academics like Hanabusa, the Japanese claims to Okinawa were based on the historical relations between the two territories.

Also, it was important for many Japanese scholars to confirm American academics’ thinking on the Japanese claim of sovereignty in order to clarify the international position and future of the Ryukyu Islands. Ueda Toshio (1904-1975), in his review of twenty-three American publications on the Okinawan question, concluded that scholars in the United States shared the view that Japan had historical rights over the Ryukyu Islands.49 In his study, he mostly relied on Hyman Kublin’s article on the 1870s’ controversy between Japan and China concerning sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands.50 For Kublin (and Ueda) both China and Japan had a long history of relations with the Ryukyu Islands, but China had lost its rights over the Ryukyus because the Qing government persistently used an old system of traditions to sustain its claim rather than Western legal rationalism.51 The Japanese on the contrary, as Kublin stated, “deemed the issue an affair of the first magnitude and, unshackled by tradition, quickly revealed how well Occidental diplomatic procedure had been mastered”.52 In conclusion, Ueda’s position was that Japan’s legal rights over Okinawa had strong historical and legal foundations recognized by the Western Powers.

A more pressing issue was how to interpret the Japanese position on Okinawa after the San Francisco Peace Treaty. If put under the Trusteeship System, the Japanese jurists were confident that the Ryukyus would be initially severed (bunri) from Japan as a former enemy territory but eventually would return to Japan. There were a few precedents in international law for comparable cases. For example, Irie Keishirō (1903-1978) mentioned
the case of Bessarabia, a region of Moldavia. Bessarabia was severed from Russia after the Crimean War; but returned in the Berlin treaty of 1878.\textsuperscript{53} My impression is that, in general, the Japanese scholars did not worry much about the future of the former Okinawan prefecture as a trust territory. They were more concerned with defining where Japan stood if the Ryukyu Islands were not put into the Trusteeship System.

As previously stated, the San Francisco Peace Treaty gave the U.S. the right to exercise all and any power of administration, legislation and jurisdiction in the Ryukyu Islands. The Japanese government endorsed this at the peace conference and reaffirmed its position in several bilateral treaties (e.g. The Aerial Navigation Service between Japan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of 1952). However, the scope and duration of Japan’s "residual sovereignty" was not defined in the SFPT. The treaty did not make clear to what rights Japan was entitled as holder of “residual sovereignty”; or how Japan was to fulfill its obligations towards the local Ryukyuans.\textsuperscript{54} For Irie, the U.S. was entitled to the administration but not the disposal of the territory.

*In relation to the southern territory, since Japan keeps residual sovereignty, America merely received the rights of administration for an unspecified time; without Japan’s consent, it cannot change the territorial status. Even though Japan promised to agree to any American proposal to the U.N. in relation to putting the southern territory under the Trusteeship system, to which America is the sole administrating authority, it is not the case that the U.S. has received carte blanche to propose a change in Japan’s vested territorial rights.*\textsuperscript{55}

Indeed, the transfer of authority did not mean dividing the country. It only meant transfer of one section of the territory to the administration of another state.\textsuperscript{56} Irie asserted that the Ryukyu Islands belonged to Japan, and not to the U.S. Thus, Japan had the right to expand various legal prerogatives into the territory and to keep its own public institutions in Okinawa. Moreover, he concluded that any institution established by the U.S. administrative authority, including the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI), could not engage in foreign affairs as its authority came from the U.S. not from Japan.\textsuperscript{57} Like Irie, Shinjō Toshihiko, asserted that Okinawa belonged to Japan. Indeed, he was more categorical when it came to defining what kind of sovereignty remained with Japan. For him, Okinawa’s legal position was best explained as a quasi-leased territory:

*For the above points, today’s Okinawa is in a situation just like a leased territory. But because it has not been furnished with the necessary formal conditions of a leased territory, the international legal position of Okinawa is in a ‘state of preparation to lease;’ in other words I think is reasonable to understand it as a ‘quasi-leased territory’.*\textsuperscript{58}

Similarly, Kuwada Saburo considered that the transfer of administration did not cause a change in the nationality of the local population since “the administrator may not confer on the inhabitants the nationality of the state; the power of the administrator is limited to granting the inhabitants permission for permanent domicile”.\textsuperscript{59}

Finally, Irie stressed that if the U.S. did not pursue the option of the Trust territory, Japan could claim its “right of re-vindication (*shicchi kaifukuken*)”. Moreover, because the treaty did not limit the scope of Japanese participation in Okinawa’s daily life, Irie called for a more active role by the Japanese government in Okinawa issues.
Overseas Okinawans: Consular responsibility

The American and Japanese authorities did not discuss the legal status of overseas Ryukyu migrants during the negotiations of the peace treaty. This is despite the ongoing flow of self-funded Okinawan migrants to South America, mostly to Argentina, from 1948 onwards. By 1952 over one thousand Okinawans had migrated to South America. There is no reference of their legal status in the peace covenant.

Indeed, overseas Okinawans were invisible to Japanese and American negotiators. Consequently, when migration became a state effort in 1954, questions such as how Okinawan people could obtain legal benefits from their nationality, or what government was responsible for them abroad, emerged. Following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Okinawan people had the right to a nationality (article 15[1]) and no one could arbitrarily deprive them of it (article 15 [2]). However, cold war politics cast a shadow of ambiguity over these fundamental human rights in Okinawa. Both, the U.S. and the Japanese governments claimed responsibility for the migrants in the 1950s. So the question that arises from this situation is this: to what extent were the Japanese and the U.S. governments responsible for the Ryukyuan migrants?

From the American point of view, since the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands were under U.S. authority the U.S. was the sole party responsible for their wellbeing. This was also considered to be the case when outside Okinawa. The establishment of the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (hereafter USCAR) in 1950 and the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (hereafter GRI) in 1952 aimed to promote the development of Okinawa and the betterment of living conditions in the islands. Since the migration program, a policy to reduce population in a demographically constrained region, was one of the joint-policies pursued by these two organizations, the U.S. authorities in Okinawa
considered that the success of the emigration plan was connected with the development of the Ryukyu Islands. As Norman D. King, Chief of the Public Affairs Division, demanded: “The State Department must assume the responsibility of providing protection for the émigrés. Failure to do this will undoubtedly result in assumption of responsibility by a Japanese mission”. Outside the islands, the U.S Foreign Services was made responsible to assist the migrants. Initially the Foreign Operation Administration (FOA) was the American agency in charge of the migrants.

The Okinawan migrants had to apply for a travel permit and an identity document (mibun shōsho) at the USCAR offices. The latter document, in lieu of a passport, identified them as “Ryukyuan” and indicated neither Japanese nor American citizenship. In fact, it proved to be more a cause of confusion than assurance for the travelers. For example, it made it difficult for the Ryukyans to obtain visas in the consulates and embassies in mainland Japan. It also provoked constant misunderstandings at the port of entry in the country of destination. At the end of the day, the American position was that Okinawan migrants were the inhabitants of a U.S. occupied territory. Consequently, they could travel and enter into foreign countries as Ryukyans, not as Japanese citizens, and thus, subject to the U.S. consular services. On the other hand, the Japanese position called for the recognition of the migrants as Japanese nationals (nihon kokumin toshite). If the SFPT prevented the Okinawan people from enjoying the benefits of Japanese nationality in the Ryukyus, there was no legal impediment to recognize their nationality beyond the islands. Irie Keishirō, a leading advocate for a greater involvement of the Japanese government in Okinawan affairs, analyzed the legal position of Okinawan migrants in the Kyoto conference of 1954. Taking the case of Cyprus in the nineteenth century as a precedent, he concluded that in a case of transfer of authority the inhabitants keep their nationality. Since the Japanese constitution guarantees freedom to move and change residence (chapter 2, article 22) the Okinawan people could maintain their Japanese nationality even if they migrated overseas. Furthermore, for Irie the U.S. rights over the Ryukyus were geographically framed and thus held no authority over the Okinawan people outside the Ryukyu Islands. Indeed, from a Japanese point of view, the nationality of the inhabitants of the southern territory had to be properly specified in their travel documents: “The citizens of the Ryukyus, together with being ‘Ryukyuan’ are Japanese nationals. For this reason, the Certificate of Identity has to be applicable to the Japanese and Ryukyuan laws”. Therefore, Irie concluded that the Ryukyuan had no legal impediment to seek and receive assistance from the Japanese consulates or embassies.

“Following the SFPT plan, even though all and any of the southern territories would become part of a trust territory, as mentioned above, the status of Japanese nationals doesn’t change; and in contrast with other trust territories’ inhabitants, in this case they keep Japanese nationality. Moreover, unless special regulations are set forth in the trust agreement the protective authority of Japanese diplomacy continues to exist”. Japan was rightfully entitled to claim and take responsibility for the overseas Okinawans. In the end Okinawa, as Prime Minister Yoshida had stated in the last stage of the peace treaty negotiation, has “always been Japanese territory, inseparably tied to Japan proper; and its inhabitants are Japanese”. Thus we could have expected a stronger commitment from the Japanese government towards its overseas nationals. However, due to the
American pressure to keep the Okinawans under their control (and the prosaic Japanese defense of their rights), the Ryukyuan migrants were kept in an ambiguous position. As seen below, in some cases, post-war Okinawan migrants depended more on U.S. consulates than on the nearby Japanese diplomatic offices in South America.\textsuperscript{75}

**The Hogo Mondai and the limits of Japanese nationality in Bolivia**

The question of the status of the migrants and their nationality originated a debate which was called “the protection problem” or *Hogo Mondai*.\textsuperscript{76} As explained in the Tokyo based monthly-publication “Kaigai Ijū” (External Migration):

The beginning of the discussion on the Protection Problem was initiated when the GRI requested to the Japanese government that the Okinawans overseas be treated as Japanese citizens. The Japanese Foreign Ministry accepted the request and in the case of Bolivia discussed sending a delegate from the embassy in Peru. However, the American [government] (with the authority over Okinawa) felt uncomfortable that the GRI was asking the Japanese government to protect the migrants so assistance for sending migrants overseas is still at a standstill.\textsuperscript{79}

The U.S. government had allocated nearly one million dollars to support the Ryukyu migration program and wanted to protect its investment.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, in the case of the Santa Cruz colony, it had compromised with the Bolivian government to ensure the sustainability of the colony.\textsuperscript{81} The U.S. thus had a stake in the success of the migrants in paving the way for a well-established community which could host thousands of Okinawans as well as contribute to the prosperity of the host society.

The debate on the *Hogo Mondai* took a twist when natural disaster struck the newly established Okinawan community “Uruma” in Santa Cruz. As told by Gushiken Kōtei, a leader within the local community, an unknown high fever disease ran wild throughout the colony. “It was a disease which, within three days of getting the fever, determined whether the patient dies or lives”.\textsuperscript{82} The unknown disease, at the time called “Uruma”, took the lives of fifteen migrants in six months. Shūzō Nishihira, leader of the Okinawan group in Bolivia, urgently wrote to GRI’s Chief Executive requesting help.\textsuperscript{83} The GRI looked to the Americans for help.\textsuperscript{84} First, Higa Shūhei, Chief Executive of the GRI, and Inamine Ichirō, chair of the Ryukyu Emigration Association, wrote several letters to U.S. authorities and to their American acquaintances to hasten aid.\textsuperscript{85} In reply, coordinated by Point 4, the U.S.
dispatched a group of physicians from Foreign Operations Administration (hereafter FOA) to the region. Together with Bolivian specialists, they treated the patients and investigated the disease. Higa, in February 1955 thanked them for the assistance: “It is thanks to the great efforts made by both the U.S. Government and Bolivian Government to protect against the disease that the patients seem [sic] to have recovered”. For the United States, the question of the success or failure of the Ryukyuan colony posed a grave problem from the standpoint of public relations because it could serve as “an example of the U.S. treatment and concern for the welfare of Ryukyuans”. Conversely, the Japanese government did not show similar interest or readiness to get involved in the Uruma disease crisis. The Japanese upon hearing of the disease outbreak in Bolivia, while preparing for the incoming Japanese mainland settlers, secured a report from their Legation in Peru and, two months later, appointed a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a resident official in Bolivia. However, the Japanese move did little to counterbalance U.S. control of and responsibility for the Ryukyuan community in Bolivia.

The Uruma disease crisis confirmed the dependent relationship between the Ryukyuan community and the U.S. government. The case revealed that the Japanese government, far from Bolivia, did not challenge American primacy in Ryukyuan affairs in Bolivia. Indeed, in taking no action in a time of crisis, the Japanese government failed to establish a claim to sovereignty over Okinawa.

The Hogo Mondai entered a new stage when the Japanese government began its own migration program in Bolivia. Less than a year after the first GRI-sponsored community was established, a mainland Japanese community was created in Bolivia. There was thus both an Okinawan colony and a Japanese colony in the region of Santa Cruz. For the benefit of mainly the latter, the Japanese government strengthened its diplomatic links in the region by adding to the embassy in Lima, Peru a mission in La Paz, Bolivia. In addition, the Overseas Cooperation Office (Kaigai kyōkai rengokai) (aka. Kaikyōren) opened an office in Santa Cruz to assist the mainland Japan migrants in Bolivia. Technically both communities were Japanese and all migrants were Japanese nationals. Japan confined its support to Japanese migrants. For instance, according to the Japanese Nationality Act of 1950, art. 9 and the Family Register Act of 1947, art. 104, if Japanese nationals wished to obtain Japanese nationality for a new born child in Bolivia or elsewhere abroad, they were required to report the birth of the child to the nearest Japanese diplomatic office within 14 days of the birth. The Act also states that if the will to obtain Japanese nationality was not made known within that period, the child would lose the privileges of obtaining Japanese nationality. Ryukyuans in other parts of South America outside Bolivia could register the newborn in a Japanese embassy or consulate. The diplomatic service processed the documents and sent them to the justice bureau in Fukuoka where a special Family Registration Office exclusively for Okinawans operated. In Bolivia, as reported by Ken Asato from the Economic Development Department of USCAR, all GRI-sponsored settlers sought to obtain Japanese passports for their children, but:

[U]nlike other Japanese diplomatic service offices in South America, the legation [in Bolivia] does not register Ryukyuan settlers as Japanese nationals. Therefore, it does not issue Japanese passports to them. The Japanese legation [in Bolivia] is afraid the U.S. government will object to issuing passports to them for reason that emigration of
Although the Japanese and GRI requested that the Ryukyuan migrants be placed under the protection of the Japanese office in Bolivia, the U.S. rejected this petition, insisting rather that Point 4’s office would carry on with that responsibility. The American authorities held that a Japanese passport was not necessary for Ryukyuan migrants. Not having one did not prevent settlers from pursuing “legitimate activities” or from receiving “lawful protection from the Bolivian government”. Besides, as stated by Lt. Col. C. I. Guida, from the Executive Office, “all U.S. embassies and consulates are prepared to assist people from the Ryukyu Islands”. Asato concluded that “the crux of the whole matter lies in the desire to maintain a link between the place they left and the land they chose [...] however the Japanese legation in Bolivia does not handle such matters of the settlers for the reason stated [above]”.

In other words, the hogo mondai was a conflict between Japan’s obligation to protect its nationals, and the U.S. insistence on maintaining its guardianship over the migrant community in Bolivia. It was not the case that the Ryukyuans desired to end their connection with the American government in Bolivia in favor of a closer relation with Japan. Ota Sochi, Director of Social Affairs GRI, suggested that in order to provide complete protection for the migrants, “(...) the emigrants carry the passport issued by the GOJ’s resident office as well as the certificate of identification issued by the High Commissioner so that they can receive protection from both the U.S. government and that of Japan”. However, this idea was also rejected by the American authorities. The American position in Bolivia created a Gordian Knot that the Japanese did not dare to cut. The result was that Okinawans were deprived of their right to have a nationality and kept in an ambiguous status (neither Japanese nor American). In short, the ambivalence of their status overseas reflected the ambivalence of their status at home.

Conclusions

In this article we have analyzed some of the consequences of Article 3 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty on Okinawan migrants, particularly to Bolivia. We observed that the U.S. defense requirements were essentially territorial and that John Foster Dulles attempted to satisfy the Department of Defense requirements by assuring that U.S. maintained control of the island and the inhabitants. Article 3 sprang from an Asian cold war context and it was meant to be an instrument to be used in Asia, not in South America. However, Japan’s post-war territorial division was projected onto the overseas communities as we have demonstrated for Bolivia and South America.

Article 3 gave the U.S. the right to control entry and exit from the Ryukyu Islands. In addition, the American hegemonic reach enabled the U.S. to maintain responsibility for the islanders throughout South America. For the U.S. the most important Ryukyuan communities were those which involved higher transfers of funds and also those for which the U.S. entered into a formal agreement with the local government. Consequently, the Okinawan community in Bolivia, the first migration project since the U.S. took control of the Ryukyus, was among all such communities in South America the most influenced by American hegemony in terms of their Nationality.
Although Article 3 separated the administration of the Japanese territory it did not legally affect the Okinawan people’s Japanese nationality. As shown by some of the Japanese jurists quoted in this study, the treaty neither hindered Japan from participating in Okinawan daily life, nor prohibited it from taking responsibility for overseas Okinawans. The Japanese government, however, failed to provide basic consular services such as provision of identifying documents for Ryukyuans abroad, notably in Bolivia, as a result of American pressure to maintain control. If we understand a client state as a state that conducts its foreign policy according to the dictates of a more powerful state, Japan behaved as a client state in Bolivia in the 1950s. Where we could have expected a stronger Japanese commitment from the Japanese government towards its overseas nationals, we found a pragmatic nation reluctant to act against the U.S. will.

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Notes

1 I will use the terms Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands (or Ryukyus), and Nansei Shotō interchangeably. The Nansei Islands are the entire island chain to which the Ryukyus belong. In the San Francisco peace treaty the term Nansei Shotō (plus its bearings) was used. Okinawa is the name of the largest island of the Ryukyu group, and “Okinawa” is often used to designate all of the islands and the Japanese prefecture as well.


10 The literature on this case has focused, mostly from an ethnographic perspective, on the local dynamics in the colonies in Bolivia and their relationship with the local Bolivian community.

11 The JILD is the journal of the Japanese Society of International Law (est. 1897), based in the Faculty of Law of the University of Tokyo. It has been published since 1902.


15 Although in the Cairo meeting Roosevelt intended to transfer the islands to China, Department of State personnel were not aware of his intention. So when the Division of
Political Studies, under Dr. Isaiah Bowman, interpreted the Cairo Declaration, it concluded that the Ryukyus “did not appear to be of the type which fell within the meaning of the phrase in question (...)” quoted in Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem*, p.57.

16 For the Cairo Communiqué see [here](#); for the Potsdam declaration [here](#). All sites visited on April 7, 2010. The Yalta Agreement, the other main wartime agreement, did not address the future of Japan’s territory. For a complete study on the wartime agreements and the position of China towards Okinawa see Hara Kimie, *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia-Pacific: Divided Territories in the San Francisco System* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.158-65.

17 As early as 1942 discussion was held on the status of Okinawa. In 1943 the State Department recommended that the islands be returned to Japan following U.S. victory. See Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem*, p.53.


23 Initially the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State aimed to retain “facilities” and develop the U.S. position in Okinawa. See Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949*, p. 655. In 1950, this came to mean control of the whole territory. Dean Acheson, "Crisis in Asia - an Examination of the U.S. Policy," *The Department of State Bulletin* XXII, no. 551 (1950). pp. 111-118.


27 Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951*. pp. 1057-1062. The U.S. position in Okinawa was repeatedly criticized by the Soviet bloc following the peace treaty meeting in San Francisco. See *Nippon Times*, "Excerpts from Gromyko Speech," Sept. 7 1951.

28 Edwin O Reischauer, one of the most influential academics in Japanese affairs, and later U.S. ambassador to Japan, supported limiting the U.S. trusteeship on Okinawa as much as possible and returning the rest of the territory to Japan. W.W. Butterworth, Director of the Office of Far Easter Affairs, William Sebald and Douglas L. Oliver were cautious about extending the occupation. And J.F. Dulles and John Allison supported the trusteeship option. See respectively: Edwin O. Reischauer, *The United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). pp. 237-239; Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949*. p. 815; and Yoshida, *Democracy Betrayed*, p.45.

29 Under the Mandates System, the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations was responsible for supervising the mandates territories but in the practice it did not have real power. See George Thullen, *Problems of the Trusteeship System: A Study of Political Behavior in the United Nations* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1964). p. 12, *ibid* p.11. The Trusteeship system has been inactive since 1994.

30 In the history of the Trusteeship System the only case of making an ex enemy territory a trust territory was when Somalia was trusted to Italy, its former colonial master. There are no cases in which states voluntarily placed a territory under the system. Chairman Edwards Toussaint, *The Trusteeship System of the United Nations* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1956). p. 40.


35 “Treaty of Peace with Japan” in UCLA East Asia Studies Documents at [here](accessed April 7, 2010).

36 *Ibid*.

37 The Peace treaty was signed by forty eight nations, including Bolivia. The USSR opposed the “illegality” of transferring the Ryukyus to U.S. custody. Similarly the Gov. of India rejected Article 3 and thus did not attend the SFP Conference. *Nippon Times*, "Excerpts
from Gromyko Speech." For the Indian position see Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951.* pp. 1062; 1269-70; 1288-1291.


43 Ibid.

44 The case’s description can be found in Whitman, *Digest of International Law.* pp 268 – 271.


46 The Ryukyu kingdom was a tributary state to China and since the seventeenth century to the Satsuma daimyo. See George H. Kerr, *Okinawa, the History of an Island People*, 1969 ed. (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1958).


49 Ueda T., " “Amerika gakusha no mita Okinawa mondai” (Okinawa Question in the Eyes of American Scholars)," *Kokusaihō gaikō zasshi* LIV no. 1-3 (1955).

50 Ibid. pp. 40-46.


53 Irie Keishirou, " Okinawa shotō no hōteki chii" (Legal Status of Okinawa) *Kokusaihō gaikō zasshi* LIV no. 1-3 (1955), p.64.

54 Ashida Hitoshi, former Prime Minister and leader of the Democratic Party questioned Yoshida on the contents of the treaty. The focus was the practical benefits of having “residual sovereignty” of the territory.
Irie, "Okinawa shotō no hōteki chii)," p.74.

Ibid., p.77.

Ibid., pp.78-80.

Shinjō T., "Okinawa no kokusaihōjō no chii" (Status of Okinawa in International Law), Kokusaihō gaikō zasshi) LIV no. 1-3 (1955), p.107.


Following the documents on the San Francisco Peace Treaty published in the FRUS collection.


The declaration of Human Rights was ratified in 1948. Japan joined the United Nations in 1956.


The U.S. supported the emigration program as a policy to reduce the levels of social tension in an overpopulated area. See Kozy Amemiya, "The Bolivian Conection: U.S. Bases and Okinawa Emigration," in Okinawa: Cold War Island, ed. Chalmers Johnson (Cardiff: Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999).


In the preamble of the 1961 agreement between the Bolivian Government and the United States concerning the immigration of Ryukyuans, it is made clear that because the U.S. exercises “all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants”, it can act as responsible authority for the migrants in Bolivia. See “Agreement between the Government of Bolivia and the Government of the United States of America Concerning the Immigration of the Ryukyuans” Draft 8/23/61. The United States Administration Materials – The Ryukyu Islands: S 312 UN 19 (20), at the Sengo Shiryō shitsu, Ryukyu University.

The FOA was part of the U.S. aid plan for friendly countries. In 1953 the role of FOA was to assist the colonization plan by giving guidance. See “Memorandum for the Record” 10 Nov. 1953. At the U.S. National Archives, RG. 319, SA 270 R18 Ex60 Box 30. Still in late 1954 FOA’s role in the migration program was not all clear. Oscar Powell, Director of the FOA office in Bolivia, was at loss about his duties toward the migrants, so he requested an Airgram defining in general terms what they were expected to do. See “Letter to Marry W.
Yee (Director W.C. Division FOA)" December 22, 1954. U.S. National Archives, RG. 319, SA 270 R18 Ex60 Box 30.

67 Since there was no Japanese office in the Ryukyu Islands that could emit passports, they had to apply for one of the Ryukyu-proof of citizenship.

68 For a complete description of the Visa application procedures see Tamashiro Migorō, "Okinawa kaigai iju kankei kiroku (Records Related to Okinawan Overseas Migration)," Iju kenkyū, no. 16 (1979).

69 Turkey agreed to assign the island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England in the Berlin treaty (1878). England could control Cyprus though titular sovereignty would remain in Turkey. See Thomas Ehrlich, "Cyprus, the "Warlike Isle": Origins and Elements of the Current Crisis," Stanford Law Review 18, no. 6 (1966), pp. 1024-1025.

70 Irie, "Okinawa Shotō no hōteki Chii," p.86.

71 Ibid. p.86.

72 Ibid. p.88.

73 Quoted in Eldridge, The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem. It should be noted that Yoshida’s “always” could not mean anything earlier than 1609.

74 In conversation with Ota Masahide, I learned about the case of Japanese and Okinawan fishermen who were shipwrecked on the Indonesia coast in the 1950s. The Japanese consular office in Indonesia promptly took care of the Japanese fishermen whereas the Okinawans were left without assistance.

75 The term hogo, together with “protection”, can be translated also as “conservation”, “guardianship” or “patronage”.

76 Kaigai iju, 20 July 1954, p.6.

77 “Summary of meeting held between Mr. Ishida and LO" 10 May 1954. In The United States Administration Materials – The Ryukyu Islands: S 312 UN 11 (19), at the Sengo Shiryō shitsua, Ryukyu University.


79 The U.S government, through USCAR, invested US$160,000 for the first Bolivian group. The U.S. Congress appropriated over US$800,000 to support migration. See Kaigai iju, 20 June 1954, p.39. However, the latter sum was not used in fiscal year 1955. Also the counterpart funds (from the Bolivian government), used to build housing, provide food supply for the first year and for road construction, was derived from the nine million dollars in aid received from the U.S. government. Therefore, most of the money came from U.S. appropriations. See "Memorandum for the Record" 10 Nov. 1953. U.S. National Archives, RG. 319, SA 270 R18 Ex60 Box 30.

80 The U.S. Technical Assistance Program was called “Point Four”. Harry Truman’s inaugural address in 1949 proclaimed the Point Four Program, with the objective of

81 Gushiken arrived in Bolivia a year after the disease was controlled. He quotes his brother, a member of the first group, to explain the tragedy. Kotei Gushiken, *Okinawa ikyūchi : Boribia no daichi to tomori* (Okinawa’s Migration Land : Together in Bolivia’s Ground) (Naha: Okinawa Taimusu, 1998). p. 52.

82 “Letter from Shuzo Nishihira (Chairman Urgent Countermeasure) to Higa (6 January 1955)”. In U.S. National Archives, Registration Number 319, Stack Area 270 Room 18, ex.60 box 30.

83 Higa Shūhei, Chief Executive, wrote to J. Tigner requesting immediate dispatch of government officials. He also called for an official investigation and necessary action. Similarly, Inamine wrote to U.S. Senator W. Judd. Letters and related documents in Okinawan Prefectural Archive (hereafter OPA), Cod. R 0053789B.

84 Many of Inamine’s letters were directed to Representative Walter Judd, who had advocated and sponsored migration to Bolivia. See Walter Judd papers, Box 145, folder 2, The Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), California.

85 JICA, *Kaigai iji*, 20 March 1955, p.8. American specialists were interested in the disease itself and ran a series of experiments. The treatment was mainly to immunize the population against yellow fever with the first injection of diphtheria-tetanus-whooping cough vaccine administered to all children. See “Letter to Harry W. Yoe (FOA) by O.Powell”, February 1, 1955, U.S. National Archives R.G. 319 S.A. 270, R.18 Ex.60 Box 30.

86 Initially, it was thought to be malaria but the test failed to confirm it. JICA, *Kaigai iji*, 20 March 1955, p.8. According to Kozy Amemiya, it could have being an outburst of Hanta virus. Amemiya, "The Bolivian Connection: U.S. Bases and Okinawa Emigration."

87 “Remittance as medical expenses for the patients among emigrants”, OPA, Cod. R 00053789 B


90 This doesn’t mean that the Japanese newspaper did not cover the event, but in their report there is no direct mention to any form of official aid.

91 “Report of the group condition”, OPA Cod. R00053789B. The official exchange rate was one dollar for 100 bolivianos, but the free rate was one dollar for 1200 bolivianos. Finally, at a different level, Nagayama Tetsu, chief of the Uruma Colony, reported that the Japanese Association at La Paz “was kind enough to present us Bs. 1,074,000.00 in token of
sympathy.” Ryukyuans were Japanese nationals even though Okinawa was under U.S. military control.

93 This situation changed in the 1960s when the U.S. modified its position towards Okinawan emigrants and allowed the Japanese agencies to gain control over all Okinawan and Japanese colonies.


95 “Status of Ryukyuan Emigrants in Bolivia” OPA, Cod. 0000011835, p.2. Italics mine.

96 Nihon Kaigai Kyokai Renairais, “Boribia no seikatsu to roudou”, 1956, p.84.

97 “Status of Ryukyuan Emigrants in Bolivia” OPA, Cod. 0000011835, p.2.


99 “Status of Ryukyuan Emigrants in Bolivia” OPA, Cod. 0000011835, p.3.


101 This situation affected the socioeconomic conditions of the community in the 1950s and early 1960s. Years later the mainland Japanese community of San Juan in Bolivia remembered this situation. JICA, Shinsaku Nanbo, in Nihonjin Borivia Ijyūshi (History of the Japanese Migration in Bolivia) (Tokyo: Nihonjin Borivia Ijyūshi Hensai iinkai, 1970). p.147.

102 See note 95.
Part II: Contemporary Okinawan Society and Culture

Memories of Okinawa: Life and Times in the Greater Osaka Diaspora
Steve Rabson
2003
Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power

Out migration has long been a key component of the modern Okinawan experience. As the poorest prefecture in the country with an extremely limited land supply, there were plenty of economic incentives for Okinawans to seek employment outside the prefecture, and large numbers traveled to such places as the sugar and pineapple fields of Hawaii, the coffee plantations of Brazil, newly established colonies in Bolivia (see the Augustine chapter) and many other places in North and South America, Asia and the Pacific Islands region. As a consequence prewar Okinawa came to have the highest ratio of emigrants to total population in pre-World War II Japan and it is virtually *de riguer* for families in Okinawa to have relatives who live overseas. Although not as closely documented because of the absence of border control procedures (except for the period of U.S. occupation), even greater numbers of Okinawans migrated to the cities of mainland Japan. Large numbers of Okinawans still travel from job-scarce Okinawa to the mainland in search of economic opportunities.

Steve Rabson has done extensive field work among Okinawans in the Greater Osaka area and in his article mobilizes insights and interview responses he has gathered over the years to provide an overview of the experiences of Okinawan emigrants to the main islands since the early 20th Century. As he makes clear, Okinawans on the mainland were strong affected by cross-pressures that, on the one hand, stemmed from real and imagined “differences” between Okinawans and mainland Japanese as well as the complex and changing political status of Okinawa via-a-vis the rest of Japan that was discussed in earlier chapters of this reader. In general, until recently few Japanese thought in terms of hyphenated identity, such as “Okinawan-Japanese.” Perceived differences were readily manifested in unequal treatment and created strong pressures for assimilation. Since the 1990s, however, a “boom” in mainland interest in Okinawa and Okinawan culture—engendered mainly through music and other popular cultural forms—has altered attitudes relating to “Okinawan-ness” somewhat among Japanese mainlanders and among mainland-based Okinawans themselves. As he highlights the interplay of these various currents over time, Rabson makes it amply clear that identity among Okinawans on the mainland is a complex, shifting and multifaceted phenomenon.
This chapter is based on a study of people who have migrated from Okinawa to greater Osaka and their descendants. Okinawans are defined as individuals with at least one grandparent or two great-grandparents from Okinawa, including those who moved to greater Osaka between late 1945 and early 1972 when Okinawa was officially called “The Ryukyu Islands” by its American military occupiers. From July 1999 until June 2001, I administered a survey questionnaire to 313 respondents, interviewed more than 100 individuals, collected writings by and about Okinawans in greater Osaka, and attended their social functions, performance events, and informal gatherings. Throughout the two years of this study, I lived among Okinawan neighbors in the largest residential community of Okinawans in greater Osaka which is located in Taishō Ward of Osaka City. This chapter summarizes the history of Okinawan migration to greater Osaka; presents interviews and writings that describe, in particular, their experiences residing in what Okinawan scholars have called “ethnic communities”; examines the role of prefectural associations and other organizations of Okinawans in greater Osaka; and discusses the ways in which individuals in this diaspora remember Okinawa or view their relationship with an ancestral homeland where many of them have never lived.

Why they came to greater Osaka

Okinawans started moving to greater Osaka in significant numbers, mostly for temporary periods, around 1900, the same year commonly cited for the start of Okinawan emigration abroad. Most came either to work in factories or to sell Okinawan products, such as sugar, awamori, and textiles, after regular boat service was established between Naha and Osaka. During this period, Osaka was becoming known as “the Manchester of the East” for its many textile mills that recruited large numbers of workers, mostly women, including many from Okinawa and Korea as well as rural areas on the mainland. Families in Okinawa usually received a lump-sum payment for contracts negotiated through recruiters, and the factories provided their children, often girls as young as thirteen, with gainful employment, regular meals, dormitory lodging, and wages that helped support the household back home.

For mainland Japan, World War I brought enormous economic benefits. Besides adding former German concessions in China and German territories in the South Pacific to its empire after Germany’s defeat, Japan gained a huge export market, which greatly stimulated its domestic industries. Manufacturers were deluged with orders for munitions and supplies as they displaced American and European manufacturers in large sectors both of the domestic consumer market and Asian markets.

The rural economy in Okinawa, already languishing, was devastated by the collapse of world sugar prices in 1921, compelling more Okinawans to leave for South America, Hawaii, and the Philippines, however, the largest number moved to mainland Japan. Meanwhile,
expansion of the industrial and consumer economy on the mainland that started during the “World War I boom” intensified competition for workers among recruiters and employers. This resulted not only in better wages for women and men working in factories, but also made possible access to more prestigious jobs, especially for women, some of whom were now able to leave the spinning factories for work as department store clerks and telephone operators. New factories in Osaka and its environs brought a rapid increase in the city’s textile, construction, metal processing, and lumber industries. Shipbuilding firms also opened assembly plants in what was then the city’s Minato (“Harbor”) Ward where Osaka’s largest Okinawan community settled in the eastern portion that split off in 1932 to create Taishō Ward.

By late 1914, when Okinawan communities had begun to form, two-fifths of the population of Osaka’s Kita Okajima Precinct (part of Taishō Ward after 1932) was estimated to be from Okinawa. Of the approximately 20,000 who came to the mainland from Okinawa every year during the 1920s and 1930s, nearly half worked as manual laborers in the factories of greater Osaka. In 1925, for example, of 19,926 Okinawans moving to the mainland, 8,994 came to the Osaka-Kobe area. The recorded population of Okinawans residing there grew from 1,575 in 1920 to 8,994 in 1925 and 20,356 in 1930, declined to 16,929 in 1935, and grew again to 53,678 in 1940. During this same period for the mainland as a whole, the resident population grew from 9,626 in 1920 to 19,926 in 1925 and 43,150 in 1930, declined to 32,335 in 1935, and grew again to 88,319 in 1940. By 1940, the population of Okinawans on the mainland was approaching 15 percent of the total population of Okinawa Prefecture itself, some 600,000 at the time.

In contrast to Osaka, known as a “labor market,” Okinawans thought of Tokyo as a “center of arts and culture” where young people went to attend school and begin careers in such fields as literature, journalism, and painting, as well as in business. A popular saying in Okinawa at the turn of the twentieth century was “The rich emigrate abroad, the students go to Tokyo, and the poor go to Osaka.” In reality, of course, students also went to schools and colleges in Osaka and Kyoto. And, despite this “working-class” image of Osaka, many Okinawans in professions such as medicine, pharmacy, law, and education settled there after completing their schooling on the mainland. Okinawans in Osaka worked on the prefectural police force, in the city hall, on newspapers as reporters, and in local hospitals as physicians. By 1910 Osaka had approximately sixty Okinawan schoolteachers and thirty firefighters. Okinawans also worked in banks, shipping companies, and retail stores, managed restaurants and clothing stores, and owned small businesses in the city.

When discussing Okinawan migration, mainlanders invariably refer to the “palm tree hell” (sotetsu jigoku). This ironic phrase is commonly used to describe economic conditions in Okinawa during the years following the collapse of world sugar prices in 1921. The devastating shock, felt first by farm families, spread rapidly to related businesses and banks which failed one after another. Employers could not meet their payrolls, and even the Okinawa Prefectural Government, unable to collect taxes, went bankrupt. As in times of famine in the former Ryukyu Kingdom, people resorted to eating the seeds and lower stalks of Japanese fern palm (cycad) plants that provided nourishment, but required careful cooking to avoid food poisoning. Okinawans, however, criticize the term “palm tree hell,” noting that it sounds like some kind of natural disaster, obscuring the responsibility of the
Japanese government for its discriminatory policies toward Okinawa where, before World War II, people paid higher taxes and received fewer social services than in any other prefecture. Okinawans also note that, far from protecting the local sugar industry, the Japanese government abandoned it in favor of an intense program to develop sugar plantations in Taiwan, Japan’s colony acquired as one of the spoils of victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.\footnote{11}

With Okinawan migration to greater Osaka increasing thirteen-fold between 1920 and the early 1930s, the national government dealt with depression-era conditions in Okinawa by rejecting proposals for relief and, instead, sending 56,000 Okinawans as emigrants to Japanese island territories in the South Pacific where by 1940 they outnumbered local populations.\footnote{12}

Okinawan residents of greater Osaka today include people who came to rural areas of the mainland initially in the massive evacuation that began in late 1944, and others who barely survived the Battle in 1945. Memories of the evacuation, the Battle, and the firebombing of Osaka in 1945 comprise an important legacy of the Pacific War in the Okinawan community.

When the war finally ended, many Okinawans who had lived on the mainland or evacuated there before the Battle were unable to return during the period Okinawans call “kaosu” (chaos) stretching into the aftermath of massive destruction in which whole families were annihilated, villages obliterated, property demolished, and the landscape altered irrevocably. Thousands were finally able to go back, at least temporarily, beginning in 1946, but travel to and from Okinawa was strictly controlled under the U.S. “Military Government” which began requiring that people wanting to return provide family registers that had also, in many cases, been destroyed in the Battle. Those wanting to go to Okinawa included Okinawan soldiers returning from military service abroad or from prisoner-of-war camps in the U.S.S.R., as well as civilians. Occupation authorities on the mainland first established an office in Fukuoka to provide alternative documents, but many people were unable to obtain them. Later, U.S. occupation authorities in Okinawa issued what were euphemistically called “passports” for travel between the mainland and Okinawa, but were really more like the old Soviet exit visas, obtainable only after what were sometimes lengthy investigations. Those who did manage to return in the early postwar years often arrived to find their families decimated, their homes in ruins, little prospect for employment and, in some cases, their lands seized, without compensation, for U.S. military bases. As a result, many had to make U-turns back to the mainland.

Where they settled: growth, movement, and changing conditions in the greater Osaka diaspora

Kansai, the mainland region with the largest number of migrants, encompasses Osaka, Hyōgo, and Kyoto Prefectures, but can also refer, along with Kinki, to a wider area including Mie, Nara, Shiga and Wakayama Prefectures. Okinawans reside throughout this region, but by far the largest numbers live in Osaka and Hyōgo, the only prefectures in Kansai with Okinawan residential communities. This is why, for the sake of convenience, I refer to Osaka and Hyōgo Prefectures as “greater Osaka.” Residential communities of Okinawans can still be found elsewhere on the mainland in Yokohama and Kawasaki, while in Fukuoka,
Nagoya, Hiroshima and other cities, where such neighborhoods existed in the past, Okinawan migrants and their descendants have now largely dispersed.

Precise figures for Okinawans now residing on the mainland are not available. Until 1940 such statistics were compiled periodically from official family registers (koseki) by the prefectural police in Okinawa. However, since the war, family registers of most Okinawans born in greater Osaka have indicated domiciles on the mainland, not in Okinawa. And many migrants established new family registers on the mainland after their official records were destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa. Prefectural associations have compiled estimates based on their membership lists, but, until recently, these have enumerated households, not individuals, and do not include non-member households. A more comprehensive, though imprecise, mainland-wide survey was published by the Okinawa Prefectural Association of Hyōgo (Okinawa Kenjin-kai Hyōgo-ken Honbu) in November of 2000 which estimated that the two largest populations by far were 36,500 in Yokohama City and 70,000 in Osaka Prefecture. Other sources estimate the population of Okinawans in Osaka City’s Taishō Ward at 19,000,13 by far the largest in Kansai.14

Like migrant and immigrant communities elsewhere, Okinawan communities in greater Osaka formed near where jobs were available and where other Okinawans already lived who could provide support and contacts, especially important for newcomers. Many Okinawans also preferred an environment for daily life where it was possible to speak the dialects, eat the food, practice the religious observances, and maintain other social and cultural customs of the homeland to the extent possible in what were, for most, unfamiliar urban conditions. And, like migrants and immigrants in many places, people from Okinawa chose to live in such communities in order to cope with prejudice and discrimination, including denial of lodging and employment, they encountered because societies at large have often tended to look down on or exclude people with differences, real or imagined. Relentless pressures to “assimilate” (dōka), coming both from mainlanders and from Okinawans themselves, caused many to abandon much of what was distinctively Okinawan when they stepped outside the community, but inside it people could still live, in many ways, as they had before coming to the mainland. In 1996 Kinjō Isamu recalled his early childhood in Taishō Ward shortly after his family moved there from Okinawa in 1954. By this time, Okinawans had been settling there for some three decades, and his childhood memories are far more positive than those of people who had migrated in the 1920s when the community was still going through its early growing pains.

My parents maintained our Okinawan lifestyle so completely that sometimes we forgot we were in Osaka. We always spoke in Okinawa dialect and, since we were among many other Okinawans in the Manzai-bashi section of Kita Okajima Precinct, it was easy to live this way. My father raised pigs [for the many cuts of pork used in Okinawan cuisine] and grew gōyaa [bitter gourd] in a vacant lot, and he made brown sugar candy. My mother had her weaving implements sent from Okinawa, and wove [Okinawan style] kasuri splash-patterned cloth. We conducted all the annual religious observances strictly by the old lunar calendar, including the spring shiimii festival of feast and prayer when relatives gather to honor departed ancestors, and the summer o-bon festival [when spirits of the ancestors are said to return to this world for a brief visit].
The distribution of the Okinawan population in greater Osaka has changed over time with shifting labor and consumer demands as old factories closed and new ones opened. The Okinawan community in Wakayama, a center of the prewar textile industry, virtually disappeared after World War II as many of its residents moved to the growing Okinawan community in Amagasaki where small and medium-sized metalworking shops were opening. Such shops can be found as well in Taishō Ward of Osaka, where community residents also work in the two large metal-parts factories, Kubota and Nakayama. Other Taishō residents work as proprietors or employees in stores, selling mostly consumer goods and services, including those which line the three-block long shopping arcade (shōten-gai) in Hirao Precinct, and also as professionals in real estate, pharmacy, medicine, dentistry, and teaching. Many single male residents in Taishō Ward work for local private contractors at construction sites, while, as elsewhere in Japan, there is a large and growing population of retirees.

Major movements of population have also occurred within localities, particularly starting in the late-1950s when families of Okinawans, as well as many mainland Japanese, moved from houses or tenements to apartment blocks (danchi) being built in large numbers at the time. This movement, however, was not always voluntary. In Taishō Ward, for example, residents of make-shift houses and barrack-like tenements in a low and often-flooded riverbank area of Kobayashi Precinct that Okinawans called “the hollows” (kubun-gwa in Okinawa dialect) were relocated by the city of Osaka to newly constructed municipal apartments nearby in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was part of a citywide “slum clearance” plan that targeted this area of marshy, unclaimed land officially deemed unsanitary and unsafe. Okinawans had begun living there in the chaotic period just after World War II, which had left much of greater Osaka devastated from fire-bombings. On what had been unclaimed land they constructed dwellings from tarpaper, tin, cardboard, plywood, and scrap lumber without official building permits. Interviewed in 1999, a former resident described the origins and growth of the hollows.

Many poor people began living there shortly after the war. When one person put up a house, others followed, building houses, moving in, and starting families. In the aftermath of recent bombings, there were always big puddles everywhere. Around 1950 people began putting up barrack-like tenements using lumber, tarpaper, and cement. Landlords living elsewhere also built tenements they rented.

There was electricity in the hollows, but the puddles slopped over with what seemed like sewer water. They were pumped out occasionally, but most of the time people had to put down boards for walk-paths to avoid sloshing through them.\textsuperscript{15}

Kinjō Isamu recalled the hollows from the 1950s.

About one-third of the people there were Okinawans, with many of the others from Kyūshū and Shikoku. When new people moved in from Okinawa, their friends and relatives would come to help put up a house using discarded lumber and other materials. No one owned most of the land, so it was squatters’ rights for the first to claim an open space. My father built his first house this way with help from other Okinawans. Instead of paying them, he served food and drink afterwards. This was one of the ways the \textit{yuimaru} (cooperative
Though called by the media at the time an “Okinawa slum,” some of the approximately 1500 Okinawan migrants and their descendants who lived there recall the hollows wistfully as a place with “a spirit of community cooperation” (kyōdō-tai seishin) where people helped build dwellings by yuimaru and loaned money to each other under the coop system, called “moai” in Okinawa, of pooling funds among relatives and close friends that is also practiced elsewhere in Asia. In addition, they made room in their homes for displaced neighbors, especially during such troubled times as when “typhoon Jane” leveled many dwellings and flooded the area in 1950. But other former residents call nostalgia for the hollows a romanticization of the past, and recall freezing winters, sweltering summers, flooding waters where sewage floated, swarming mosquitoes, devastating fires that fed on tar-paper, and taxi drivers who would refuse to take passengers to Taishō Ward for fear of soiling their vehicles in mud puddles or damaging their tires in potholes. Kinjō Isamu recalled that conditions there were much worse than in the neighborhoods of soggy old houses crammed together that we saw in a documentary film shown by one of our teachers at school with a passionate interest in the “Buraku problem.” I realized then that, like Buraku people, many Okinawans were hired only for grueling, dirty jobs, but that, in a way, we faced worse discrimination because, unlike them, we needed “passports” to visit our hometowns [in Okinawa under U.S. military occupation].

In 1996 Kakinohana Yoshimori remembered his first impression of the hollows from the early 1970s, shortly after he had moved to Osaka from Miyako Island.

Now people in Taishō Ward dress neatly, wearing the latest fashions, but in those days laborers walked the streets in baggy work fatigues. On the one hand, I was relieved to be among other Okinawans, but the place was depressingly poor. When I first saw the hollows, before the relocation, I was appalled, wondering if this was how Okinawans on the mainland had to live. It truly was a slum, though people from there would be angry to hear me say that today. But it’s the truth. One glance at the outdoor sinks and toilets, the maze of alleys, the houses patched together with boards and tin, and anyone would have to agree.

The current fascination among mainland Japanese with things Okinawan, which includes Okinawan communities on the mainland, could explain, in part, why a place commonly called a “slum” in the past has become the object of recent nostalgia in Japan for the early postwar period and of admiration for the resourcefulness of its residents in the face of adversity. This trend could also explain why it has come to acquire a more positive image in the current memories of some Okinawans, and why published interviews and writings have been appearing recently.

Still, whatever “narrative” of the hollows one accepts today, for most residents it was their one and only home when Osaka City targeted it for “clearance” in 1969. Okinawan student leaders organized protests, applying such tactics as sit-ins at municipal government offices learned from local Buraku activists. Protracted negotiations with the city dragged on until most residents agreed to move, with negotiated rent subsidies, to new municipally owned apartment buildings (shi-ei danchi) in the early 1970s. The smaller number of people living
in the hollows with deeds to their land were offered alternative lots, though of somewhat smaller size, in nearby precincts. Interviewed in 1999, one former resident recalled that “the compensation money the city was offering us to evacuate didn’t amount to a sparrow’s tear. They built fine apartments at the places we were relocated, but moving there put us all deeply in debt. I can still remember how worn out with worry members of the tenants’ association were as they ran around every day trying to scrape up the money for moving expenses.” The last tenant to hold out, an elderly woman, finally moved to a municipally owned apartment in 1979.

After that, the hollows was sunk underwater, flooded deliberately for the artificial expansion of Osaka Bay. Meanwhile, some mainland Japanese living elsewhere in Taishō Ward voiced resentment because they were not offered relocation rent subsidies in the new apartments or alternative parcels of land. Today, nothing of the hollows or anything like it remains in Taishō Ward. Apartment buildings, large and small, and one-family houses predominate, along with residences storekeepers have built above or behind their shops. The Okinawan community there is now a modestly prospering, though far from affluent, neighborhood of merchants and working people roughly comparable in cultural distinctiveness and economic circumstances to Brooklyn’s ethnic neighborhoods in Williamsburg (Italian) and Greenpoint (Polish). As for land, virtually no vacant lots or open spaces remain today like those still available when Kinjō Isamu’s family moved to Taishō in 1954, so Okinawans can no longer raise pigs. However, many families still maintain small gardens of goyaa that are so numerous on one street in Kobayashi Precinct that it has come to be known as “goyaa dōri.” Okinawan foodstuffs for preparation at home and in restaurants are sold in many neighborhood stores, including some run by mainlanders. 46% of the respondents to my questionnaire indicated that they ate Okinawan food regularly; 40% indicated that they observe Okinawan religious practices; and 60% indicated that they perform or listen to Okinawan folk music, which one can often hear walking along neighborhood streets in the evening.

How they coped: adjusting to differences and responding to prejudice and discrimination

People from Okinawa have encountered hardships on the mainland because of differences that are real, but more often imagined or exaggerated in the minds of mainlanders. A proportionally larger population from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands settled in the Ryukyu Islands in prehistoric times than in what is now mainland Japan. As a result of this early migration, physiological characteristics distinguishing Okinawans from mainland Japanese include shorter average stature, darker skin, fuller chests, and rounder eyes. Yet many Okinawans are physically indistinguishable from a majority of people on the mainland where there is also significant individual and regional variation to the extent that some mainlanders are even said to “look Okinawan.” Mainlanders have tended to exaggerate or invent “differences,” cultural as well as physiological, fostering stereotypes which are likely to be activated when someone is thought to be Okinawan. Furthermore, people who are said to “look Okinawan,” like Okinawans themselves, have been ridiculed for features that are, in fact, envied by many on the mainland. In what is one of the most popular cosmetic surgical procedures in the country today, women have tissue removed to enlarge their eye openings. And the beaches in Okinawa are crowded year-round with
women and men from the mainland assiduously darkening their skin, suntans acquired in the pursuit of leisure being a mark of wealth and sophistication often associated with travel abroad.

While their physical features have often attracted unwanted attention, language differences have posed more serious problems for Okinawans on the mainland. Again, both real and imagined differences are involved. During the U.S. military occupation of Okinawa, mainlanders sometimes asked people from Okinawa if they spoke English at home. As for actual differences, the dialects of mainland Japan and the Ryukyus are closely related structurally, and are said to have diverged from a single “mother dialect” in a process thought to have occurred between the second and seventh centuries A.D. Today Ryukyu dialects have come to be the most divergent among all local dialects in Japan, a distance which has been compared to the difference between French and Italian. And, like dialects in northern Honshū and southern Kyūshū today, the dialects of the Ryukyu Islands, some of which are mutually unintelligible, are not understood by people in other parts of the country unless they make a special point of studying them. On the other hand, for more than a century, since the middle of the Meiji Period (1868-1912), “standard” Japanese has been promoted by the media in Okinawa and required—at times punitively—in local schools. With daily discourse among those under fifty now conducted almost entirely in “standard” Japanese, the dialects of Ryukyu are gradually dying out despite recent efforts at preservation in the arts and education.

Nevertheless, many Okinawans on the mainland, especially those migrating after early childhood, have struggled, at least to some extent, with “standard” Japanese. Even younger migrants who have mastered it in Okinawa as their first language often retain a distinctively “Okinawan accent” and may be unfamiliar with certain local idioms, resulting in ridicule and a self-consciousness that hinders their ability to express themselves fully. An “Okinawan accent” includes a more fluctuating intonation (as opposed to a flatter mainland intonation) along with the occasional lengthening and shortening of vowels contrary to the mainland standard (Amagasaki pronounced as “Amagasaaki” and Osaka pronounced as “Osuka”). A woman in her late fifties who had come to Osaka in 1953 reported that one reason she had become active in the local Okinawa Prefectural Association was so that “I could feel comfortable about speaking with others in an Okinawa accent (Okinawa-namari).” When speaking to each other in Osaka, first generation migrants from Okinawa often mix words and phrases from Okinawa dialect with Kansai Japanese. In an ironic reversal, the recent “boom” of interest in Okinawan culture has given the dialect a “trendy” status in Japan today so that mainlanders are now picking up expressions like chura (pretty girl or handsome boy), waji-waji (angry), and kūsu (awamori aged at least five years), as well as learning the words for such Okinawan cuisine as gōyaa (bitter gourd), mimi-gaa (pickled pigs’ ears), and saada-andagii (spherical donut).

Among Okinawans interviewed for this study who recalled struggles with language on the mainland was a woman in her fifties who had moved to Osaka from Nago in the early 1960s. After finally receiving her “passport,” she arrived in Osaka and was hired in an office where she had to answer the telephone and take messages. She often needed to ask callers to repeat information because she could not understand it the first time or worried that her
reply was not being understood by the caller. At such times she would apologize, explaining that she had arrived only recently from Okinawa.29

A woman in her mid-forties who had come to greater Osaka in the mid-1970s told in a June, 2001 interview of a co-worker from Okinawa at a supermarket who was harassed relentlessly by his supervisors because he couldn’t adjust immediately to local customs of repeatedly greeting and thanking customers with the correct phrases of Osaka dialect. And, in a case that became a “cause celebre” in the Taishō Ward community, a nurse trainee from Okinawa was fired in 1977 by a local hospital for alleged “inefficiency” because, her supervisor said, she spoke with an Okinawa accent. Despite intimidation by yakuza thugs, her supporters lodged a formal protest with the hospital director and the young woman’s dismissal was rescinded. She subsequently resigned her job, received compensation from the hospital as part of a settlement, and returned to her home on Iheya Island.30

Interviewed in April of 2000, a 48-year-old neighbor of mine who had migrated to Osaka in the early 1970s and remains single gave struggles with language as the main reason he never dated women born and raised on the mainland, though he had been approached a number of times over the years, including on two occasions during my residence there, by such women who said they found him attractive. And a woman from Nago in her early thirties who had migrated as recently as 1985 reported that “I had real trouble with language when I first arrived, especially because idioms and intonation was different. I felt depressed because I was often unable to express myself or understand completely what others said. Even today, I have occasional problems.”31

Aside from language, other differences exaggerated or invented have spawned prejudices and discrimination in their most virulent forms. Japanese who traveled or worked in Okinawa early in the Meiji Period initially conveyed stereotypes that were already widespread and deeply rooted in Japan by the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most blatant (and subsequently most studied) manifestation of these attitudes was the notorious 1903 “human pavilion incident” at the Fifth World Trade and Industrial Exhibition, held that year in Osaka. The so-called “scientific human pavilion” (gakujutsu jinrui-kan) was not one of the official, government-sponsored exhibits, but was designed and constructed as a private business venture in consultation with Tsuboi Seigorō,32 known as “the founder of Japanese anthropology.” What has subsequently been described as a “freak show” was located just outside the main entrance to the exhibition grounds where it could easily attract some of the estimated 5,300,000 visitors to what was Japan’s largest yet international exhibition. Scheduled to open on March 10, it was to feature twenty-one highly exoticized “representatives” of “eight peoples:” five Ainu, four Taiwanese, two Koreans, three Chinese, three (Asian) Indians, one Javanese, one Bulgarian, and two Okinawans, all dressed in their “native” (genjū-min) clothing and displayed in cubicles that were later compared to animal cages at circuses.33 Protests from the Chinese Embassy and from Koreans in Osaka led to cancellation of exhibits from these countries (Korea was “annexed” by Japan as a colony seven year later in 1910), and protests from Okinawa, such as an angry editorial in the April 7, 1903 Ryūkyū Shinpō declaring “We must never tolerate such humiliation,” led to removal of the “Ryuukyū” exhibit in May after two months of display.
Poet Yamanokuchi Baku (1903-1963), born in Naha, who spent virtually all of his adult life on the mainland, poignantly evoked mainland stereotypes of Okinawans. In his short story “Mr. Saitō of Heaven Building,” the narrator recalls the experience “of living in Tokyo as a man from ‘Ryukyu’ for the past sixteen years. I’ve run into people wherever I go who...stare at me strangely—as if I’m not even human. And in those stares I can hear their questions. Is Ryukyu in Okinawa Prefecture? Do the people there eat rice?” More recently, during the U.S. military occupation when far fewer mainlanders than now made visits to Okinawa which then required passports and entry permits, people from Okinawa on the mainland were asked such questions as whether they lived in a jungle, wore grass skirts, or ate with knives and forks.

Moving from Okinawa to Osaka in 1925 at the age of nine, Oyakawa Takayoshi recalls his first few weeks in school on the mainland.

Some of the other students would look at me derisively, calling me “Ryukyuan.” ...I was shocked, having no idea why they made fun of me because I was from Okinawa. ...It got so bad I couldn’t stand it, and stopped going to school for about a week. My parents understood what was happening, though, and didn’t scold me.

Drafted into the Imperial Japanese Army in 1937, Oyakawa writes, “the first unit I was assigned to was all Okinawans because, it was explained in the company briefing, soldiers from each prefecture were trained in separate units. But the company commander made fun of us, saying it was really because ‘Okinawa is thirty years behind the mainland.’”

Okinawans have encountered prejudice on the mainland whether, like Oyakawa, they settled there or came temporarily for “work away from home.” Kinjō Tsuru went to work in 1919 at the Fukushima Spinning Factory in Shikama, Hyōgo Prefecture.

My contract was for three years, but I ran away after working for only one. ...I just couldn’t stand it anymore, always being made fun of because I was from Okinawa.

I was taunted especially by the woman of about fifty who was in charge of our rooms in the dormitory. Whenever she talked to me, she would yell out scornfully, “Hey, you, Ryukyu” or “Listen here, Ryukyu.” I’m no weakling, though, and yelled back at her. ...“So what’s wrong with being from Okinawa?” or “Didn’t you also come out of a womb?” ...

We Okinawan women formed a group that stood up to her, and there were a lot of big arguments. I remember Ms. Yonamine especially. She was about forty and really told that room manager off. “We might be under contract here,” she said, “but we haven’t sold our lives to you.” I’ll never forget how good that made me feel. ...

If we were late getting back for the five-o’clock curfew, we’d be called into the office the next day for a bawling out of “you Ryukyu girls.” Only one person there, a man working in the kitchen, treated us well because, he said, we had come from so far away. We called him Dad.

Besides barbs and insults, the problems people faced on the mainland simply because they came from Okinawa manifested themselves in material ways that directly affected their lives and livelihoods. Starting in the 1920s, some employers and landlords posted signs in front of factories, employment offices, and lodging houses announcing “Koreans and
Okinawans prohibited” (Chōsen-jin Ryūkyū-jin o-kotowari). In explaining such exclusion, employers sometimes complained that Okinawans tended to change jobs if they were offered better conditions elsewhere, and landlords claimed that Okinawans tended to live with too many relatives in lodgings meant for fewer tenants. It is true that people who traveled long distances to “work away from home” often lived with relatives, at least temporarily until they got settled. But Okinawans were certainly not the only ones coming from remote rural areas of Japan to lodge with relatives in cities like Osaka, especially during the acute prewar housing shortage. Furthermore, large families that often included in-laws and grandparents were still the norm in Japan at this time. And, while it is true that Okinawans would change jobs for higher wages, especially since they had to send at least part of their earnings back to their families, they were surely not the only workers in Japan leaving one workplace for better conditions at another.40

In fact, Okinawans might have been motivated, at least in part, to change jobs because employers seem to have considered it smart business practice to offer them lower wages and inferior working conditions. Extensive statistical records from the 1920s and 1930s reveal a pattern of discrimination in employment contracts, housing, and even workplace safety measures. Tomiyama quotes published interviews of company officials who recalled that, seeking workers at low wages, “we made a special effort to recruit factory women from among Koreans, Okinawans, and Burakumin.”41 Employers at mainland cotton spinning factories in particular assumed that “Ryukyuans” could be paid lower wages, would put up with abusive working conditions, and did not require compensation for fires or accidents. This discriminatory attitude manifested itself in a number of management policies, such as housing Okinawans separately and giving them different meals from mainland workers.42

Statistics also show that women from Okinawa were disproportionately assigned the most dangerous and arduous jobs in spinning factories.43 Arakaki Kaeko, who worked in 1927 at the Fukushima Spinning Factory, in Hyōgo Prefecture, describes one of several successful protests against discriminatory treatment of workers from Okinawa.

They deducted 15 sen from our monthly wages for meals, but served only leftovers to the Okinawans. The mainland workers got warm rice, while ours was always cold. It was clearly discrimination.

Finally, we couldn’t stand it anymore, and six of us Okinawan factory women decided to take action in protest. “The hell with this,” we told them. “You deduct all this money from our pay, and give us nothing but leftovers.” Then, as soon as they served us the food, we hurled it back in their faces and knocked the serving trays down on the floor.

This really shocked the company, and after that we got the same food as the mainland workers.

Also, among other insults, our supervisors were always telling us that “Okinawans are dirty because you eat garlic and pork, like Koreans who eat red pepper.”

So one day all the Okinawans gathered for a protest in the factory yard. We sat down on the ground and refused to work or eat in what today would be called a hunger strike. Then, maybe after the company contacted him, the president of the prefectural association, Mr.
Kinjō, arrived in a hurry to check out the situation. “We can’t work any more in a place like this,” we told him. “Please get us the money for our return fares.”

At last the factory manager showed up and apologized to us, and since the supervisors had to go along with him, our treatment suddenly improved.44

As recalled in interviews, these experiences from the spinning mills indicate, first, that Okinawans did not necessarily accept prejudice and discrimination passively, and, second, that mainland co-workers and supervisors were responsive at times to their protests. Blatant discrimination persisted well into the postwar years despite the fact that it was now illegal. Two people I interviewed for this study reported seeing signs in front of apartment buildings in Taishō Ward as late as 1973 announcing, “Okinawans and members of Soka Gakkai not admitted” (Okinawa to Sōka Gakkai, nyūkyo o-kotowari), and a local community leader reported in 1987 that some landlords in the city were still refusing to rent to Okinawans.45 A woman interviewed in April of 2000 said she was told by landlords that Okinawans tend to live with too many relatives, the same excuse given in earlier decades, and that members of Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist sect that actively recruits and proselytizes, tend to hold crowded, noisy prayer meetings at night. Signs excluding Okinawans on taverns and restaurants in Tokyo and Yokohama have been observed as late as the mid-1980s, and were given by one interviewee in March of 2001 as a major reason for moving from Yokohama to Osaka.

Protests by women mistreated in textile factories and by supporters of the nurse fired in 1977 for speaking with an “Okinawan accent” represent some of the many ways Okinawans on the mainland have responded to these injustices. Considering that the source of prejudice and discrimination is often psychological—presumptions of superiority by a majority over a minority—many Okinawans have sought to associate themselves in mainland minds with the majority by undertaking prodigious efforts to “assimilate.” Throughout the prewar and wartime years, and during the U.S. military occupation, Okinawans have often identified themselves with this majority by vigorously emphasizing their Japanese nationality. Published reaction from Okinawa in 1903 to the “human pavilion” at the Fifth World Trade and Industrial Exhibition in Osaka did not criticize the inhumanity of such a display, but its inclusion of Okinawans with Ainu and Taiwanese. An April 7 editorial in the Ryūkyū Shinpō objected, not to the exhibit in principle, but to its inclusion of “Japanese citizens of Okinawa Prefecture,” and complained that “lining up citizens of Okinawa Prefecture with Taiwanese barbarians (seiban) and Hokkaido Ainu is to view Okinawans...as one of these.” With heavy overtones of scapegoating, the editorial described this “humiliation” as the result of “being portrayed as an ‘inferior race’ (rettō shuzoku).”

This attitude has been characterized as the victims of discrimination becoming its perpetrators, and was also observed among women factory workers in Osaka from Okinawa and Korea who are said to have hurled the derogatory epithets “Korean whore” (Chōsen piii) and “Ryukyu pig” (Ryūkyū buta) at each other during arguments.46 Furthermore, Okinawans sometimes assign high and low “status” among themselves. A first-generation migrant from Miyako Island, interviewed in April of 2001, reported that some migrants to Osaka from Okinawa Main Island (hontō) have tended to look down on
people from the outer islands (ritō). Protesting “the evils of discrimination” with a more positive appeal to shared national identity, Okinawan novelist Kushi Fusako pointed out in 1932 that “Like mainlanders, Okinawans serve in the military and perform their other duties as citizens.”

Okinawans who emphasize their Japanese nationality have often, but not always, de-emphasized their Okinawan ethnicity. Their efforts to “assimilate” culturally with majority Japanese (Yamatun-chu) have included not only practicing mainland customs of dialect, diet, dress, inter-personal formalities, and religious observances, at least outside the home or neighborhood, but also rejecting traditional Okinawan religious practices and such art forms as classical dance (ryūbu) and folk songs (min’yō or shima-uta), or performing them in private, away from the eyes and ears of Yamatun-chu. Oyakawa Takayoshi recalled that, after moving to Osaka in 1925 as a child, he developed a strong aversion for things distinctively Okinawan.

I hated Okinawan dance and sanshin [Okinawan shamisen] music...and despised the word 'Ryukyu.' In Chitose Precinct there was an open field where performers erected a lean-to stage, set up a booth for collecting admission, and put on Okinawan plays. Mainlanders would gather to watch in fascination, but they made fun of Okinawans in loud voices and I felt ashamed.

Another thing I hated was when people riding the trains or walking down the street spoke in Okinawa dialect. I thought that in public they should always use standard Japanese or Osaka dialect.

Perhaps the most conspicuous way Okinawans on the mainland have sought to de-emphasize or conceal their ethnicity has been changing the pronunciations, and sometimes the Chinese characters, in their distinctive Okinawan names. This trend started in Okinawa itself after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 when more and more Okinawans wanted to identify themselves with a nation rising in wealth, power, and status. Name-changing is, of course, an expedient familiar to many Americans, like myself, whose names were changed from those of recognizably Irish, Italian, or Jewish origin to inconspicuous “Anglo” alternatives. My grandfather, who emigrated from Russia to the Lower East Side (then a Jewish ethnic community) of Manhattan in 1900, agreed somewhat reluctantly when his children changed the legal family name from the obviously Jewish Rabinowitz (meaning rabbi’s son) to “Rabson” during a time of widespread anti-Semitism in the 1930s. (Despite the legal change, he never used "Rabson.") Okinawans changed their family names around the same time in mainland Japan so that Kinjō became “Kaneshiro,” Higa became “Hiyoshi,” and Kabira became “Kawahira;” and men also changed their personal names from, for example, Shin’yū to “Masahiro,” Ryōmei to “Yoshiaki,” and Shōtoku to “Masanori.” In Japan before 1945, changing one’s name to characters or their readings more common on the mainland was a relatively easy procedure, and even officially encouraged at a time when the Japanese government was also endeavoring to “assimilate” residents of colonies in Taiwan and Korea as “imperial subjects.” In fact, such changes were made mandatory in Korea by the notorious “Name Order” of 1939 requiring Koreans to adopt Japanese names.
Yet even during the prewar years when pressures to assimilate were at their peak, some Okinawans on the mainland opposed tendencies to reject their traditional culture, vigorously asserting its value. In 1927 sanshin performer Fukuhara Chōki founded a record company in Osaka devoted to Okinawan folk music; and Kushi Fusako wrote five years later, “I do not believe that our customs that differ from those on the mainland should be despised or discarded. [They] have deep roots in our culture [and] natural environment.” Interviewed in 1996, Kinjō Kaoru, who immigrated to greater Osaka as a small child in 1954, asserted that “people being different doesn’t make them better or worse. I think it’s been a mistake for us to try to become Japanese to the extent of destroying our own ethnicity.”

Published in 1996 during a nationwide “boom” of interest in Okinawa, such affirmations of the value of Okinawan ethnicity could well have had more resonance among readers in contemporary Japan than Kushi’s affirmations would have had in 1932 when government policy and popular trends for assimilation were intensifying after the Manchurian Incident the previous year.

**How they organized: changing forms and agendas of the Okinawa prefectural associations**

Along with the sometimes-painful efforts to “assimilate” with mainland Japanese, migrants from Okinawa have had notable successes organizing for their mutual benefit and advocacy as Okinawans. This organizing, crucial to survival for people dealing with poverty, cultural differences, and discrimination, began informally with the first “pioneer” migrants who provided material assistance and networks of contacts for housing, employment, and even marriage, to friends, relatives, and fellow-villagers moving to the mainland. The first formal organization in greater Osaka was the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association (Kansai Okinawa Kenjin-kai), founded in 1924. The association’s newspaper *Dōhō* (Comrades) explained:

Our prefecture is under the same government as the rest of Japan, but, because we are in a remote location and have a different history and economic structure, we encounter unexpected misunderstandings and insults from the people of other prefectures. If we are to overcome the many obstacles imposed only on our prefecture and advance, socially and economically, to the status of people in other prefectures, we cannot possibly rely on the strength of disparate individuals. ...It is through one organization that we must move into society.

The authors of this article go on to support their call for organizing with comparisons that pose discrimination in global terms, but are sure to raise eyebrows today.

As individuals, the Jewish people have produced great numbers of outstanding individuals compared with other peoples of the world, and, it is fair to say, have been praised and honored since ancient times as being truly the highest among races in human society. Yet, the reality of their daily lives is precisely the opposite. In Europe and America today, Jews are subjected to outrageous insults. This is because their strength as individuals is dispersed and they have not organized as a group. ...In the reverse phenomenon, the Burakumin have not produced outstanding individuals of world-renown, but, in less than
Putting Okinawa at the Center

four years time, they have built an organization and forged an ethnic solidarity that have made them the largest and most powerful social movement in Japan.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite a founding statement that contained apparently unintended slights of Burakumin and factual errors (there were numerous Jewish organizations in Europe and America in the 1920s), the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association built on appeals for ethnic solidarity to establish numerous local branches and subdivisions. The association has subsequently gone through one dissolution and rebirth as well as several re-organizations. Meanwhile, separate associations have been formed in the other prefectures of greater Osaka, the largest and most active today being the Hyōgo Okinawa Prefectural Association (Okinawa Kenjin-kai, Hyōgo-ken Honbu), founded in 1946. People have also organized into groups from local areas of Okinawa, and today there are hometown friendship associations (kyōyūkai) of migrants and their descendants for Nakijin, Haneji, Haibaru, Kochinda and other localities from which large numbers of people have moved to greater Osaka.

The roles of the prefectural associations have, of course, differed from each other and changed over time. In the early years, they provided essential support systems, including loans and temporary housing, to new arrivals and, unlike today, they led the movement for improved conditions among Okinawan factory workers. While they have continued to aid new arrivals from Okinawa, they function more as social and cultural facilitators today, presenting concerts and Okinawan products expositions, arranging and providing venues for classes in Okinawan performing and design arts, and organizing regular gatherings of community members. While they cooperate with each other in a wide range of ways, disagreements have arisen from time to time within and among prefectural associations over, for example, whether and how to become involved in political issues.

The first incarnation of the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association was led by activists committed to Marxist ideals, and organized on the model of a political party. Established in 1924, it was deeply involved in labor-union efforts to improve the wages and working conditions of factory workers in Osaka, many of whom came from Okinawa. However, within two years, this organization was virtually decimated by arrests of its leaders following brutal government suppression in 1926 of a strike by Okinawan workers that association leaders helped organize at the Tōyō Cotton Industries’ Sangenya factory, located in the present Taishō Ward of Osaka. On August 11 union members submitted a fifteen-point written petition to company officials seeking compliance with factory labor laws, freedom to leave the company grounds, an end to mandatory transfers of workers’ earnings to their families in Okinawa, equalization of wages, and reforms of other discriminatory practices. The company responded by firing forty of the petitioning union members. A strike began in the early morning of August 14 with 200 factory women from Okinawa leaving the dormitory. The police were quickly mobilized to drag them forcibly back to the factory grounds where many were beaten, kicked, and thrown in the mud by company supervisors. Now the police arrested more than 50 labor activists in the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association on charges of inciting a riot, and jailed many of them. Two years later the labor organizing activities of the association were effectively shut down by the massive police round-ups of “leftists” and others viewed as dissidents on March 25 and April 16, 1928, and continuing government suppression resulted in an end to all the association’s activities in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{55}
This experience has loomed large in the memories of older Okinawans in Osaka, and was cited by Okinawan sociologist Shingaki Masami as one reason that the current leadership of the Osaka League of Okinawa Prefectural Associations (Osaka Okinawa Kenjin Rengō-kai), established in 1946, a successor organization to the Kansai Prefectural Association, has been reluctant to pursue an active agenda on social and political issues today. When the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association was re-established in 1931, the labor activists were gone and its new leadership was comprised of professionals with university degrees who turned away from labor activism. In place of the former political-party structure, the leaders re-centered the organization around the hometown friendship associations of people from local areas of Okinawa. Though debate resumed over the relative merits of assimilating or living as Okinawans, leaders called for Okinawans to speak “standard Japanese,” associate more with people from other prefectures, minimize the practice of Okinawan customs, and abandon Okinawan religious practices in favor of mainland Shintō. This was, of course, a highly repressive period of growing militarism in Japan when the government was compelling the worship of state Shinto and banning indigenous religious practices as part of the “policy to make imperial subjects” (kōminka seisaku) in Okinawa, as well as in Japan’s colonies and territories.

Since World War II the leaders of prefectural associations have continued to disagree on how to respond to pressures for assimilation and whether or how to advocate on political issues. However, as in Okinawa itself, overwhelming support developed among members for reversion, particularly after U.S. seizures of private land for military bases brought many involuntary “migrants” to greater Osaka. Okinawans there felt increasingly cut off from their homeland after what they called the “disappearance of Okinawa Prefecture” in 1945 and the Japanese government’s agreement to a Peace Treaty that “severed Okinawa from Japan” in 1952. Overcoming initial reluctance among leaders of the Osaka League, prefectural associations in greater Osaka and elsewhere on the mainland went on to play a major role in the reversion movement. They organized large demonstrations in 1956 which featured speakers from Okinawa as part of the “land struggle” (tochi tōsō) protesting U.S. seizures of land for military bases in Okinawa and occupation rule generally. Subsequent protests calling for reversion drew many participants, including a demonstration by more than 10,000 in Osaka City on October 1, 1966 during which a petition was presented to visiting Prime Minister Satō Eisaku.

Large numbers of mainland Japanese joined the struggle for reversion, though Okinawans sometimes complained about ulterior motives among those on the right who seemed interested mostly in recovering territory lost in war and those on the left who seemed intent on using “the Okinawa problem” as a political football to attack the conservative government. Nevertheless, achieving reversion was crucial materially and psychologically for the entire Okinawan diaspora, removing the stigma of Okinawans as “an occupied people” and freeing the flow of communication, information, and travel.

Japanese citizens no longer needed “passports” to enter Okinawa, and published materials from the mainland were no longer screened by military censors. However, as in Okinawa itself, the terms of the reversion agreement provoked anger and a sense of betrayal because U.S. bases remained virtually intact despite the Japanese government’s constantly repeated promises to reduce the military presence in Okinawa to “mainland levels” (hondo-
nami). As a result, the reversion agreement (*henkan-kyōtei*) came to be known sarcastically among Okinawans as the “discriminatory agreement” (*henken kyōtei*).

While the Hyōgo Okinawa Prefectural Association has continued to advocate for removal of the bases, including a petition drive in 2001, the Osaka League has been comparatively quiet on the issue. Residents of the community in Taishō Ward explained to me that one reason is that, since reversion, some community residents, including prominent League members, have been receiving substantially increased “rental” payments from the Japanese government for land seized from them by the U.S. government in the 1950s. In an effort to “stabilize” land-use for bases after reversion, the Japanese Defense Facilities Agency immediately increased these payments to “military landowners” (*gun-jinushi*) by as much as six times the pre-reversion rates paid by the U.S. government. During 2000 and 2001 I met four individuals receiving such payments, including one interviewee in Taishō Ward who showed me her contract from the Defense Facilities Agency that specified annual payments of 12 million yen or about $100,000 in 2001. Her land in Oroku, seized originally to build barracks for U.S. Naha Air Base, is now a dependents’ housing area for Japan’s Air Self-Defense Forces which took over the base after reversion.

The Japanese government’s “hush money” strategy has not always worked, however, either in Okinawa, where “antiwar landowners” (*han-sen jinushi*) have formed an active protest organization, or on the mainland. Another interviewee in Taishō Ward told me in February of 2000 that his family in Okinawa, whose land was confiscated in the 1950s to expand Kadena Air Base, contributes these payments to support the anti-base movement while he personally devotes much of his time to organizing protests and speaking at rallies in greater Osaka. Meanwhile, in another example of diverse opinions on this issue, not all Okinawan residents of Hyōgo Prefecture agree with that association’s opposition to military bases. One interviewee from the Hyōgo Okinawan community in Takarazuka City told me in April of 2001 that her father, who also receives “rent” for land seized in the 1950s, gets angry whenever he reads about another protest demonstration, insisting that, if the bases are to be removed, landowners should receive compensation for lost income.

Partly because of such diversity of views and circumstances among members, Osaka League leaders have sometimes been hesitant to “lead” on other issues as well, taking up the banner only after a clear membership consensus develops. Officials explain that their organization, descended from the second, less activist incarnation of the Kansai Okinawa Prefectural Association, has a more conservative membership and is necessarily less “political” than the Hyōgo association, founded in 1946 during a time of vigorous activism on issues such as reversion and military bases in Okinawa. League leaders in Osaka are still haunted by memories of the brutal government suppression during and after the 1926 strike at the Tōyō Cotton Industries’ Sangenya factory, and see their most pressing issue as maintaining their organization of an estimated 7,000 members of whom an increasing proportion are elderly, first-generation migrants. This trend is borne out by results from my survey which showed a 20% higher rate of prefectural association membership among respondents in their 60s and 70s (53.6% and 51.5% respectively) as compared with respondents in their 40s and 50s (35.7% and 30.4% respectively).
Some League officials believe that elderly members would prefer not to be reminded of hardships they have suffered simply for being Okinawan, or to attract too much attention. In the years before Okinawan culture became trendy in the early 1990s, one official discouraged a group of younger community residents in the mid-1970s from organizing performances of eisa dances and presenting this annual Okinawan festival in the neighborhood because he feared that, for mainlanders to see these traditional dances in colorful costumes, would “embarrass” the Okinawan community. Another League official in his late sixties has refused to acknowledge in interviews that there has been discrimination against Okinawans in Osaka. Such denials contradict League publications which fully document it, and interviews by me and others of League members who described discrimination they have personally encountered.

Nowadays, amidst the nationwide “Okinawa boom,” all the prefectural associations in greater Osaka organize events to which the public is eagerly welcomed, where eisa-odori and other traditional dances and music are performed. The Osaka League now actively supports and promotes Okinawan culture in many ways, sponsoring concerts, offering space for training studios in the performing arts, and inviting speakers in various fields from Okinawa to lecture in the Osaka area. The most important functions of this organization today include providing space and organizational support for such social occasions as banquets to celebrate the New Year, honor elderly members, and commemorate such special occasions as the anniversary of the League’s founding, events at which Okinawan music and dance are almost always performed. The League also organizes the annual September “sports festival” in which local Okinawa prefectural associations in greater Osaka and nearby prefectures compete in relay races and other events. In addition, the League sells tickets and rents buses for the semi-annual pilgrimages to root for Okinawa’s representative team in the National High School Baseball Tournament held at Kōshien Stadium in Nishinomiya, an Osaka suburb, where officials from the Osaka League and Hyōgo Association also distribute tickets, arrange bus transportation, help rooters find seats, and clean up discarded trash at the game’s conclusion.

Over the years, the prefectural associations have not only provided for survival-support, advocated vigorously in the 1920s for labor reform and in the 1950s and 60s for reversion, but have also contributed to postwar infrastructural and economic improvements in the community. Prefectural associations in greater Osaka were crucial for the community during the chaotic period immediately after World War II. They aided in the resettlement both of Okinawa residents who had evacuated to rural areas on the mainland, but whose status changed to “refugees” after their prefecture was devastated by the Battle; and, of Okinawan soldiers and civilians who chose to be repatriated to greater Osaka from Taiwan, Micronesia, the Philippines, and other areas formerly part of the Japanese empire because many of them had nothing left to go back to in Okinawa. Prefectural associations continue to assist new arrivals from Okinawa to settle in greater Osaka. The Osaka liaison office of the Okinawa Prefectural Government also helps people from Okinawa to find jobs in greater Osaka, and to secure housing. In the years following reversion, this office recruited migrants to work mostly in factories, while in today’s economy they are more likely to work as nurse trainees, cooks, or waitresses. Approximately 260 young people each year find jobs in greater Osaka through this office. Although some of these people settle in the
area, often becoming managers of stores, restaurants, or small factories, virtually none choose to live in Okinawan communities, preferring, like many other Okinawans coming to the mainland today, to reside near the places where they work or study. In contrast, many who migrated in the early 1970s before reversion in “group hirings” (shūdan-shūshoku) organized by commercial recruiters settled in Taishō Ward after their contract periods ended.

Where things stand: lingering prejudice, a new pride in “roots,” and mixed blessings of the “Okinawa boom”

From what were often troubled beginnings, life for most residents of the Okinawan communities in greater Osaka has improved over the years as many migrants saved their factory wages, started businesses, bought property, and sent their children to colleges or professional schools. And, while their economic resources have not reached the average level of Japanese “salarymen” in more upscale residential areas, many have enjoyed relative prosperity in recent years. Mainlanders living in the more affluent areas of greater Osaka refer to these communities as “downtown” (shita-machi) or, in the case of Taishō Ward in southwestern Osaka, somewhat disparagingly as “the deep south.” With the currently heightened interest in Okinawa throughout Japan, many mainland visitors have been attracted to the community where they shop in stores that sell Okinawan products, eat in restaurants serving Okinawan cuisine where Okinawan music is often performed, and learn to perform Okinawan dance and music themselves at the culture centers and studios. This influx has provided relief for some in the community from the economic doldrums that have been felt in Japan as a whole since the early 1990s.

In the year and a half between June of 1999 and December of 2000, a new store selling Okinawan products and four new restaurants, one with nightly performances of music and dance, opened in a four-block area near the Taishō train station. There were already three Okinawan restaurants, one offering live performances, making a current total of seven in this area which is still three miles from the Okinawan neighborhoods in Kobayashi, Hirao, and Okajima where such businesses can be found in virtually every block. Community residents often make fun of the Yamatun-chu tourists, and sometimes express regret for what they see as growing dilution (or “mainlandization”) of Okinawan arts and culture. But most proprietors eagerly welcome the large crowds of visitors who regularly pack local restaurants offering Okinawan cuisine and live music, especially on Saturday nights when even the local regulars (jōren) are turned away unless they have reservations.

Many Okinawans in greater Osaka today have themselves developed greater interest and pride in their “roots” (rūtsu), using the English word in describing this trend. Today, second and third-generation Okinawans, as well as mainlanders, are studying the traditional performing arts, design arts, and cuisine, along with learning some Okinawa dialect. Their motivations are many and varied. Interviewees cited the influence of parents and grandparents, strong impressions from a visit to Okinawa, or the effects of a performance they had attended. A professional writer in her late thirties said in November of 2000 that she had never felt pride in her family’s origins, largely because she associated being Okinawan with being poor, until Shō High School became the first team from Okinawa to win the national high school baseball tournament in April of 1999. She felt
proud, she said, because Okinawans had “finally beaten the Yamatun-chu at something.” She is now writing her first novel which is based largely on her father's experience as a migrant from Okinawa living in Osaka. On the other hand, some second and third-generation Okinawans in greater Osaka still seek to minimize their connections with Okinawa, emphasizing, for example, that “I’m Osakan, though my father came from there.”

Today, amidst the “Okinawa boom” and a popular trend for exploring one’s ethnic “roots,” it is much too easy to look back with a smirk at people who never spoke their local dialect or ate Okinawan foods in public, only practiced sanshin secretly in closets, and changed their names. Yet it must be remembered that, during the years of malicious prejudice and blatant discrimination, for Okinawans living and working on the mainland, the issue was often physical and psychological survival. Though discrimination is now illegal, it has by no means disappeared (see interviews cited above). Today prejudices based on stereotypes persist on the mainland despite—and to some extent because of—the recent fascination in Japan with an exoticized and commercialized “Okinawa” that has made recordings of Okinawan pop music into best sellers and singers from Okinawa into super-stars. A woman in her mid-sixties who had migrated to greater Osaka in 1962 commented on her questionnaire that “I was shocked when I first came at how many people were ignorant about Okinawa, mostly because it wasn’t mentioned in school curriculums. But nowadays everyone’s trying to ride the wave of interest in it.” Since reversion, community residents are no longer asked if people in Okinawa speak English at home or use knives and forks for daily meals, but they are still subjected to such double-edged praise of Okinawans as “so relaxed and carefree” (implying a certain indolence and lack of responsibility) or “so casual and easy-going” (implying a lack of courtesy and diligence). Koreans and Chinese are also subjected to such “praise” in Japan for being “clever” (implying wily or tricky). The president of a loan agency in Taishō Ward told me he never lends money to Okinawans because “they don’t pay it back.” And an executive of a manufacturing company in Osaka told me his firm decided not to locate a factory in Okinawa because “people there can’t do quality work.”

In official ways, too, there are still problems, as when the All-Japan High School Baseball Federation banned the wearing of eisa robes by second-generation Okinawan rooters from Amagasaki for the semi-annual national baseball tournament at Kōshien Stadium in Nishinomiya, near Osaka. The Federation explained that its regulations forbid the wearing of “strange” (kii) garments, though the Okinawan rooters pointed out that fans from Kōchi and Hiroshima Prefectures were allowed to wear their brightly colored local costumes. Fans have defied this ban recently by carrying their packaged eisa robes in through the stadium entrances, then changing clothes in the rest rooms. In recent years, teams from Okinawa have placed high in the tournament, regularly reaching the finals or semi-finals. Then in the spring of 1999, when Okinawa Shō High School became the first team from Okinawa in the tournament’s 55-year history to win the championship, residents of Okinawan communities on the mainland, which always send bus-loads of rooters to their games, celebrated joyously. Savoring this victory of Uchinaan-chu over Yamatun-chu, Okinawans commented that “the postwar period is finally over for us.” This is a mocking reference to the phrase used by Prime Minister Satō Eisaku who negotiated the Okinawa reversion agreement with U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1969, viewed by Okinawans as
yet another mainland betrayal for failing to include promised reductions in the U.S. military presence.

In September of 1995, the movement among community activists opposing American military bases in Okinawa shifted into high gear after the September, 1995 rape of a twelve-year old elementary school girl in Kin by two U.S. marines and one sailor. Protest marches were organized in Osaka to coincide with the massive demonstration of an estimated 85,000 in Ginowan City, Okinawa. Subsequent marches and rallies drew large numbers of participants in Osaka and Kyoto. In addition, regular information meetings (gakushū-kai) have been held in public auditoriums and university lecture halls with activists and scholars from Okinawa as featured speakers. Former Okinawa Governor Ōta Masahide has given a number of well-attended lectures recently in Osaka auditoriums. In greater Osaka and elsewhere on the mainland, singers from Okinawa perform anti-war and anti-base protest songs at regular concerts. Yet, while members of the greater Osaka Okinawan community often take the lead in organizing these events, the proportion of community residents who participate in political activism is comparatively small. Among respondents to survey questionnaires, only 6.8% of migrants and 4.5 of descendants indicated such participation. Though many Okinawans in greater Osaka joined protests against the military bases following the 1995 rape, most of the time one tends to notice the same core of activists from the community turning out for events, which usually draw larger numbers of mainlanders, and for organizational meetings.

The “Okinawa boom” has also made residents aware of the need to convey full and accurate information about the communities to outsiders, especially to the media which is now reporting on them frequently. To keep up with growing demands, the Kansai Okinawa Bunko (Culture Center) has assumed what has become an increasingly heavy burden, offering written materials, recordings, video tapes, lectures, and guided tours to the public at very low cost and with an extremely small, largely volunteer, staff. Groups of students and teachers from public and private schools in greater Osaka and nearby prefectures come regularly to the Bunko for “field work” seminars that include lectures and guided tours as well as performances of Okinawan music. Demands on the Bunko for information and interviews reached a fever pitch during the months leading up to the 2000 G-8 Summit Conference held in Okinawa. Scholars from the Taishō Ward community and from Okinawa have subsequently met there regularly to prepare fuller information and check existing materials for accuracy.

Though the influx of tourists and consumers has provided income for some, the greater Osaka communities, where small and medium industries depend heavily on sub-contracts from larger companies, have been hit hard by economic doldrums afflicting Japan as a whole in the 1990s and 2000s. Residents have suffered in the continuing series of lay-offs, euphemistically called “restructuring” (risutora), at the medium-size metalworking factories, and orders for extracted metal and molded metal parts have dwindled at the smaller workshops. Local merchants often complain that business has fallen off sharply since the “bubble burst” on Japan’s economy in 1990-91, and the incomes of construction workers have dropped sharply with local labor agencies offering fewer jobs. A growing number of homeless wander Osaka streets now, sleeping on sidewalks or in parks, as
elsewhere in Japan's cities. And, as elsewhere, the economy is the issue community residents say is of the greatest concern to them.

Clearly, the “Okinawa boom” has brought mixed blessings to Okinawan communities in greater Osaka as well as to Okinawa itself. Nowadays visitors from the mainland sometimes comprise the majority in audiences at live performances there of Okinawan music and a high proportion of the participants in such anti-base demonstrations as the recent “human chains” around Kadena Air Base. Okinawans themselves are divided over whether to welcome mainlanders to partake in the islands’ culture and politics, or to discourage their participation. At least one eisa performance group in Osaka bars mainlanders because, as the director explains, eisa has special religious significance for Okinawans. (This group does accept people with only partial Okinawan ancestry.) Okinawans inside and outside the prefecture are caught between a desire, on the one hand, to convey accurate information about their culture and political oppression to mainlanders and non-Japanese, and frustration, on the other, when these efforts result in a superficial fascination with “Okinawa” that encourages dilettantism, stereotyping, and commercial exploitation.

Interviewed in April of 2000, a teacher at a local junior college in his early forties complained that, for too many mainlanders, “Okinawa” has become a “tasty morsel” to consume in the media and on forays to Okinawa or the greater Osaka community; and, that, for some academics, it has become a “hot topic” they can use to publish research which is too often based on one-dimensional portrayals of Okinawans and the issues confronting them. Perhaps the most important message conveyed in the interviews and questionnaires collected for this study is that Okinawans in greater Osaka have responded in a wide variety of ways to these challenges, and that their responses have frequently changed over time to adjust to new conditions. What is often presented as a dichotomy of “assimilation versus cultural preservation” is, more often today, a continuing series of choices made in daily life that depend on individual preferences rather than on decisions to take one side or the other. An eighteen-year old musician interviewed in February of 2001 explained that, although both her parents were from Okinawa, she had chosen to make her career performing mainland folk music from northeastern Japan (tsugaru-jamisen) because she was better able to express what she felt in its melodies and rhythms. At the same time, she preferred Okinawan food which her mother cooked at home.

Nowhere is diversity more evident than in the ways Okinawans in greater Osaka remember or conceptualize a “homeland” they might have left many years ago or where they never lived at all. Among interviewees, several women who came originally to work in textile factories before World War II said they had decided to remain in greater Osaka after their contract periods ended because Okinawa did not offer comparable economic prospects for them, their spouses, or their children. Other migrants from both the prewar and postwar period cited limited social and cultural horizons in the rural Okinawan villages where they grew up as reasons for remaining on the mainland. Descendants who had visited Okinawa only during the U.S. occupation period described a place of natural beauty, but with widespread poverty and an oppressive atmosphere under foreign military occupation. Other descendants associated Okinawa with poverty on the mainland as well as with discrimination their parents experienced there, and tried to minimize their connections with it. The magazine journalist quoted above, who came to appreciate her heritage after
Shō High School won the national baseball tournament in 1999, had previously associated Okinawa with her family’s poverty, employment discrimination her father had encountered, and teasing she had suffered in school for her parents’ origins. On the other hand, many Okinawans in greater Osaka, migrants and descendents alike, have visited their “homeland” regularly and describe highly positive memories, associating Okinawa with a congenial natural and cultural environment, as well as a leisurely and healthy lifestyle, where people suffer less stress and live longer. A number of individuals over 60 expressed a desire to relocate to Okinawa when circumstances in their lives, such as family obligations, would permit. In the case of one couple in their 70s, the husband had in fact returned in 1999 to enjoy his retirement years living in the family’s home on the seashore in a quiet village north of Nago while his wife remained to live with their son’s family in Taishō Ward where she preferred the urban life style. Such diverse responses, shared by people in many places with memories of an ancestral “homeland,” should remind us that, far from being static and monolithic, attitudes and choices vary widely among individuals in diaspora communities.

This essay is reprinted from Laura Hein and Mark Selden’s Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, used with permission.

Notes

1 “Ryukyu” never caught on as a place name during the U.S. occupation, either in Okinawa or on the mainland. This was partly because the word “Ryukyu” evoked memories of derogatory references by mainland Japanese who identified people from Okinawa Prefecture with what had recently been a “foreign” kingdom. This implied that Okinawans were not fully Japanese and, thus, “inferior” to mainlanders.

In addition, Okinawans at home and on the mainland easily saw through the U.S. military’s insistence on calling Okinawa “The Ryukyu Islands” and the people there “Ryukyuans” as part of a heavy-handed effort to separate them from from Japan. The failed American attempt to re-”Ryukyu안ize” Okinawans was undertaken in hopes of suppressing the reversion movement, which had gained support steadily since the early 1950s.

2 In a sense, I was one of those “occupiers,” though my job as a U.S. Army draftee in the maintenance platoon at an ammunition depot in Henoko from July, 1967 to June, 1968 had nothing to do with administering the occupation.

3 Kaneshiro Munekazu,”Esunikku gurupu to shite no ‘Okinawa-jin” (Okinawans as an ethnic group), Ningen Kagaku, no. 37, (1992): 29-57.


6 Meiō University historian Higa Michiko, interview, November 2000.

7 Yūhi (Launching forth), Volume of essays and photographs commemorating the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Osaka League of Okinawa Prefectural Associations (Osaka Okinawa Kenjin Rengo-kai, 1987); Yūhi (Launching forth), Volume of essays and photographs commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Osaka...
8 Kaneshiro, 1992.

9 Yūhi, 50, 61.


12 Okinawa-ken Heiwa Shiryō-kan, 31.


14 They are concentrated mostly in its Hirao, Kobayashi, Kitamura, Kita Okajima and Minami Okajima precincts, and comprise about one-fourth of the ward’s total population officially listed at 75,043 for the year 2000 (Taishō Ward Office, General Affairs Section, 2001). For the other communities in greater Osaka, unofficial and unpublished estimates are that 7500 migrants and their descendents live in Osaka’s Nishinari Ward, next to Taishō Ward, and approximately 10,000 live in or around the Tonouchi section of Amagasaki City, just across the Kanzaki River from Osaka City in Hyōgo Prefecture where another 1500 are estimated to live in the Takamatsu section of Takarazuka City and 900 in Itami City.


16 Ōta Jun’ichi, Osaka no Uchinaan-chu (The Okinawans of Osaka) (Osaka: Burein Sentaa, 1996), 89-90.

17 “Hōchi sareru Okinawa suramu” (Okinawa slum long-neglected), Asahi Shinbun (July 15, 1968).


19 Interviews for this study conducted in September 1999.

20 Ōta, Osaka no Uchinaan-chu, 91.

21 Ōta, Osaka no Uchinaan-chu, 119.


23 Mizuuchi, 1999, 52.

24 Arasaki Moriteru, 44.


27 Some Okinawans over fifty articulate the consonant “s” as “sh” in words like sensei (teacher), pronounced “shenshei,” or sensō (war), pronounced “shenshō.” Some of them also articulate the vowel sounds “o” and “e” as “u” and “i,” respectively, in words like teiki (commuter pass), pronounced “tiiki,” and hako (box), pronounced “haku.”

28 Written comment on questionnaire, April 2001.

29 Interview, April 2000.


31 Written comment on questionnaire, December 2000.


33 Chinen Seishin’s acutely satirical stage play “Jinruikan” (Human pavilion, 1976) features a uniformed “trainer” brandishing a whip who barks commands at “male” and “female” specimens.


35 Molasky and Rabson, Southern Exposure, 89.

36 Interviews, June and August 2000.

37 Oyakawa Takayoshi, Ashiato: Oyakawa Takayoshi no kaisōroku (Footprints: recollections of Oyakawa Takayoshi) (Matsuei Insatsu, 1995), 21-22.

38 Oyakawa, Ashiato, 26.

39 Fukuchi, Okinawa jokō aishi, 78-79.


41 Tomiyama, Kindai Nihon, 130.

42 Tomiyama, Kindai Nihon, 111.

43 Higa, 6.

44 Fukuchi, Okinawa jokō aishi, 120.
Though references to the former Ryūkyū Kingdom and its cultural legacy were usually free of negative connotations, calling someone “Ryūkyū” or “Ryūkyū-jin” was more problematic. As in examples quoted above, mainlanders used the term “Ryūkyū” or “Ryūkyū-jin” derisively when scolding factory workers returning late for curfew; or, when announcing on signs in front of factories and rooming houses “Chōsen-jin, Ryūkyū-jin o-kotawari” (Koreans and Ryukyuans prohibited). Women from Okinawa who were displayed like circus animals in the notorious “Human Pavilion” at a 1903 international exposition in Osaka were called “Ryūkyū-jin.” And Hirotsu Ryūrō’s 1926 novel, which he titled “Samayoeru Ryūkyū-jin” (The vagabond Ryukyuan), was widely criticized by Okinawans on the mainland for a protagonist caricatured from negative Okinawan stereotypes. Its author subsequently made a public apology and canceled scheduled reprintings.

Recently, however, the status of the word “Ryūkyū” seems to have improved among Okinawans and mainlanders alike, though some connotations remain problematic. Okinawans at home and in the diaspora express varying degrees of pride and nostalgia from historical memories of the formerly independent Ryūkyū Kingdom, in part because hopes have been unrealized for a significant reduction of the military presence and healthy economic development in Okinawa after reversion. Furthermore, there is currently a widespread fascination among mainlanders with cultural manifestations of an often exoticized “Ryūkyū,” which has been exploited commercially. N.H.K. television’s 1993 serial historical drama, criticized by some Okinawans for stereotyped characterizations, was entitled, like the book it was based on, “Ryūkyū no kaze” (The Winds of Ryukyu). The word “Ryūkyū” now occurs frequently in the titles for recordings of widely popular Okinawan folk and folk-rock music, such as the 1995 c.d. “Ryukyu Magic” (Air-4001, Tokyo). Okinawans in the prefecture and on the mainland offer lessons in Ryūkyū buyō (classical dance), Ryūkyū ryōri (cuisine), and Ryūkyū min’yō (folk music) to a growing clientele.

Oyakawa, Ashiato, 2-22.
Molasky and Rabson, Southern Exposure, 82.
Quoted in Ōta, Osaka no Uchinaan-chu, 97-98.
Tomiyama, Kindai Nihon, 164.
56 Interviewed in September, 1999.


58 *Koko ni yōju ari* (The banyan tree here) Volume of essays and photographs commemorating the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Hyōgo Okinawa Prefectural Association (Okinawa Kenjin-kai Hyōgo honbu, 1982), 145-216.


60 Arasaki, 71-72.

61 Interview, November 2000.


63 See Ota Jun’ichi.


66 Published interview of Kinjō Kaoru, co-director of the Kansai Okinawa Bunko (Culture Center), in *Yomiuri Shinbun*, May 13, 2001.

67 Comment from interview of descendant in his mid-30s, February 2001.

Language Loss and Revitalization in the Ryukyu Islands
Patrick Heinrich
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http://japanfocus.org/-Patrick-Heinrich/1596

One element contributing to Okinawa’s “difference” from the Japanese mainland is the existence in Okinawa of languages that are unintelligible to mainland Japanese. Paul Heinrich takes up the topic of language in Okinawa and, as he makes amply clear, the situation is complicated and, from the standpoint of language preservation, dire. In Heinrich’s assessment, the Ryukyu Islands are home to five different, mutually unintelligible language groups. However, since the Ryukyu Kingdom’s 1879 absorption into the Japanese Empire, as a consequence of strong official and unofficial pressure to adopt standard Japanese, which Heinrich details, these languages are disappearing rapidly. Notwithstanding the efforts of groups today to revitalize local Ryukyuan languages, Heinrich ultimately ends his piece on a pessimistic note. He claims that saving the endangered languages of the Ryukyus would require strong official support that is not currently forthcoming.
Language Loss and Revitalization in the Ryukyu Islands
By Patrick Heinrich

Every two weeks one of the world’s estimated 6,000 languages dies. It appears inevitable to many that the number of languages spoken throughout the world will have drastically diminished by the end of the 21st century. Pessimistic estimations consider that as many as 80% of the languages currently used will by then have vanished. The danger of such loss does not go unnoticed. Many speakers of indigenous minority languages around the world struggle to retain their mother tongues. This holds also true for the Ryukyu Islands, located between Kyushu and Taiwan. In the course of the nation building process since the Meiji era, a language regime was established throughout Japan in which the language of Tokyo came to serve as the means of inter-regional communication throughout Japan, including the Ryukyu Islands. The spread of Standard Japanese led to re-negotiations of the language-identity nexus in the Ryukyu Islands. As a matter of fact, so strong proved the idea of one unitary Japanese national language to be in Japan that the Ryukyuan languages are seriously endangered today and conscious efforts of language revitalization are necessary to ensure their future use. This is an account of how the Ryukyuan languages came to be endangered and of current efforts for their revitalization.

Modernist language ideology and the language – dialect question

The boundaries of languages and language varieties – a term linguists prefer to dialects since it does not connote the idea of a deviation from a chosen standard – do not come into existence by themselves. They reflect the interests of those responsible for drawing these boundaries. The extension and the names of languages and language varieties are, more often than not, influenced by nation imagining ideology.

The Ryukyuan languages, their classification and assessment are a case in point. During the forced assimilation of the Ryukyu Kingdom into the emerging Japanese nation state between 1872 and 1879, the various language varieties of the Ryukyu Islands came to be designated as Japanese dialects. The first such classification was made by a bureaucrat. Matsuda Michiyuki, a high-ranking official in the Japanese foreign ministry, was the first to stress linguistic correspondences between Japan and the Ryukyu Islands in the early 1870s. He claimed that the varieties spoken in the Ryukyu Islands were part of the Japanese language.

The first study on the Ryukyuan languages by a trained linguist was that of Basil Hall Chamberlain in 1895. It successfully established evidences of a shared Ryukyuan-Japanese genealogy. That is to say, Chamberlain proved that Japanese and the Ryukyuan language family share the same ancestor language, similar to, say, French, Italian and Spanish. Today we know that Japanese and the Ryukyuan languages must have split not long before the first written evidences of Japanese appeared, that is to say, at some point before the 7th century. Chamberlain treated Ryukyuan as a set of languages distinct from Japanese.
There are good reasons for doing so. The chain of mutual intelligibility is interrupted several times in the Ryukyu Islands. The concept of mutual intelligibility serves linguists as an etic tool, in other words, as a politically and culturally disinterested means for drawing linguistic boundaries. In Japan, for instance, speakers of a Tohoku language variety and a Kyushu variety might experience severe difficulties in understanding each other. However, the chain of mutual intelligibility is nowhere interrupted in the Japanese main islands as mutual intelligibility to the neighbouring local variety is always possible.

On the basis of mutual unintelligibility, five different varieties of the Ryukyuan language family can be ascertained. These are, from north to south, the varieties spoken on Amami-Oshima, Okinawa, Miyako, Yaeyama and Yonaguni. These varieties form the Ryukyu language family. Needless to say, none of these varieties allows for mutual intelligibility with any Japanese variety. Following the conventions of comprehensive glossaries of world languages, rather than Japanese national (identity) linguistics (kokugogaku), these varieties will be treated as languages in the following. Since the Amami-Oshima island group is part of Kagoshima prefecture, the term Ryukyu is preferred over Okinawa.

The linguistic situation in the Ryukyu Islands is complex. The doyen of Ryukyuan linguistics, Hokama Shuzen, proposes the following division of Ryukyuan varieties (from south to north):

Yonaguni

Sakijima    Yaeyama    Ishigaki

Hateruma

Miyako   Miyako

Irabu

Tamara

Amami-Okinawa North-Okinawa

South Okinawa

Yoron

Okinoerabu   East Okinoerabu

West Okinoerabu

Tokunoshima

Amami-Oshima North Amami-Oshima

South Amami-Oshima
The linguistic situation in the Ryukyu Islands is complex. All of the approximately 50 populated islands have distinctive language varieties which very often allow for many more subdivisions within them. It is worthy of note in this context that the Okinawa Language Research Centre (Okinawa gengo kenkyu sentā) has conducted phonological studies into some 800 different local varieties.

The differences between the Ryukyuan varieties and Japanese are extensive. Tokyo university professor Hattori Shirō demonstrated in the 1950s that the percentage of shared cognates in the basic vocabulary between Tokyo and Shuri (Okinawa) stands at 66% and at 59% with regard to Miyako. The latter percentage is lower than that between German and English. As an illustration of the differences in the lexicon and morphology, consider the following sentence taken from a contemporary version of the Momotarō tale:

Okinawa: Sigu kadi ndandi ici hoocaasi taacinkai sakandi sakutu, naakakara uziraasigsaru ufuwikiganu nziti caabitan.

Standard Japanese: Sugu tabete miyō to itte hōchō de futatsu ni sakō to shitara, naka kara kawairashii otoko no ko ga dete kimashita.

English: When he said that he wanted to eat it right away and was just about to cut it into two pieces with his knife, a cute boy emerged from within (the peach).

Mutual unintelligibility notwithstanding, Japanese linguists of the Meiji period chose to rely on Matsuda Michiyuki’s view according to which the Ryukyuan varieties were part of the same language. They included both the Japanese and the Ryukyuan varieties in the newly created concept of national language (kokugo). In so doing, they followed the model of most Western nation states which claimed that all language varieties within the boundaries of the state were part of one language, the national language. While dialectologists drew a clear line between the Ryukyuan varieties and those of the main islands, everyone else came to regard the Ryukyuan varieties simply as yet another Japanese dialect group. Dialects, however, that deviated very strongly from Standard Japanese. This deviance from Standard Japanese led to the view that these varieties presented an obstacle and should best be done away with. The Ryukyu Islands were thus perceived to have a serious language problem and, consequently, the view emerged that Ryukyuans had to be relieved of the ‘burden’ of their languages. This specific view of language, or language ideology as it is called in linguistics, was not limited to the Ryukyu Islands. It became widespread across the world as an effect of the emergence of modern nation states. Such nation-imagining language ideology is responsible for the fact that bilingualism in nation states is, more often than not, unstable. Speakers of minority languages are often pressured to express their loyalty to the state by abandoning their mother tongue. Exactly this happened in the Ryukyu Islands after 1879.

Language shift before 1945
During the first eight years of Japanese rule over the Ryukyu Islands a strict policy of preservation of ancient customs was implemented. It was only in 1879 that the first two exceptions were made. The Meiji government ordered that this policy should not apply for education and industrial development. Starting in 1880, the view began to prevail that Japanese language dissemination was unavoidable in order to gain control over the islands and to govern them in the interests of mainland Japan. Following the reorganization of the Ryukyu Domain into Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, Vice Minister of Education Tanaka Fujimaro was dispatched to the archipelago with the objective of developing and implementing an educational policy for the prefecture. In his history of Okinawa George H. Kerr describes how Tanaka, upon visiting the prefecture, decided that Ryukyans had to learn Japanese and therefore ordered that a Conversation Training Centre be established. Such training facilities had been founded throughout Japan prior to the implementation of the 1872 educational system in order to provide for teacher training. In contrast to teacher training facilities in mainland Japan, the Conversation Training Centre in Okinawa was also responsible for the compilation of a bilingual Okinawa-Japanese language textbook titled ‘Okinawa Conversation’ (Okinawa taiwa). It was written by mainland officials from the Department of Education in collaboration with some Ryukyuan members of the pre-modern ruling class. The textbook was used from 1880 onwards in all schools of the prefecture.

The efforts to render Ryukyans Japanese through language education became more comprehensive after the proclamation of the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890. Attention shifted from mere communicational needs to national citizen education and imperial subject education. These attempts grew more intense in Okinawa Prefecture following Japan's 1895 victory in the Sino-Japanese War. Following the integration of Taiwan into the Japanese empire in the same year, the greater differences between Taiwanese and Japanese made policymakers and the local population aware of similarities between Ryukyans and mainland Japanese.

Starting in the first decade of the twentieth century, efforts to spread Japanese increasingly employed coercive measures. Ryukyuan languages were banned from schools in the so-called Ordinance to Regulate the Dialect in 1907. When a Movement for the Enforcement of the Standard Language was established in 1931, language dissemination activities attained a new quality. Together with the Department of Education, the movement developed schemes for Japanese language dissemination beyond the public domain. Japanese was promoted through debate or presentation circles. In order to secure a thorough spread of Japanese, relatives of school children were invited to participate. Speaking a Ryukyuan language during such presentation circles was considered an unpatriotic act, and children taking part in debate circles risked being penalized if they failed to speak Japanese.

Japanese language dissemination became increasingly seen as an important instrument for forcing Ryukyans to adapt to mainland customs and traditions. In accordance with the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement, launched in 1937 after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the local Department of Education and the Movement for Enforcement of the Standard Language compiled a policy platform called Programme for Education in Okinawa Prefecture. The programme placed Japanese language dissemination high on its agenda. In order to forcefully implement language policy measures, committees responsible for the
supervision of language dissemination were set up in all local communities. An ordinance proscribed the Ryukyuan languages at government offices and at various other public institutions. People who addressed the staff of post offices or governmental offices in Ryukyuan had to be refused service and employees caught using a Ryukyuan language risked punishment.

In short, Japanese language dissemination at the time relied heavily on negative and coercive measures. One of the most notorious forms of punishment was the so-called dialect tag which had to be worn around the neck by the last pupil to have used Ryukyuan in class. The pupil wearing it was then responsible for passing it on and therefore had to monitor the language use of his fellow students. The use of the dialect tag increased drastically in the 1920s and 1930s, peaking at the time of the general mobilization campaign. The view prevailed that the perceived language problems of the Ryukyu Islands were best solved by their eradication, by punitive means where necessary. It is worthy of note here that the use of the dialect tag was not exclusively confined to Okinawa Prefecture. It included Kagoshima Prefecture and the entire Tohoku region, two regions with distinctive local dialects. Nowhere, however, was the use of the dialect tag more prominent than in the Ryukyu Islands and it was only there that attempts were made to ban the local language varieties in private domains.

Language ideology, the determination of what language(s) ought to be, played a crucial role in the language shift processes in the Ryukyu Islands. As an effect of language modernization the national language, kokugo, became to be represented by, if not equated with, its standard variety. In addition, the view emerged that Standard Japanese was ‘correct’ and that deviations from it were ‘wrong’. The ideology of linguistic nationalism was furthermore based on the belief that all Japanese nationals had equal access to the national language and hence should be equally proficient in it. Therefore, lack of respect for and proficiency in (Standard) Japanese became to be perceived as anomalous. The effects of insufficient proficiency were embarrassment and the reasons for deviant language attitudes and language behaviour were sought at the individual level.

As an effect of such ideological beliefs, the Ryukyu Islands thus stood out as the region in which (perceived) embarrassing language behaviour was most pronounced. There was resistance against such views and the suppression of the Ryukyuan language and culture by local activists and scholars of Okinawan studies. These included Jahana Noburo, Iha Fuyū, Higashionna Kanjun and Kinjō Chōei as well as by mainland scholars of folklore studies such as Yanagita Kunio, dialectologists such as Tōjō Misao and folk art scholars such as Yanagi Muneyoshi, to mention only some of the more prominent. However, the endeavours to end the oppression of Ryukyuan languages failed due to the growing pressure on Ryukyuan to adapt to mainland Japan language and culture during the Sino-Japanese and later the Pacific War.

The dissemination of Standard Japanese and the suppression of the Ryukyuan languages had drastic effects on the language ecology of the Ryukyu Islands. Standard Japanese came to be exclusively used in the public domain. It thus replaced the variety of Shuri (Okinawa), the ancient capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had previously served as the language of official and inter-island communication. Due to further consequences of the modernization
process such as an increasing mobility of the population, a growing rate of exogamy and an extension of infrastructure, local language varieties also came under pressure and were increasingly often replaced by Standard Japanese in private domains too. Drastically changing political circumstances notwithstanding, language shift from the Ryukyuan languages to Standard Japanese continued unremittingly after 1945.

**Language shift after 1945**

Circumstances for language planning could hardly be worse than they were in the Ryukyu Islands immediately after 1945. With Okinawa Island being completely destroyed and the population living in temporary camps, language planning was not a priority issue. Provision of food for the population and reestablishment of infrastructure proved to be more urgent tasks. In some cases, pupils learned writing by drawing script characters with their fingers in the sand of nearby beaches. There was, in addition, a drastic shortage of qualified teachers due to the fact that many teachers (and pupils) had been killed. Many of the surviving teachers filled administrative positions left vacant by the departure of mainland personnel, increasing thereby teacher shortage.

Two groups vied to dominate language planning activities between 1945 and 1972. American military authorities sought to encourage the use of the Ryukyuan languages (and English), while important Ryukyuan institutions promoted Standard Japanese. A report compiled in 1944 by anthropologists from Yale University for the preparation of a possible occupation of Japan stressed exploitations of and discrimination against Ryukyuans by mainland Japanese. On this basis, the American authorities developed a policy of encouraging Ryukyuan autonomy. Such policy rested above all on US perceptions of the strategically important location of the Ryukyu Archipelago. US authorities thus explored the Yale report as a basis to legitimize their attempts to split Okinawa from Japan, that is, to preserve it within the orbit of American power as a bulwark with respect to US policies toward China, Taiwan, and Korea.

Along the lines of a policy encouraging Ryukyuan independence, mainland Japanese teaching materials were initially banned and American authorities called for the compilation of Ryukyuan textbooks. A Textbook Compilation Office was set up. However, the prevailing view among its members was that the development of Ryukyuan textbooks was unrealistic. Attempts at developing Ryukyuan teaching materials ran into several problems, such as the absence of a modern written Ryukyuan style since official records had been written in classical Chinese prior to the Japanese seizure of the Ryukyus and the fact that pre-modern literature had largely been composed in Chinese and Japanese written styles. Furthermore, a fixed orthography did not exist, nor resources and materials on which such textbooks could be based. As a result, the idea of Ryukyuan textbooks was quickly abandoned. With American interest in language planning quickly declining as well, Japanese textbooks were imported from mainland Japan after 1951.

In contrast to US postwar planning for Japan, development and strict implementation of a far-reaching occupation policy for Okinawa, ‘the rock’ as GIs derogatively called it, had never been high on the agenda in the early occupation years. It took until Communist victory in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in the following year before a long term policy for the island was framed. By that time, however, a return to the pre-war
policy of Japanese language spread had taken root. Thus, after a short period of uncertainty about language education in school, the practices established before 1945 were continued. The only difference was that Japanese language education was no longer called ‘national language’ (kokugo) but ‘reading lessons’ (yomikata). A conference of school directors in 1950 determined that school education should follow exactly the pattern of mainland Japan, with Japanese as the language of instruction.

Whereas the first initiatives in language planning were taken by American occupation authorities, the focus shifted soon to Ryukyuan educators. Standard Japanese served Ryukyuans as a symbol of their struggle for the reversion of Okinawa to Japan. Part of the reason was that the Americans were already using Ryukyuan languages as a means for distancing the Ryukyus from Japan, and thereby, implicitly, for a continued affiliation with the US. Ryukyuans were clearly aware that the US administration was trying to prolong the occupation in their own interest by claiming that Ryukyuans were not Japanese. While the US was thus trying to undo the effects of linguistic and cultural assimilation of the past 50 years, such language and identity planning was not supported by Ryukyuans. US language policy only produced resistance which meant, with a view to language, continued Standard Japanese language spread. Whereas the view that Ryukyuans were a different nation than the Japanese prevailed among the US authorities and, to a certain degree, also among Ryukyuans in the early years of the occupation, political activities aiming at Ryukyuan independence declined drastically after 1950. The presence of extensive military infrastructure, land confiscation, noise pollution, crime, prostitution, poverty, all had the effect of leading the overwhelming majority of Ryukyuans to favour immediate reversion to Japan. US American occupation thus inadvertently reinforced Ryukyu Islands-mainland Japan bonds. Promotion of Standard Japanese after 1945 thus continued to serve as a means to foster a Japanese identity for the Ryukyuan population and a means of resisting the unwelcome US occupation.

Due to the continued efforts to promote Standard Japanese after 1945, use of Ryukyuan languages or Ryukyuan interference on Standard Japanese were again condemned as bad language. Even the dialect tag saw a revival. Other oppressive measures against Ryukyuan in schools included less drastic forms of punishment and admonition, such as counting the instance of use of Ryukyuan words by individual pupils. Those found using such words too frequently were requested to use only Standard Japanese in class or had their names recorded in the class register. Local linguists such as Karimata Shigehisah and Takaesu Yoriko reported to me that they had experienced such measures in their early schooldays in the 1960s and 70s.

Natural intergenerational language transmission in the Ryukyuan languages was interrupted from the early years of the US occupation. The diverse mosaic of sociocultural contexts and experiences makes it difficult to generalize a single, monolithic Ryukyuan language situation. In most cases people born after 1950 no longer speak Ryukyuan languages, particularly those living on Okinawa, the main island. Speakers of Ryukyuan tend to include younger people in the outlying islands of the Okinawa Island group as well as in the other island groups. It can be noted that there exist differences between local communities within island groups which seem to reflect the various degrees of radicalism with which Standard Japanese was spread. Furthermore, language shift occurred faster in
the cities than in the countryside. As a result, the sociolinguistic situation is complex. In addition to the older generation, usually proficient in a Ryukyuan language variety, the middle generation often has passive skills and some of them can even be regarded as semi-speakers. The young generation is overwhelmingly monolingual Japanese. In addition, contact varieties of Standard Japanese and Ryukyuan varieties have emerged. These varieties are summarized under the term Okinawan-Japanese (*uchinaayamatoguchi*). They show strong variation according to region and age of its speakers. The study into the current use of these contact varieties is still little developed, due to the fact that they are so widely spread and considered to be of little prestige.

**Attempts at language revitalization**

In recognition of the endangerment of local cultures and languages several attempts have been made to revitalize languages at risk in the Ryukyu Islands. The early efforts initially concentrated in the northern Amami-Oshima island group. The earliest language revival organizations on Okinawa Island is that of Okinawa City (formerly Koza City), established in 1955 as Koza Society of Culture. By the mid-1990s more than half of all local communities in Okinawa Prefecture had societies devoted to the maintenance and promotion of Ryukyuan culture. In 1995, the Prefectural Society of Okinawan Culture was founded as an association of these societies. It organizes the popular annual Ryukyuan public speech event called Let’s Speak the Island Languages Meeting. The threat of language loss has led to numerous popular publications about Ryukyuan languages and various language textbooks. News in Okinawan is broadcast daily on local radio. In recent years, presentation circles and plays in Ryukyuan languages have been incorporated in the school curriculum as part of local culture classes. There are also a few language classes as part of extracurricular activities. Furthermore, Ryukyuan language classes are offered in tertiary education as part of general education where they enjoy huge popularity. Since all five universities in the Ryukyus are located on Okinawa Island, the variety taught there is that of Okinawa, more specifically Shuri/Naha.

The most important institution for the revival of a Ryukyuan language is the Society for Spreading Okinawan (*Uchinaayagikai*). At its constituting meeting, the society formulated as its objectives the establishment of dialect classes at elementary and middle schools, the organization of Okinawan teacher training, and the development of an Okinawan standard orthography.

While a standard orthography has now been established for the language varieties of the Okinawa Island group and teacher training is being held, Okinawan has not been introduced in schools. In other words, education in both public and private schools is conducted exclusively in Japanese and it is not possible to study Ryukyuan as a second language in the schools. Introducing classes in Okinawan requires the approval of the Okinawa Education Council, which has so far not been supportive of the scheme. Other activities of the Society for Spreading Okinawan include the design and distribution of an Okinawan language button. Wearing the button signals that the bearer wishes to be addressed in Okinawan. Furthermore, the Society organized the first Island Language Day which was held at the Naha community centre on September 18th this year. An estimated 100 endorsed a declaration asking for the recognition of Okinawan, Miyako, Yaeyama and
Yonaguni as independent speech communities. (Note that the language varieties of Amami-Oshima, which are located in Kagoshima Prefecture, are absent). The language declaration claims the rights to use these languages in private and public domains, to receive language instruction in order to develop language proficiency, and the right to receive public services in these languages.

There are other research and speech circles in the Ryukyu Islands. On Okinawa Island alone, I could trace such circles at community centres in Shuri, Naha, Urasoe, Tomigusuke, Haebaru, Kochinda, Nishihara, Tamagusuke, Okinawa City, Ginowan, Chatan, Kadena and Ginoza. With the exception of Chatan, where children are being taught Okinawan, these circles are usually visited by people over 50 who primarily look for opportunities to use Okinawan. Participants do not actively endeavour to spread the language to new speakers and domains of usage. These circles can therefore not be seen as language revival institutions in the strict sense.

The future of the Ryukyuan languages

The most important measure of language revitalization is that of passing the retreating language on to younger generations. This is of course easier said than done. The current popularity of things Ryukyuan throughout Japan however offers opportunities for language revitalization since it includes appreciation of the local languages. Two examples illustrate both renewed interest in Okinawan languages and the difficulties in passing the languages to new generations. In its issue of April 11th 2001, the Okinawa Times reported on a student from Osaka who started studying Okinawan after starting his studies at the University of the Ryukyus. He states that it struck him that there were language varieties in Japan which he could not understand at all. In a letter to the editor, published in Okinawa Times on September 7th 2005, a 17 year old high school student from Uruma City on Okinawa criticizes elderly speakers for not using the local language when talking to her and urges them to pass the languages down to younger generations. In concluding, she writes: ‘I, who was born in Okinawa, feel ashamed for not even understanding jokes in the language of Okinawa. Will the dialect really vanish just like this? Don’t you have the impression that a great quality of Okinawa will be lost?’

The situation is difficult, but there is hope. In particular the current dialect boom in Japan might be useful for Ryukyuan language revitalization. With Standard Japanese being thoroughly spread among the young generation, varieties other than Standard Japanese are experiencing a revaluation. It can be noted that in trend-spots such as Shibuya young women, always quickest to set and respond to linguistic trends, are inserting as much dialectal elements as possible in their speech. As an effect, the formerly ubiquitous shouts of ‘totemo kawaii!’ (totally cute) are in the process of being replaced by their equivalents from local varieties such as ‘namara!’ (Hokkaido) or ‘sekarashika!’ and ‘chikappomenko!’ (Kyushu).

The dialect boom has been reinforced and picked up by Japanese mass media. One of the current linguistic bestsellers is ‘Chikappomenko hōgen renshūchō’ (Totally cute dialect exercise book). Many popular TV shows have dialect corners and the number of web-sites on local varieties is constantly rising. Ryukyuan local varieties meet thereby with particular interest. In the music industry, the case of Isamu Shimoji (35) is worth of note. Originally
from Miyako, Shimoji was a company employee on Okinawa until a few years ago. When he threw in some Miyako language into a karaoke rendition of an Eric Clapton song, friends convinced him to give a concert of Miyako songs at a local community centre. Soon self-produced tapes made it to the airwaves of the local radio station FM Okinawa. Shimoji went on to produce a CD of contemporary popular music titled ‘Kaitakusha’ (Pioneer) which is almost completely in the Miyako variety. The CD is selling very well throughout Japan.

The recent Japanese Okinawa boom notwithstanding, resistance against attempts to revitalize local languages are far from being unknown. For example, in a letter to the editor, published in Okinawa Times on December 3rd 2004, a government official opposed the idea of reviving the Ryukyuan languages and having them taught in school. She writes: 'I have come across the misunderstanding that the Okinawan dialects are believed to constitute language systems of their own because terms such as Okinawan or island language and the like exist. As a matter of fact, they are merely instances of corrupt accents and Old Japanese words which have not vanished but continue to be used in Okinawa. (...) Although there have recently been voices calling for teaching the dialects as languages to children, such a practice would be dreadful. What is the idea of teaching corrupt accents? If pupils are not taught to speak proper Japanese they will face humiliation when grown up because of the language barrier.'

In addition to resistance, many attempts at reviving the Ryukyuan languages simply fail. For instance, a course on the language variety of Yoron Island started in 2004 only to be cancelled after a few sessions because it failed to attract participants. As a rule, activists aiming at language revival are left to rely on their own wits and funds. It seems that this is not enough to achieve a broad-based revival.

There exists no language policy comprehensively addressing the linguistic situation in the Ryukyu Islands. There is also a lack of professionally trained linguists. Several branches of linguistics such as sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology are absent. Much of the linguistic research in the Ryukyu Islands is conducted by amateurs, who find support from linguistics professors at the local universities. A research grant of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for a project called "Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim" which ran from 1999 to 2003 provided a much needed impetus for professionally conducted research. In spite of the fact that the Ainu and the Ryukyuan languages were recognized as endangered Japanese languages, however, research focused exclusively on language documentation.

While endangered languages require efforts with regard to description and language planning, the latter point has so far been completely neglected. Literally no research has yet been conducted on how the Ryukyuan languages can be revitalized. As it stands, there is no reliable information on questions as fundamental as how many speakers of the different language varieties exist, how old they are, where they are located, and what level of proficiency they have. Furthermore, nothing is known about local awareness concerning the possible loss of their languages in the speech communities themselves, the attitudes of the speech communities toward language endangerment, and, to be based on such fundamental information, realistic goals for language revitalization have not yet been set.
It is a sad fact that the local universities and the International Clearing House of Endangered Languages at the University of Tokyo pay little attention to these aspects of sociolinguistic research. As an effect of such neglect, both issues of the *UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages* completely fail to mention the Ryukyu languages (and have grossly optimistic views on the Ainu language situation). While concentrated efforts are being made to document Ryukyuan language varieties, the greatest need seems to be for language planning rather than on documentation. In particular, acquisition planning, that is to say, the planning for new speakers, is an issue that can ill afford any further delay.

To be sure, the survival of the Ryukyuan languages hinges on language choices to be made by the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands. Only they can choose to maintain and transmit their languages. But while grassroots movements have sprung up and a wide-spread appreciation of local culture and language can be noted, there is not such sentiment evident in official institutions. As it stands, the most urgent task in language revitalization is to secure support from local education boards, the prefectural governments at Okinawa and Kagoshima as well as the Japanese state. Having the Ryukyuan languages supported by these institutions would have a huge symbolic meaning, increasing their value and encouraging their future study and use. They could also provide the material and institutional support for a wider language acquisition program.

Thus far, however, it appears that the extent of language endangerment and its consequences have not been fully realized by the Okinawan government, or, if realized, is not perceived as a problem. There is also little awareness of the danger of language loss even among those supportive of the local languages. When I interviewed the local photographer and documentary filmmaker Higa Toyomitsu, who has made audiovisual recordings in Okinawan of more than 500 survivors of the Battle of Okinawa, even Higa, at first, showed a lack of awareness about language endangerment. When I pointed out that there was a need to find new domains of usage and new speakers of the language in order to secure the future existence of the local languages, he answered:

> Well, there are such places where you can use Ryukyuan languages. These places exist and I make my recordings there. I myself am such a place. It doesn't matter whether someone speaks well or not. As long as these people are there, the language will be there as well. No worries (daijōbu)!

After I explained that the language would vanish with its present speakers if no counter measures were taken, Higa lamented that too few people were getting involved in issues of cultural and linguistic revitalization.

> If you make attempts for revitalization, everybody says ‘great’. But when it comes to making an effort, they don’t do anything. I mean, look, even the scholars here don’t do anything. They only care whether their own field of research is affected. But if you say, let’s do something for the revitalization of such and such island language, they will do nothing. They only do something for their research. And if it is for some bigger issue, even they won’t do anything. What I would like to see is scholars really getting involved. So what would you make out of something like that? [Laughs].
The remarks by Higa point to the fact that it would be naïve to simply equate statements about concern with evidence that people are really aware of what is at stake and/or that they are ready to get involved.

Language loss affects more than language use—it affects identities. To start with, the Ryukyuan languages, or their absence, profoundly affect Ryukyuan identity. The collapse of a language is always accompanied by thoroughgoing changes in local culture. Attempts to revitalize languages are therefore not purely linguistic endeavours. Leaving behind languages which have been passed on for hundreds of years inevitably constitutes a decisive break with the past. Powerful symbolic links to a shared culture and history are forever lost.

Viewed from another angle, a further decline of the Ryukyuan languages would weaken the multilingual and multicultural bases of Japanese society. This is crucial, because the current policy of ignoring linguistic and cultural diversity within the Japanese nation contradicts and runs counter to other efforts aiming at internationalisation. The latter policy appreciates and cherishes linguistic and cultural diversity on an international level while the former ignores such diversity on the national level. While there has been an upsurge in literature pointing out and describing Japan's multilingual tradition and heritage in recent years many people and institutions continue to cling to the modernist paradigm according to which there is a one-to-one congruence between the Japanese state, nation and language. Producing evidence about Japan's multilingual and multicultural past and present is one thing, having it reflected in popular attitudes and in official policies quite another.

As it presently stands, modernist language ideology which claims linguistic homogeneity across nation states continues to serve as self-fulfilling prophecy—in Japan as in many other places across the world. Every two weeks a language dies while thousands of others continue to decline. This reinforces the validity of modernist nation-imagining ideology. To many the view of the linguistically homogenous nation appears to be more true, natural, normal and historical day by day. This is one of the major reasons why it is so very difficult to save a threatened language. With every day, it seems to become easier to perceive language revitalization as an unfeasible endeavour. When I asked Shimoji Toshiyuki from the Local Research Society of Miyako (Miyako kyōdo kenkyū-kai) whether there were people who would oppose language revitalization and whether he could imagine the local language varieties being taught in school, he sounded first optimistic about the idea and then, slowly, gave in to the view that prospects were rather bleak, enumerating, as he did, the difficulties involved:

If it were possible to save the dialects, and if one could get pupils to use them at school, this would be good. I think that this would be really good. I don't think that anyone would be against it. Well, I don't know, but I don't think that someone would oppose the idea. [Pause] Dialect [pause] at school [pause]. Even if one wished to teach it at school, how should it be taught? To start with, there is the question whether the teacher would be able to speak the dialect. People who speak the dialect properly would need to train the teachers. One would need to incorporate it into general education (sōgō gakushū). You know, the curriculum is already set and there is the question to which extent the dialect can be incorporated into the
There is no need to do it in a half-hearted way like having two lessons a year or so – if it is incorporated into school education, it would need to be done properly. Even if you were to teach it, say one hour a week, I don’t think that this would allow pupils to engage in conversations. And one would need a leader who would pursue all these things [pause]. It’s difficult, isn’t it?

Shimoji is right. It is difficult and everything he mentioned indeed needs to be done. But while that appeared to be almost insurmountable to him, it is most important to recognize that it actually can be achieved. The Ryukyuan language might very well survive in the event that such action is taken. It won’t happen, however, unless a growing number of people become involved, readers of Japan Focus not excluded.

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For the last twenty years the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma—or more precisely, its relocation—has been at the epicenter of severely strained relations between local residents of Okinawa and both the national government of Japan and the government of the United States. As Shimoji Yoshio points out in the following article, like other U.S. bases located on the main island of Okinawa, Futenma was originally constructed on largely agricultural land that was seized by the U.S. military during the Battle of Okinawa and not returned to its owners. In the subsequent decades, the surrounding area urbanized to the point where the Futenma facility is now located in the center of a densely populated city. This has generated problems for residents of neighboring areas ranging from noise and environmental pollution to crimes committed by US personnel along with frustrating constraints on land use. Tensions were brought to a boil in 1995 when three servicemen from another U.S. Marine base abducted and raped a 12 year-old girl and in 2004 when a helicopter from Futenma crashed into neighboring Okinawa International University. Both incidents ignited massive protest demonstrations against the U.S. military presence. In 1996, an agreement was reached between the U.S. and Japanese governments to relocate the Futenma base to a proposed off-shore facility to be constructed off the coast of a less densely populated northeast area of the island. However, the relocation has been stalled ever since over concerns about the environmental damage that the proposed facility would do and resistance on the part of Okinawans, almost all of whom would prefer to see the facility moved out of the prefecture entirely.

The controversy over Futenma’s relocation can be looked at as a distillation of the “base issue” that has been at the center of Okinawan politics, Okinawa’s relations with the central government in Tokyo, and U.S.-Japan relations since 1945. Seen in this light, Shimoji’s review of the history of the Futenma facility and his contextualization of Futenma’s place in the large set of issues associated with the U.S. military presence in Okinawa reveals what is at stake in the multiple ways the U.S. military bases affect Okinawan society.
Futenma: Tip of the Iceberg in Okinawa’s Agony
Yoshio Shimoji

Futenma’s history

Futenma Air Base (official nomenclature: U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma) was constructed toward the end of World War II to transport troops, supplies and ammunition in the forthcoming attack on mainland Japan (Operation Downfall). But the war ended before that plan was executed. Futenma should then have been returned; but, instead, it has remained in the firm grip of the U.S. military all these years to this day.

The U.S. military seized the land in clear violation of Article 46 of The Hague Convention, which states: “Family honor and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated.”

There are presently more than 3,000 so-called “military base landowners” for Futenma Air Base alone and more than 40,000 for all bases and installations in Okinawa (Cf. Registered members with the Federation of Military-Base Landowners Associations number 38,000 as of October 2011). These figures provide crucial information about how these bases came into being. For example, Futenma Air Base with a total land area of 4.806 square km, and with private land accounting for 93%, was constructed during the Battle of Okinawa and afterwards, while area residents were herded into concentration camps.

When they were finally freed and allowed to return home, they found that their villages and rich farmland had disappeared without a trace, incorporated within a vast air base. Reluctantly, they settled down outside the fenced-off compound in areas designated by the U.S. military as settlement areas with no regard to property rights of landowners.

Iha Yōichi, former Ginowan City Mayor and a native of Ginowan Village (now Ginowan City), writes in his book (Futenma Air Base is in Your Neighborhood -- Let’s Remove It Together, p.15), that "when the war was over and people were allowed to go home, they found their villages had disappeared completely, the area transformed into a vast base."

The area where the Futenma Air Base sits was an important traffic junction connecting the north and south of Okinawa. Along a beautiful pine tree-lined highway five settlements [alternatively, hamlets] formed Ginowan Village (now Ginowan City) with a total 1944 population of 12,994 -- Ginowan, Kamiyama, Nakahara, Maehara and Aragusuku. Ginowan was the largest with numerous houses and stores, where public offices including a post office, a school (Ginowan Elementary School) and the village hall, were located. They were all swallowed up into the 2,400-meter runway (later extended to 2,700 meters) and other facilities and appurtenances.

Some of the other U.S. bases and facilities in Okinawa, officially totaling 33, have a more or less a similar history. Iha says that more than 60 villages disappeared into U.S. bases in this way. Only Kadena Air Base has a somewhat different history in that it was initially constructed by the Japanese Imperial Army just before the invasion of the Allied Forces. After taking control of what the Imperial Japanese Army called Naka Hikōjō (Central Air Base), the U.S. forces expanded it sevenfold, expropriating land in the
surrounding area encompassing Kadena, Chatan and Koza (later Okinawa City) and renaming it Kadena Air Base (area: 19.9 square km). Adjoining the air base, just across the Okinawa/Kadena Route, is the vast Kadena Ammunition Storage Area (26.6 square km).

**Okinawa as a U.S. military colony**

Before proceeding, let me present some data on the bases from *Kichi no Gaiyōo* ("Summary of Bases") published by the Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division.

As of March 2009, the total land area in the prefecture occupied by the 33 U.S. bases and installations was 229.2 square km. Since the area of exclusive U.S. military bases nationwide is 310.1 square km, Okinawa's share accounts for 73.9%, nearly three fourths. In other words, U.S. military bases and installations predominantly concentrate in Okinawa, whose land mass is only 0.6% of the whole of Japan.

The following are some of the major bases and installations for exclusive use by the U.S. military (all in square km):

- Northern Training Area (78.2), Iejima Auxiliary Air Base (8.0), Camp Schwab (20.6), Henoko Ordnance Ammunition Depot (1.2), Camp Hansen (51.2), Kadena Ammunition Storage Area (26.6), Camp Courtney (1.3), U.S. Army Garrison Torii Station (1.9), Kadena Air Base (19.9), Camp Zukeran including Camp Butler and Camp Foster (6.4), White Beach Naval Facility (1.6), USMC Air Station Futenma (4.8), Makiminato Service Area (2.7), US Army Fuel Storage Facility (1.6). [Subtotal: 225.8 square km]

- Camp Seals (0.7), Camp Kuwae (0.7), Ginbaru Training Area (0.6), Naha Military Port (0.6), Awase Communications Facilities (0.6), Okuma Rest Center (0.5), Kin Blue Beach Training Area (0.4), Camp McTureus (0.4). [Subtotal: 4.4 square km]

The remaining 11 installations consist of 8 firing ranges, among which are Kitadaito Firing Range (1.1) in Kitadaito-Son and Kobisho Firing Range (0.9) in the Senkakus; Kin Red Beach Training Area (0.17 km2), Tengan Pier (0.31 km2) and Tsukenjima Training Area (0.2), etc., with the total area of 2.4 square km.
The grand total of the 33 installations used exclusively by the U.S. military amounts to 229.2 square km. [The figure excludes 5 joint use areas with the SDF.]

However, U.S. military-only areas are not limited to those 33.

According to Executive Response No. 6 (October 10, 2008), in reply to inquiries submitted by Representative Kantoku Teruya, there are 19 water areas reserved for exclusive U.S. military use, some directly connected to installations on coastal land and others located farther offshore. There, according to the Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division, commercial fishing and *mozuku* seaweed farming are prohibited and the areas are off limits during military drills. The total area of these 19 coastal water areas is 1172.6 square km. The others are water areas partially included in international waters with a total area of 53,755 square km.

In addition, there are 20 designated areas of airspace, including some exclusively for use by the USAF and others for joint use by USAF and JASDF. Executive Response No. 6 states that it is inappropriate as well as impossible to specify their area. But the map prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see below) shows approximate sizes of the areas designated as USAF training airspaces.
Okinawa is thus contained and encroached by the U.S. military from land, sea and sky to a degree that one can call virtual occupation. Of course, these bases and installations were formally offered to the U.S. military under the bilateral agreement called the Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty. Yet the situation is nothing more nor less than occupation or pseudo-occupation.

This continued pseudo-occupation of post-war Okinawa by the U.S. military does not stop at the hardware aspects like military installations; it goes beyond to the software, as well.

The Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) stipulates that the Japanese authorities cannot take a suspected U.S. service member into custody if he or she was "in the hands of the United States" or succeeded in entering a US military base, as was often the case.

When a CH-53D helicopter crashed on the campus of Okinawa International University on August 13, 2004, the crash site was immediately cordoned off by the Marines before Japanese police and fire fighters could act. This incident, together with the crash landing of a Kadena Aviation Club-owned small plane in a Nago sugarcane field in 2008, clearly attest to the fact that Okinawa (or Japan) is still under practical U.S. military occupation. In both cases, the area was cordoned off by the U.S. military and the wreckage was carried away while the Japanese police stood idly by.

Land Struggles and their Consequences

The regional tensions created by the Korean War (1950-1953) may have been a motive for the further expansion of the existing bases in the early 1950s. Land was requisitioned forcefully, often at bayonet point and by bulldozer. Jon Mitchell writes about how land was requisitioned in lejima in 1953:

> With all of Okinawa under U.S. administration, the authorities started by tricking the landowners into signing voluntary evacuation papers... But then, when some families refused to leave, 300 U.S. soldiers with rifles and bulldozers dragged women and children from their beds, tore down their homes and slaughtered their goats.” ("lejima: an island of resistance,” The Japan Times: May 22, 2011)

Isolated from the main island by the sea, lejima islanders had no other means than marching across the length and breadth of Okinawa Island with straw mat placards in hands, appealing their plight, like a band of vagabonds.

The struggle in lejima in 1953, however, was only one of numerous struggles against forceful land expropriations by the U.S. military in those days. That year, multiple forceful land expropriations were carried out by the U.S. military government (USCAR): first in Aja and Mekaru districts (the current Shin-Toshin area) in Naha City (April), then in Mawashi (now part of Naha City, also in April), then in lejima (July) and finally in Oroku (now part of Naha City, in November). Two years later, in January 1955, the Isahama district in then Ginowan Village (now Ginowan City) experienced the same forced confiscation. All these land requisitions were executed at bayonet-point and by bulldozer, leveling houses and
destroying farms in the face of protesting farmers, mothers, children and their supporters. (See Supplement to Okinawa Encyclopedia, pp. 168-170.)

Attempts at forceful land expropriation were also made on several occasions in 1966 for the expansion of the facility of Tengan Pier in Gushikawa (now part of Uruma City) but the plan failed in the face of a storm of local residents' life-risking protest.

On January 7, 1954, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower made it clear in his State of Union Message that the U.S. intended to keep Okinawa indefinitely. Then, on March 17 of that year, Washington announced plans to make lump-sum payments to military base landowners for the requisitioned lands. On April 30, the Legislature of the Ryukyu Islands unanimously adopted a "Petition on Military Use of Land," setting forth the following four principles: (1) no lump-sum payments, (2) appropriate compensation for lands taken, (3) compensation for damages, and (4) no new land expropriation.

Confronted with worsening public opinion on the land question, U.S. Congressman Melvin Price led an investigation team from the U.S. House of Representatives to Okinawa during October 23-26, 1955. In June 1956, the congressional team submitted their findings to the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, recommending that the U.S. acquire fee titles for the land used for the military purposes in Okinawa, approving and supporting Washington's plan for lump-sum payments and betraying the Okinawa people's high expectations. It was the last straw. On July 28, 1956, a "Prefectural Rally to Win Four Principles" was held in Naha with more than 100,000 angry participants from all over the island.

All these events, unforgettable for prefectural residents, are recorded in Okinawan memory as "Island-wide Struggles against Land Expropriation."

As a consequence of this prefecture-wide movement to secure land rights, in 1958, USCAR (US Civil Administration of the Ryukyus) finally agreed (1) to raise land rents to twice the appraisal values of 1956 and (2) make payments in annual installments or 10 years' advance payments if so desired by individual owners.

Concurrent with recovering sovereignty over Okinawa in 1972, the Japanese government took over responsibility for paying land rents to military base landowners for the U.S. government. In response to the Federation of Military Base Landowners Associations' petition for a land rent increase, the Satô government raised payments 6.4 times to the surprise and deep satisfaction of the landowners (Okinawa Encyclopedia Vol. 1, p. 1014). Since then rents have been raised on a yearly basis, totaling 91 billion yen in 2011, an increase of 31 times from 1972 (disregarding inflation).

The central administration in this way succeeded in quenching the flames of the land struggle, thus guaranteeing the stable use of bases by the U.S. military as stipulated under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. It goes without saying that Washington has been quite satisfied and pleased with the measure with all payments by the Japanese government.

What then would become of military base landowners if the bases were completely eliminated or moved out of Okinawa? Certainly, there are quite a number of landowners who are uneasy about how the current Futenma problem will be resolved. I have the
personal experience of being called by a Yomitan military base landowner, who loudly criticized my call for the reduction of the U.S. military footprint. What he and others like him ignore is the the fact that the military base landowners owe much to the general public, which strongly supported their cause at the time of the 1956 prefecture-wide struggles, making it possible for them to retain their property rights intact to today while receiving extraordinary rent increases from the Japanese government.

Some military-base landowners call attention to economic ill effects that would result from reduction or removal of military bases. Condoleezza Rice, former U.S. Secretary of State, echoed a similar caveat in the face of a mounting call for Futenma’s unconditional closure. There may be some truth in what they say. But it is worth noting that, since the total withdrawal of U.S. Navy and Air Force from the Philippines, the former sites of Subic Bay Naval Station and Clark Air Base (both closed in 1991) have become thriving business centers (renovated as the Subic Bay Freeport Zone and Clark Special Economic Zone), creating far more jobs than when there were the bases. The return of Okinawa’s most fertile and central land areas could result in similar or greater gains that would not be limited to the military base landowners.

Indeed, some areas that were returned at the time of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan have become thriving business districts: for example, the Shin-Toshin business center in Naha the site of a sprawling U.S. military housing area until 1972. The areas, under the old names of Aja and Mekaru, and Mihama District in Chatan-chō are now sites of recreation centers, shopping malls and gourmet restaurants. Naturally, land prices there are now much higher than before.

**Futenma must be moved out of Okinawa immediately**

For more than fifteen years Japan and the U.S. have agreed to close the Futenma base. The base must not only be closed, it cannot be transferred to Henoko or anywhere elsewhere in Okinawa. On this point, the Okinawan people across party lines are unified and have made plain in successive elections at every level and in repeated demonstrations of massive scale.
It is up to governments in Tokyo and Washington to recognize this political reality and search for an alternative solution, whether to move the base to the Japan mainland, Guam, elsewhere in the Pacific, or, preferably, to the U.S. mainland.

U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma sits dangerously in the heart of the crowded housing area of Ginowan City. The Bush administration’s Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, when he visited Okinawa and observed the base from a helicopter in November 2003, cautioned that "there’s an accident waiting to happen" there any time. His worry proved correct when the CH-53D helicopter crashed on the nearby campus of Okinawa International University on August 13, 2004.

The time has come to close this hazardous base. Certainly, there is no basis for reclaiming the pristine coastal waters off Henoko to construct a new fortified military complex that includes port facilities for the U.S. Marines. The U.S. violated international law when its military encroached upon private lands with impunity and built the base. On what legal and moral basis, then, can it demand its replacement?

Yoshio Shimoji, born in Miyako Island, Okinawa, M.S. (Georgetown University), taught English and linguistics at the University of the Ryukyus from 1966 until his retirement in 2003.
This essay develops McCormack and Norimatsu’s point that memories of the past impact contemporary Okinawa and shape the identities of Okinawans. Roberson shows how memories of the Battle of Okinawa are a powerful presence in contemporary Okinawan popular music. In Roberson’s words: “Early songs reflect the dynamics and contradictions of assimilationist pressures and desires that led Okinawans to participate ... in Japan’s wars and empire building. Later songs give witness to personal and cultural ambivalences and to the profound injuries suffered by Okinawans during the battle. As a result of their experiences in war, Okinawans have since that time sung of peace, first in terms of desiring to return to what they think of as a long-ago peaceful homeland, and later imagined in response to American military control and to the promise offered by Japan’s ‘Peace Constitution.’” Popular songs in Okinawa, in short, can serve as a fascinating lens through which to observe the way in which Okinawans’ historical experiences have shaped contemporary Okinawan culture and politics.
Songs of War and Peace: Music and Memory in Okinawa
James E. Roberson

I—Sengo Zero-Nen

Memories of the Battle of Okinawa are complexly interwoven with the past, the present and the future. They are a vital force, in the sense of being both living and important, because of the continuing everyday presences of the war in Okinawa, among Okinawans, who also long for peace. These memories and their multiple inscriptions and engravings in Okinawan places, bodies and minds can act, as Yelvington (2002) has elsewhere and somewhat differently argued, as powerful resources in recollecting a past, in giving cohesion to or in re-membering present collective identities, and in authenticating both claims to that past and legitimating current actions, claims and contestations. Thus, for example, when the Japanese Ministry of Education attempted in 2007 to modify history textbooks to downplay the involvement of the Japanese army in Okinawan civilians’ forced suicides during the Battle of Okinawa [see the Aniya article in this volume], an estimated 110,000 people gathered in Ginowan to protest this rewriting of still vital memories.

This essay surveys the cultural politics of memory and music in Okinawa by situating some of the songs that mark Okinawans’ journeys through the landscapes and imaginaries of war and peace. An abridged and revised version of my paper “Memory and Music in Okinawa: The Cultural Politics of War and Peace” (Roberson 2009), it also draws from related work (Roberson 2007, 2010a, 2010b). The songs I describe here are primarily though not exclusively from the folk or new-folk (min'yō or shin-min'yō; also shima-uta) and “Uchinā Pop” (see Roberson 2003) genres. Though for certain songs I also draw attention to particular musical elements, my primary focus is on song lyrics. I first describe songs that give voice to Okinawans’ experiences of assimilation and mobilization in the period prior to the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. I then describe songs which recount the world of war experienced at home by Okinawans, and which sing of the sorrows of war and of the treasure of life. I next describe songs from the long postwar period that sing of dreams for peace and that protest the continuing presence of American military bases and armed forces.

As recorded and recalled, these Okinawan songs comprise critical, contested, and at times contradictory sites of historical memory and of continuing social dialogue. The complexities of contemporary memory work in Okinawa involve both individual and collective identities constructed within historical contexts framed and fragmented by contending local, national, and international forces and influences, including those of (neo)colonialism and imperialism. Here, memories become “perilous” in the double sense described by Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama as “memories in need of recuperation and as memories that continue to generate a sense of danger” (2001:3). The perilousness of memory in Okinawa is related to processes of remembering and forgetting a war in which nearly one third of the population on the main island perished but in which Okinawans themselves were complexly participant, to continuing conditions of militarization by both American and Japanese forces, and to strongly held yet fragile and contextually imagined dreams of peace.
My goal here, then, is to consider how songs in Okinawa may be heard to constitute complex sites of cultural memory and resistance. I contend that regardless, or because, of their minority voice, these songs need to be carefully listened to, especially by people from American and Japanese centers of economic and political power and imperialism.

II—Becoming Japanese

In 1879, the Meiji Government of Japan unilaterally dissolved the Ryūkyūan Kingdom and established the Prefecture of Okinawa (see Kerr 1958). Invoking a modernist rhetoric of progressive “civilization,” Japan subsequently embarked on the political-economic and cultural assimilation of Okinawa, employing a “totalizing vision of ‘Japaneseness’” in the processes of making Ryūkyūans into proper Japanese imperial subjects (Morris-Suzuki 1998:26-8; Christy 1997:141-169). This assimilationist dynamic involved a dialectic in which Japan was held up as the progressive model of civilized modernity to overcome Okinawan backwardness. Japanese historian Tomiyama Ichirō’s (1995) important work on war memory in Okinawa emphasizes the everyday aspects of assimilation and the consequences of these for Okinawans. While language was in many ways the most important and debated issue in Okinawan cultural assimilation, other cultural and religious practices (including Okinawan folk music) were also targeted as backward and in need of reform. Such assimilation also included the extension of the Japanese military draft to Okinawa, which was welcomed by members of the Okinawan elite as a sign of Okinawa’s equal inclusion in the Japanese state (Ōta 1996:56-7).

The everyday and ideological dilemmas and dynamics of Okinawa’s modernist/imperialist assimilation are reflected and commented on in a number of prewar Okinawan folk songs. One such song is Hadashi Kinrei no Uta (literally, Barefoot Prohibition Song), recorded in 1941, that sings of the prohibition on walking barefoot promulgated in early 1941 as part of the Movement for the Improvement of Manners and Customs (Fūzoku Kairyō Undō). While ironically also referring to Okinawa as “Shūrei no Kuni” (Land of Propriety) and “Bunka Okinawa” (Cultural Okinawa), Hadashi Kinrei warns about possible fines and other embarrassing consequences if found barefoot in Naha. In part it also reflects the (self-) disciplining of, if not the attempt to eliminate, such everyday aspects of Okinawan “backwardness.” (see Arakawa 1982:7; Nakahodo 1988:166).

Hadashi Kinrei may be heard both to reflect and to resist prewar assimilationist processes and practices. Okinawan writer and social critic Arakawa Akira contends that, sung in Okinawan dialect and to sanshin² accompaniment, Hadashi Kinrei uses music and the nuances of local language to indirectly invert the pro-Japanese denotations of the lyrics. Such contradictions and inversions suggest the folk manipulation of music in expressing ambivalence toward assimilationist programs, making music a subtle if contradictory weapon of the weak (see Arakawa 1982:8; Tomiyama 1998).

Tsuyoi Nipponjin (Strong Japanese), also recorded in 1941, more clearly shows the strength of Japanese control and influence as the embodiment of desirable modernity and the (self-) inclusion of Okinawa(ns) in Japanese imperialism. Extending to seven verses, Tsuyoi Nipponjin sings, in Japanese but to sanshin accompaniment, of Japan as the land of the emperor and gods, where strong and brave men are fighting a sacred war (seisen), and where the women are also strong, holy mothers (seibo) and angels caring for and
supporting their men. The last verse is especially dense in the work it performs as a lyrical site involved in the making of imperial subjects:

**Tsuyoi Nipponjin**

Men going forthrightly to the sacred war
wives on the home front taking up hoes
Advance the building of Greater East Asia
with the latent power of 3000 years
Be Proud, Be Proud! Prospering for a Thousand Generations
For Eight Thousand Generations, Long Live the Japanese Empire!

Showing the attraction and allegiance of Okinawans as members of the Japanese nation-state, in what may be simultaneously heard as a song of professed patriotism and of propaganda, *Tsuyoi Nipponjin* remains a site of memory marking Okinawan complicity in Japan’s militarist imperialism. As Michael Molasky points out, “Okinawans were not mere victims of Japanese colonialism and imperialism, for many also aspired to be recognized as fully fledged Japanese citizens and to partake of the fruits of Japanese power and prosperity” (Molasky 1999:14). Open recognition and critique of such complicity remains a contentious issue in postwar Okinawa (Molasky 2003:184; Medoruma 2005) (see Ishihara, et al. 2002; Figal 1997:745-78; Yonetani 2000:145-68).

A number of other Okinawan folk songs similarly bearing the deep colorings of the wartime system that appeared between 1939 and 1941, with titles such as: *Wakare no Sakazuki* (Wine Cup of Parting), *Jūgo no Mamori* (Home Front Defense; literally, Defense Behind the Guns), *Jūgo no Tsuma* (Wife Behind the Guns/Wife on the Home Front), *Senshō Bushi* (War Victory Song), *Nikudan* (Human Bomb), and *Mamore Nan’yō* (Defend the Southern Isles!). The gendered division of imperial subjecthood (Angst 2001:92-3) and of Okinawan complicity in the Japanese imperialist project is given clear refrain in many such songs. While “for the sake of the country” Okinawan men went to the front lines, Okinawan women struggled “behind the guns” to take care of family, farm and village. One of the earliest and the most re-recorded of such songs is Fukuhara Chōki’s 1933 *Gunjin Bushi* (Soldier’s Song; see Arakawa 1982:6; Takaesu 1982:150-1). The first two verses are:

**Gunjin Bushi**

Since I met and wed you, but few months have passed,
Now we must part, since it’s for the sake of the country
Do your utmost, my beloved wife

My husband, you are a soldier, so why do you cry?
I pray that you will return smiling,
For the sake of the country, perform your public duty.

At the time of *Gunjin Bushi*’s composition and recording, Fukuhara lived in Osaka’s large Okinawan community. Fukuhara was subject to investigation for *Gunjin Bushi*, since the Japanese authorities apparently felt it inappropriate to use the honorable Japanese Imperial soldier’s appellation “gunjin” in the title of a popular Ryūkyūan song. According to one story line, Fukuhara renamed the song “Shussei Heishi o Okuru Uta” (Song to Send off a Soldier Going to the Front) or, combined with “Kumamoto Bushi” as “Nyūei Defune no Minato” (Harbor of a Boat Leaving for the Barracks), though he did not otherwise change the music or lyrics (see Nakahodo 1988:152-5; Uehara 1982:207; Kamiya 1998:111).

While marking Okinawan complicity in Japanese imperialism, the conflicted nature of Okinawan incorporation into the Japanese imperialist project may also be heard in many of these songs. Musical elements such as the use of local dialect, the Ryūkyūan musical scale and instruments, most notably the *sanshin*, mark the celebration of Okinawan cultural distinctiveness amid on-going pressures to become good imperial subjects. Thus, that *Tsuyoi Nipponjin* is accompanied by music employing the Ryūkyūan scale may at once be heard to lend local support to the nationalism of the mostly Japanese language lyrics, and by, inserting Okinawan musical difference, qualify the full imperialistic thrust of the song (Arakawa 1982:5). Similarly, that the wartime cooperation voiced in *Wakare no Sakazuki* is shaded by a characteristic sadness in the *sanshin*-based music, may be heard to render problematic any simple reading of Okinawan wartime complicity (Arakawa 1982:5-6; Nakahodo 1988:154-5).

Thus, while the Okinawan elite may have welcomed the Japanese state’s extension of the draft to Okinawa, the subtexts of many prewar Okinawan may be heard to reflect commoner Okinawans’ ambivalence about being so mobilized. This local Okinawan ambivalence toward incorporation into Japan’s imperial project—compounded by later reflections on the horrific outcomes of such mobilization—may in part account for the re-recording of songs such as *Gunjin Bushi*. What is signaled by the musical incongruity here is perhaps also similar to that in the recent performance piece based on this period of memory/history by Fujiki Hayato, wherein “Okinawan culture—the same culture that somehow articulated with Japanese militarism—also empowers the recognition of the peril of becoming Japanese” (Nelson 2003:219). However, it must also be remembered that the Okinawan past as embodied action was constructed under historical conditions of unequal power relations. In his liner notes to the 2002 CD re-release of Kinjō Minoru’s immediate important post (1972) reversion LP, *Jidai*, which included versions of several prewar songs, Okinawan writer, media personality and music expert Uehara Naohiko is thus critical of the militarist, imperialist context in which the songs first appeared and suggests that many songs may now be listened to as anti-war songs.

These songs thus not only narrated experience to contemporary audiences but remain as (re-) recorded and archived sites of memories of Okinawans’ unequal encounters with assimilation policies, cultural reform movements, and military cooperation, service and sacrifice. They reveal the conflicted position of Okinawans and necessitate readings that recognize both Okinawans’ complicit participation in and implicit resistance to Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, the critical or rehabilitating commentary of postwar writers...
such as Arakawa and Nakahodo must be seen as part of ongoing contemporary internal debates about Okinawa’s “difficult past” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991:376-420) of participation in Japanese assimilationist, militarist, and imperialist projects.

There are important historical and political reasons for the contemporary forgetting of many such songs beyond a mere denial of complicity in Japan’s imperialist aggression. That is, the cultural amnesia evident here must in part be understood in relationship with an eclipsing focus on the suffering of Okinawans at home. And, such contemporary cultural amnesia regarding assimilationist, militarist, and imperialist complicity must be understood within the context of the continuing American military presence in Okinawa, and of related appeals for their removal and for the realization of local prayers for peace.

III—Ikusa-yu

The husbands, lovers, and sons departing for war in the songs described above were going elsewhere, “a thousand ri away” according to the lyrics of Kuni nu Hana. These songs are mournful but often lack the grounded specificity of place, while death is primarily portrayed only as a possibility facing the soldiers being sent off and requiring that the surviving women carry bravely on. With the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, however, death became an immediate and enduring reality for ordinary Okinawans.

The “typhoon of steel” produced by fighting between American and Japanese forces began when American troops landed on the outlying Kerama Islands in late March and on the main island of Okinawa on April 1 of 1945, and then lasted through June 23, when organized Japanese resistance ended, and continuing until early September, when the Japanese military formally surrendered. Some 150,000 Okinawans died, approximately one-fourth of the prefecture’s total and one-third of the main island’s prewar population. Commonly given numbers for Okinawan deaths include some 38,754 common citizens and another 55, 246 civilian combat participants. A further 28,228 deaths occurred among soldiers of Okinawan origin and Okinawan army employees, including student, nurse, and civilian defense corps members who did not necessarily differ greatly from ordinary citizens (see Okinawa Prefecture 1991; Ota 2000). Okinawan deaths during the Battle of Okinawa embodied most devastatingly the disjunctures between Okinawan desires and everyday actions to become modern imperial subjects versus Japanese discrimination against and disregard for Okinawan culture and lives (Tomiyama 1995; Medoruma 2005; Oshiro 2002:21-2; Ishihara 2001).

The horrifying realities of the Battle of Okinawa are remembered and reflected upon in a number of postwar sanshin-based folk songs that narrate Okinawans’ direct experiences of wartime suffering, (being) sacrifice(d), and survival. Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā, for example, graphically describes surviving Okinawans as the leftovers of the American warships’ cannons. Describing also the postwar hardships of impoverished Okinawans and their joys at seeing their children born and grow, Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā ends:

Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā

That war which devoured my parents

Those cannons that devoured my homeland
Even if I’m reborn, I won’t be able to forget.
Just who was it that started these things?
My resentment and regret are endless.
Let us tell to all generations,
That you and I, and I and you are all
But the leftovers of the warships’ cannons.

Another of these songs is *Himeyuri no Uta*, originally popular in 1967 (Takaesu 1982:158), which portrays the fate of the Himeyuri Student Nurse Corps, composed of 219 female higher school students who were drafted into service as nurses. Most died during the battle. The lyrics to the first two and the last verses (of ten total) are:⁹

**Himeyuri no Uta**

It is widely known, the story
Of Okinawa’s Himeyuri Unit
Of Girl Students who were sacrificed

The two lines of loyalty and piety
They held in their breasts
Harder than iron, Japan’s *yamato-damashi*
Cherry blossoms

... At last, honorable deaths, the Himeyuri girls
Together in their graves, are they crying?
Sad and lonely crying, summer cicada

(for a live recording by Kenbō with Bōchirāzu, set to photographic montage, follow [this link](#))

Linda Angst notes that for most Japanese and Okinawans the Himeyuri girls are the "primary (and conflicted) symbol of dual Okinawan wartime patriotism and victimhood" (2001:33; see also Angst 1997). The Japanese language lyrics of *Himeyuri no Uta* may be heard to simultaneously invoke and invert gendered and national symbols such as cherry blossoms. Thus, like cinematic and other narratives regarding the Himeyuri students,¹⁰ the political implications and meanings of *Himeyuri no Uta* are open to variously positioned nostalgic and critical readings and acts of remembering. Okinawan folk-music researcher
Nakasone Kōichi critically writes that the use of militarist-era words such as “yamato damashi” (Japanese soul) and “gyokusai” (honorable death—literally, shattered or crushed jewel) beatify patriotic death. On the other hand, Uehara Naohiko argues that Himeyuri no Uta should now be heard as a protest song that retrospectively, reflexively questions the meanings of “(for the sake of the) nation” and “honorable deaths” (Nakasone 1999:238; Uehara 1986:127-8).

Such protesting political inversions—and the transformative potentialities enabled thereby—are given further expression and force by the musical elements of the song, as to a certain extent was seen earlier in regard to Hadashi Kinrei no Uta. Thus, Himeyuri no Uta is sung to plaintive sanshin accompaniment and uses the melody of Haisen Kazoe-Uta (War Defeat Counting Song), a song composed in the aftermath of the war that recounts the sorrows and losses of war and the futility of the battle, criticizes Japanese military strategy, and calls on listeners to rebuild postwar Okinawa (Nakasone 1997:115-16). To different musical accompaniment, I have also seen Okinawan singer-songwriter and folk guitarist Sadoyama Yutaka perform Himeyuri no Uta at an event in Tokyo marking Okinawa’s “Irei no Hi” memorial day for victims of the Battle of Okinawa, very clearly evoking the protest potentials of the song. Thus, while I believe it would be a mistake to ignore the cultural-political significance of lyrics, sometimes read against the grain, it also is true that the performative dimensions and contexts of songs may carry or constitute, sometimes alternative, forms of significance.

Another song that acts as a critical site of memory of the Battle of Okinawa is Tsukayama Hiroyoshi’s Nuchi du Takara (Life is a Treasure). Sung in Okinawan dialect, this didactic anti-war song calls, as does Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā, for its listeners to keep memories of the war alive, forever. The first two verses are: 11

**Nuchi du Takara**

Forget, I can’t forget, the sorrows of the warring world

Every time I remember, my hair stands on end

    Truly, we must tell of the war

    Truly, life is a treasure

To survive the war, we hid in caves

But the caves also became hells, the houses of devils

    Truly, we must tell of the war

    Truly, life is a treasure
By invoking the phrase “nuchi du takara,” Tsukayama embeds his song in complex webs of cultural, historical and political reference. Thus, for example, anti-base activist Ahagon Shōkō’s similarly titled book opens with the famous Ryūka (short Ryūkyūan poem) attributed to King Shō Tai at the time of his forced abdication in 1879: “The Era of War has ended// An era of peace has come// Do not grieve and moan, Life is a Treasure” (Ahagon 1992:2; my translation). Okinawan writer Shima Tsuyoshi (1997) has more broadly suggested that the Battle of Okinawa has two faces, represented among other things by the main public and the lesser known war sites and memorials. Shima sees the phrases “honorable death” (gyokusai) written on war site epitaphs and “life is a treasure” (nuchi du takara) spoken by Okinawans as representing opposing sets of values: gyokusai expressing those of the imperialist military, and nuchi du takara expressing those of common Okinawans in their will to live (1997:235-47). Songs such as Himeyuri no Uta and Nuchi du Takara, Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā and others give voice to “gyokusai” but especially convey “nuchi du takara” orientations.

These and other songs that recount local experiences related to the Battle of Okinawa act as sites of memory available for re-excavation and embedded within other discourses and debates. By focusing on Okinawan suffering these songs perhaps risk joining the “national victimology” that Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama note as the product of “dominant modes of remembering” in postwar Japan (2001:7; see also Orr 2001). As such, they threaten to sing the forgetting of Okinawan complicity and responsibility in a complex contrapuntal similar to that which Gerald Figal (1997) discusses in relation to the commemoration of the war dead at the Cornerstone of Peace in the southern Mabuni area.

On the other hand, by singing of Okinawan sacrifice and suffering, these songs simultaneously act as critiques of Japanese militarism, contributing to the broader “oppositional memory work”(Fujitani, White and Yoneyama 2001:13) going on in Okinawa. As such, these songs allow for interpretations of their significance as musically composed sites of memory that critically invoke Okinawan suffering as the result of Japanese and American militarized violence and of Okinawan complicity born of misguided assimilationist loyalties. The protagonist of Kanpō nu Kuē Nukusā thus asks in critical, challenging fashion: “Just who was it that started these things?” It is the nature of the Battle of Okinawa as a “difficult past” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991)—together with the intervention of peace activists and the existence of counter-narratives, including those in song—that helps preclude facile revisions to history and social memory in Okinawa.

Survivors of the Battle of Okinawa, including many civilians, were initially placed by the American military into internment camps throughout Okinawa (Molasky 1999:17). Two well-known songs recall life in these camps, PW Mujō (also, PW Bushi) and Yaka Bushi (Bise 1998:184). The lyrics of both songs largely overlap and were written in the POW camp at Yaka. Both melancholic songs sing of sadness deepened by the harrowing experiences of war, by thoughts of homes and villages destroyed by fighting, by worries about the safety of relatives, and by personal troubles. The lyrics to the first verse of Yaka Bushi are:13

**Yaka Bushi**

Beloved Okinawa, turned into a battlefield
Turned into a battlefield
All of the people, with flowing tears
With flowing tears

The final verse of *PW Mujō* laments:

**PW Mujō**

If only there had not been this thing, war
This pitiful figure, I [we] would not have become
How pitiful is a PW

As Molasky similarly points out regarding other Okinawan narratives of the war and American occupation, *PW Mujō* and *Yaka Bushi* mark the internment camp experience not only as the end of the war but as the beginning of the postwar era of the American Occupation (Molasky 1999:17). *PW Mujō* and *Yaka Bushi* are still recorded and performed. Kina Shoukichi included *Yaka Bushi* on his 1998 CD Akainko, while Koja Misako recorded *PW Mujō* on her anti-war 2005 CD *Kuroi Ame*. Kinjō Minoru, meanwhile, has performed in military olive green, playing *PW Bushi* on a *kankara sanshin* modeled on the rustic instruments originally made in the camps from empty food ration cans and other discarded American military materials (Bise 1998:184). For a recent video recording of *PW Mujō* by young performer Uema Ayano, follow this link.

**IV—Miruku-yu**

That the end of the world of war (*ikusa-yu*) would lead to a world of peace (*miruku-yu*) has been a long held hope among many Okinawans. In this section, I describe songs that over the past half-century plus have narrated Okinawan dreams of peace. Here the political contexts within and at times against which the songs are sung become critical in understanding the changes, continuities and complexities of such dreams.

**A—Nuchi nu Sūji**

While songs like *Yaka Bushi* describe the end of the war from the position of someone having experienced the battle in Okinawa, there are a number of songs which describe the (desire to) return to Okinawa among people who were elsewhere at the war’s end. The theme of separation that runs throughout many wartime songs becomes an inverse longing to return in Fukuhara Chōki’s famous early postwar song *Natsukashiki Kōkyō* (or, *Natsukashiki Furusato*; Nostalgic Homeland). Written and first performed by Fukuhara in Osaka in 1947, the first and last verses are:

**Natsukashiki Kōkyō**

The Okinawa I see in dreams, is its original shape
But the Okinawa I hear of in rumor, has changed completely
Oh, I want to go! Back to the island of my birth
When will it be that freely, with all my family
We will be able to live together smiling?
Oh, let us go! Back to Okinawa!

Though also reflecting general nostalgic desires and imaginaries among the Okinawan diaspora (see Roberson 2010b), which in part account for its frequent re-recording, Natsukashiki Kokyō more directly portrays early postwar Okinawan concerns for loved ones and dreams for peace given particularly sharp resonance by the then recent Battle of Okinawa. While Natsukashiki Kokyō describes a yet unrealized desire to return to Okinawa and find family members safe and Okinawa at peace, Noborikawa Seijin’s Sengo no Nageki (Postwar Lament) portrays the sadness of someone who has in fact returned to Okinawa from Japan (Yamato) to find that Okinawa has been transformed by the war and that his family are not there. Such is the teaching and fate of war, he laments, and protests.16

In addition to such mournful laments, however, there are other songs that participate in what Chris Nelson refers to as the “politics of hope” found in the performances of Onaha Buten and Teruya Rinsuke and more recently of Fujiki Hayato. Onaha and Teruya visited the interment camps and villages of central Okinawa in the immediate postwar period and through comedic performances that included music encouraged war weary Okinawans to celebrate and enjoy life (Nelson 2003, 2008). Of similar sentiment is Hiyamikachi Bushi, a song from the early 1950s. Now commonly played up-tempo, this song calls on Okinawans to stand up and be proud, even if they fall seven times and more (Nakasone 1997:162-3.).17 For a version of Hiyamikachi Bushi performed by Noborikawa Seijin, follow this link.

Kadekaru Rinshō’s early 1960s Jidai no Nagare and Teruya Rinken’s 1993 Yu-Yu-Yu may also be heard as satirically comical (Jidai no Nagare) or energetically optimistic (Yu-Yu-Yu) calls to celebrate life, despite difficulties faced and changes in the world. The recent Uchinā Pop songObā Jiman no Bakudan Nabe (Grandma’s Favorite Bombshell Cooking Pot), by the group Begin, may also be heard as a playful invocation of the same spirit.18 Optimistic, and often comical songs of the “nuchi nu sūji” celebration of life give voice in a different key to the “nuchi du takara” value orientation introduced above. Such celebrations of life, furthermore, invoke celebrations of peace. As Teruya Rinken (Rinsuke’s son) has said: “We sing about how wonderful it is being alive here and now. It’s the celebration of life like this which negates war and other acts that involve violence and killing” (Barrell and Tanaka 1997:114).

B—Heiwa no Negai

In the long postwar period, the theme of peace has been taken up in a continuing series of songs. Peace appears to have become a more explicitly expressed theme from about the mid 1960s. This, of course, was the time of the Vietnam War, when Okinawa was still under US Occupation and used for American military operations in Southeast Asia. This is also,
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however, a time during which Okinawans protested more vocally about their desire to return to Japan and its “Peace Constitution.”

Songs mapping Okinawan calls for reversion include *Akogare no Uta* (Song of Yearning), which sang of the desire to return to Japan and the Japanese era (*yu*), and *Okinawa o Kaese* (Return Okinawa; written in the 1950s) which became, as it remains, a movement and protest song (see Arakawa 1982:10; for more on *Okinawa o Kaese*, see Roberson 2003). Other songs combined dreams of peace with the desire to return to Japan, portrayed in political rhetoric and in song lyrics as Okinawa’s ancestral homeland (*sokoku*; on Okinawa protest movements, see Tanji 2006; Taira 1997). *Heiwa no Kane* (Bell of Peace), popular in 1966, and *Heiwa no Negai* (Prayer for Peace) are two such songs (Takaesu 1982:158). The latter, re-recorded in 1997 by Tamaki Kazumi, combines a call like that in *Nuchi du Takara* not to forget the sorrows of war with appeals for return to Japan and for a peaceful Okinawa. The first and last verses are:¹⁹

**Heiwa no Negai**

This island Okinawa, always nothing but war
When will the time finally come that we can live in peace?
Ah, let us together, for this island Okinawa
Pray for Peace, for this Okinawa

....

Our thoughts one, beloved Yamato
The happiness when finally we return²⁰
Ah, let us together, for this island Okinawa
Pray for Peace, for this Okinawa

For a performance of *Heiwa no Negai* by Suzy [Sūji [-gwa], a performer based in the Yokohama-Kawasaki area, that was intended as part of an online sanshin lesson but interestingly uses a type of kankara sanshin, follow this link.

A song such as this indexes complex ironies of history. Okinawans, discriminated against and strategically sacrificed in war by the Japanese, seek to return to Japanese control and benefit from its postwar Peace Constitution, which was a product of the American occupation of Japan. The formal occupation of Japan, but not the withdrawal of US forces, had ended in 1952 with Japanese agreement to continuing American occupation of Okinawa. These ironies must be understood strategically and logistically, within the context of Okinawan attempts to free themselves from American military domination and racism. The prayer for peace is thus less ironic than multi-vocal, simultaneously recalling the experiences of Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa and restating Okinawan desires for a peaceful home free of the American military.

However, despite Okinawans’ “prayers for peace,” close to 40 years after reversion, nearly 75 percent of the U.S. military bases and 60 percent of U.S. military personnel in Japan
remain concentrated in Okinawa. Symbolic here is the yet unrealized 1996 agreement to “return” Futenma Air Base, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, which has met with continuing protest because of plans to relocate the base within Okinawa Prefecture near the town of Henoko (see Inoue 2007). Furthermore, between reversion to Japan in 1972 and the end of 2003, there were some 5,269 reported crimes committed by US military and their dependents in Okinawa. These included 977 cases of aggravated assault and 540 violent crimes, the latter of which between 1972 and 1995 included 12 murders as well as 111 reported cases of violence (including rape) against women and girls (see Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division 2004; Arasaki 1996:204). There continue to be off-base automobile accidents, cases of environmental pollution, forest fires, stray bullets and other accidents and incidents related to the American military bases. In August 2004, for example, a large CH-53D transport helicopter crashed onto the campus of Okinawa International University, leading some 30,000 Okinawans to gather in September 2004 to protest (Asahi Shinbun 2004a; Asahi Shinbun 2004b).

Singer Koja Misako, a former member of the Uchinā Pop group, the Nenes, released a mini-CD in 2005 called *Kuroi Ame* (Black Rain), which includes *PW Mujō* and several versions of the title track, *Kuroi Ame*. This song was originally composed by Sahara Kazuya, Koja’s partner and producer, after joining a “Peace Festival” organized in Baghdad in 1990 by wrestler-politician Antonio Inoki (Yoshizawa 2004). The black rain in the song thus originally referred most directly to the missiles and bombs dropped during the first Gulf War, but also offers ready allusion to the black rain that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombings of those cities.

Koja’s recordings and performances of *Kuroi Ame*, however, index as well the “typhoon of steel” that fell on Okinawa during WWII and the continuing crashes of American military aircraft. The association of *Kuroi Ame* with the Battle of Okinawa is lyrically accomplished by the insertion after the second verse of an interlude in which Koja sings the final verse of *PW Mujō* coupled with a Ryūka (8-8-8-6 syllable poem) of her own composition. The lyrics to the first verse and interlude of Koja’s recording of *Kuroi Ame* are:

**Black Rain**

Rain keeps falling
Rain pours down
The sky is dark
Who knows where this rain is coming from
Hooy, hooy, hooy, hoo
Hooy, hooy, hooy, hoo
....

If there was but not this war
This sad figure
I/we would not have become

By but the two characters of “war” [*sensō*, 戦争]
Life is taken
Those surviving left to cry
Are the children

The intertwining of a more universally composed anti-war message with Okinawan particularities is further enhanced when Koja has introduced or interlaced live performances with personal comments referring to the crash of an American transport helicopter into the campus of Okinawa International University in August 2004, to her own childhood memories of witnessing the crash of an American B52 bomber, and to memories of her father, who died while working on the U.S. Airbase at Kadena. Koja’s narration, acting as prelude and spoken interlude accompanying a live performance of *Kuroi Ame* recorded on this CD, is roughly as follows:

**Prelude:**

The song I’m about to sing is called Kuroi Ame. From the first time I sang on stage until here today, how many years have passed? I first sang on stage when I was about five years old and this year I’ll be fifty-one, so I’ve been singing for forty-plus years. In that lifetime of singing, I’ve had lots of varied experiences. Today, during this short time, there are lots of things that I can’t fully describe. In the town where I live, Kadena, there is a large American military air base, called the largest in East Asia. Inside that military base there are many people working, and outside, we are living. American jets that had taken off have on a number of occasions crashed. Among those times when planes have crashed, the most terrifying was when I was a young elementary school student, when a B52 with black wings crashed. At that time, I remember thinking, even though I had not experienced war, ah, Kadena has been hit. That frightening memory is, after all, impossible to forget no matter how many years pass. This year, it makes 60 years that, throughout, we’ve been told of how Okinawa suffered as the site of the sole land battle on Japanese home soil. It might appear as though it is now [a time of] peace, but in Okinawa, [the war] hasn’t ended. Inside the heart of Okinawa, paradise has yet to arrive. With my prayers embraced in this song, *Kuroi Ame*.

**Interlude:**

My father worked inside of Kadena airbase. While on his way to work [one day], my father was run over by a military truck and died instantly. At that time, my mother was 28, my father was 30, I was four. My mother and I have both lived as best we could. But, my mother passed away at 67. Now, I have a child and grandchild, and when I have the strength to look back and think about the past, my father’s death is so mournfully regretful. I think, if there hadn’t been the war and Okinawa was as it had been in the past, my father would surely even now have happily been taking loving care of me. My most loved, most loved father’s memory only have I held in my heart and lived. Therefore, children like me will only have sad memories, so after all having one’s parents healthy and happy is best.

Koja’s narrative here is many layered and multivocal, interweaving personal and Okinawan cultural memory; intertwining past, present and future in criticism of war; and appealing for peace both in Okinawa, where the war has not ended even after 60 years, and more universally.
There are a number of other recently produced songs that similarly recall Okinawan experiences of war and repeat Okinawan desires for a peaceful existence at home and elsewhere, thereby also reminding us of the on-going local importance of such memories and of struggles to achieve a less militarized and more peaceful present and future. In 2000, Daiku Tetsuhiro recorded *Okinawa Kagayake* (Shining Okinawa; for more, see Roberson 2009) that sings of a future, shining Okinawa, that has been able to put its past sorrows to sleep and that will heal hearts and teach the world about peace. As the liner notes to this CD point out, *Okinawa Kagayake* must be understood within, and as a positively phrased and future-oriented statement of resistance against a political context in which the real, foreseeable future of Okinawa as a “discarded stone” (*sute-ishi*) burdened with the continuing presence of American military bases appears likely to remain unchanged.

Although rarely overtly political the Nenes’ 1997 CD, *Akemodoru Unai* included a number of songs with peace as their theme. Among these were *Heiwa no Ryūka* (Ryūka of Peace; for a video, look [here](#)) and *Nasake Shirazuya* (Heartless Bastards). The immediate context for these songs includes the 1995 rape of a twelve-year old Okinawan girl by three US servicemen and the renewed struggle in the 1990s to regain control of land occupied by U.S. military bases (see Angst 2003; Inoue 2007). Sung in Japanese and set to a deceptively, ironically, light electric guitar pop tune, *Nasake Shirazuya* calls on its listeners to live with mutually held compassion and excoriates Japanese politicians and America for forgetting the past so easily and for being so uncaring about the lives of Okinawans, even fifty years after the end of World War II. The refrain, repeated at the end, is: “50 years, 50 years// All you who forget so quick and easy// You heartless bastards you.”

Like *Kuroi Ame* making reference to rain is *Sora ga Shiranai Ame ga Futteita* (A Rain the Sky Knew Not Fell) included on a 2004 CD by Kamiya Chihiro. And, in 2001 the punk-rock band Mongol 800 recorded *Song for You* on their two million plus selling CD *Message*. Sung in English, *Song for You* pleads for listeners not to repeat past mistakes and asks “how many boys [will] be killed by fuckin’ wars.” It concludes with a positive vision not unlike that in *Okinawa Kagayake* of Okinawa/the world as “Forever green. Forever blue/ Never end LOVE and PEACE and SONG.”

The desires for peace sung of in these songs imagine Okinawa as a place where there are no military bases and no crimes or accidents associated with them and their soldiers. Such desires make meaningful otherwise self-exoticizing, neo-romanticist recollections of a halcyon Ryūkyūan past as well as dreams of a future Okinawa, which, sung of in universalistic terms, simultaneously allow for the creation of a space where it is possible to imagine peace in, of, and for Okinawa—and through Okinawa, the world. The particular, obdurate histories and memories of war and military occupation in Okinawa are thus related to future imaginings of a dreamlike, peaceful Okinawa. As such, while the shining Okinawa that Daiku sings of may risk the construction of an Okinawa blind to its past, it must simultaneously be heard as constituting a poetic site of resistance to experiences of war and the continuing American military presence.

That such songs continue to be composed reflects (upon) the ongoing presence of the war in Okinawa—in both individual and cultural memory, in physical marks left upon the land, and in the continuing presence of the American military. Like other earlier songs, they not
only call for peace as a longed for future possibility or critically recollect past experiences of war, but thereby also indict present conditions in Okinawa, whether indirectly, as in *Kuroi Ame* or *Okinawa Kagayake*, or more forcefully as in *Nasake Shirazuya* or *Song for You.* These songs thus act as sites of cultural resistance and by their continued creation, recording and performance insert into the public sphere—both Okinawan and Japanese—Okinawan memories of war and dreams of peace, significant because of the everyday traces and presences of war, even after more than 60 years. As such, these songs require that we listen to them seriously.  

**V—This Ain’t no Sideshow**

Representing a larger corpus of songs in various musical genres, the songs introduced here constitute a continuing feature of the Okinawan musical landscape. Viewed from the present, they may appear to compose a discordant set. Yet, as mnemonic sites and practices, the creation and lyrical content of these songs reflect, resist and require an understanding of ongoing historical processes, contexts and events in Okinawa that compose fields of experience and identity characterized by unequal power relations.

Early songs reflect the dynamics and contradictions of assimilationist pressures and desires that led Okinawans to participate, with whatever sadness on parting, in Japan’s wars and empire building. Later songs give witness to personal and cultural ambivalences and to the profound injuries suffered by Okinawans during the Battle of Okinawa. As a result of their experiences in war, Okinawans have since that time sung of peace, first in terms of a desired return to an originary peaceful homeland, then imagined in reference to reversion from American military control to the promise offered by Japan’s “Peace Constitution.” More recent songs offer visions of a peaceful Okinawa shining for all to gather warmth from or sharply criticize the powerful conjunction of self-serving Japanese and American geo-politics in maintaining conditions in Okinawa that make such desired peace a dream too long delayed by the everyday realities of continuing militarization.

Though as suggested by Kinjō Minoru’s LP/CD *Jidai* never complete, the postwar amnesia constituted through the elision of wartime songs that index assimilationist Okinawan complicity, like other forms of personal and cultural forgetting, is troubling. However, it must also be understood in relation to the eclipsing, defining trauma of the Battle of Okinawa and the continuing presence (with Japanese state support) of American military forces. While some might suggest that early wartime Okinawan songs that bear the lyrical markings of Japanese assimilationist and militarist control are largely and rightly forgotten (see Arakawa 1982: 7), this simultaneously reminds us that if social memories are “contextual, partial, and subject to self-interested manipulation and obfuscation” (Kenny 1999:425), they are also persistent and resistant to efforts at revision (Climo and Cattell 2002:5). There are, as Appadurai points out, limits to the debatability of the past, and this is as true of Okinawan complicity as it is of the more pernicious attempts of the state to revise if not falsify historical representations of the war (Appadurai 1981; see also Figal 1997; Ishihara, et al. 2002; Yonetani 2000).

Furthermore, as Schwartz has pointed out in regard to contested American commemoration of the Vietnam War, “To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present.” (Schwartz 1982:374). In Okinawa,
memories of the war given voice in song, like other practices and structures for meaning making and in other contestations over commemoration, are part of ongoing struggles in which Okinawan identities are constructed in inter-relationship with Japanese and American influences and forces. However, the needs of the present in Okinawa are here also importantly composed with reference to visions of the future. Memories of the war, including the dangers of memory undone, are thus linked both to present cultural and political identity construction in Okinawa and to interrelated dreams of a future, peaceful Okinawa free of wars and weapons.

Thus, while also speaking to historical complexities and contradictions, these Okinawan songs of war and peace are important because—as George Lipsitz writes more broadly of the messages and products of popular culture in the introductory chapter to *Time Passages*, entitled “Popular Culture: This Ain’t No Sideshow”—“[a]t their best...they retain memories of the past and contain hopes for the future that rebuke the injustices and inequities of the present” (1990:20).

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**Notes**

1 Takahashi Miki (2010) has recently criticized Nakahodo Masanori, Kumada Susumu and me (Roberson 2003) for such focus. I make no apologies. I conversely suggest that a-theoretical and a-political detailing of musical minutiae, however fascinating for fans and fetishists (including lay and academic “Okinawa freaks”), risks obscuring if not obfuscating the broader cultural-political significance of musical production and practice, especially in complexly contexted, marginalized and contested places such as Okinawa.

2 The key Ryūkyūan instrument, the sanshin is a three-stringed instrument derived from the Chinese sanxian and is a predecessor of the Japanese shamisen, see Kaneshiro (1997).


4 Translation based on Nakahodo 1988:152. Lyrics and music by Fukuhara Chōki. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.

5 See: *Chanpurū Shinguruzu Volume 2: (Sensō to Imin)—Heiwa no Negai*, Toshiba EMI, TOCT 9552, 1996.

6 By 1940 some 42,252 Okinawans were resident in Osaka, another 11,426 in neighboring Hyogo Prefecture. See Tomiyama (1990:254).

7 Such reluctance was also reflected in Okinawan migration abroad as a strategy not only to improve their economic conditions but to avoid the military draft (Matsumura 2002:136; on songs of Okinawan migration, see Roberson 2010b).


There have been at least five major Japanese motion pictures about the Himeyuri students, starting with Imai Tadashi’s 1953 Himeyuri no Tō (see: Nakae and Nakae 2000:154-75). Angst’s critique resonates with those of others: see Fujiwara (2001), Shima (1997).

Lyrics and music by Tsukayama Hiroyoshi. Tsukayama Hiroyoshi, Nuchi Du Takara—Yomitansan Basha Muchā, Marufuku Records, CCF 83, 1995. My thanks to Bise Katsu of Campus Records for permission to include this translation.

For more on sites of war memorialization, see Figal (2003).

This translation based on Yamazato Yuki Natsukashiki Kōkyō, Nafin VICG-6009, 1998.


Lyrics and music by Fukuhara Chōki. This translation based on Yamazato Yuki Natsukashiki Kōkyō. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.


Tamaki Kazumi, Tinin, Akabana, APCD 1003, 1997. Lyrics by Heija Nami, music by Fukuhara Tsuneo. My thanks to Fukuhara Ongaku Jimusho for permission to include this translation.

The original reads, “Yagati uhizamutu muduru urisa,” implying the return of a child to the safety of a parent’s care.

Translation of main verses by Kurota Nagisa, included in liner notes to Koja Misako, Kuroi Ame, Disk Milk DM006, 2005. Translation of interlude by the author.

Nenes, Akemodoro Unai, Antinos Records, ARCJ 69, 1997. The liner notes to the western release of this CD weakly translate this as “You are Inhumane.” I prefer the more direct “Heartless Bastards,” though here “bastards” is conversely perhaps too strong for the Japanese “shirazuya.”


Medoruma (2005) thus questions the correctness of talking about the “postwar” period in Okinawa.

An anonymous reviewer of a prior version of this paper (Roberson 2009) objects that the songs discussed in this paper must be seen as commodities produced by a massive music industry, and that their potential as vehicles of resistance is thus reduced to being “facile deployments of cultural memory.” The reviewer is also “tired of every gesture being valorized in cultural studies analyses as a form of resistance.” I understand the need to be cautious about the culture industry and reading everything as resistance. However, I also believe that it is dangerous to deny a priori the critical political significance of popular cultural production, particularly that by people who have been or are subjects of colonialism and imperialism. This is especially true in the case of Okinawa, where such resistance has been given voice for over 60 years in music and in other forms of cultural and political protest—including ongoing anti-war and anti-base movements and sentiments that in 2010 continue to intervene into US-Japan-Okinawan relationships and exercises of power.

**Bibliography**


Putting Okinawa at the Center


Dances of Memory, Dances of Oblivion: The Politics of Performance in Contemporary Okinawa
Christopher T. Nelson
March 18, 2013
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Christopher_T-Nelson/3916

As in Roberson’s analysis of popular songs, Christopher T. Nelson shows how memories of war shape popular culture in Okinawa today—in Nelson’s case in the context of community-based dance performances known as eisā. Today eisā is the most widespread and widely recognized community activity practiced in contemporary Okinawa. The Koza Riot that Nelson refers to occurred during the evening of December 20-21, 1970, in what was then a red light district catering primarily to American military personnel outside Kadena Air Force Base. The rioting was precipitated by an incident in which a car driven by an intoxicated American soldier struck an Okinawan man. Efforts by U.S. Military Police to extricate the soldier in question sparked eight hours of street fighting between hundreds of MPs and thousands of local Okinawan residents, resulting in dozens of injuries and large-scale property damage. Most observers interpreted the Koza Riot as an expression of widespread simmering resentment among the local population against the U.S. military presence.

Nelson teases out the sociocultural significance of eisā in Okinawa today using an interest technique. Through observations and comments obtained as a participant the Sonoda Seinenkai (literally, Sonoda youth association), an eisā group based in near the site of the 1970 riot and through detailed descriptions of how the group performs eisā and what this feels like subjectively, Nelson is able to show how eisā performance constitutes a cultural process that connects history, social structure, and community. In Nelson’s interpretation eisā performs a dual function in contemporary Okinawa. It serves as a communal mechanism for transcending the pain caused by memories of war and it acts as a medium for reproducing local community and local identity. In this sense, the dance form is both a product of Okinawa’s distinctive historical trajectory and reinforces and sustains that trajectory into the future, making it difficult to overstate the significance of this now iconic cultural form.
Dances of Memory, Dances of Oblivion: The Politics of Performance in Contemporary Okinawa

Christopher T. Nelson

The Burden of the Past

In Okinawa, as perhaps anywhere else, the past exists uneasily alongside the present. It can pass unnoticed, occasionally rising for a moment of recognition, slipping away again under the weight of the routine tasks of daily life. And like the unexploded bombs that still lie close to the surface of the Okinawan landscape, it can erupt into the present, casting its shadow over a future not yet experienced. Memories, wrenching and traumatic, can tear the fabric of the everyday, plunging those who experience them into despair and even madness. They haunt the present with their melancholy demands for repression, making their presence known in the prohibitions that they have engendered.¹

Photo 1: A Street in Koza
Performing, Remembering, Becoming

I spent every evening during the summer of 1998 at the Sonda Community Center in Okinawa City, about a mile or so south of the point where the Koza Riot began. As I had done the summer before, I joined dozens of men and women [of the Sonda Seinenkai—the youth group discussed in the pages that follow] in the pounded clay courtyard as they prepared to dance eisā. I joined them as a visitor, a student and a friend, struggling to learn something of the way that Okinawans came to grips with a past that weighed so heavily on the present. In fields and parking lots across central Okinawa, thousands of young Okinawan men and women practice eisā throughout the summer, preparing for three nights of dancing during obon—the festival of the dead.
In recent years, many scholars have worked to understand the politics of remembrance in Okinawa. However, little attention has been paid to eisā, the most widespread modality of public memorative practice in the islands. As my friends often told me, eisā was necessary so that they could respond to the demands and desires of their ancestral spirits, to the hundreds of thousands who were killed during the war. Eisā is danced to escort the spirits of the dead from their tombs back to their homes and to entertain them during obon. To narrate and embody the history of impoverished Okinawan courtiers sent down from the capital. To express and sustain the pride and honor of these neighborhoods, the power and the artistry of the dancers. To create and share karī, the gift of happiness and belonging produced in performance, necessary for life.

Okinawa City was still a base town, its crowded neighborhoods of concrete buildings clustered along the fence of Kadena Air Base like a coral reef. And yet, the numbers of Marines and airmen in the streets have been reduced by new regulations imposed by their commands and others have been encouraged to stay on base by the escalation in anti-base demonstrations. In recent years, the once-thriving base economy has collapsed as a result of the loss of dollars spent by servicement on R&R during or after combat in Korea or Vietnam, the long slide of the dollar against the yen, as well as the construction of on-base communities that claim the GI dollars once spent in Okinawa City. Row after row of buildings thrown up in the frenzy of a Vietnam era boom are now falling to ruin, the bar district is quiet, prostitution has virtually disappeared—
Filipina and Russian women are now working in the bars that remain. Most Japanese tourists avoid Okinawa City, preferring the resort hotels of Onna and the southern islands, the shopping malls and nightclubs in Mihama. The bases remain, dominating the Okinawan landscape, a staging area for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a beachhead held against dreams of developing central Okinawa in other ways.³

After the Pacific War, this area of uninhabited wooded hillocks and swampy lowlands was settled by impoverished former Ryūkyūan courtiers who had lived in Nishizato, a farming village several miles to the west. Their homes had been destroyed in the Battle of Okinawa, their land confiscated in the construction of Kadena Air Base.⁴ They were joined by displaced or unemployed farmers from all over central and northern Okinawa, workers from Kyûshû and Amami Ōshima, as well as laborers from other outlying islands. While they worked in the American bases that now dominated the island or in the cities that were quickly constructed around them, they built this crowded neighborhood of narrow streets and small wooden or concrete houses. At its center stood the community center, surrounded by a group of massive family tombs.

In many ways, the community center echoes the space of the tomb. Before the war, dancers and musicians from Nishizato gathered on summer evenings in the courtyards of the crypts that lay on the edge of their hamlet. Night after night, they danced and sang before the spirits of their ancestors, practicing for the day that would bring eisā again to the streets of their villages and the courtyards of their homes. Pleasurable and demanding, away from the fields where they labored each day, from the discipline of the home, from the regulation of the state, resisting the pressure and the lure of labor migration to the mainland or the South Pacific. In the company of their friends and the spirits of their ancestors, farmers and laborers became dancers and musicians.

Those tombs and villages are gone. The material presence of the ancestors, so painstakingly ordered and attended by their families, was fragmented and dispersed—destroyed along with many of the lives of those who memorated them. For those who
survived, relationships with ancestral spirits were too precious to lose, obligations to the
dead too great to ignore. Rebuilding the tombs and recollecting the ancestors was one of
the first priorities of Okinawan households in the postwar reconstruction. However, tombs
and household altars are not the only places in which the spatial fields of the ancestors
were reinstall. The community center itself has been a site of repeated daily labor to
situate and recall the dead. It is a space that is filled with the creative activity of dancers
who struggle to express their desire to understand—and to change—the world around
them.

Virtually every inch of available wall space is covered with the graphic traces of Sonda’s
past. Banners commemorating their victories in competitions. Row after row of framed
photographs showing generations of dancers. Certificates noting the youth group’s
performances in decades of annual eisā competition in Okinawa City and their appearances
throughout Japan. Letters of appreciation from prominent Japanese politicians, performers
and admiring fans. Images that organize powerful constellations of gender, work and
creativity.

The oldest picture, a framed black and white group photograph above the door shows a
group of men, lean and sunburned, staring gravely at the camera. They are dressed in
short, working kimono and wearing farmers’ woven conical hats. One or two men
hold sanshin—the Okinawan shamisen—and several drums are lined up in the
foreground. These are the first dancers to come together to dance eisā after the war. In the
early 1950s, Kohama Shuei, a well-known musician as well as a member of one of the
leading families in the area, gathered the young men of the neighborhood together in the
Quonset hut that served as their community center. Together they worked to master not
only the steps and the songs of the eisā, but the style that marked the performances during
the festival of the dead in the streets of Nishizato, their lost village. In central Okinawa,
only young men of noble ancestry had been allowed to participate in eisā, and then only
with the groups from their natal communities. Until Shuei decided to resume the dance
after the war, it was inconceivable that outsiders would be allowed to join. Over the
objections of many of his neighbors, Shuei broke with tradition. He not only allowed but
encouraged all the young men to dance. If the disparate group that had come together in
his neighborhood were to survive the aftermath of the war, he was sure that they would
need eisā.
Putting Okinawa at the Center

Faded color photographs show that women have joined the group by the late 1950s or early 1960s. The decision to eliminate gender as well as class restrictions seems to be both principled and pragmatic. Kohama said that he and his friends were grateful for the contribution of women to the life of the community, their work and their sacrifice. At the same time, they thought that the addition of women would add to the complexity of the dance and would certainly appeal to the audiences at public performances.

The clothing of the dancers also changed. When they were all déclassé nobles, they proudly wore the modest kimono of the farming village where their families were born. When participation in the seinenkai was opened to everyone, noble or commoner, native or outsider, men began to wear the garb of a stylized Okinawan samurai, women the equally stylized kimono of rural farmers. Kohama Shuei told me that he and his friends were inspired to select costumes that would help the young men and women of the neighborhood to create a dramatic impression on the audience and judges at performances. One cannot help but notice the powerful representations of gender and class in these images, in contrast to the conditions of Okinawan daily life. To imagine the attraction that representations of strong, handsome Ryūkyūan warriors had for a cook at a base club or a servant in an American household; to think of the possibilities that a graceful, laughing rural dancer presented to a maid at a cheap hotel or a prostitute in a crowded club. What seems to be a gendered assignment of class also speaks to the history of the community: men’s martial attire evokes the remembered world of the Ryūkyūan Court; women’s simple yet elegant kimono references the rural villages where déclassé nobles labored to build new lives.
At the same time, these costumes were not simple representations of the Okinawan past; rather they were selected from the most popular plays and dances of the Okinawan theater—the *Uchinā Shibai*. It was in Okinawan popular theater—a genre also suppressed by the Japanese colonial authorities—that performers could move effortlessly from a tragedy depicting court intrigues and martial prowess to a romanticized peasant dance. Thus, costumes not only referred to favorite images and idealized qualities of the past; they also suggested the protean expressiveness of theatrical performance. However, in transforming themselves, dancers also opened themselves to the judgment of the audience gathered for performances: an appropriated image could only be maintained if the dancers demonstrated that they were deserving of it.

The images displayed in the community center are important elements in mediating the transmission of the varying versions of the *seinenkai’s* past. They provide visual linkages between the interior space of the building and other people, places and events distributed over space and time. Traces of other moments, graphic reminders that figure practices of recollection, for the storytelling that is as much a part of *eisā* as the dance.

Outside, the members of the *seinenkai* prepared for rehearsal—just as they did every evening during the three months preceding *obon*. Most of the dancers came to practice directly from work. From the dress of the members of the youth group, it was clear that Sonda was a working class neighborhood. A majority of the young men were in *sagyōfuku*. Baggy, calf-length trousers in vivid pastel colors, white t-shirts, towels knotted around their heads. High school boys still in school uniforms: black trousers and white shirts. The remaining young men were dressed in current hip-hop fashion: shiny sweats, baggy denim shorts or pants, large, blocky sneakers, oversized jerseys: Fubu, Mecca, the Japanese National soccer team.

Young women in fashionably tight blouses with wide collars and flared pants. A few in matching knee-length skirts and vests, the uniforms of local banks and offices. None of the high school girls still wore their school uniforms. Younger girls in wide-leg jeans, clunky, thick-soled sneakers or sandals, undersized military T-shirts. Style means attention to detail: the right jewelry, wristwatch, hairstyle, colored contacts.

The *jikata—sanshin* musicians—sat at the front, tuning their instruments and warming up their voices. Dancers removed their cellular phones, pagers, watches, lighters, cigarette packs and wallets, leaving them on windowsills and along the steps. Everyone filed down onto the watered clay surface of the courtyard.
Dancers came to the community center to play, but it is a form of play that has its costs. The dancers have shrugged off many of the more conventional chances for recreation that contemporary Japanese society offers, even in Okinawa. They have—if only for the moment—refused the distractions of mass culture, of television, bars, games, parks and films. Although they may dance side by side with the young men or women—neighbors, coworkers or classmates—who they might otherwise date, they have deferred the opportunity to do so. At the same time, they have refused certain kinds of work: more profitable employment in the dense urban areas of Naha or Urasoe, mainland Japan or America; labor in the remaining bars or brothels, nightclubs and snacks of nearby Nakanomachi. They cannot meet the demands of employers for overtime, for different hours, for selfless devotion to their jobs. For the most part, they have also turned their backs on university education and intellectual labor. The dancers have also sacrificed one of the most treasured goals of a worker—sleep. The toll taken on laboring bodies is inescapable, but sleep offers a daily refuge from work, a chance to recover one’s strength, to heal. Perhaps even the opportunity to dream. Instead they commit themselves to hours of arduous and demanding activity that, until the recent popularization of Okinawan performing arts, marked them as hooligans and lowlifes.

Standing in the courtyard, the drummers—all men—adjusted the carriage of their instruments and dancers shifted their bodily hexis to that of the dance. The male dancers lowered their hips, turned their knees out and sank into a wide stance. Head up, shoulders back, hands on hips, a look of quiet confidence on their faces. Women stood, feet together, legs and back straight, hands at their hips, faintly smiling. The men’s position is hard; the women more relaxed. Older members moved through the formation, physically correcting the dancers.

To the front, the jikata counted out the beat and dove into Nandaki Bushi—The Ballad of the Southern Grove—the first song of the eleven pieces that make up their eisā. With the simultaneous sound of fifty drums being struck, the dance began. The song is sung in unison, the lyrics in Okinawan. For twenty minutes or more, the songs continue and the dancers dance. Women work to make the stately grace of the dance seem effortless. Along with the male dancers, their performance draws heavily on Okinawan folk and classical genres, creating the figure that organizes the eisā, elegant and controlled. The drummers
dance a counterpoint to this. Leaping and turning, beating out a rhythm that is sometimes straight, sometimes syncopated, they struggle to maintain Sonda’s reputation of speed and physicality. Dancers whose bodies are already exhausted and injured from long hours of harsh, physical labor. Dancers for whom this evening’s exertions are a respite before another day of work. Sweat from the dancers splashes the ground—some people say that if you scratch away the clay, it’s salt all the way down to the roofs of the tombs at the bottom of the hill.

A 2010 performance of Sonda Seinenkai; here.

Their performance conjures the account of a journey, assembled and sung from narratives of the past. A complex secondary genre, eisā is a cycle of narratives that recount the diaspora of the Ryūkyūan nobility that began in the 19th Century, their impoverishment and exile to the mountainous northern forests, their struggle to return to the capital once more. Each of the songs narrates the experiences of a particular time and place where the former nobles lived along their journey. Some are songs that were composed during the period that they represent; others are later representations of that time and place. With their own particular chronotopes, their own narrative organization of space and time, the songs are bound together by the formal structure and the performative production of the dance. All are woven together, harmonized in performance by the powerful rhythm of the drums that opens the dance. Eisā’s heartbeat, say the dancers. These songs also fitted together by the similar stylistics of the dance: stepping and spinning, first clockwise, then counterclockwise. The understated, graceful movement of the women that demonstrates the influence of Okinawan traditional dance. The way that shimedaiko—the small, hand-held drums—are extended at arms length by the men, then swung in dramatic underhand arcs.

The initial songs are elegiac narratives of the past, narrating what could be called Ryukyuan mythic time—a powerful fusion of time and space. Even the titles of the songs—Nandaki Bushi, Chunjun Nagari and Kudaka—rejecting dutiful labor and the submission to authority in favor of creative performances, drinking and romantic celebrations. Dancers create narratives of un commodified sexuality and personal choice in the time that they might otherwise spend in bars and clubs. Who is to say which is more real or more fulfilling? At the same time, the moments recreated in the performance suggest that their
determination has a cost. Autonomy has its bounds, and desire cannot always be fulfilled. A powerful tension emerges in the performance—the tension between hope and loss.

Like the voices heard in these songs, the dancers face the consequences of their dance—fatigue, disappointment, sacrifice of opportunities for material advancement. Still, they throw themselves into the moment. Determined to master the most forceful strikes, the most furious arcs of the drums, the most spectacular spins. Dreaming that they will equal the forms of the past, adding something new, something of their own creation. Hence the lead jikata’s comment, "Unless you decide that you’re going to try to do this better than everyone else, your dancing will never amount to anything!" Close to exhaustion, their voices hoarse, uniforms dripping with sweat, they conclude the dance with an exultant burst of energy.

Eisā speaks in many voices. Of course, it calls out to the audience present—friends and family, ancestral spirits, tourists. It speaks to others as well, absent parents, companions and lovers, drawing on the captured speech of singers represented by jikata of long ago. It would also be possible to think of another level of address: the singer speaks to herself in her words and her actions, repeating again and again these narratives of what she can do, of who she is. Through this repetition, the singers bring the world of eisā, the world of the work into themselves, into their everyday lives.

Dancers are determined to transform themselves from the young men and women who began learning the eisā together into those who are fully capable of the dance. To become those who are able to produce karī. Describing it as a gift of happiness and belonging, my friends have told me that karī is essential to life. As performers, it is their responsibility to create karī and “attach” it to their relatives, their friends and neighbors. Karī strengthens and renews the bond between the living, the ancestral spirits, and those yet to be born. In eisā, the dancers draw upon their aesthetic, productive powers to recollect and recreate the very relationships that make life worth living, in which the living and the dead can join each other in happiness. Chura nashun, people say—to make beautiful. In the moment of the dance, filled with the complex patterns described by their bodies in movement, their voices raised in song, the rhythm measured out by their drums, they create place and a time of beauty.
The cycle of songs eschews any direct reference to the abjection, the horror of the eras that they depict—although minyō [folk songs] that take up these themes certainly exist. Nonetheless any reference to the past always carries the charged ambiguity of a beauty underwritten by the memory of pain and loss, a joy tempered by sadness and despair. The beauty of the performances begun by Kohama Shuei and his friends was driven by the need to renew life in a shattered world. The dancers who still gather to learn and to perform the eisā know this well. How can it be completely forgotten in the dance?

They demonstrate that they have the courage to put aside memories of horror and abjection, to allow these inescapable fears and anxieties to slip into a kind of oblivion during the performance. In the courtyard of the community center, in the space soaked with the sweat of generations of dancers, they create something of beauty in the shadow of the horrors of the past. This is why today’s dancers no longer need to be of noble ancestry. They have learned to do the things in practice that were once the exclusive provenance of those of noble birth. Hour after hour, night after night, they have developed the skill and artistry to dance the eisā, to create karī, to rebuild what has been broken, to make a place for the living and the dead in the world that they have been given.

_Dancing in the Street_

It was the night of September 4, 1998—ūkui, the third and final night of obon. We had already been dancing through the narrow streets and alleys of Sonda for several hours. Women in indigo kimono, men in the attire of Ryūkyūan warriors—dressed to convey the images of generations of dancers lining the walls of the community center. For the last three nights, we had covered what seemed to be every road, every path in the neighborhood. We had entertained the spirits of the dead who had returned to their homes and accepted the hospitality and the gifts of the households and businesses that we visited. I was exhausted. My left hand was stiff from carrying my drum and the heavy calluses lining my fingers had begun to tear away. My right shoulder ached from an old injury. Too much drinking, too little sleep. It was much the same with everyone else. Around me, dancers and drummers—particularly the veteran performers—favored damaged knees and shoulders, struggled with increasingly painful back injuries. The everyday world of labor exacts a price from those who struggle to escape its regulation; or perhaps I should say that those who do so are painfully reminded of the price already paid by all who labor.

Although everyone was clearly exhausted, enthusiasm crackled through the formation. It was nearly time for ōrāsē—a fight between neighboring seinenkai. Older members often spoke of the violent clashes with other groups that marked the eisā of earlier years. Rocks and bottles were thrown from the audience; groups might even attack one another with heavy bamboo staffs or lash out with fists. Now the battle was waged with sanshin and drums, with dancing bodies and raised voices.

_Sonda Seinenkai street performance on the final day of Obon, August 2011_ [here](#)
hear a muted call and response from the dancers. One of the men was shouting out something, lost in the pounding of the drums; the women, their voices keen in response. *Give us some sake!* Ahead of us, our banner bobbed up and down as the standard bearer danced to the rhythm of the drums.

Thousands of spectators of all ages thronged the streets. They parted before us as we advanced, pressing up against the walls and storefronts. The spectators laughed and waved, children darting and waved, people come together in these streets—people that would be unlikely to associate under other circumstances. Not just locals, but Okinawans and mainland Japanese from across a broad spectrum of classes, American soldiers from the bases. Tourists, scholars, performers, broadcasters. Older members gently remind spectators to keep back and moved aside those who ignored their warnings.

The *sanshin* continued to repeat the same droning figure and we followed the standard bearer deeper and deeper into the bar district. Then, on a signal from the *jikata*, the standard was lifted high, and everything stopped. People rushed at us from all sides. Elderly bar owners hurried their hostesses into the street, carrying trays full of glasses of iced oolong tea or *awamori* to us. Reporters from local radio stations moved in to question cooperative looking dancers. Cameramen moved up and down the ranks. Tourists asked to join the dancers in photos. Local merchants signaled to older members, formally handing them envelopes bearing offerings or asking for dancers to enter their clubs for brief performances. The offerings were accepted; the requests were politely declined. Now was not the time for distractions—*ōrāsē* was only moments away.

The crowd before us literally seethed. For the past decade or so, *eisā* has been growing in popularity and tourists throng to performances throughout Okinawa. This is also true of performances in the mainland; however, an *eisā* festival in the Okinawan community in Osaka has been riven by controversy. Local activists encouraged young men and women to dance in order to develop their pride in being Okinawan. They also hoped that the dance would be a source of pride to older members of the community who have suffered from Japanese prejudice throughout their lives—stigmatized as dirty, primitive, menial laborers. In many ways, their *eisā* was an enormous success: thousands of people come each year to watch the performances. However, the presence of so many aggressive spectators discourages the older members of the community from attending. After
enduring years of discrimination, they were unwilling to publicly participate in
performances that identified them as Okinawans before a Japanese audience, regardless of
any putatively positive valuation. At the same time, the insistent clamoring of tourists to
join the dance has created other problems. For activists such as Kinjō Kaoru, the festival
has become yet another occasion for Japanese tourists to demonstrate the colonizer’s
thoughtless appropriation of the most intimate practices of the colonized, the insolent
consumer’s unconstrained desire. As he bitterly reflected, any Japanese who honestly
respected Okinawan culture should simply stay away. 8

Sonda has been subjected to the same flood of visitors. Mainland tourists come to Sonda
throughout the summer, but their numbers swell during the days of obon and the festival
that follows. The members of the seinenkai anticipate these visits and are prepared to deal
with their nearly overwhelming numbers. During performances, volunteers direct traffic
and control tourist presence, keeping them out of the way of the dancers and insisting that
they not interfere with local residents. While never quite extended the warm embrace of
belonging that they might hope for, tourists are treated as guests, with kindness and
respect. The dancers allow them to beat on the drums after practice, seat them at tables in
the kôminkan [public hall], offer them food and drink, entertain their questions, include
them in conversations, even teach them to dance. Moments such as this are opportunities
for the dancers to demonstrate their confidence and their pride in their dance.

Iha Masakazu, the charismatic young leader of the seinenkai, told me that members of the
youth group dance for many reasons: to be with their friends, to carry on a family tradition,
to show respect for their ancestors. Still, he said that the most important reason is to be
seen. 9 Most of the members spend their working hours in garages, buses, technical schools,
grocery stores, hotel lobbies, restaurant kitchens and shop counters. They long to be seen
as something else, and in the images of the past and present members of the seinenkai that
line the kôminkan, they have an object for their longing.

When these young men and women perform in the streets of Sonda, on the field
surrounded by thousands of spectators at the Zentō Eisā Matsuri [All-Island Eisā Festival],
before a busload of mainland high school students, they know that they will not only be
seen, but they will be seen as powerful, dynamic dancers of the Sonda Eisā. Time and time
again members have told me of the pride, the pleasure and the sense of duty that they feel
when they are seen in this way, seen by their friends and family, their ancestral spirits,
Japanese tourists and American spectators.
This confidence is reflected in the equal treatment that they accord to their visitors. Young tourists and aging schoolteachers, native ethnologists and professional performing artists, well-known athletes and television personalities all seem to be given the same consideration. However, this does not seem to be an attempt to flatten social distinction. The courtesies extended to guests in Sonda acknowledge the importance of these visitors. As Iha himself wrote in a collection of essays about eisā: “we dance the eisā holding in our hearts the idea that each one of our viewers is our judge. What’s more, we are committed to show them a performance that will live up to the expectations that they have for the Sonda eisā.”

Without diminishing themselves, dancers acknowledge that their guests possess the skill and knowledge to make valid aesthetic judgements. This is an important element in the construction of the work: it enables the dancers to appropriate their audience in the same way that Kinjō feared that spectators in Taishō-ku would appropriate the performance.

The youth group from neighboring Kubota approached us from the end of the street, pushing through the crowd like an icebreaker. As they moved closer, the sounds of their performance filled the silence that we had created. Finally, they halted when they were no more than ten yards to our front. A space opened between us, and the standard bearers of both groups stepped into the opening, lifting and shaking the huge flags as the crowd roared. Without waiting for Kubota to be completely prepared, our jikata played the opening notes of Chunjun Nagari. Ōrāsē had begun. We all struck our drums in unison—the sound was tremendous. Kubota had also begun, their version of Chunju Nagari echoing seconds behind our own. For a moment, I worried about the distraction of their competing melody, feared being drawn away from our rhythm. But there was no time for that kind of concern—the dance demanded my whole attention. Every moment had to demonstrate pride, poise, perfection.

The crowd was joining us too—long wailing whistles, shouted responses. I glimpsed an elderly man dancing in a doorway, the eisā of decades ago. The responses of the women behind me, sharp and strong. The dancers next to me, behind and in front of me, matching me in every move, perfectly synchronized. How can I describe their expressions—rapturous? I could no longer hear Kubota at all, I couldn’t see anything beyond the front of our formation. There was no time, no space for anything but the dance. The repetitions of
the figures of the dance came effortlessly. I felt as if I was hitting the drum harder than I ever had before, stepping higher, swinging the drum in powerful arcs. We danced through the cycle of songs, then repeated it again.

We all began to push forward. Our columns collapsed until we were all standing shoulder-to-shoulder, beating the drums furiously. Behind us, the men and women dancers moved forward as well, adding their voices and their clapping to the dance. I’d lost all track of Kubota. Their standard bearer and ours circled each other, bobbing and leaping in the space between groups. The tempo increased, the sanshin booming and percussive. We pressed forward, hammering away as if we could physically drive them back with the intensity of our drumming. I was blinded with sweat, my arms ached with the effort. I was beginning to worry that I couldn’t go on any further when I noticed Iha whistling and waving us forward as he danced with the standard. Dancers from both groups set their drums on the ground and leaped into the space between the formations. More and more dancers joined—two first year members rushed past me, one on the other’s shoulders.

The jikata shifted to a different version of the standard Tooshindoĭ—The Chinese Treasure Ship Has Come—moving from the driving, percussive rhythms of eisā to a folk style that showcased their speed and agility. And as quickly as the tempo and the style of the performance changed, the feeling of conflict slipped away. Everyone from Kubota and Sonda came together, men and women, laughing and dancing. Everyone was shouting Kachāshī! Kachāshī! Tourists were being pulled from the crowd into the street. The dancers offered them their drums, demonstrated gestures, drew them into the dance. Many of the tourists hesitated, laughing nervously; others rushed to join in, waving their arms in imitation of kachāshī, the ecstatic dance that ends every performance. Taking up the bachī and the drums that dancers handed to them, they tried to strike up a rhythm of their own.

One of the former leaders of the seinenkai told me that he loved ōrāsē, the chance to put Sonda’s skill and artistry on the line in front of an audience, to confront a rival group and show them exactly what they could do. However, he said that the violence that once went along with ōrāsē ruined the moment. Everyone in Sonda was proud of being tough, he said, but a lot of other people in Okinawa were tough too. However, there wasn’t anyone else who could dance like Sonda. Violence detracted from the performance, diminished their accomplishments. What’s more, it made enemies in the neighboring communities that should have been brought together by the dance. In the current performance of eisā, dancers like Iha have found a way to bring neighbors together while still demonstrating the beauty of their dance.

Once, after a long and demanding practice, I asked several of the older dancers why they still performed. Zukeran Masahide—one of the most active older members and a colorful jikata—answered without hesitation: “We still have to put the world back together.” This is what the dancers work together to create. In the streets where Okinawans have labored for decades, running bars and shops that cater to American G.I.s and Japanese tourists. In the streets lined with faltering businesses, with Naha-based banks and mainland convenience stores, where young men and women from the neighborhood are waitresses and clerks, parking lot attendants and idlers. In the streets that are the lines of
communication for the American bases, where Japanese and American strategic decisions are executed, along which troops and supplies are moved. In the streets where Okinawans once rioted against American oppression, burning vehicles, beating their occupants, storming the gates of the base.

In these streets, the spectators and performers come together, linked in the production of karī. As I have suggested, this is not simply the distribution of good fortune but the creation of a network of relationships that includes the performers, the diverse group of Okinawans and mainland Japanese, the spirits of the dead. In this place, once built by the labor of their ancestors, a moment is created for them once again. Through the beauty of the performance, the stylish self-presentation of the dancers, the pain and sacrifice, the artistry and expressiveness of the dance, ancestral spirits are gathered from their homes and entertained once more. They are given the gift of the eisā before leaving again to return to their tombs, to the other world, to the places where they are believed to dwell until they return again. Memories of every other performance, every other obon are drawn into the constellation—the ancestral spirits are shown that the dance that they worked so hard to create is still vibrant. Eisā is not just repeated without change from year to year, it is transformed to honor the legacy of the past and to meet the demands of the present. This is why the peaceful resolution of the ōrāsē is so important: in the place where there has been war, suffering and death, a struggle can be resolved peacefully, a victory can be won without loss, a conflict can end in friendship.

This is why the presence of outsiders is so critical to the creation of the work. It cannot be that the painful burden of the past is easier to bear in Okinawa City than it is in Osaka. Eisā is danced in fields where battles once raged and where other ways of life were destroyed, in streets that bear the material signs of colonial subjugation, poverty and military occupation, prostitution and menial labor. Before spectators whose class and ethnicity has long dominated the lives of the dancers. And yet, they have found a tremendous resource in other memories, in other formulations of the past. They are able to draw on all of their performances of eisā, on year after year, mile after mile danced in the courtyard of the kōminkan and the streets of Okinawa City; at festivals in Naha and throughout Okinawa; at Expo ’70 in Osaka, in schoolyards, stadiums and television studios across Japan.

All of these memories are brought into a manifold relationship in the present, conjoined to the work that is created by the musicians and dancers. For the duration of the dance, in the moment marked out by the rhythm and artistry of eisā—a hierarchy of relationships is performed as other memories, other histories fade into a moment of oblivion. Building on Ranciere’s observations, the performers make themselves visible, appear before their audience as dancers beautiful and strong, confident and kind. The audience is also constituted in the performance, given an opportunity to be a part of the festival, to join in the dance before them. To be treated as discerning and capable guests, to receive the gift of good fortune. And finally, the spirits of the dead are brought together with them, honored for what they have done, assured that their legacy remains important, given the promise of performances yet to come.

Inevitably, the moment ends. As the duration of the dance comes to a close, the memories that had been kept at bay fill the space and the time that had been cleared for the
performance. The uneasy accommodation that performers maintain between the worker, the *samurai* and the dancer cannot be maintained; the same can be said for the tension between the enthralled spectator, the uneasy visitor to the run-down streets of Koza, the tourist returned from the battlefield, the metropolitan traveler who suddenly realizes that Tokyo is very far away.

As the crowd begins to disperse, we fall into formation once again, laughing and exhausted. Dancing through the darkened streets, we make our way back to the community center. Families return to their homes, tourists to their hotels, the spirits of the dead to wherever it is that they dwell—their tombs, the other world, the island paradise known as *nirai kanai*.

What extends beyond the moment? New images have been produced, old images have been reinvigorated, old practices reappropriated. Representations of the performance circulate in tourist campaigns and commercial advertising, in banal television series and experimental film. A massive banner depicting a powerful dancer in Sonda’s attire was hung as a backdrop at an anti-base rally in Naha. Both the dancers and their audience carry the memories of the performance into their everyday lives; the dancers also bear the physical transformation of their experiences. After years of dancing with the *seinenkai*, two older men have become members of a popular Okinawan musical group that works to fuse traditional and contemporary forms. A young woman has formed a well-known vocal duo. Several members told me that they quit their jobs in local clubs, or distanced themselves from local gangs. Others have built on their experiences to become local politicians—both progressive and conservative—and some have been selected to become municipal bureaucrats. In every case, they have told me that their experience of *eisā* played a critical role in their decision. I have also heard of stories of dancers who quit jobs in the mainland and moved back to Okinawa so that they—or their children—could dance; others refused promotions or transfers so that they could remain active in the group. More common, however, are stories of the traces left in memory: the sense that one is more than who she appears to be in the working world, that alternatives exist to a daily life that is relentlessly commodified and stripped of meaning. The memories of *eisā* are often brought up against daily experience, informing the way that the world is perceived and understood. It is in this space, open to contradiction and question, that other possibilities exist, that new choices are made legible, that the possibilities of transformative action are explored.

At the same time, I do not want to take away from the importance of the moment itself. It seems that practices are too often considered only to expose their reference to other situations, their relationship to other times and places. *Eisā* involves more than acts of resistance to social pressure, a rejection of stigmatized categories of class and gender, a displacement of concerns that cannot be addressed in any other way. *Eisā* should also be understood as subject itself, created and recreated in the coordinated activity of the dancers, their audiences, and the ancestral spirits. Steeped in the forms of the past, yet driven by creative action in the present. An expression of individual and collective artistry, an archive of historical representations, and a source of strength and renewal. A determination to define themselves—as men and women, as artists, as Okinawans—on their own terms.
I learned a great deal in my years working with the Sonda Seinenkai; and yet, there are so many things that I will never know or fully understand. However, I do understand the courage that allows one to appropriate rather than fear the judgment and expectations of others, to put aside the repressiveness of everyday life, the restrictions of gender and class, the constant pressures of labor, fatigue and boredom. I understand the courage to act and to create—I have seen it in the streets of Koza.

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Notes

1 Here I am thinking of Judith Butler’s recent work on melancholy and the constitutive role that the internalization of loss has in the construction of the self. While I find Butler’s argument about the repression of the originary experience of homosexual desire compelling, I would like to broaden this category of melancholy objects to include other forms of internalized historical experience. See Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identifications” in The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection, 132-150.


3 The Okinawan bases do continue to generate revenue in the form of payments made to landowners who either voluntarily lease their land to the Japanese government or are compelled to do so. This land is then provided for use by American military forces.

4 Like the hansen jinushi [antiwar landlords] who testified at the prefectural hearing, many of the residents of Sonda continue to own land within the US bases; however, like most Okinawan landowners, very few are active in oppositional organizations such as the hansen jinushi.

5 Young men and women spend a great deal of time together, but rehearsals are controlled and there is little free time. Occasionally relationships emerge, and a number of couples that I know have married. Many others date people from work or school with no connection to the seinenkai. Surprisingly, there seem to be few relationships with the admiring mainland visitors who attend rehearsals and performances.

6 Although women have danced in the seinenkai for decades, they have never become drummers or sanshin musicians. While local women professed to be content with this,
several complained that it was difficult for women to socialize at the community center once they stop performing.

7 *The Ballad of the Southern Grove, The Chunjun River Flows,* and *Kudaka Island,* respectively.


10 Iha Masakazu, “Kandō o Hada de Shiru,” in *Eisā 360°: Rekishi to Genzai.* 306.
Much Ado over Small Islands: The Sino-Japanese Confrontation over Senkaku/Diaoyu
Gavan McCormack
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Gavan-McCormack/3947
May 27, 2013.

Gavan McCormack closes this course reader with an article that highlights the geostrategic centrality of Okinawa by providing an overview of the currently raging dispute between China and Japan over overlapping claims to a peripheral set of uninhabited islands in “peripheral” Okinawa. The dispute has become so heated that it has generated fears that it could precipitate war between the two countries. As McCormack's insightful analysis makes clear, the issues involved grow out of the historical processes associated with the decline of the Ryukyu Kingdom and Okinawa's incorporation into the modern Japanese state. His discussion covers the actions of the national governments of Japan, China, Taiwan and the United States, and brings clarity to the dispute by detailing how differently the Senkaku issue is framed and conceived in the countries involved. It serves as an excellent illustration of how, thanks to its location, Okinawa’s fate in the twenty-first century remains subject to the interplay of the larger powers active in the region, against which it remains relatively powerless.
Much Ado over Small Islands: The Sino-Japanese Confrontation over Senkaku/Diaoyu

Gavan McCormack

More than six decades from the San Francisco Treaty that purportedly resolved the Asia-Pacific War and created a system of peace, East Asia in 2013 remains troubled by the question of sovereignty over a group of tiny, uninhabited islands. The governments of Japan, China, and Taiwan all covet and claim sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

These tiny islands, together with other scattered outcroppings across the Western Pacific, assume today some of the weight that attached almost a century ago to the vast domain of Northeast China (“Manchuria”), with comparable potential to plunge the region into conflict. If the countries of the region are to transcend the 19th and 20th century eras of Japanese imperialism and US Cold War hegemony and construct a 21st century of peace, cooperation, and prosperity, the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue must somehow first be addressed.

1. The Long View

The islands known in Japanese as Senkaku and in Chinese as Diaoyu are little more than rocks in the ocean, but they are rocks on which there is a real prospect of peace and cooperation in the region foundering. It is a problem that I first addressed just over 40 years ago, and on which I have published other occasional essays more recently.

The Senkaku/Diaoyu problem calls to mind the research on which I once engaged on the “Manchurian problem,” which also arose over how to draw a line dividing “our” from “your” territory, a life-line that absolutely had to be protected. Because the line early 20th century Japan then drew was unacceptable to China, the dispute over it led in due course to the catastrophe of war. “Senkaku” is of course not to be compared to the vast domains that were then at stake in “Manchuria,” but its importance far outweighs its barren and unpopulated rocks and focuses similarly passionate, uncompromising sentiment.

While economic integration in East Asia proceeds by leaps and bounds and popular culture flows freely, the region has little sense of shared history, identity or direction and it is still framed by the security architecture of the Cold War. The difficulty is compounded by the process of gradual, but fundamental, shift in the power balance that prevailed throughout the 20th century. China rises and Japan declines, a phenomenon that may be encapsulated in a single set of statistics. The Japan that as proportion of global GDP was 15 per cent in 1990 fell below 10 per cent in 2008 and has been projected to fall to 6 per cent in 2030 and 3.2 per cent in 2060, while the China that was 2 per cent in 1990 is predicted to reach 25 per cent in 2030 and 27.8 per cent in 2060. It is that shift in relative weight, perhaps more than anything that disturbs Japan. Islands that in themselves are trivial come to carry heavy symbolic weight.

In the long historical perspective, it is possible to view the past millennium in Asia as a sequence of more-or-less hegemonic orders: the Pax Mongolica (1206 to 1368), the Chinese “Tribute” system or Pax Sinica of Ming and Qing dynasties (1368 to 1911), the short-lived Pax Nipponica (roughly 1931 to 1945), and the still-continuing Pax Americana (born with US victory in the Asia-Pacific War and enshrined with the San Francisco Treaty in
effect from 1952). The last of these, however, entering upon its seventh decade shows signs of severe strain, not least because China is too great and too tied to all the major US alliance parties to be excluded or contained. President Obama may yet succeed in renewing and reinforcing the fabric of Pax Americana alliances, and thereby in maintaining its military and political pre-eminence under the Pacific Tilt doctrine declared early in 2012, but a very different possibility is occasionally to be glimpsed: a post-hegemonic order, a concert of states or commonwealth, a Pax Asia.

Looking towards such a future, then Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo agreed with China’s president Hu Jintao at their summit meeting in February 2008 that the East China Sea should be made a “Sea of Peace, Cooperation and Friendship,” and at the bilateral summit in September, 2009, a year and a half later, Hatoyama Yukio proposed that it be transformed into a “Sea of Fraternity” (Yūai no umi), to which Hu is said to have responded positively. Three months later, in the heyday of the newly elected Democratic Party government in Japan, Ozawa Ichirō led a 600-strong, semi-official friendship mission to Beijing. That moment was the high point of a mood of empathetic cooperation. It pointed to a possible way forward, one in which sovereignty issues would be shelved and the development of resources resolved cooperatively (as indeed foreshadowed by several agreements reached and to some extent implemented during the early 21st century years), evolving gradually into some kind of regional community. The mood did not last long, however, and by 2013 it seemed an age away.

2. What are These Islands and What is Their Significance?

The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands group comprises basically five uninhabited islands, more correctly islets (plus several even smaller outcrops), known respectively under their Japanese and Chinese names as Uotsuri/Diaoyudao, Kita Kojima/Bei Xiaodao, Minami Kojima/Nan Xiaodao, Kuba/Huangwei and Taishō/Chiwei. The largest (Uotsuri/Diaoyu; literally “Fish-catch” in Japanese, “Catch-fish” in Chinese) is 4.3 square kilometres and the total area of all five just 6.3 square kilometres. The islands are spread over a wide area of sea, about 27 kilometres separating the core cluster of three islands (Uotsuri, Kita Kojima and Minami Kojima) from Kuba, and about 110 from Taishō. They are located in relatively shallow waters at the edge of the Chinese continental shelf, 330 kilometres east of the China mainland coast, 170 kilometres northeast of Taiwan, and about the same distance
north of Yonaguni (or Ishigaki) islands in the Okinawa group, separated from the main Okinawan islands by a deep (maximum 2,940 metres) underwater trench known as the “Okinawa Trough” or in China as the “Sino-Ryukyu Trough.”

Chinese documents from the 14th century record and name the islands as important navigational points on the maritime route between coastal China (Foochow) and the Ryukyu kingdom capital at Shuri, especially necessary for tribute missions during Ming and Qing dynasties. China sent the Ryukyu kingdom ten such missions and Ryukyu dispatched 281 to the Chinese court in return between the 16th and 19th centuries. Ryukyuan ships heading farther afield, on trading missions to Southeast Asia, also almost certainly used this same route. Ownership, however, did not greatly concern anyone. The European state system with its Westphalian notions of sovereignty was an alien concept. It appears that nobody actually settled there.

Two late 19th century developments wrought decisive change. In 1879 the Meiji government forcibly extinguished the Ryukyu kingdom's residual sovereignty (building upon the partial subjection accomplished by Satsuma following its invasion in 1609) and incorporated the Ryukyus (as Okinawa) within the Japanese state, unilaterally severing the Ryukyu's membership in the Beijing-centred tribute system and bringing the modern, imperialist state system that would replace it closer to Senkaku/Diaoyu.

As China protested the Japanese state's encroachments in the East China Sea, US president Grant played a role in attempting to mediate a Sino-Japanese settlement. What Japan most sought, however, was a comprehensive revision of the China-Japan Treaty that opened relations between the two countries in 1871. It wanted the same unequal treaty rights (“most favoured nation” status) in mainland China as were enjoyed by the established imperialist powers. In return it offered to split the Ryukyus: ceding the south-western islands of Miyako and the Yaeyama's to China. China countered with a proposal for a three way split: the northern islands, including Amami, to Meiji Japan, the main island of Okinawa to become independent under a restored Ryukyu/Okinawa king, and the southwest islands ceded to China. Both proposals agreed that the Miyako and Yaeyama island groups, that is to say the Okinawan islands closest to the Senkaku/Diaoyu's, should be China’s. A treaty in line with the Chinese proposal was drawn up early in 1881 but not actually adopted because of opposition at high levels within the Chinese government. Then pre-eminent Chinese leader Li Hongjiang is said to have objected that “Ryukyu is neither Chinese nor Japanese territory, but a sovereign state.” When China, one hundred and thirty-two years later, protested that there had never been an agreement between the two countries on the status of Okinawa, and urging that it be the subject of discussions, Japan and Okinawa itself were shocked, but it was stating a simple historical fact.

The unilateral assimilation to Japan of Ryukyu as Okinawa in 1879 in no way affected the status of the tiny Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. But just five years later, in 1884, a Japanese merchant, Koga Tatsushirō, settled on Senkaku. Initiating a business in collecting albatross feathers and tortoise shells, he submitted a claim through the newly established Okinawa prefecture to have them declared Japanese territory on grounds of being unclaimed and unoccupied.
In other words, Koga’s 1884 Senkaku application related to territory that was of such little import to Japan that it had been ready just years earlier to cede it (and much more) to China as part of a frontier grand bargain. The Meiji government in Tokyo delayed a decision on this matter for a full ten years, fearful of rousing China’s suspicions at a time when it worried that China might enjoy naval supremacy. That anxiety only eased following the major battles in which it decisively defeated Qing China in the Sino-Japanese War, whereupon the Japanese cabinet resolved in January 1895 to accept the Koga proposal. Japan annexed two of the islands (Uotsuri and Kuba), as part of Yaeyama County, Okinawa prefecture. It then (1896) leased four (Uotsuri, Kota Kojima, Minami Kojima, and Kuba) to Koga on a thirty year, fee-less, basis, adopted the name “Senkaku Islands” (in 1900) as a translation of the name “Pinnacle Rocks” found on British naval charts, and in 1926 converted the four island lease to a freehold grant to the Koga family.\textsuperscript{13} The fifth island, Taisho/Chiwei, was never part of the Koga family domain, but was simply claimed by the Government of Japan in 1921.

The Japanese annexation was a diplomatic secret, not published until many years later in the post-war compilations of Japanese diplomatic records, and the “markers” authorized by the 1895 cabinet resolution were not actually set up on the islands until May 1969.\textsuperscript{14}

Through the Japanese empire in East Asia from 1895, Koga maintained his business, expanding it to employ perhaps as many as 248 people (99 households) by around 1910,\textsuperscript{15} catching, drying, processing, and canning fish, only withdrawing around 1940, abandoning the islands under the shadow of war.

Asia then had much greater questions to worry about, and Senkaku was of interest to no one. In the immediate post-war years Japan’s Foreign Ministry made only brief reference to them, dismissing them as “uninhabited and of little importance.”\textsuperscript{16} China (Beijing)’s Foreign Ministry seems also to have had no interest in them. In a draft paper prepared in 1950, soon after the Chinese Communist party came to power, it referred simply to the islands by their Japanese name as “part of Okinawa.”\textsuperscript{17} Some doubt must remain on the status of this proposal until the actual document is published, but had it been implemented, and had Beijing actually been invited to San Francisco, such a stance might at least have informed the comprehensive discussions on territory that would have followed.

The question of Okinawa itself, raised by China in 2013 as still problematic and needing to be addressed in some arrangement between the two countries, was also seen as moot by US President Franklin Roosevelt. In 1943, he considered China’s claim to the Okinawan islands as a whole so strong that he twice asked Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek whether he would like to take possession of them in the eventual post-war settlement.\textsuperscript{18} Chiang, in a decision he is said to have later deeply regretted, declined.

In administering the Ryukyus from 1951 to 72, the US also assumed control of seas that included the Senkakus.\textsuperscript{19} However, in the negotiations over Okinawan reversion (1969-1972) it drew a line between the different sectors, transferring to Japan sovereignty over Ryukyu but only administrative control over Senkaku. Sovereignty was left unresolved, in implicit admission that the islands might be subject to competing claims. The United States has held strictly to that position to this day.
Why then, did the US split Senkaku from Ryukyu in 1972? Hara Kimie, Toyoshita Narahiko, and others, attribute the decision to Machiavellian US design. They believe it was explicit and deliberate. According to Hara, the US understood that the islands would function as a “wedge of containment” of China and that a “territorial dispute between Japan and China, especially over islands near Okinawa, would render the US military presence in Okinawa more acceptable to Japan.”⁴⁰ According to Toyoshita, the US took a deliberately “vague” (aimai) attitude over territorial boundaries,⁴¹ sowing the seeds or sparks (hidane) of territorial conflict between China and Japan, and thereby ensuring Japan’s long-term dependence on the US and justifying the US base presence.⁴² For both, the implication is clear: the Senkaku/Diaoyu problem of today is the consequence of a US policy decision. Though conscious intent is necessarily difficult to prove, their hypothesis certainly offers a plausible explanation for the US shift of position.

The vague and unresolved “wedge/spark” formula of Senkaku/Diaoyu ownership, by ensuring ongoing friction in the Japan-China relationship also served as one of a set of keys locking Japan in place as a client or US-dependent state.⁴³

The Senkaku/Diaoyu “problem” as it came to be known arose in the context of simultaneous developments at this time: the US shift of its position (marked most dramatically by the Nixon-led rapprochement with China), the sudden realization on all sides, following an ECAFE report on its 1968 investigation, that island ownership rights might carry potentially valuable resource rights to a sector of the East China Sea believed to be “the last remaining, richest, as yet unexploited depository of oil and natural gas,” the lodging of claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu group by both Japan on the one hand and ROC and PRC on the other; and the stirring of a significant international overseas Chinese movement to support the Chinese demand.⁴⁴

3. The Shelf, 1972-2010

Subsequently, Japan and China paid attention to Senkaku/Diaoyu on two key occasions, in 1972 and 1978. When Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei raised the question to Chinese premier Zhou Enlai on the former occasion, Zhou replied that the matter should be shelved as opening it would complicate and delay the normalization process.⁴⁵ Six years later, in Japan to negotiate a Peace and Friendship Treaty, Deng Xiaoping reiterated this “shelving” formula, preferring to leave it to “the next generation” to find sufficient wisdom to resolve it.⁴⁶ For roughly 40 years a modus vivendi held: though occasional landings (by Chinese activists from a Hong Kong base and by Japanese rightists sailing from ports in Okinawa) took place, the two governments tacitly cooperated to prevent them.⁴⁷

Today, the Japanese Foreign Ministry adopts the improbable position that there was no such “shelving” arrangement.⁴⁸ While it seems clear there was no formal diplomatic document to such effect, however, the exchanges recorded above were not trivial. What seems likely is that both sides stated their respective positions but chose to avoid formal negotiations which might have delayed general settlement.⁴⁹

One prominent Japanese scholar now accuses the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of “inexcusable and outrageous” behaviour in having altered the Minutes of the Tanaka-Zhou
meeting of 1972 and “burned and destroyed” those of the Sonoda-Deng meeting of 1978 lest either yield evidence prejudicial to the official case of undisputed Japanese sovereignty. In light of the recent revelation of the trashing of a vast cache of Foreign Ministry materials on the eve of Freedom of Information rules being introduced in 2001, Yabuki’s allegation cannot simply be dismissed.

In two decisive steps, however, in 2010 and 2012, Japan moved to ensure that the shelf never be put back. In 2010, the Democratic Party of Japan’s government arrested the Chinese captain of a fishing ship in waters off Senkaku, insisting that there was “no room for doubt” that the islands were an integral part of Japanese territory, that there was no territorial dispute or diplomatic issue, and the Chinese vessel was simply in breach of Japanese law (interfering with officials conducting their duties). The fierce Chinese response caused Japan to back down and release the captain without pressing charges, but Japanese resolve hardened and China appears to have concluded that Japan had determined to set aside the “shelving” agreement. Mutual antagonism deepened steadily thereafter.

From China’s viewpoint, it was striking that Japan concentrated its diplomatic effort not on resolving a bilateral dispute over borders but on widening it to a security matter involving the United States, attaching its highest priority to securing an assurance from the US government that the islands were subject to Article 5 of the US-Japan Security Treaty, the clause that authorizes the US to protect Japan in the case of an armed attack “in territories under the administration of Japan.” U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accepted that position in October 2010, and in due course, under strong Japanese prompting, it was entered into the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2013 and approved by the Senate on 29 November 2012.

That is to say the US continued to acknowledge the “administration of Japan over the Senkaku Islands” but took no position on the question of sovereignty. Although much was made of this, there was “nothing new” in it. It means that, while the United States had no view on which country should own the islands, or even what they should be called, it was ready to go to war to defend Japan’s claim to them. It is a position that Henry Kissinger (in April 1971) described as “nonsense.”

As the confrontation intensified, the left-right political divide in Japan dissolved into an “all Japan” front, with a broad national consensus supporting the Japanese official story of its Senkaku rights, protesting China’s threat to Japan’s sovereign territory and insisting there was no dispute and that the security alliance with the US covered defence of the islands against any China challenge.

If September 2010 marked “shelf down,” in April 2012 it was as if the shelf supports were removed too. Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintaro announced to a conservative American think-tank audience in Washington, D.C. that his city was negotiating to buy the three privately owned islets of Uotsuri, Kita Kojima and Minami Kojima, in order, he said, to clarify public, Japanese governmental jurisdiction and remove any possible challenge to their sovereignty by China or Taiwan. His announcement – coupled with his calculated abuse of China (or “Shina,” the insulting, wartime appellation Ishihara deliberately chose to employ) - stirred a diplomatic storm.
Ishihara's Tokyo Metropolitan Government began distributing a poster featuring a photograph of the three islets that it was concerned with and the message calling for the "courage" to say, "Japan's islands are Japan's territory." It also published an advertisement in the Wall Street Journal asking for US support for its island purchasing plan, pointedly noting that the islands were "of indispensable geostrategic importance to US force projection," leaving no room for doubt as to the direction in which the United States should project its force.

The summer of 2012 in East Asia was hot. Rival groups of activists challenged each other with acts of bravado. Vessels under various flags and representing various claims over the islands made or attempted to make visits, ratcheting up tension.

On 7 July, 75th anniversary of Japan's launch of all-out war on China, Prime Minister Noda adopted the Ishihara cause and declared the national government would buy and "nationalize" the islands. Later that same month he declared his readiness to deploy the Self-Defence Forces to defend them, and in September he formally purchased them (for 20.5 billion yen, or ca. $26 million) and "nationalized" them, declaring to the UN General Assembly that the islands were "intrinsic Japanese territory," over which there was no dispute and could be no negotiation.

Protest demonstrations followed in Hong Kong and cities and towns across China – cars were overturned, Japanese restaurant windows smashed, Japanese goods trashed, and exchanges of tour groups, students, and businesses suspended.

4. Abe - "Taking Back"

Abe Shinzō campaigned for the December 2012 lower house election under the overall slogan of "taking back the country." He pledged not to yield one millimetre of Japan's "inherent" territory of Senkaku, a matter on which there was no dispute, no room for discussion or negotiation. He wrote:

"What is called for in the Senkaku vicinity is not negotiation but physical force incapable of being misunderstood."

Abe's close friend, education minister Shimomura Hakubun, was equally forthright. He referred to Senkaku as having been "stolen away" (an odd formulation when effective control was plainly in Japan's hands).

"Right now," he went on, "Japan is not functioning as a nation. ... The 67 years since the end of World War II have been a history of Japan's destruction. Now is our only chance to remake the country."

Shimomura, and presumably the Abe government, evidently believed that to stand up to and refuse to negotiate with China was to "remake" Japan. When former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio challenged the government (while on a visit to Beijing), saying,

"But if you look at history, there is a dispute ... If you keep saying, 'There is no territorial dispute,' you will never get an answer;"
Abe’s Defense Minister, Onodera Itsunori, branded him a traitor (kokuzoku). The intransigent language of Japanese governments in 2013 was reminiscent of 1937, when Japan’s then leader, Konoe Fumimaro ruled out negotiations with China’s Chiang Kai-shek in the fateful months leading to full-scale war with China, and when the national media was similarly self-righteous and dismissive of China’s “unreasonableness” and “provocation.” To China it looked as though Japan was actively collaborating in construction of a militarized Maritime Great Wall of China to block its access to the Pacific Ocean. In April Diaoyu was for the first time declared a “core interest,” and in May the People’s Daily added that the status of Okinawa itself had to be negotiated.

However, the high-risk associated with the policies and initiatives declared by the new Abe government evidently alarmed Washington. When US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio at their meeting in Washington in January 2013 that there was indeed a dispute and that Japan should sit down with China to negotiate it, it was in effect a rebuke. Although Abe subsequently moderated his language and policy, when he visited Washington in late February 2013, he was given neither dinner nor even a joint press conference, having to satisfy himself with a perfunctory lunch with the president. Furthermore, the Joint Communique made no reference to what he most sought: US backing for the Japanese claim to sovereignty over Senkaku/Diaoyu. Instead it was devoted entirely to a single issue, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, Washington’s primary agenda. By insisting that he “would not act rashly” over the dispute, Abe appeared to be striving to dampen fears that that was precisely how the White House suspected he might act. There was a plaintive note to the press conference at which he stood alone to declare the alliance strengthened. He was more at ease in front of the “Japan handlers” at the Center for Security and international Studies (CSIS) later that day declaring that “Japan is back,” by which he was understood to mean that its obedience to Washington directives on the construction of the new base at Henoko on Okinawa was unquestioned, the TPP accepted and base reorganization his greatest priority. Concern that Abe’s neo-nationalist and historical revisionist (rejecting “the narrative of imperial Japanese...
aggression and victimization of other Asians”) agenda might be “divisive” and “could hurt U.S. interests” spread in Washington (and throughout the US media).

5. Intrinsic National Territory

The Japanese Senkaku claim rests on three fundamental assertions: that the islands, though annexed in 1895 just after China’s defeat in war and three months prior to the Treaty of Shimonoseki by which Taiwan and other islands were specifically ceded to Japan, were not “war spoils,” (or “stolen territories” in the words of the 1943 Cairo Agreement) but terra nullius, territory un-owned and unclaimed by any other country; that the Japanese occupation had been unchallenged between the act of annexation in 1895 and the publication of the ECAFE report in 1968, for at least 70 years; and that the islands were in some almost metaphysical sense Japan’s intrinsic, inalienable territory, what it called koyū no ryōdo, a fundamental sector of the Ryukyu Islands. What for one purpose was abandoned and un-owned becomes for another Japan’s absolute and inalienable territory.

As to the first claim, based on terra nullius, such a claim is of dubious merit today, if only for the reason that it harkens back to the time when imperialist countries divided up the world at their will. It has in some cases, notably Australia, has been judicially overruled at the highest court level. It stretches credulity today to argue that the Japanese annexation was justified on the terra nullius principle and was therefore unrelated to the victory it had just seized over China in war and more broadly to the military and diplomatic advantage Japan enjoyed in the context of its rise and China’s decline as the wave of high imperialism washed across East Asia. From China’s viewpoint, a single line may be drawn from Ryukyu (1879), Senkaku (1895), Taiwan (1895), to Dongbei or “Manchuria” (1931). The People’s Daily in May 2013 drew precisely such a line.

The prefix “koyū no ryōdo” (“intrinsic” or “inalienable” national territory), attaches now almost inevitably to any reference to “Senkaku Islands,” implying at least that they had long been “part” of the Ryukyu islands. Yet that is a dubious proposition since they were not part of Ryukyu’s “36 islands” in pre-modern times nor when the prefecture was established in 1879, but were tacked on to it 16 years later. It is also an ironic appellation for islands unknown in Japan till the late 19th century, then identified from British naval references, not declared Japanese till 1895 or named until 1900, for which neither name nor Japanese claim was revealed until 1952. Furthermore, what were annexed in 1895 were two islands, Uotsuri and Kuba. Two others were added in the leasehold arrangements established in 1896, and one more in 1921. When the Government of Japan “nationalized” the “Senkakus” in 2012, it acted in relation of its rise and China’s decline as the wave of high imperialism washed across East Asia. From China’s viewpoint, a single line may be drawn from Ryukyu (1879), Senkaku (1895), Taiwan (1895), to Dongbei or “Manchuria” (1931). The People’s Daily in May 2013 drew precisely such a line.

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It means that, however outspoken and bold they may be to address China, and however adamant on Japan’s “inherent” ownership rights, courage deserts Japan’s leaders when facing the United States. Long-term US military occupations of what they claimed to be “intrinsic” territory simply do not matter. Whatever “koyū” means, it is not inconsistent with occupancy by another country, even if that other country should choose to bomb such islands to smithereens, so long as that “other country” is the United States.

The word “koyū” (Chinese: “guyou”) has no precise English translation and the concept is unknown in international law and foreign to discourse on national territory in much, if not most, of the world. The concept seems to have been invented in Japan around 1970, along with the term Hoppō Ryōdo (Northern Territories) as part of the effort to reinforce linguistically Japan’s claim to what had been known as the Southern Kurile Islands. It was subsequently adopted to underline the Japanese claim to Takeshima (Dokdo) against South Korea, and then to the Senkaku islands (against China and Taiwan). However, in due course Japan’s rhetorical device to make its own case seem beyond dispute was adopted by all parties (including China and Korea), making the claims absolute and unnegotiable, and thereby obscuring one of the lessons of modern world history: that borders are rarely absolute or sacrosanct, as shown by the example of Germany sacrificing most of its Prussian heartland in 1945 but then emerging, reinforced, at the centre of Europe.

Furthermore, being a rhetorical rather than scientific term, the word “koyū” whose linguistic sense is “intrinsic” or “unequivocal,” in practice has been given an opposite meaning, territories that tended to be marginal and inferior, susceptible of being abandoned or traded away by the “mainland” if the interests of the “koyū hondo” (intrinsic mainland) core require it. Thus, Japan’s readiness (mentioned above) to trade the Miyako and Yaeyama island groups in 1880 as part of a frontier grand bargain. Likewise, too, when facing a survival crisis in the summer of 1945 the Japanese mission to sue for peace headed by Konoe Fumimaro (three times former Prime Minister), carried instructions issuing from the emperor himself to ensure the “preservation of the national polity” (i.e., the emperor-centred system), in which it was taken for granted that Japan would not only lose all its colonies but be reduced to “abandoning Okinawa, Ogasawara and Karafuto (Sakhalin) and having to be satisfied with a “koyū hondo” consisting just of the four islands of Honshu, Shikoku, Hokkaido and Kyushu.”

The Miyako and the Yaeyama Islands could be traded away in 1880, and Okinawa itself could be sacrificed to protect the interests of “Japan proper” and save the national polity in 1945, showed that frontier territories, whether or not graced with the title of “intrinsic,” in fact ranked low in national policy. Nowhere ranked lower than Senkaku, the periphery of Japan’s periphery.

As to the second, there is a disingenuous quality to the Japanese position that China’s silence on the Japanese occupation of the islands until 1970 could be construed as consent. International law offered no system to which aggrieved colonial or semi-colonial countries could appeal and no such recourse was open to China - whether the Republic (whose capital moved from Nanjing to Taiwan in 1949) or the People’s Republic (from 1949) - until the time it was actually shown, when the withdrawal of US forces from Okinawa became imminent and focussed attention on what was and what was not “Okinawa” and to whom it
should be “returned.” Normalcy” with Japan was not accomplished for China until 1972, which also happened to be the year that the US returned administrative authority over the Senkakus to Japan. From then, the Chinese protest was plain.

6. China’s claim

The Chinese claim (People's Republic and Republic alike) to Diaoyu rests on history (the records of the Ming and Qing dynasties) and geography (the continental shelf and the deep gulf that sets the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands apart from the Ryukyu island chain). For both, the islands are an integral part of Taiwan’s territory and the fact that they were appropriated by Japan as part of the violent processes of the Sino-Japanese War, and should therefore have been returned to China under the Potsdam Agreement, is plain.

There are two further, increasingly important angles, rooted in contemporary geopolitics. One is the inequity in the hand China is bequeathed by its forbears because they did not establish a chain of island colonial and dependent territories like the other powers of the early modern and modern world and for that reason China gains virtually nothing from the huge distribution of global marine resources carried out under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) while the former colonial powers have been richly rewarded.

While global attention concentrates on the supposed grab for ocean and resources being carried out by China in the East and South China Seas, the far greater claims by the club of advanced countries, mostly former imperialist and colonial powers, have for the most part
escaped attention. The great beneficiaries have been the US, UK, France, together with Australia, New Zealand and Russia, followed closely by Japan, whose claims as a maritime great power, with or without Senkaku/Diaoyu, grow rapidly in significance. Discoveries of methane hydrates, rare earths, and precious and industrial metals in significant quantities in its various ocean domains (including claimed but contested ones other than Senkaku/Diaoyu) make it a potential maritime superpower. In terms of ocean domains Japan ranks at No 9, controlling five times as great an ocean area as China, while China, at No. 31, ranks just between The Maldives and Somalia. China “played no part in the 19th and 20th century processes of dividing up the Pacific land territories and plays none now in dividing up its ocean.” The very fact that China is such a minor player in global terms in its claims on world oceans might reinforce its determination not to yield in the spaces, such as Senkaku/Diaoyu, where it does have a claim. As Peter Nolan notes (his reference here to South China Sea may be extended to East China Sea),

“The West’s preoccupation with Beijing’s involvement in the South China Sea contrasts sharply with the complete absence of discussion of the West’s vast exclusive economic zones in the region. The former imperial powers’ acquisition of control over vast marine territories and resources through UNCLOS has received negligible attention other than in specialist legal journals, yet it eclipses by some distance the area and resources that are in contention in the South China Sea.”

Furthermore, the Chinese desire for “normalcy” as a global power, able to project its naval weight and to protect its maritime interests in the same way other powers take for granted, is seriously disadvantaged by lack of any undisputed access to the Pacific Ocean. From its perspective, the gateways to the Pacific lie in the north through the Sōya Strait between Sakhalin and Hokkaido, Tsugaru Strait between Hokkaido and Honshu, and in the south through the Ōsumi Strait between Kagoshima and Tanegashima or the Miyako Strait between Okinawa (main) Island and Miyako Island. Further south lies the Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines. Japan resents the Chinese Navy’s passage through such passages, notably the Osumi and Miyako Straits, but from the Chinese viewpoint, the long chain of Japanese controlled islands looks like nothing so much as a maritime great wall, and the moves to militarize the sectors till now neglected (especially between Okinawa Island and Taiwan) stir rising Chinese concern.

The spectrum of thinking in Chinese society may be much less monolithic than commonly assumed. Although anti-Japan sentiment in China is undoubtedly subject to some manipulation by government, distrust of Japan rests on an accumulation of unresolved grievances from the more than a century of modern history, and it is likely to be even stronger at the popular than at the government level.

In general, China and Taiwan are united in their stance on Senkaku/Diaoyu matters, but it is to be noted that a Japan-Taiwan fisheries agreement was concluded in 2013 (after 17 years of talks) under which Taiwanese fishermen would have right to fish in certain specified waters adjacent to Senkaku/Diaoyu, if not in near coastal waters. It may be seen as a smart Japanese diplomatic gesture to split Beijing and Taipei, and thus to ease the pressure from hostile confrontation on all its frontiers. It presumably means that the Taiwan coastguard will no longer confront Japanese forces with hostile intent. The deal
made no reference to territorial issues but Beijing objected, and whether it will hold
remains to be seen.\textsuperscript{69}

Kyoto University’s Inoue Kiyoshi made the point forty years ago that, “Even though the
[Senkaku] islands were not wrested from China under a treaty, they were grabbed from it
by stealth, without treaty or negotiations, taking advantage of victory in war.”\textsuperscript{70} It is a
judgement confirmed in 2012 from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum by The
Economist, which wrote: “Whatever the legality of Japan’s claim to the islands, its roots lie
in brutal empire-building.”\textsuperscript{71}

7. The Okinawan Perspective

Okinawans are aware in the depths of their bones that contest over sovereignty, in their
regional waters, threatens them. The more the national security agenda as defined in Tokyo
and Washington advances, the more insecure they become. War for the defence of Senkaku
would be a “re-run of the battle of the Second World war, with us, Okinawans, the victims,”
as Hiyane Teruo of the University of the Ryukyus puts it.\textsuperscript{72}

Okinawan Senkaku thinking is characterized by five things: the claim of a long and close
connection; the agency of civil society rather than government; the orientation towards an
inclusive and regional cooperative rather than exclusive solution; the opposition to
militarization (Okinawans in 1945 learned the bitter lesson that armies do not defend
people, and are therefore disinclined to believe in any defence of the Senkaku that rests on
militarizing them and embedding them in hostile confrontation with China); and (by
contrast with the rest of Japan) a long historical memory of friendly relations with China.

Some now talk of an Okinawa-centred “livelihood zone” or (a proposal originating in
Taiwan) of a “Minjian East Asia Forum.” Proponents of such agendas avoid the language of
“inherent territory” or exclusive claims to oil or gas resources, prefer instead to talk of
community, open borders and priority to the local over the nation state. For them,
“livelihood zone” replaces “koyū no ryōdo.” Naturally, they oppose military interventions
and force-based positions. They are the antithesis of the Tokyo-centred “inherent”
(national) territory. They believe the focus on “sovereignty” has to be widened to open a
perspective of “spheres of border interaction,” “substantive spheres for neighbouring
countries,” and a Northeast Asian “demilitarized zone.”\textsuperscript{73}

The challenge is especially critical for Okinawa because it has focussed so much of its social
energy over decades on the struggle against a militarization and base dependence, which
the Japanese state and mainland media justify by reference to “China threat.” The Japanese
national bureaucracy in Tokyo and its American patrons who pursue the agenda of
Okinawan base reinforcement as part of military confrontation with China naturally hope
that a sense of threatened “national” interest would serve to soften Okinawan opposition to
the base agenda. The adoption of unanimous resolutions by the Okinawan Prefectural
Assembly and the City Assemblies of Miyako and Ishigaki (geographically closest to
Senkaku) affirming that the Senkaku islands did indeed “belong to Japan” and calling for
Japan to be resolute (kizentaru) in defending them indicted that “national security”
considerations were indeed becoming important considerations in Okinawan base politics.
When the People’s Daily in May 2013 suggested Okinawa’s status needed to be re-
negotiated, the Okinawan people’s movement saw it as a blow, fearing that, whatever the Chinese intent, any such campaign would be bound to weaken their movement.\textsuperscript{74}

8. Conclusion

Where the Japanese case for exclusive entitlement to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is strong on a strict reading of international law, China’s is strong on grounds of history and geography. Its insistence that the frame for thinking of the problem include not just an antiseptic “international law” but the record of colonialism, imperialism, and war also has a moral quality.

There are no tribunals to adjudicate on such conflicting claims and, despite the assumption that there has to be a “right” answer, international law is no set of abstract and transcendent principles but an evolving expression of global power relations, reflecting at any one time the interests of dominant global powers.\textsuperscript{75} None of the state parties (Japan, China, Taiwan) is likely to submit to any formula that holds the possibility of a zero outcome. So, even though there are no residents of these islands with rights to be protected and in that sense resolution should not be so difficult, and despite the large economic interests shared by China and Japan, recourse to international law arbitration is highly unlikely.

Forty-five years after ECAFE’s report that raised the prospect of an oil and gas bonanza, no resource has been confirmed. The surrounding waters may or may not be rich in hydrocarbons but, even if they are, for one party to exploit them in the face of hostility of the other would be risky in the extreme. And if, for example Japan were to successfully to extract some resource, to attempt then to transport it across the Ryukyu Trench to Japanese markets would also be forbiddingly difficult and expensive, rather like transporting Middle Eastern oil over the Himalayas to Japan, while transport from the edge of the continental shelf to markets in eastern China on the other hand would present little problem.\textsuperscript{76} Quite apart from political considerations, the immense technical difficulty and risk involved therefore makes the cooperation of multiple governments and financial groups highly desirable.

For Japan, Senkaku/Diaoyu becomes a key element in the definition of a role in the region and the world: a regional state concentrating on building a cooperative order or a US client state cooperating in building a structure of containment of China, even while fearful the US might one day shift its Asian core interest from Japan to China – the trauma of the Nixon shocks remaining deep in the Japanese consciousness. The US “Client State” is bold towards China and craven towards the United States. To be able to set aside the deception and sophistry over “inherent” territory and absence of dispute that has been allowed to swallow rational discussion of the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue would require nothing short of a “spiritual revolution.”\textsuperscript{77}

The election in Japan late in 2012 of a government of “Shinto” believers in the uniqueness of emperor-centred Japan who were denialists of Nanjing and “Comfort Women” and proponents of a stronger Japan, with a fresh constitution to warrant greater military build-up, could scarcely fail to ring alarm bells in China, and for that matter throughout Asia.\textsuperscript{78} It
also caused concern in Washington, as the Congressional Research Service in May spelled out.

Three general points may be made.

First, it is hard to imagine any advance on the current, increasingly militarized confrontation over Senkaku/Diaoyu unless and until Japan concedes that there is a dispute. The longer it resists doing so, the greater the loss of face it stands to suffer when eventually, likely under US pressure, it finds that it has to.

Second, the issue is not simply territorial but deeply rooted in history. Japanese tend to forget; Chinese are unable to forget. The “Senkaku” issue today carries a “blowback” quality of unassuaged Chinese suspicion over Japan’s long neglected or insufficiently resolved war responsibility, the high-level denials of Nanjing, the periodic right-wing attempts to sanitize history texts, the refusal to accept formal legal responsibility for the victims of the Asia-wide “Comfort Women” slavery system, the periodic visits by Prime Ministers (notably Koizumi, 2001-2006) and Diet Members to Yasukuni. In April 2013, Deputy PM Aso and 168 members of the Lower House participated in the spring rites at Yasukuni.

Third, Japanese elites and the mass media alike seem to have lost the capacity to appreciate the Chinese position or to achieve a self-critical awareness of their own. While projecting a picture of China as threatening and “other,” they pay minimal attention either to the circumstances surrounding the Chinese claim to the islands or to the reasons for the general suspicion of Japan. They take for granted that Japan “owns” the islands and blame it for the crisis over them, and they have no sense of responsibility for the trashing of the “freeze” agreements of 1972 and 1978 (whose existence, for the most part, they simply deny). Japan’s claim is rhetorical, ambiguous, manipulative, and hostile to compromise or negotiation, yet few doubt that the Japanese position is “fundamentally solid and quite tenable under existing international law.”

However superficially intractable, however, the kind of regional, East China Sea way forward, alluded to earlier by Fukuda Yasuo, Hu Jintao, Hatoyama Yukio, and others, need not be so difficult and indeed could be fairly straightforward, at least in principle. Since the prospect of a resolution to the sovereignty question is minimal, best, therefore, to set it aside, to revert in effect to the “shelving” agreement of 1972-2010 but to combine that with active cooperation around and perhaps under the islands. Agreements for sharing resources, sharing responsibility for the protection of nature (with possible UN World Heritage status), and for shared policing and administration of the islands and their seas could be negotiated. Cooperative arrangements for fisheries and resource extraction had been put in place in parts of this sea before the crisis that erupted in 2010 froze most of its mechanisms, and could be reinstated and expanded. China scholar Yabuki makes a simple, radical proposal,

For instance, there could be a ‘one island, two governments’ response to ‘Senkaku-Diaoyu,’ wherein Japan might administer the islands on odd days and China on even days. What is required is the creation of this type of a ‘new consensus’ based on shared administration, the maintenance of peace and order, and fair sharing of resources.
It is a formula unlikely to recommend itself to either side at this moment, but it, or something like it, may in fact be the only realistic way forward. Only such a perspective, relativizing the nation state and building a structure of cooperation around and across national borders, offers a prospect of resolving the Senkaku/Diaoyu problem, transcending the San Francisco system and signalling the birth of a *Pax Asia*.

**Author**


**Notes**

1 This is a slightly revised version of a paper first delivered as keynote address to “The China-Japan Dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Symposium,” at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on 19 April 2013, and presented subsequently during April–May 2013 at Cornell University, The School of Advanced and International Studies at Reischauer Institute in Washington D.C., Free University of Berlin, University of Vienna and the Free University of Tbilisi, Georgia. I am grateful for the comments and criticism received on these various occasions.


4 “China, Japan sign joint statement on promoting strategic, mutually beneficial ties,” China View, 8 May 2008.

5 Sachiko Sakamaki, “China’s Hu, Japan’s Hatoyama agree to extend thaw in relations,” Bloomberg, 22 September, 2009


10 Uemura, op. cit., p. 89. See also Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012, p. 5


12 See the series on Senkaku/Diaoyu published in Renmin ribbao, 8-10 May 2013, especially part 3, “Ma-guan jōyaku to Diaoyudao mondai o ronjiru,” Renmin ribao (Japanese edition), 10 May 2013.


14 Lee and Ming, p. 7.


19 Edict No 27 of the (US controlled) Government of the Ryukyus in 1953 formally defined the geographic limits of the US Trust territory to include the Senkakus. That unilateral act served to extend the bounds of the Ryukyus unilaterally and illegally, according to China. (Renmin ribao, 10 May 2013).


21 Toyoshita, Senkaku mondai to wa nani ka, p. 52.


“Senkaku mondai o dō omou ka,” or “What do you think about the Senkaku islands?” The Japan-China Summit meeting between Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka and Premier Zhou Enlai on September 27, 1972” reproduced in Lee and Ming, op. cit. p. 36. See discussion in Toyosita Narahiko, “Senkaku mondai” to wa nani ka, Iwanami gendai bunko, 2012, pp. 48-50, also Yabuki Susumu.


See Lee and Ming, p. 11.


McCormack and Norimatsu, pp. 57-58.

There are those who now argue that it was China, first in 1992, then in 2008 and 2012, that pulled down the shelf. I am not persuaded, however, and the legal and administrative measures referred to did not lead in practice to any change in China’s policies. (See Togo Kazuhiko, “The Senkakus Issue,” NBR Japan Forum, 15 April 2013.)

Details in McCormack and Norimatsu, pp. 211-214.


Lee and Ming, p. 2


Mizuho Aoki, “Poster boasts metro plan to buy Senkakus,” Japan Times, 14 July 2012.


Toyoshita, Senkaku mondai to wa nani ka, pp. 72-3.

Lee and Ming, pp. 4-5.

Meeting Deputy Secretary of State William Burns on 15 October, quoted in Tabata, p. 113.

Abe Shinzō, "Atarashii kuni e," Bungei shunju, January 2013, 124-133, at p. 130. China’s riposte came months later when Major-General Luo Yuan declared that it would depend for resolution of the Diaoyu problem on “the elevation of our comprehensive national strength,” to which end it would proceed with mobilizing its forces into Diaoyu waters, so that “when needed we can turn the three major fleets into a fist to draw out the [Japanese] blade.” ("Viewpoint: National strength still to be raised to solve Diaoyu Islands issue," China Military Online, 17 May 2013.)

APA Group, Big Talk 257 - Japan Must Take Another Look at All Facets of its Modern History, Including the Kono Statement, Murayama Statement, and Tokyo Trials Historical Viewpoint. Hakubun Shimomura interviewed by Toshio Motoya, link.


Abe, meeting on 15 October with Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, quoted in Tabata Mitsunaga, “Ryōyūken mondai o meguru rekishiteki jijitsu,” p. 113.

"Remarks With Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida After Their Meeting," Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Washington, DC, January 18, 2013. For Satoko Oka Norimatsu’s analysis of the media reporting of this meeting, see “Kurinton Kishioda kaiken hôdō: masumedia no aorini damasarenai yōni,” Peace Philosophy, 20 January 2013,


Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, “Japan is back,” Speech on 22 February 2013 to CSIS, Washington.


Toyoshita Narahiko, “‘Senkaku kōnyū’ mondai no kansei,” Sekai, August 2012, p. 42.
For discussion of this point, Toyoshita, “Senkaku könyú’ mondai no kansei,” pp. 41-49 (later resumed in his book, Senkaku mondai to wa nani ka, Iwanami gendai bunko, 2012.)


64 See inter alia, “Deep-sea mud proves rich in rare earths, but remote deposits hard to extract,” Yomiuri shimbun, 22 March 2013, and “Dai kibo kaitei kōshō ’shigen rikken’ no yume de wa nai,” editorial, Ryukyu shimpō, 2 April 2013.


66 ibid.

67 Nolan, op cit, pp. 94-95.


70 Inoue, p. 123.

71 “China and Japan: Could Asia really go to war over these?” The Economist, 22 September 2012.

72 Hiyane Teruo, emeritus professor of the University of the Ryukyus, quoted in “Senkaku kaiketsu e kennai kenyūsha ra shidō,” Ryūkyū shimpō, 13 January 2013.


75 Yabuki, interviewed by Mark Selden, p. 13.

76 Guo Rongxing, pp. 9, 25-6.

77 Wada, Ryōdo mondai o do kaiketsu suru ka, p. 19.


80 For the Congressional Research Service discussion, *Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress*, p. 16 (fn. 24)


82 Yabuki, interviewed by Selden, p. 4.
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