

Is It Nationalism? History's Impact on Okinawan Identity

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Abstract

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Consisting of a subtropical archipelago south of the Japanese mainland, playing host to a bevy of American military bases, and once the semi-independent kingdom of Ryukyu, Okinawa holds a unique and contentious place within the Tokyo-run nation-state. The central argument found in these pages suggests that a new look at the islands' identity along two tracks—a “high track” that focuses on the grander objects of the region's history such as castles or monuments and a “low track” dwelling on day-to-day matters such purchasing a meal or watching a sporting event—shows Okinawa evolving into a sub-state nation solidly within Japan. As the southern realm continues developing its unique identity, fulfilling the high track's symbolism, it allows greater economic and political integration with the nation-state, showing the power of the low track. This process is not steady, but these developments provide the smoothest path for full integration with Tokyo.

Additionally, the philosophical divisions applied here allow unification between divergent approaches to nationalist theory. The bended-knee view of the region's nationalism allows Anthony D. Smith's The Ethnic Origin of Nations with its emphasis on history and *ethnie* to coexist with the every-day approach found in Banal Nationalism by Michael Billig and Ernest Gellner's Nations and Nationalism. These political observers seemingly holding opposing viewpoints actually work as a team. The results of this combined approach can be found all across Okinawa in ordinary places such as vending machines, professional wrestling, and license plates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Streets of Koza

Walk the two of the main commercial streets in Koza—an Okinawa City, Okinawa neighborhood—and the visitor sees the major nationalist theories play out into a vibrant synthesis. The “ghostly *national* imaginings”¹ of Benedict Anderson, evoking symbols of nationalism that appear timeless and a bit otherworldly, work in concert with Michael Billig’s informal “flagging” found in his book Banal Nationalism.² At one end of Gate 2 Street sits the entryway, fences, keep-out signs, and guardhouse of the United States’ Kadena Air Force Base, and the commercial district ends across the road from a customs-inspection house that flies the Japanese flag. On Gate 2 Street, American military members and Okinawans walk down the sidewalks past South Asian-owned urban-clothing stores such as “Playaz” and “Flash” as a few loudspeakers blare hip-hop, hold the option of eating local food at stalls, become drunk at bars such as the First Chance/Last Chance Saloon (the name changes depending on whether one is walking from or to the air base), watch exotic dancers at Amazonasu, or eat an ice-cream cone and watch an outdoor concert at Koza Music Town. All under the watch of the occasional tour bus filled with mainland Japanese visitors. Here memories of American land grabs, crime, and mismanagement exist cheek-by-jowl with the creation of an everyday Okinawan culture and its ties to American fashion, Japanese government, and international commerce. Here memories of the 1970 Koza Riot—where local citizens burned American cars and attacked the base out of frustration with both the United States

¹ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, Third Edition, Verso, London: 1983, 9.

² Michael Billig, Banal Nationalism, 2006 edition, SAGE Publications, London: 2006, p.8.

and Japan³—mingle with the mixture of Americans and Okinawans that has created distinct music since at least the 1970s. The Baskin-Robins ice cream parlor at Koza Music Town, a small shopping mall and concert venue, uses imagery from Charles Schultz's Peanuts comic strip extensively and boasts steady business. But it was also there in February, 2008, that 38-year-old Marine Tyrone Luther Hadnott convinced a 14-year-old girl onto his motorcycle, where she later accused him of raping her, setting off a series of protests, boycotts, and harsh feelings.⁴ In Koza, Okinawan nationalism is always being created in ways great and small, tragic and lively.

Koza's other commercial road, Park Avenue, raises Anderson's Spectre of Comparisons and the notion that cultures look to similar but distant places for identity. Quieter and showing the wear of neglect, this street produces a much smaller American presence. The strongest opponents of the United States' military and Japanese government, such as former Okinawa Governor Masahide Ota and the miniscule Ryukyu Independent Party, envision Okinawa as an entrepot. It hardly escapes notice that Asia boasts small-sized, commercially powerful places such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Macau. An international feel exists on Park Avenue's run-down sidewalks with a Jamaican restaurant, a wide array of shops, and a now-closed Brazilian restaurant. Two Irish pubs, Morrigan's and Paddy Mac's, exist on the same block. The tattered covered walkways and the empty streets suggest that the commercial comparison shows an ailing Okinawa, yet it remains a compelling national image.

³ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, Keystone: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S.-Japanese Relations, Texas A&M University Press, College Station: 2000, p. 176-177.

⁴ David Allen, "Okinawa Marine Accused of Rape Is Released By Japanese Police," Stars and Stripes, 2 March 2008.

The images from Koza's streets show how Okinawa, a Japanese prefecture and formerly the semi-independent Ryukyu Kingdom, is evolving in its nationalism. The neighborhood—by pairing the greatness of collective memories in past riots, grievances, and a shared, romanticized past alongside the everyday creation of an identity generated in shops, restaurants, and clothing—shows a two-track theory nationalism for the region. The view found in Anthony D. Smith's The Ethnic Origins of Nations, and to a lesser degree Anderson's books, focuses on grander objects and concepts as nationalist vehicles, which this paper will call "high-track nationalism." These bended-knee concepts show a distinct Ryukyuan identity. More informal indicators, crystallized in Billig's flagging, serves as the more informal "low-track nationalism" and evokes a distinct province within Japan. This pairing, in which each pole powers the other, indicates how a developing sense of an independent identity is simultaneously slowly meshing with the Japan on the sub-state nation level. A unique culture is preserved on its streets, but outside money and interest propels it. The signs in English are for Americans, but Okinawans read most markings in Japanese rather than the indigenous Ryukyu language. The mainland tourists view a culturally different part of Japan, but a region of the nation nonetheless. This ongoing creation of Ryukyu nationalism extends beyond its citizens and the key Japanese islands. The American military and the historical role of the Chinese further define Okinawa. Add in the comparative roles created by thriving Asian economies, former Japanese colonies, and the South American countries where Okinawans settled during their Diaspora, and the region becomes the perfect laboratory for nationalist theory. Gate 2 Street and Park Avenue appear far removed from the islands' castles, indigenous religious shrines, and World War II monuments, but they

serve the same purpose as the distinct artifacts of a sub-state nation preserved by outside financial power and interest.

Defining Okinawa

Giving textbook definitions for Okinawa is necessary before launching into a study of the location's nationalism. Key concepts must be explained, and a geographic context must be established. The descriptions range in this section from the general to the specific. Before embarking on the definitions, the term Ryukyu must be clarified. The island's former independent name is the Japanese rendering of the Chinese characters describing the region. The Chinese pronunciation—Liu Ch'iu, Loo Choo, and similar variants—are also seen in English-language materials, especially before Japan fully annexed Okinawa in 1879. In the 1800s, locals pronounced the term Doo Choo,⁵ and today it is occasionally rendered as “dyukyu.” The apparently self-published book Okinawa or Ryukyu—no printing house is listed in the edition found at the Camp Bulter library's special collections, though that is not an uncommon situation for other works found in standard form elsewhere—listed seventy-six European-related names for the islands starting with the letters C, D, K, L, N, O, R, and U. It also credited the Ming Emperor Taiso with the name.⁶ Generally, the outsiders' terms prevailed in American accounts rather than the indigenous name for the land.

In its most extensive definitions, the label Okinawa serves as an alternative from of Ryukyu. Okinawa often refers to the Ryukyu Islands, a 1,200 kilometer-long

⁵ George H. Kerr, Okinawa: The History of an Island People, 2000 edition, Tuttle Publishing, Rutland, Vermont: 1958, xvi.

⁶ Earl Rankin Bull, Okinawa or Ryukyu, Newark, Ohio: 1958, 1.

archipelago consisting of 146 islands⁷ running from Kyushu, the southern main Japanese island, to Taiwan. The Ryukyus separate the Pacific Ocean on its east and the East China Sea on its west. The Kuroshiro Current runs along the island chain, bringing a subtropical climate different from mainland Japan with clear waters, coral reefs, rain forests, and exceptional biodiversity.⁸ Okinawa performs a similarly broad role in labeling the old Ryukyu kingdom. That monarchy, which began as a petty chiefdom set on the main island, was recognized by the Chinese government in 1372. Fostered by Chinese support, Ryukyu took control of the island chain.⁹ Okinawa serves as an alternate form of Ryukyu, yet the latter term signifies some level of detachment from mainland Japan.

The middle range uses of Okinawa, and the most common in American usage, refer to the prefecture and the eponymous largest island in the chain. The use of the term as an administrative unit dovetails nicely into Anderson's "Census, Map, Museum" chapter in Imagined Communities. The transfer from semi-independent status to Japanese territory could be marked by transforming the name of the administrative unit from Ryukyu to Okinawa.¹⁰ It intensified with administrative and revenue reforms in the 1890s¹¹ and high-handed assimilation campaigns during the Imperial Era. A tax reorganization campaign which included measuring land and taking a census was deemed so important that a public park in the prefectural capital of Naha possesses a monument to it.¹² The main island—roughly divided into a mostly urban southern section and the

⁷ Takeshi Matsui, "Research on the Ryukyus: Progress and Problems," Current Anthropology 28 (1987): S94.

⁸ Kenny Ehman, Okinawa Explorer, TK2 Productions: 2005, 3-4.

⁹ Mitsugu Matsuda, "The Ryukyuan Government Scholarship Students to China 1392-1868. Based on a Short Essay by Nakahara Zenchu, 1962," Monumenta Nipponica 21 (1966), 16.

¹⁰ Matthew Allen, Identity and Resistance in Okinawa, Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, England: 2002, 6.

¹¹ Kerr, 423-424.

¹² Ehman, 72.

northern portion filled with small towns, military reservations, and forests—serves as the most solid notion of the term. It focuses on one geographic location that culturally and politically dominated its neighboring islands. Today it contains much of the prefecture’s population and financial power. The province and island serve as the most concrete definitions of Okinawa, but somehow this use of the term misses much of its broader implications.

At its most specific, Okinawa refers to the Okinawa City, which serves as a microcosm of the region’s modern history. The contradictions and contrasts found in the Koza neighborhood extend into other regions of the municipality. Bounded by Kadena on its west and the Pacific to the east, Americans maintain a strong commercial and residential presence off base. Still, Mayor Mitsuko Tomon served as an especially strong critic of the military presence in the aftermath of Hadnott’s arrest and release.¹³ Pocket sized-sugarcane fields tended by old men wearing straw hats border modern residences. The city plays host to the Prefectural Athletic Park which, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, shows the simultaneous rejection and embracing of Japan. The term Okinawa is a tricky one with a sliding scale of meanings and ramifications. This thesis focuses mostly on the main island, since it holds the overwhelming majority of the American presence, but an explanation of how far this one title extends is necessary for further discussion.

Overview

The rest of this chapter extrapolates the idea that Okinawa’s two-track nationalism will lead the prefecture further into the Japanese culture while, paradoxically, entrenching Ryukyuan identity. Chapter 2 will lay the technical groundwork on nationalist theory. This brings together Anderson and Billig. It also merges the seemingly

¹³ Linda Sieg, “Japan’s Okinawans Rally Against U.S. Military Crimes,” [Reuters](#), 23 March 2008.

larger dispute between Ernest Gellner's belief that nationalism is a modern idea in his Nations and Nationalism with Anthony D. Smith's view that the concept holds deeper roots. Okinawa will show how Smith's idea of a "myth-symbol complex"¹⁴ actually dovetails into nationalism's industrial-age birth. The folk memory of female clergy in the old Ryukyu religion, which points to Smith, transforms into the treatment of Okinawan women by American troops during the Vietnam War or local residents driven off their property by military land grabs, episodes that distinctly echo Gellner's hypothetical Ruritania. Nationalist theories and concepts may appear to be in conflict, but they actually work in concert. The Ryukyuan nationalist worried about Japanization may not notice that Japanese money and the mainland's gawking tourists may actually be preserving the local identity in a way that would not occur if Okinawa achieved independence.

Chapter 3 covers the rise and fall of the Ryukyu Kingdom as the islands reached their peak as an agro-literate society. The introduction of metal tools from what is now Japan helped create a relatively modern Okinawa with three petty kingdoms occupying the main island. People outside the islands further developed a unified region when China's Ming Dynasty in the fourteenth century, desiring a peaceful sphere of influence dominated by trade, financially backed the Okinawan realms in exchange for fealty. Chuzan, the trio's central realm, garnered the most lucrative ties with the Middle Kingdom and official overlordship of the island, conquered its neighbors, and began taking other islands in the archipelago. The Ryukyu Kingdom's location between Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Korea led to a mythic golden age of a peaceful,

¹⁴ Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations, Blackwell Publishing: Malden, Massachusetts: 1986. 1988 ed. p. 15-18.

prosperous trading nation from the start of the Ming Dynasty's influence until an invasion from mainland Japan in 1609. Modern historians dispute the idealized image of Okinawa serving as a sail-age precursor of modern Hong Kong or Macau, but the concept of the islands funneling Southeast Asian goods to northern climes dominates historical memory. Additionally, the Chinese stewardship created a lasting impact on local culture from worship to architecture. The Ming Dynasty, by furthering its interests and proto-nationalism along its newly regained frontiers, created a whole new country and culture. Satsuma, a feudal realm in Kyushu, invaded the supposedly unarmed islands in 1609, quickly taking over the kingdom and abducting the king. Collective Okinawan memory portrays the Ryukyus as a conquered realm. Popular history portrays Satsuma, looking for a way around Japan's famed closing of its ports outside of Nagasaki, using the archipelago as a back-door trading post while it reaped the profits and imposed financial burdens on the kingdom. More recent scholarship suggests that Satsuma's dominance was not nearly as steep as the Okinawan psyche suggests. Japan already held some influence over the Ryukyu court, though not as much as the Chinese. Satsuma brought in key agricultural advances, interfered very lightly with the royal government, the trade with Southeast Asia was actually a distant memory by the time the Japanese feudal lord seized the realm, stagnant agricultural production now appears awfully similar to undocumented income to dodge Satsuma's duties, and the Ryukyu kingdom embarked on a political comeback during the 18th century. The concept of a militaristic Japan using the islands as a colony and stripping it of its prosperity fits in well with Okinawa's tragic fate during World War II and its relative hopelessness in the postwar years. It also set up the historic pattern of the Ryukyus taking a good-cop, bad-cop role with its dual outside

rulers. The virtuous Chinese and the avaricious Japanese will be replaced by virtuous America and violent Japan and later still by militaristic America and peaceful Japan.

The Meiji Restoration of the late 19th century propelled Japan on a quick arc from rising imperial power to ruin, and Okinawa bore the brunt of both ends of the Imperial Era. It also featured many of the hallmarks of modern nationalism. Chapter 5 shows how the reinvigorated northern neighbor began its initial conquests by pressing its feudal claims over the Ryukyus. Utilizing an incident involving a shipwreck in Formosa, Japan officially annexed the kingdom in 1879 after nearly a decade of maneuvering, renamed the region Okinawa, labeled it a prefecture but used it as a colonial source for raw materials, and treated its people as an “other.” Ryukyuan elites, dazzled by Japan’s rapid advances, strongly embraced the new leadership, but the islands suffered financially as mainland-demanded monoculture cut off traditional staple crops and allowed middlemen to seize the profits. Okinawans began embracing their role within the Japanese kingdom, despite their second-class status. The emergence of Ryukyuan studies and interest in the region’s arts helped codify the idea of Okinawa-ness in a way that contrasted with the creation of other-hood. Finally, diaspora communities on the mainland, Hawaii, and South American furthered the idea of the islands in conjunction with the northern kingdom.

The nation-state’s militarism, culminating in the 1945 Battle of Okinawa shows the limits of the prefecture’s status in Imperial Japan and codified Okinawan nationalism, though it is never expressly named as such. Chapter 6 shows that with the Americans approaching, the nation-state’s armed forces seized much of the main island, conducted a violent battle, seized the caves in which locals hid during the battle, and, once Tokyo saw

the carnage of its nearest possession, it began planning for nationwide surrender. The harrowing imaginings from the months-long conflict, commemorated in museums, tourist sights, films, and prefecture-produced print-capital help enshrine the idea of peaceful Ryukyu betrayed by Japan.

After the war, the Okinawans' relationship with the mainland swung wildly from mild alienation to complete embracing of the country that had delivered them into ruin a few years previously to an uneasy place in the nation-state. Chapter 7 shows how the American administration let the archipelago's situation drift through inaction, turned the area into a military-occupied colony with an armed-forces version of the *Raj*, and the Okinawans saw reversion to Japan as a panacea. As the islanders agitated for reunion with the north, the United States continued to further the idea of the islands as a distinct sub-state nation with historic literature showing the region as different from Japan, home-grown politics and parties, and America's lip service to democracy creating a very strong Okinawan culture of protest and civic engagement. As the United States and Japan negotiated Tokyo's sovereignty over the Ryukyus, the islanders again developed their nationalism as the archipelago became the weakest part of a three-party situation. Once the mainland reacquired the prefecture, the key political decision for its citizens became the choice of equality of military burden, which favored the left-wing parties, or equality of economic growth, which tied the islands with the establishment Liberal Democratic Party. After the 1995 incident in which three American servicemen brutally raped a local schoolgirl and the left-wing governor became limited in his powers, a cultural compromise took place. If the Okinawans elected an LDP governor, Tokyo backed official—but unnamed—expressions of Ryukyu nationalism, honoring old shrines,

traditional arts, and even placing the old kingdom's castle on the 2,000 yen bill. The crucible of the region's history helped create a true sub-state nationalism, vivid in its independent identity—the high track—but strongly tied with the mainland in economics and government—the low track.

Chapter 8 crystallizes the two-track approach, through history and nationalist theory with the simplest summation of Okinawan sub-nationalist identity. The “we’re this; they’re that” of Ryukyu-ness—whether viewed in an Anderson-style conception, Gellner and Billig’s everyday manifestation, or Smith’s *ethnie*—is summed up in one sentence: “We get invaded.” The theory espoused in these pages and projected on the islands has no direct parallel with other cultures, but it could be applied to a wide range of places. Its echoes can be seen in South Korea, Britain’s sub-state nations, China, Indonesia, and Puerto Rico, among other political theaters. Though Okinawa serves as a true sub-state nation, its historic path can, and probably will, change. A strong sense of Ryukyu identity would further tie the prefecture in with the nation-state. If the mainland fully alienates the islands’ special place within Japan, an example would be a recent campaign to whitewash the imperial army’s crimes during the Battle of Okinawa, an independence movement could conceivably take root. But for now, integration with mainstream Japanese culture abets rather than dilutes Okinawan nationalism.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Nationalism's Two Tracks

The nature of Okinawan nationalism calls for a definition of the high-track and low-track approaches, the categorization of competing scholarly interpretations of the philosophy, and the implications for the prefecture. This serves as a tricky task since this gives Billig's banal view and Smith's more grandiose vision equal footing, tying the two seemingly contradictory approaches together. The dualities of sacred and profane, old and new, and nationalism or regionalism feed off each other as though they serve as the positive and negative poles of an electric battery. This thesis takes an ambivalent view of the conflict between different theories¹⁵ on national origin, and it does not seek to ally with various "ists" or "isms" that populate nationalist studies. The history of Okinawan nationalism shows far more consensus among theories and less debate than expected. The contradictions of the Ryukyus show the merits of differing takes on political science and history, and therefore unifying the works of brilliant scholars who often find themselves in conflict.

After this chapter, this thesis takes a chronological study of Okinawa through the lens of nationalism. The epic relics of self identity emerge out of history and the mythology that it, or later generations adopting it, creates. Yet the past often shows how these big events change life on a casual basis. Okinawa's trade with Southeast Asia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries¹⁶ brought the *goya*—a warty, bitter melon—into local cuisine.¹⁷ *Goya champuru*, a dish that mixes the melon, tofu, and often Spam, evokes the Ryukyu kingdom, Southeast Asia (even the term "*champuru*" evolved from a

¹⁵ Smith, 3.

¹⁶ Kerr, 124-125.

¹⁷ Naomichi Ishige, "Okinawa: Land of Longevity," [The World of Kikkoman](#).

Malay and Indonesian world for “jumbled up”),¹⁸ mainland Japan, and the United States. The vegetable serves as both a banal indicator through its place growing in small gardens, sitting on produce shelves, or on a dinner plate, yet it evokes Smith’s *ethnie* with its heritage and its implied link to the islands’ independence and proto-entrepot past. The *goya* serves as an emblem of Okinawa, dominating signage and taking an honored place in gift shops. The grinning picture of an anthropomorphic bitter melon wearing a seatbelt by the busy Route 58 as drivers motor along the aquamarine Nago Bay is both banal in its silliness and ubiquity, yet startling in its size and message. Nationalist indicators, to use a cliché, can simultaneously evoke everything from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The implication of two-track nationalism for Okinawa offers a surprisingly conservative point: Since World War II, assimilation with the mainland and the United States largely promotes the region’s identity and nationalism. Both nation-states for print-capital and geopolitical reasons have ushered in an era of Ryukyu revivalism that would probably not have taken place if the global conflict had not taken place. If Tokyo respectfully allows local culture to flourish, and the Americans promoted the idea of the region as a conquered colony doomed to tragedy, it reaps the benefits by signifying the prefecture as an equal, if culturally distinct, region of Japan. Okinawans, for the most part, desire equality with other parts of the mainland in financial, cultural, and political ways. Allow the Ryukyu culture to flourish in local arts, mainland tourism, and pop-cultural impact—the whole point of this theory—and nationalism will blossom and then evolve into provincialism. This evolution will not take place soon or in a steady manner, but with enough time, patience, and foresight Okinawa will merge with the nation-state.

Describing Five Takes on the Subject

¹⁸ Ibid.

Before defining high- and low-track nationalism, a brief summary of the five major books on the subject used in this enterprise must take place in order to sort out authors' viewpoints and theories. These monographs are Benedict Anderson's landmark works Imagined Communities and The Spectre of Comparisons, Banal Nationalism by Michael Billig, The Ethnic Origin of Nations by Anthony D. Smith, and Ernest Gellner's Nations and Nationalism. The writers debate or complement each others' approaches, but a broad duality occurs between sacred and profane indicators that exist simultaneously in the portraits presented by the four scholars. Despite the differing viewpoints, a harmony exists between these works of nationalist theory.

Imagined Communities, so familiar in political science circles that it is sometimes identified as simply "IC,"¹⁹ shows the creation of nationalism and its variants as "cultural artifacts of a particular kind"²⁰ rather than the natural creation of a people. The nation-state is famously, "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."²¹ Anderson noted the rise of written vernacular languages²² and the printing press²³ across Europe mortally wounded the power of Latin across the Christian world and fostered the standardization of a few languages that would one day create nations. Anderson focused on the territorial homogenization of language, literature, and later, the running of a state or colony under the chapter titled, "Census, Map, Museum,"²⁴ initially lending itself to the low-track

¹⁹ Marc Redfield, "Imagi-Nation: The Imagined Community and the Aesthetics of Mourning," Diacritics 29 (1999) 58.

²⁰ Anderson, 4.

²¹ 6.

²² 18-19.

²³ 37-38.

²⁴ 163-185.

nationalism of today's newspaper, a trip to the bank, or a best-selling novel. Yet his imagery extrapolates the ordinary and takes into the high track. The anti-colonialist nationalist novel, helping to clarify identity and create a sacred space, shows the everyday world of the imagined community in an extraordinary fashion.²⁵ Out of the printing press comes, with time, the “ghostly *national* imaginings” such as any nation's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.²⁶ For Okinawa, the Ryukyu imaginings are disseminated by Japanese media. In a few of televised examples, local television provider OTV is affiliated with national network FNN, NHK Okinawa uses many local symbols, and national broadcasts feature commercial breaks that use local music, turquoise waters, and other traditional imagery.

Anderson furthered his views with The Spectre of Comparisons, which took its title from a sentence written by Filipino nationalist Jose Rizal, which ultimately referred to the “double consciousness” in which people measure, or simply apprehend, one society with or versus another.²⁷ This view becomes strong when Okinawan nationalists wonder why the islands cannot resemble entrepots or local residents notice that mainland Japan has fewer American military facilities. Anderson focused on colonial—or in the case of Thailand, near-colonial—countries, but his theory works from the occupying countries in Okinawa. The Japanese tourist on Gate 2 Street sees the American influence, while the United States military member walks the streets and believes he or she is experiencing Japan. If The Spectre of Comparisons is taken to its fullest extent, then similar polities abound. America's fostering the myth of a historically weaponless Okinawa, discussed in a later chapter, helps build the Ryukyu identity.

²⁵ 26-33.

²⁶ 9.

²⁷ Anderson, 229.

Banal Nationalism describes the creation of nationalism in what is so commonplace that it appears seemingly unseen to the person living in that community. Ordinary events “flag” nationality that is an “endemic condition.”²⁸ People think of nationalism existing in other places, but citizens of established nation-states have become so accustomed to their own nationalism in every-day life that they do not know it exists in their midst.²⁹ For Billig, the unwavering flag found in a newspaper supplement, outside a government building, or in front of someone’s house creates an identity with the nation-state far more effectively than the waving, official flags found in marches or formal events.³⁰ The politician using language such as “our” or “we,”³¹ the weather map,³² and following a national sports team³³ casually and repeatedly ties a citizen with its nation. Okinawans find so many flaggings that its distinctiveness from the mainland is automatically assumed. Commuters drive past the fences and gates of American bases and see military members’ license plates with their distinctive Y or A markings.

Anthony D. Smith took the opposite tack in his The Ethnic Origins of Nations. The author agrees with Billig by listing nationalism as a largely modern creation, but that some pre-modern societies possessed a proto-nationalism with “striking parallels”³⁴ and creating the concept which he calls “*ethnie*.”³⁵ The heart of *ethnie* arises out of the “myth-symbol complex”³⁶ where the concept’s namesakes forged and maintained the proto-nationalism’s identity and passed it along to modern times. This places the author

²⁸ Billig, 6.

²⁹ 15-16.

³⁰ 39-43.

³¹ 101.

³² 116-117.

³³ 119-122.

³⁴ Smith, 11.

³⁵ 12.

³⁶ 15.

between “primordialists” who see nationality was a core human value and the modernists.³⁷ Smith’s emphasis on *ethnie* implies a high-track approach. A nation’s past becomes romanticized—and, in some cases, invented—creating a history approached with a bended knee. He argued that these are not inventions,³⁸ but that “nationalism writes its own history.”³⁹ *Ethnie*, particularly when a nation or community looks backwards to an analogous version of it that geographically matches its land such as Okinawa, provides an importantly potent approach to high-track nationalism.

Nations and Nationalism countered Smith. Gellner argued that in pre-industrial societies, people were divided into two broad categories. The first, smaller group consisted of several ranks of the ruling classes such as royalty, clergy, and other wealthy people. These people held an international outlook—described as “horizontal” by Gellner—and differentiated themselves among societies, though not in ways that entirely align with Billig’s, Smith’s, and Anderson’s take on modern identity. Gellner pointed to rulers of early nineteenth-century Tunisia, who identified themselves as Turkish but did not speak that language.⁴⁰ The larger classification contained the majority of the world’s population whose lives focused on their local communities.⁴¹ Industrial society, built upon progress and constant economic expansion⁴² expanded the horizontal category over all of society.⁴³ An increased need for uniform communication and education forged the nation and nationalism into being.⁴⁴ Gellner emphatically writes, “Contrary to popular

³⁷ 12.

³⁸ 178.

³⁹ 177.

⁴⁰ Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York: 1983: 9-10.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² 23.

⁴³ 32.

⁴⁴ 33-34.

and even scholarly belief, nationalism does not have any very deep roots in the human psyche.”⁴⁵

Defining the Two Tracks

Specifically stating what is high-track and low-track nationalism, how each one flows into the other, and ultimately how this duality generally points to Okinawa’s continued political meshing with Japan while actually strengthening its nationalism on a sub-state level, serves as the key technical matter of this project. High-track objects include formal places such as monuments, museums, government buildings, and epic sweeps of history. These are seen as loftier nationalist indicators, since they help mold a society in a highly formalized manner, often displaying a reverent view of the myth-symbol complex found in Smith. Low-track examples would include food, drink, sports, and everyday life, clearly evocative of Billig. Anderson, despite his emphasis on the seemingly low-track world of the printed word, serves as a transformative element between the two poles. A dog-eared book of German folk tales may serve as a profane element in this duality, yet it transmits and drums up interest in the storied past. Often a high-track indicator evolves into a low-track signifier or it transforms in another direction. As Anderson cleverly noted, memorials to Washington and Lincoln are treated with a bended knee, but the pair adorn the most common and least-valued American currencies.⁴⁶ It must be acknowledged that dividing nationalist indicators serves as a tricky proposition. One person’s sacred memory is another’s profanity. The two rails of nationalism leaves a world of emblems with dual meanings. The *goya* is merely an edible version of Germany’s *Hermannsdenkmal*. It is both evocative and silly, depending on the

⁴⁵ 34.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 49.

context. It speaks to an independent Ryukyu, and it serves as a provincial curio. It both separates the islands from the mainland and brings these places together.

The majority of the nationalist literature surveyed took issue with Smith's *ethnie*, but his approach should still be taken into account since ancestral ties to previous societies play a major role in how Okinawa views itself. Billig dismisses *ethnie* by noting a survey that only 15 of 180 countries come from one established people, rather than a conglomeration of peoples. He tartly writes "This estimate ignores the long-buried senses of peoplehood cluttering the cemeteries of history."⁴⁷ That may be true, but Okinawa—and by extension many other peoples—will show that historical memories scattered over a wide area provide a toolbox for the construction of nationalism. Local identity may well emerge from Gellner's strata since royal, religious, and trading relations in Ryukyu were established with China, feudal Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, forming the old semi-independent kingdom. Everyday flaggings may give Okinawa a sub-state nationalist feeling with newspapers, sports teams, and food. Yet iconic foods came from the days of Ryukyu's contact with its neighbors. The actions of the few set up the general borders of what became Okinawa, even if the finer details were established in later centuries. The actions of Gellner's smaller categories limited the range of the people's identity to a few nations and geographically to the islands themselves. *Ethnie* may serve as a backwards reflection of the industrial age, but the events of the agrarian past clearly created and limited the menu of nationalist options used in later years. Smith, Gellner, Billig, and Anderson, without realizing it, work together, giving a fuller picture of the creation of identity.

⁴⁷ Billig, 27.

The sacred indicators of Ryukyu identity dot the islands, especially on the largest one. Dozens of family tombs—shrines where families commemorate departed kin and even hold picnics—seemingly appear every 100 yards. Castle ruins draw tourists and serve as reminders of the days when the Ryukyu Kingdom served as an independent nation. World War II memorials commemorate the sacrifices undertaken by local citizens as they dodged American and Japanese gunfire, bombs, and atrocities. This evolves into the epic sweep of historic narrative. As Ota wrote on the Battle of Okinawa in the afterward to an American book containing nine interviews with main-island women, “Our verdant land was turned into blackened earth, and our ancient cultural heritage—our most valuable national treasure—was destroyed.”⁴⁸ Gellner could find Ota’s writing as a top-down implementation of nationalism. Anderson would opine that the written word found on memorials and history spurs the local identity and would be pleased that it as an American who published this view to be returned to the Okinawans themselves. Billig would tell us that the memorials and tombs are hardly noticed and that they sit in the background. Smith would tie the ruined castles of Ryukyu with the destruction found on Okinawa. The two tracks come together considering the sacred space of Shuri Castle, the seat of government of the Ryukyu kingdom. Busloads of mainland tourists along with minivans full of American military families troop through the restored structure and grounds. Driving through Okinawa does not support one theorist over another, but confirms all takes on nationalism.

Despite this apparent consensus, a broad two-track pattern emerges. Grand imagery, often coming from *ethnie*, are just as likely to spring from major events in the

⁴⁸ Masahide Ota, “Afterward,” trans. Marie Yamazato, in Women of Okinawa (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 147.

present and recent past as one way of projecting Okinawan identity. The following chapters will show that high-track indicators combine to reinforce the image of Okinawa as a separate nation occupied by Japan. Daily flaggings create the more nuanced picture of a sub-state nation reaching accommodation with the larger nation-state. The distinct tombs and shrines show a separate nation for Okinawa with the ghosts of national power found in its castles and history. Life's constant grind tells a different story. Echoing Billig's observations,⁴⁹ Okinawa appears on the televised Japanese weather map, but usually it appears in a separate box within the cartogram in a manner similar to the way Alaska and Hawaii are placed on the American renderings. Notably, the local Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper places the entire country together, with all islands outlined in red on its weather map. Employees in service jobs such as grocery clerks or hotel workers sport Hawaiian-style shirts in the summer, evoking the separate climate from the mainland, but still speak Japanese. National store chains populate the main island, but boast displays for local products such as *goya*, locally styled tofu, or canned pork such as Spam and Tulip. Mainland and international soft-drink producers expand their product lines to create Okinawan-themed beverages. In one example, Coca-Cola sells a canned tea with *shisas*—a pair of lion-dogs found in statue form on nearly building in the islands that originally date to Ryukyu's "golden age" under Chinese auspices⁵⁰—on the packaging. This links the storied, glorified past with an everyday thirst quencher and multinational commerce. Japanese financial backing and the price breaks found in large conglomerates with more extensive infrastructure tie the islands to the mainland, but those same northern companies understand the payoffs and market share found in maintaining a

⁴⁹ Billig, 116-117.

⁵⁰ Okinawa Tourist Information, Mahae Plus, "*Shisa*."

Ryukyuan identity. Okinawan brewer Orion, seeing potential problems when favorable tax laws to boost the prefecture's economy were due to expire, merged with mainland beer conglomerate Asahi in 2002.⁵¹ Asahi received a cut of the profits for a local institution, a distribution network for its beers on Okinawa, and it could sell Orion to the mainland by advertising the Ryukyus' exotic imagery to the mainland with turquoise waters, local drummers parading down Gate 2 Street, and swaying palms. In this way, the mystery of Okinawa becomes meshed Japan at the mainland at the grocery store or bar, while still maintaining a sense of other-ness. The low-track nationalism involves the "here and now" of daily life, it is more powerful than the high track, barring a political or military calamity. The high track, however, plays a key role in powering the low track through cultural background and history. Okinawa's separation from the mainland helped create and shape Orion, but now that it has access to the Japanese mainland, it becomes a distinct part of the nation-state.

A Sporting Argument

Athletic competition provides a vivid example of creating and reinforcing national identity, and in many cases a team's supporters serve as the microcosm of an imagined community. Sports shows the strengths and limits of Billig's argument, hits upon many of the classic questions involved with nationalism, and shows the two-track view of nationalism in a clear, entertaining manner. Sports, in short, serve as nationalism in miniature. Fans imagine the communities, see great shrines and everyday symbols, and create a bond among them even if most of the members of the "nation" have never met each other.

⁵¹ [Japan Update](#), "Asahi, Orion, Enters into Cooperative Partnership," 27 December, 2001.

Apparently, Billig severely underestimates the power of sport in Banal Nationalism, though he may have severely truncated his examples to support his argument. The author spends his section on athletics emphasizing the pastime's role in creating a British identity, leaving the casual observer of sports highly puzzled. Billig emphasizes United Kingdom-unifying events such as the country's annual quixotic quest to win the Wimbledon men's title, track and field, and the occasional international rugby tour in which Britain sends a united squad.⁵² More popular sports in the United Kingdom actually break the country down into its sub-state components. Soccer, so popular that the Guardian gives it equal billing with national and world news as a link on its website,⁵³ features the national teams of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The idea of a unified squad for the 2012 London Olympics was met with protests along the sub-state level.⁵⁴ One group of Scottish fans loves to chant a ditty implying the opposite of national unity with their southern rival. One stanza goes:

Now we're back in Scotland after all the deeds are done
We dinnae really give a damn if Scotland lost or won
For we met the English had our fun
Reminded them o' Bannockburn
We're just the Happy [sic] hooligans of Wembley⁵⁵

Perhaps the chant becomes so commonplace that it fades into the background, but the "hot" flaggings of nationalism exist by mentioning the Battle of Bannockburn and an English soccer sacred space in Wembley. That stadium serves as a high-track indicator with key memories such as England's 1966 World Cup victory, Football Association Cup finals, and the 1948 Olympics, among other seemingly sacred moments. England and

⁵² Billig, 119-122.

⁵³ The Guardian, guardian.co.uk.

⁵⁴ BBC Sport, "Blatter Against British 2012 Team," 9 March 2008.

⁵⁵ Tartanarmy.net, "Happy Hooligans of Wembley."

Scotland even possess separate governing bodies and leagues. Rugby, Lions' tours aside, exacerbates the sub-state situation by unifying Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the playing field, complete with a unique national anthem for the combined jurisdictions. The Ireland Rugby Football Union flag flies instead of the Union Jack during matches played in Ulster.⁵⁶ Billig may describe British sports as a strictly unifying force, but its impact and imagery appears far from that simplistic take. It both stretches and squeezes the idea of nationalism akin to the way a baker kneads dough.

This push and pull of sporting identity plays out strongly in Okinawan athletics, the most vivid example coming from the soccer team F.C. Ryukyu. The club creates an imagined nationalism, often reliant on high-track themes. It uses the name "Ryukyu," not "Okinawa" or any city within the prefecture. The team's emblem sports a pair of *shisas* holding a soccer ball. A father of one player in the club's development program told me that the squad's main maroon-like color is associated with fabric brought to the islands during the "golden age." When the squad needed a boost after a disappointing 2007 season, it hired Philippe Troussier—who is best known for coaching seven national teams,⁵⁷ including Japan when it played co-host to the 2002 World Cup—as manager. Yet for all its nationalist imagery from *shisas* to a national team-caliber coach whose face adorns public bus advertisements and posters across the island with the words "Troussier Revolution," the organization's goal is to rise up the pyramid of divisions and reach the top league in Japanese soccer by 2013.⁵⁸ Attend a match and the complications and wide range of local identity intensifies. F.C. Ryukyu sports cheerleaders that include both

⁵⁶ Gavin Mairs, "Why It's Time to Take a Stand on National Anthems," Belfast Telegraph, 23 August 2007.

⁵⁷ AFP, "Football Coach Troussier Holds Talks Over Socceroos Job," 5 December, 2007.

⁵⁸ AFP, "Troussier Signs With Japanese Lower-Leaguers," 12 December, 2007.

Americans and Okinawans. Sit behind the youth-development squad eating local box lunches while watching the senior team play, and the same ethnic make up emerges. Some teens only speak English, others Japanese, and a third group translates. Yet they all play together on the field and laugh when they keep placing pickled, sour plums on one American's lunch while he's watching the game. The aim, despite the rich use of Ryukyu imagery and branding the club as a near-national team on the high track and the low track's creation of a unique culture through Americans and a Frenchman, is equality with the big cities on the mainland and just possibly winning the Emperor's Cup tournament.

A more puzzling sporting version of sub-state nationalism, one largely by and for mainlanders, comes from the recently launched Okinawa Pro Wrestling. Though wrestling serves more as a burlesque than an actual sporting event, Billig does mention it in Banal Nationalism.⁵⁹ The new circuit—spun off from Osaka Pro Wrestling by founder Hiroto Wakita, known by his stage name Super Delfin—uses physical comedy as its hook and relies on silly, Okinawan-themed costumes. Wakita's original circuit helped revive downtown Osaka's economy, and the new venture eyes drawing tourists to Naha's kitschy Kokosai-dori, or International Street. Characters include anthropomorphic versions of a pineapple, grown in the island's northern section; a cape-wearing *goya*; a habu, the poisonous snake found on the islands; a mongoose; an extremely goofy-looking pig; a *shisa*; and a local trickster spirit. At the circuit's opening day, visitors to the pocket-sized Delfin Arena were greeted with three older women performing traditional Ryukyu dances before the card began, and as the event opened images of aquamarine waters, palm trees, and other tropical scenes flashed on television screens to the tune of UB40's reggae-style cover of "Red, Red Wine" instead of the standard American fare of

⁵⁹ Billig, 151-153.

heavy metal music and violent imagery. A giant local media presence covered the event for Okinawan consumption. Whether the Okinawan spirit found in the organization is a positive force or a modern minstrel show becomes cloudy with the role of a character that I was told was named Okinawa Man, but the Japanese wrestling website [Osaka Holiday Paradise](#) labels Menso-re Oyaji.⁶⁰ Menso-re Oyaji entered the arena with the persona of a mellow, drunk Okinawan during his tag-team match. Wearing a Hawaiian shirt, a mask that included a stylized bowl of *soba* noodles on top, and a grin, the character cheerfully bumbled into the ring sipping from a can of Orion beer. Displaying a rather casual attitude to wrestling, Menso-re Oyaji was tagged into the match to tangle with the prostrate anthropomorphic pineapple, ran into the ring, suddenly realized he still gripped his beer, rushed over to a neutral corner to gently set down his can, walloped the pineapple, and then returned to his beer for a few quick sips rather than pinning his foe or playing to the crowd. Certainly the comedic style of wrestling tied Okinawa in with a popular mainland-Japan version of the art, but the imagery sets the islands as a world apart. Okinawa Pro Wrestling utilizes both the high and low tracks to offer an informal way to delineating the region as a distinct people within the greater Japanese nation, though whether this is accomplished in a positive or negative manner is up to debate.

Okinawa's relationship with Japan's major sport, baseball, lacks the comparative zest of soccer or wrestling but offers a more of a provincial view of the prefecture. Nine Japanese teams and three Korean squads, in a move echoing American clubs' preparing for the upcoming season in Florida or Arizona, head south to the islands for spring training.⁶¹ Still, the possibility of a major-league franchise relocating to the southern

⁶⁰ [Osaka Holiday Paradise](#), "Latest News," 5 July, 2008.

⁶¹ Charles, Bill, "Bats Are Swinging As Teams Prepare for Season," [Japan Update](#), 14 February, 2008.

province appears highly remote, even as sub-arctic Hokkaido in the far north is represented by the Nippon Ham Fighters, who warm up for the campaign in Nago. Okinawa has shown some success on the high school level with Okinawa Shogaku, an expensive private school in Naha, winning the National High School Invitational tournament in 1999 and 2008.⁶² As Okinawa Shogaku romped to a 9-0 victory in the 2008 title game, the high-track nationalism did not fit the expected high-track aspects of a separate culture. As traffic died around the island as people watched the contest on television, the sacred space became not castles or *shisas*, but the Koshien Stadium, the oldest baseball venue in the country⁶³ located in the Kansei area near Kyoto and Osaka. The park is where Japanese baseball legends grab their first taste of fame and where seemingly every school boy dreams of playing on the dirt infield usually described as “sacred.”⁶⁴ Pitcher Nao Higashihama tossed a complete-game shutout for Okinawa Shogaku in the final, becoming the first hurler to perform the feat since current Boston Red Sox superstar Daisuke Matsuzaka blanked his foes in 1998.⁶⁵ The print-capital of live television coverage, radio, and sports newspapers places the islands not as a sub-state nation but at the heart of Japan. The comparisons are not with the mainland as a separate realm, but with other high schools and other provincial parts of the country. As Okinawa Shogaku approached the title, more and more people watched the contest. At the Jusco shopping mall in Okinawa City, miles from Naha, crowds began gathering around television sets. When the school recorded the final out, polite applause showered the

⁶² Kyodo News, “Okinawa Shogaku Wins 2nd Title at High School Invitational,” 4 April, 2008.

⁶³ Kokoyakyu—High School Baseball, “Pilgrimage to Koshien,” 2005.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kyodo News, “Okinawa Shogaku Wins 2nd Title at High School Invitational.”

mall. With the victory and new sacred spaces, the typical high track rail was removed, and for a few innings Okinawa was truly within Japan.

So What Is Okinawan Nationalism?

Providing an exact nature of Okinawan nationalism—particularly from an American military spouse—remains dicey, but two-track thesis suggests that it involves any cultural artifacts, widely held beliefs, and other customs that separate the islands' culture from the mainland. In short, what would have a Ryukyuan say “we,” and a northerner say “they.” This fits in with Anderson by placing Okinawa and Japan on an equal footing, and feeds into other theorists since it uses their opinions on nationalism. Paradoxically, the stronger the nationalism becomes the more it places the southern prefecture within the nation-state's mainstream. As the sports section shows, local nationalism blends into provincial pride and, in the case of the baseball tournament, even outright Japanese nationalism. This definition appears basic, but one imagines that 100,000 Okinawans would offer 100,000 different opinions on what is Okinawa-ness, creating the need for a looser description. A place that serves as a former kingdom, a province, a tourism destination, and an American military outpost offers a variety of interpretations of nationalism.

Tatsuko Yamada, one of nine Okinawan females engaged in Ruth Ann Kelso's series of interviews entitled Women of Okinawa, lives the life of a Ryukyuan's “we,” a Japanese person's “they,” and an “us” by bringing the two places together. Yamada lived through the American occupation with her father working for the Americans in the immediate post-war years as an illustrator, her family was adopted by an military couple,

and her little sister was even named Dorothy.⁶⁶ As a child, Yamada developed an interest in ballet, and described her instructor as “Japanese,” but she developed into a well-regarded teacher of *Ryubu*,⁶⁷ a traditional Okinawan dance that emerged during the fifteenth century, the “golden age” of Chinese stewardship, and revived in the years after World War II.⁶⁸ As the interviewee said, “Aesthetically speaking, it is Okinawa.”⁶⁹ She described rampant discrimination from the mainlanders during her days as a student at Tokyo’s Keio University, where signs outside of restaurants even read “Okinawans Prohibited”⁷⁰ or her father’s time in Japan in the prewar years. He changed his last name to fit in with northern culture; when he won a highly prestigious wood-carving contest, the organizers stripped him of the title since it was unthinkable that a southerner would win the contest; and when he wanted to return home, his first wife refused. Despite this, there is an implied dream for an equal footing within the Japanese nation. When Okinawans tired of the American occupation, they demonstrated for reversion to the mainland. Protestors waved Japanese flags and referred to themselves as Japanese. After reunification, and islanders felt that they were still treated as second-class citizens, people called themselves “*uchinanauchu*,” the Ryukyuan term for a person from Okinawa and sheathed their flags.⁷¹ Yamada, despite her clear dissatisfaction with Tokyo’s policies and mainlanders’ attitudes, clearly wants more engagement with Japan. She hopes the Americans will leave the bases, despite acknowledging the military presence’s financial benefits, to help spur tourism from the north. She believes the national government is

⁶⁶ Tatsuko Yamada, “Tatsuko Yamada,” *Women of Okinawa*, ed. Ruth Ann Keyson, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2000: 58-59.

⁶⁷ 61.

⁶⁸ Ruth Ann Keyson, “Tatsuko Yamada,” *Women of Okinawa*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2000: 57.

⁶⁹ Yamada, 63.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ 64-65.

“obligated to pump more money into the economy” and “that a lot of problems here need to be addressed by the Japanese government.”⁷² Yamada’s views shows one way in which an Okinawan wants a distinct, but clearly equal, role within the Japanese nation-state.

Yamada’s observations—and others, such as the anonymously written Unofficial Constitution of the Republic of the Ryukyus—emphasize what Okinawa is not. The islands claims a peaceful heritage, but American bases cover large sections of the main island. It clearly holds an independent culture, but as the constitution states, the Ryukyus have “suffered centuries of exploitation and oppression under the feudalistic and imperialistic rule of China, Japan, and the United States of America.”⁷³ Citizens vote for candidates in the national government, yet they feel powerless toward Tokyo and Washington. When the victorious Allies revived the Ryukyu name for the region, islanders wanted assimilation with Japan,⁷⁴ and the idea of *uchinananchu* blossomed after reversion.⁷⁵ Yamada observed that mainlanders saw Okinawans as drunks,⁷⁶ and Americans often perceive the region as bucolic. If the main focus of nationalism is what makes a people a “we,” then the less-remembered focus of it comes from what makes a people “them.” Nationalism is a two-way street.

Ultimately, Okinawa’s nationalism is an elusive target that at times appears Japanese or American depending on the observer. The idea of a local food would serve as a banal indicator of identity. Tokyo features its share of Okinawan restaurants. On the

⁷² 67.

⁷³ “Unofficial Constitution of the Republic of the Ryukyus,” trans. John Purves, [The Okinawa History and Culture Website](#).

⁷⁴ Richard Siddle, “Return to Uchina” in [Japan and Okinawa](#), 135.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 136.

⁷⁶ 63.

main island, people eat the iconic taco rice, a mixture of rice, seasoned ground beef found in classic American tacos, lettuce, and tomatoes. Seasoning packets are found in grocery stores and gift shops for tourists. A&W Root Beer stands, a piece of nostalgia for many Americans, dot the island. According to one newspaper report, mainlanders find this odd.⁷⁷ This cuisine, just two of many examples within local food, shows how the islands create a unique culture through commerce and geopolitics.

Crystallizing the Concept and Its Ramifications

Two-track nationalism combines a pair of very different views on the concept. Most authors in the survey show some high-track manifestations in their works, but it mostly emanates from the low-track centered Nations and Nationalism. The low track appears far more commonly in day-to-day life, but it draws deeply on the high track and even Smith's *ethnie*. Anderson is correct when nations are "Imagined Communities" but many parallel and complementary social structures are imagined, such as sports teams' fan bases or cuisines. The industrial age created a mythic version of the past, but history provided the material to be glorified. An analogy for this system comes from an electrically powered train. The low track, illustrated by Billig, serves as the main rails of Okinawa's identity moves forward in its evolution. The high track and Smith serve as the third rail and the powerful electric current. Gellner and Anderson serve as the engine, propelling the locomotive and its cars while connecting the rails with the power source.

For Okinawa, this should mean a slow, but unsteady, integration with the Japanese nation-state. Allow print-capital to run its course, and the prefecture will merge with a mainland as a unique region. But following the railroad analogy, the union becomes unsteady if the Japanese or American government seemingly attacks the high

⁷⁷ Linda Sieg, "Okinawa Cuisine: Tofu, Spam and Root Beer," Reuters, 12 March, 2008.

track. To use a cliché, the system becomes unhinged if the nation-state touches the third rail. The national government's attempts in 2007 to release new textbooks ignoring the Japanese army's atrocities toward civilians during the Battle of Okinawa⁷⁸ created harsh feelings toward Tokyo. The islands elected Hirokazu Nakaima—a member of the ruling, but politically reeling, conservative Liberal Democratic Party—as governor in 2006 on a pro-base, pro-government platform.⁷⁹ The next year, he spoke a massive protest anti-textbook protest.⁸⁰ If the government powers offer Okinawa a societal respect, then the region will blossom within the country proper.

This theory offers conservative ramifications: If the mainland government wants strong relations with its southernmost province, then it must take a culturally hands-off attitude with Okinawa, mixed with a financial policy that allows local growth and financial integration. This modified “Japan, Incorporated”-style approach lets capitalism develop a distinct Okinawan culture within the country as a whole. A more unwieldy approach alters this dynamic. A later chapter will show how the United States cut off the Ryukyus from mainland print-capital, unleashing a surprisingly strong wave of unintended Japanification during the 1950s and 1960s. Imperial Japan's rigorous cultural integration efforts doomed the prefecture to second-class citizenship and ultimately destruction during World War II. Two-track nationalism, if left to its own devices, will create the real Okinawa, a true merger of Ryukyu and Japan.

⁷⁸ [The Japan Times](#), “Okinawa City Rips Efforts to Alter Textbooks,” 15 May, 2007.

⁷⁹ [Japan Policy and Politics](#), “Nakaima's Win in Okinawa Election Spells Progress for Futemna Move,” 27 November, 2006.

⁸⁰ [BBC News](#), “Huge Japan Protest Over Textbook,” 29 September, 2007.

Chapter 3: The Ryukyu Kingdom

The Creation of Historic Memory

The historical arc of Ryukyu, divided between its rise to a Chinese-backed “golden age” during the fourteenth century and a second era of perceived domination under the Japanese feudal realm of Satsuma that lasted between 1609⁸¹ and the beginnings of outright annexation by Japan during the 1870s, shows the creation of high-track nationalism, merges nationalist theories, and indicates that Okinawa’s identity becomes dependent on other nation-states or national-identity structures/formations. Popular literature presents the islands’ era of independence in almost cartoon-like terms with good China, bad Japan, helpless Okinawa, female high priestesses, and the creation of searing imaginings. A historic moment may become lost for centuries, only to revive when contemporary events seemingly mirror the sacred, lionized past. A seemingly everyday object, such as a *shisa* or *goya*, directs the viewer toward this independent era with its creation of today’s colorful, if less-than-accurate, discourse.

Informal literature such as websites, non-academic books, and everyday conversation usually presents the Ryukyu Kingdom’s history as a peaceful, mercantile realm overrun by greedy Satsuma, a mainland feudal realm. The islands, unified by the petty chieftom of Chuzan, channeled commerce between what later became known as Southeast Asia and China, Japan, and Korea. Often, the golden age’s decline is painted with the image of Satsuma, closed off by Japan’s hermit-kingdom status, invading weaponless Ryukyu, using the kingdom as a back-door way to trade with China, imposing heavy taxes on locals, and squeezing every bit of money out of the entrepot.

⁸¹ Matsuda, “The Government of the Kingdom of Ryukyu, 1609-1872” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1967), 2001 ed., 16.

Overwhelmed, the land's vibrant shipping industry collapsed, dooming Ryukyans to poverty and centuries of backwater status. The Okinawa Peace Network of Los Angeles, a pacifist organization striving for demilitarization of the islands and often an observer of the Okinawan diaspora, wrote in its history that the kingdom had a "high degree of national sovereignty that was eventually shattered by the colonial domination by the Satsuma-han in the 17th century."⁸² Half-Okinawan, half-American Kenny Ehman, wrote in his summary of the region's history, "Satsuma used Okinawa's relationship with China to allow trade to continue for its own profit. ... The heavy tax burden placed on the Ryukyuan government meant that peasant farmers had to work even harder in order to make annual tax payments to Satsuma."⁸³ The late Mitsugu Sakihara, a professor for many years at the University of Hawaii, noted in an afterward for 2000 publishing of George H. Kerr's 1958 work Okinawa: The History of an Island People, that Kerr's history was overly sympathetic to the islands in the aftermath of World War II's destruction and "he was consistently a friend of the weak and oppressed; however in his zeal to right wrongs, he was sometimes less than impartial."⁸⁴ These presentations of an almost cuddly Ryukyu Kingdom perform three valuable examples of nationalist theory: They present a "golden age" and its opposite to project a national identity, print-capital disseminates this familial sense of peoplehood, and the use of American-based research presents a valuable example of Anderson's theories on comparison. American literature during the United States' military occupation provided a strong impact on nationalist discourse with Kerr's glowing portrait of the kingdom penetrating everyday views of the

⁸² Okinawa Peace Network of Los Angeles, "Early History of the Ryukyu Kingdom and its Relationship with China and Japan," date unknown.

⁸³ Ehman, 11.

⁸⁴ Sakihara, 543.

region's history, sense of nationhood, and nobility compared with warring nations. As Sakihara wrote after gently criticizing Kerr, the scholar's work "reminded Okinawans of their proud heritage and helped to give them courage to face the future."⁸⁵

The Creation of Ryukyu and the Golden Age

The road to the Ryukyu nation-state began with the rise of Chuzan, one of three petty kingdoms populating the main island,⁸⁶ and China's revival under the Ming Dynasty. Seeking to revive its geopolitical status, the empire consolidated its hold over its neighbors and sent out contacts to outlying realms to seek fealty. King Satto of Chuzan quickly proclaimed his allegiance to the Middle Kingdom, and in return, he received Chinese recognition and trade contacts in 1372.⁸⁷ These moves gave the pocket-sized territory legitimacy in the eyes of the Ming Dynasty, ultimately placing it in the same breath with realms such as Korea, Annam, Champa, Cambodia, and Tibet.⁸⁸ The other two Okinawan chiefdoms, Hokuzan and Nanzan,⁸⁹ struggled to catch up with their neighbor, beginning their trade with China in the 1380s. By then, Chuzan established commerce with Korea and soon thereafter began receiving tribute from other islands in the Ryukyu archipelago.⁹⁰ In the following decades, Chuzan, with its superior harbors and unified government,⁹¹ established ties with Japan in Kyoto and sent a delegation to Siam.⁹² The stronger realm conquered Hokuzan by 1422⁹³ and Nanzan by 1429. The kingdom expanded further, most likely capturing a large island to the north known as

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Matsuda, 16.

⁸⁷ Kerr, 64-65.

⁸⁸ 66.

⁸⁹ Ehman, 10.

⁹⁰ Kerr, 74.

⁹¹ 85.

⁹² 81.

⁹³ 85.

Amami-Oshima in the 1440s and nearby Kikajima two decades later.⁹⁴ The creation of a small nation-state, and its historic echoes reverberating to the present time, was complete. By choosing to further its national aims by creating a tranquil sphere of influence with itself at the center, China found success and in later years a past to project its nationalism while indirectly birthing the Ryukyu Kingdom and creating a historic bench mark for Okinawan nationalism.

The social impact of China's tributary relationship with Chuzan and, eventually, Ryukyu powered the high track of nationalism today and the both poles during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The empire's influence on day-to-day life spread across the islands.⁹⁵ Chinese immigrants from Fukien, welcomed with tax breaks, food, and social status, created what would be today would be called an instant middle class. These newcomers introduced Chinese writing, worked as traders, served at the royal palace in Shuri, and provided an artisan population.⁹⁶ The lunar calendar and dragon boat races, strongly associated with China, took their place in the island and still hold a sacred position in local culture.⁹⁷ Island students from the royal court won scholarships to study in the land of the country's benefactor, bringing Chinese-style administration to Ryukyu and creating an "elite" class for the government.⁹⁸ The empire's high track influence can be further seen with its architectural touches at Shuri, where what is Chinese becomes distinctly Ryukyuan. In Okinawa prefecture's submission of several properties in a drive to name historical landmarks as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the unnamed writer

⁹⁴ Gregory James Smits, "Romantic Ryukyu in Okinawan Politics: The Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism," 2006, 7.

⁹⁵ 73.

⁹⁶ 75-76.

⁹⁷ Ehman, 10.

⁹⁸ Kerr, 79-80.

mentioned that the “Decoration of the hall represents unique Ryukyuan features, which are most evidently exemplified by the front eaves of Chinese-style gables” and a pair of stone lions once stood sentinel at one gate.⁹⁹ In 1509, new construction at Shuri produced pillars. Once again, the nomination describes this decorative element as a “unique Ryukyu decoration in the apparently Chinese-style dragons on pillars and beams.”¹⁰⁰ Yesterday’s imitation became today’s sacred object of historic independence.

This contact with China helped propel Ryukyu into a proto entrepot, channeling goods between Southeast Asia and northern nations, but the imperial government played more than a small role. The Ming Dynasty provided Okinawan merchants with support that in the words of the late historian Shunzo Sakamaki was “indulgently generous,” complete with startup funds, gifts, and upgrading tribute vessels once they reached Chinese ports. The trade vastly strengthened Shuri’s power over a kingdom with scant natural resources¹⁰¹ since the ruler licensed ships,¹⁰² giving the monarchy a monopoly on international commerce.¹⁰³ Most of the trade ventured to Siam¹⁰⁴ along with other places within Southeast Asia such as Patani, Malacca, Sumatra, and Java.¹⁰⁵ The Ryukyans ventured south for sappanwood and pepper and then exchanged these natural resources in China, Japan, and Korea for sulfur and horses, reaping as much as 750 to 1,500 times the initial buying price.¹⁰⁶ Little wonder Sakamaki called the era of Ryukyu’s Southeast

⁹⁹ Executive Committee for Commemoration of Registration World Heritage, Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu, Japan, 1999, 87.

¹⁰⁰ 94.

¹⁰¹ Shunzo Sakamaki, “Ryukyu and Southeast Asia,” The Journal of Asian Studies 23 (May, 1964): 385.

¹⁰² 386.

¹⁰³ 385.

¹⁰⁴ 386.

¹⁰⁵ 383.

¹⁰⁶ 387.

Asian commerce, which he pegged at 1385-1570, as a “golden age” for the region.¹⁰⁷

Kerr positively gushed over the island’s trade, “Who could tell what strange birds, plants, or animals might be brought ashore, what new musical instruments might be among the souvenirs, or what colorful bales and bolts of cloth might be disclosed in the cargo?”¹⁰⁸

Today’s *goya* vine, brought to the islands in those glory days, in front of a mainland-owned office building evokes a brief era in which Chuzan roared from a pocket-sized entity in the middle of Okinawa into a somewhat powerful realm, that conquered islands, and was seen as the near-equal of Korea, Siam, and just maybe Japan. Okinawans eat or decorate with the “golden age” by taking a sacred object and transforming it into flagging. Or, the modern citizen of the prefecture can reverse this process by meditating upon the ordinary emblem of the past. A common bond is forged, even for the people on outer islands or those main islanders who live in the former realms of Nanzan and Hokuzan and whose ancestors possibly thought of themselves as people overtaken by a voracious Chuzan.

Shuri helped cement its hold on the island by appropriating the region’s *noro* religion. The faith, which initially relied on local priestesses,¹⁰⁹ now found its leaders appointed by the monarch. The chief *noro* and other high-ranking clergy members scattered through Ryukyu were usually close relatives of the king, helping to take control of the land’s faith. In turn, the top cleric lived in or near Shuri during the time of the realm’s monarchy and confirmed village priestesses which held power over the hamlets’ household contacts with the divine.¹¹⁰ Israeli academic Susan Sered, in her admittedly

¹⁰⁷ 388.

¹⁰⁸ 94.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Sered, Women of the Sacred Groves, 3.

¹¹⁰ Kerr, 110-111.

fawning study of modern-day *noro* in Henza Village, a community near the main island, believed this served as a religious form of feudalism, right down to village priestesses offering each community's first produce from the growing season to Shuri Castle.¹¹¹ By the fifteenth century, the Ryukyu-*noro* combination created its own sacred space at Sefautaki, a shrine at the southeastern corner of the main island where the king would perform a pilgrimage to the usually all-female complex.¹¹² The unification of Ryukyu religion shows that Shuri, despite its Chinese backing, still held its hand on some local identity. It also provided a focal point for modern nationalists when contrasting the idea of a peaceful Okinawa with the male world of the American military.

Early Ryukyu and Nationalist Theory

Leaving aside today's projection of a golden age, the brief history of Ryukyu's first years broadly fits with Gellner's vision of agrarian society. The theorist's vision of powerful "horizontally segregated layers" of upper classes, powerful castes united across polities by a pan-national culture,¹¹³ can be found in the old kingdom. Chuzan's government, and to a lesser extent Nanzan and Hokuzan, eagerly participated in Chinese geopolitics and adopted the empire's style of rule and language. When Chuzan's King Hashi climbed to the throne after his realm conquered its two neighbors, he sent representatives to the imperial court for official recognition. The new emperor, after the ambassador performed a series of intricate and complicated tasks of court etiquette, officially recognized Hashi as King of Ryukyu and sent over an official lacquer tablet that the king displayed outside of Shuri to signify his power.¹¹⁴ China provided a

¹¹¹ Sered, 13.

¹¹² Executive Committee for Commemoration of Registration, 89.

¹¹³ Gellner, 9.

¹¹⁴ Kerr, 89.

language and a scribe class along with merchants and artisans to create additional layers. The Ming Dynasty's geopolitical aims helped guide Ryukyu into Gellner's agro-literate polity. Though some caution is needed since scholars have virtually no access to what the average Ryukyuan thought during the kingdom's early years, history suggests that Ryukyu served as a pre-nationalist kingdom with a largely limited impact on the majority of the population. Still, the past holds long-term implications for later centuries.

Despite Gellner's leverage in early Ryukyu history, his views do not hold an airtight grip on the kingdom's sense of nationalism. Religion, a rather ensconced layer in an agricultural society, rubbed shoulders with the vertical strata. Appointed *noro* linked the monarch with household priestesses. Sered noted that what could be described as Gellner's "horizontal" religions brought in from China or Japan largely struck to the international communities at the islands' main port of Naha and nearby Shuri,¹¹⁵ though in the wave of overseas faith one king commissioned a large bell included the words "... enable the King and his subjects to live so virtuously that the barbarians will find no occasion to invade the Kingdom."¹¹⁶ The string of faith spanned from the king and his family down to the household, where family shrines sate in the east and west parlors of the house and the fire deity lived in the west kitchen room.¹¹⁷ A village ritual—such as the annual tug of war where the west side, representing the female must defeat the male side while remaining largely balanced—became federalized. A snapshot of the realm's early years broadly confirms Gellner, but a small-scale version of two-track proto-nationalism emerged. Giving grain to the village priestess created a sense of Ryukyu government and what could be called proto-Ryukyu-ness. Additionally, coinage arrived

¹¹⁵ 14.

¹¹⁶ Kerr, 100.

¹¹⁷ Toichi Mabuchi, "Space and Time in Ryukyuan Cosmology," *Asian Folklore Studies* 39 (1980), 2.

in the kingdom with the 1458 minting based on earlier Chinese specie and labeled “Ryukyu, Beautiful Country of the Southern Ocean.” The money indicates a nation, but Kerr also noted that it describes the kingdom as lying in geographic relation to Japan and not China.¹¹⁸ Almost certainly, the average villager had no concept of nation in the modern sense but he or she was tied to Shuri from the grand event to the banal tending of the household fire or handling money.

The Weaponless Myth

No development in the Chinese-era Ryukyu felt more historical and nationalist impact than the myth that the kingdom became weaponless during the reign of Sho Shin (r. 1477-1527). This imagining hits upon all major views of nationalism. The actual events that served as the myth’s genesis evoke Gellner by showing the developing strata of agro-literate society. Its retellings evoke Anderson’s work by placing Okinawa in a comparative sense with Japan, China, and the United States, and its dissemination through Western sources back to Okinawa shows the power of his belief in print-capital. It created a classic myth-symbol complex along the lines of Smith, and the tale has become so common that it serves as a banal indicator, with echoes found all the way to Okinawa Professional Wrestling’s imagery. The idea of idea of pacifist Okinawa serves as the fulcrum of its identity. Before and during the heart of the myth, the islands’ past appears blurry and idealized. After pacifism is supposedly implemented, the gates of colonialism by Japan and the United States become seemingly opened. This beautiful idea of weaponless Okinawa serves as the heart of modern Ryukyuan nationalism in the writings of former Governor Masahide Ota, the Okinawa Peace Network of Los Angeles, the islands’ guidebooks, and any sight of an American military member.

¹¹⁸ Kerr, 99.

The true events that created the idea of a realm without weapons really served as an act of furthering centralized power. Actually an exercise in monarchical strength to undercut feudal rulers through the island, the concept of a nation based on no coercion whatsoever captured the fancy of Europeans during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ According to Kerr, Sho Shin decreed that local lords would no longer wear swords, that they would bring their weapons to the castle for safekeeping, they would live in the capital, and eventually the king appointed his own bureaucrats to run the feudal lands.¹²⁰ Gregory James Smits, an expert on Okinawan history at Pennsylvania State University, punctured the idea that this turned Ryukyu into a weaponless state. During the era of this alleged utopia, Ryukyu militarily occupied Asami-Oshima, defeated a Satsuma invasion of that island in 1493, and then suppressed a local uprising there in 1537.¹²¹ Smits also wrote that conflicting sources suggest the possibility of a similar repression in 1571, and that Ryukyu successfully invaded islands at the southwestern end of the archipelago during those supposedly weaponless times. Korean sources portray Ryukyuan using Chinese-manufactured firearms, and the Chinese banned the sale of weapons to the kingdom's private citizens. Smits wrote "In short, the Ryukyu Kingdom was a small-scale empire, created, extended, sustained, and defended by the vigorous use of military force."¹²² (Interestingly, Kerr portrays Shuri's relationship with the invaded islands in terms similar to nineteenth century imperialists justifying their new colonies: "The inhabitants of 14th-century Yaeyama and Miyako lived in almost Neolithic simplicity; they had few metal tools, knew little of ship-building, and eked out a livelihood by the most primitive

¹¹⁹ Smits, 17.

¹²⁰ 106-107.

¹²¹ 7-8.

¹²² 8.

agricultural methods.”¹²³) Sho Shin, rather than stashing away weapons, actually militarized the kingdom with fortified castles and troops, but under the unified rule of the monarchy.¹²⁴ This tale of pacifism, retold by European travelers in the nineteenth century, Americans in the twentieth, and Okinawans themselves in the twenty-first will have a great impact on the concept of Ryukyu nationalism.

In terms of comparison, Kerr wrote on this move in a section that noted Sho Shin’s edicts preceded a similar law in Japan by nearly 100 years¹²⁵ and that the northern nation “was in a state of anarchy, its cities gutted by fire and the countryside laid wasted by wars among the barons” during the time of Sho Shin while “Okinawa lay untouched by this turmoil and confusion.”¹²⁶ Kerr painted a picture where Sho Shin, awash in wealth stemming for an ever improving artisan class and centralized government, beautifies Naha and Shuri.¹²⁷ Smits noted the pacifist ideal blossomed in Europe after two British sailors visited the islands in 1816, sending back “accounts gushed with praise.”¹²⁸ Kerr even included the account of one of the men, Captain Basil Hall, in which the closest thing he saw to corporal punishment was an offender tapped gently with a fan.¹²⁹ Smits pointed out that the British only stuck to a small, upper-class, and heavily controlled part of the island, and that the Ryukyu government actually held strong authority to physically punish its subjects.¹³⁰ Nearly 200 years before Hall, an English ship’s pilot named William Adams noted an execution sentence passed in Naha, though it was later revoked,

¹²³ 117.

¹²⁴ Smits, 9.

¹²⁵ 107.

¹²⁶ 104.

¹²⁷ 108.

¹²⁸ 17.

¹²⁹ 255.

¹³⁰ Smits, 17-18.

and that local authorities forced his unruly crew back aboard the ship.¹³¹ In an iconic moment for observers of modern Okinawa, Hall's ship docked at St. Helena on the voyage back to Great Britain and the sailor discussed Ryukyu's supposed pacifism with the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte, who was reportedly shocked by such an exotic land. An internet search for "Napoleon and Okinawa" shows the use of the encounter with the famed general's observation of peaceful people, often with Hall's description of the Frenchman's exclamation: "'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."¹³² What usually follows is a recounting of Okinawa's trials at the hands of the Japanese and the American military. The historic impact of the idea of a weaponless Ryukyu places the island on morally superior terms with France, Britain, and most importantly today, the United States and Japan. A nation, not a region or province, is created in the eyes of the reader of Hall's account or those who speak of the islands as a glorious utopia destroyed by avarice. As often in the case of nationalism, the emotional impact and imaginings of history matter more than its accuracy.

The Satsuma Invasion

When I first arrived in Okinawa, one person showing us around the island, helping us find housing, good restaurants, and acquaint us with the culture and history, described Satsuma's 1609 invasion of Ryukyu in seemingly unbelievable terms. "The Japanese invaded," he said, "and they were shocked to find the Okinawans unarmed, saying 'We surrender.'" The teller of this tale, an American househusband who embraced

¹³¹ William Adams, "Log-Book of William Adams, 1614-1619," Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society 12 (1914-1915), 205-206.

¹³² Michael E. Stanley, "Farewell, Dear Island! The Cost of Demilitarizing Okinawa," Japan, Inc., November, 2003.

martial-arts training while on the island, shows the ubiquity of the renderings of an unarmed Okinawa at the tender mercies of the Japanese and the images it provokes among islanders and military-affiliated people from the United States. The actual history shows a slow rise of northern influence on Ryukyu, followed by an invasion, and ultimately nearly three centuries of astute statecraft that kept the kingdom independent from both Japan and China. The history shows the creation of Smith's myth-symbol complex, but events further into the islands' relationship with major powers shows the flexibility of their impact. Later chapters will show how the events between 1609 and the 1870s can be interpreted as proof of Okinawa's affiliation with Japan, from the nationalist equivalent of cousins to outright member of the larger country; its independence; and a place within greater China under the right geopolitical circumstances. Smith's critics are right when they see the theorist's ideas as merely backward reflections, but the myth-symbol complex creates the options available to modern practitioners of Okinawan and Japanese nationalism.

Satsuma's interest, and by extension Japan's engagement, in Okinawa came gradually before it reached full flower in the 1609 invasion. Satsuma—a powerful feudal realm located in Kyushu, Japan's southernmost main island—long held contacts with the Ryukyu Islands, possibly deemed overlords of the kingdom by the Japanese under Shogun Minamoto Yorimoto in 1187, and was officially seen as feudal leaders of Ryukyu under Japan's *bakufu* system in 1447. Additionally, Kyoto granted Satsuma's ruling Shimazu family maritime powers over Shuri in 1474. Later years saw Satsuma informing Ryukyu of its inferior status while the islands replied without official outright support or

denial of the claim,¹³³ though it appears the kingdom offered some forms of fealty by officially celebrating or mourning when Shimazu lords were born or died, and honored the realm's power in some documents.¹³⁴ Certainly, Ryukyu produced some moves that brought it within Japan's feudal system by sending priests to Kyoto and sending an official mission to Kagoshima in the 1570s.¹³⁵ When Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified Japan, sought new lands, and absorbed Satsuma as a powerful vassal, he granted his southern lords the rights to subjugate Ryukyu. As Hideyoshi prepared for an invasion of Korea in 1591, the *bakufu* process worked its way down from the central government asking Satsuma for troops, and in turn the lord asking Ryukyu for men. Shuri replied in 1593 by pleading poverty and sending support material after the force left Japan, creating a political motive for an invasion and ending the kingdom's political tight-rope act.¹³⁶ In the years ahead of 1609, the court became divided between Chinese and Japanese parties.¹³⁷ The nationalistic forces here work both ways. If an Okinawan held a pro-Japanese mindset, especially in the days of the American occupation, then he or she would see the islands clearly tied with the mother country through the *bakufu* system. A view less generous to Tokyo sees the events as bullying tactics ahead of taking over a small, sovereign country.

Usually, Satsuma—and once again, this implies modern Japan to many—is portrayed for its interest in Ryukyu's trade relations with China. Historian Mitsugu Matsuda illustrated it as such, noting that the feudal realm asked the empire for better trade relations and wanted Ryukyu's help on the matter in 1609. When both drives

¹³³ Matsuda, 17-18.

¹³⁴ Kerr, 140.

¹³⁵ 147.

¹³⁶ Matsuda, 18-19.

¹³⁷ Kerr, 156.

faltered, “Satsuma’s interest in China trade was the immediate motive for the ‘punitive’ expedition dispatch to the kingdom in the spring of 1609.”¹³⁸ How the Kyushu lordship thought Ryukyu would solve its problems appears puzzling. Shuri was a minor and sometimes irksome player in Chinese geopolitics. Imperial officials found the Ryukyans pushy and avaricious, with a tendency to harbor pirates.¹³⁹ The most lucrative part of Shuri’s trade, commerce with Southeast Asia, dried up during the early sixteenth century as the Ming Dynasty weakened and provided less protection to traders. In turn, pirates known as *wako* began plying the seas. Ryukyu’s trading ships, previously built by the empire, were replaced by domestically constructed vessels with less cargo space but built for speed. The newly arrived Portuguese filled the void left by the shrinking Ryukyuan presence, which was further undercut by black-marketing. The kingdom continued a vigorous trade with Japan and China, but it was not the great prize it would have been in the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Shuri’s drive for ever more opulence began surpassing Ryukyu’s capabilities by the late sixteenth century.¹⁴¹ The prospect of a greedy country taking over a small, rich one remains a potent idea in imaginings, but history suggests that Ryukyu was weakening; took some steps toward affiliation with Japan, even if it was to preserve its own existence; and the space between empires often finds itself a likely target of conquest.

Satsuma began its invasion with two additional goals that would further Japanese interests. Feudal wars had left Kyushu crawling with troops waiting for a battle, and the national government became wary of growing European influence upon Japan and

¹³⁸ 19.

¹³⁹ Kerr, 131-132.

¹⁴⁰ Sakamaki, 388.

¹⁴¹ Kerr, 115.

Spain's occupation of the Philippines.¹⁴² Kerr described a series of battles during the northern realm's conquest, but largely portrays Ryukyu as nearly defenseless:

“... the Okinawans were untrained and inexperienced. The last occasion for a general rally to arms and widespread fighting had been in the days of Sho Hashi, two centuries earlier; the arms themselves had been call in and put away during Sho Shin's reign ... The Okinawans were no match for the hardy Satsuma warriors.”¹⁴³

Okinawan novelist Tatsuhiro Oshiro echoed the same situation in his brief article on the region's history in a book released by the prefectural government ahead of the 2000 G-8 summit held on the island.¹⁴⁴ Smits shows a different view of the kingdom's battle with its eventual masters. Ryukyu, which actually possessed a fairly strong armed force to combat pirates, mustered between 1,000 and 3,000 troops and between 46 to 100 ships armed with locally made weapons and armaments acquired from Japan and China, some of them upgraded domestically. Battle-tested against *wako*, the kingdom actually repulsed the initial strike on the main island at Naha harbor rather than fulfilling the image of a noble, weaponless people who meekly surrendered. The mainlanders finally overtook Shuri by landing and the advancing to the capitol on land.¹⁴⁵ The victorious army spirited away Ryukyu's king, looted the palace, installed its own administration over the kingdom, installed tribute, and annexed the northern islands in the archipelago, including the disputed Amami-Oshima.¹⁴⁶ The invasion and sacking of a capital certainly creates a “ghostly national imagining” and myth-symbol that affects a people's psyche, but the battle for the main island raises a second question for today. Why is the conquest so

¹⁴² Kerr, 158.

¹⁴³ 158-159.

¹⁴⁴ Tatsuhiro Oshiro, “A History and Culture of Grace and Gentility,” in The Traditional Culture of Okinawa, Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2000, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Smits, 13-14.

¹⁴⁶ Kerr, 159-160.

vividly remembered, while the victory at Naha does not rank with noble defeats found in nationalistic cultures such as America's Bunker Hill, Mexico's Puebla, or Britain's Hastings and Dunkirk? Perhaps the imagery of a peaceful Okinawa is so strong that it drowns out the possibility of military prowess, and the other three examples indicated perseverance in those countries' struggles. But with a different set of circumstances, perhaps if Americans such as Kerr grasped the importance of the battle, the guns of Naha harbor could ring with the spirits of Okinawan nationalism today.

Satsuma's invasion kept Ryukyu alive for nearly another 300 years, but it effectively separated the northern islands—most notably Amami-Oshima—in the archipelago from Shuri. The United States absorbed these territories, but returned them to Japan in 1953,¹⁴⁷ nineteen years before Okinawa prefecture. American anthropologist Douglas G. Haring noticed that people in the Amami group saw the Japanese in a far different light than the Okinawans. "Perhaps nowhere else in the world is the Japanese government of the nineteenth century regarded as symbolic of liberty and progress; but the grateful Amamians still feel that way about Tokyo," he wrote, referring to the mainland's ending of serfdom.¹⁴⁸ The Okinawan diaspora more often sent its people to Hawaii and South America, while the people of the smaller islands were more likely to immigrate to the mainland, creating stronger ties. In contrast to today's image historic image of Japan in Okinawa, Amami islanders of the 1950s would "distrust of the slick, sophisticated Okinawan who is sure to swindle the innocent countryman from

¹⁴⁷ Agreement Between Japan and the United States of America Concerning the Amami Islands, 24 December, 1953.

¹⁴⁸ Douglas G. Haring, "Amami Gunto: Forgotten Islands," Far Eastern Survey 21 (19 November, 1952), 170.

Amami.”¹⁴⁹ These northern islands wanted reversion to Japan, but they particularly resented serving again under their former southern overlords.¹⁵⁰ Nationalism clearly cuts in many directions.

Ryukyu Under Two Masters

Satsuma’s first move after conquering the islands was to impose new rules for Ryukyu. These orders, which could be interpreted as friendly to common folk, could again be seen in multiple ways. The 1611 directives included stipulations that banned private servitude, curbed maintenance toward religious sites, reformed trade practices, and allowed a form of grievance from peasants who felt that they were being exploited.¹⁵¹ The same day, Satsuma released documents officially tying the kingdom to its master. With a little squinting of historical hindsight, these could be taken as Japanese nationalist documents, reforming the land and tying it to the mother country. An Okinawan-shaded pair of glasses reveals a greedy Japan attempting to clamp down on Ryukyu’s independence. In many ways, this duality sets the future of Okinawan nationalism, swinging between pro-Japanese and pro-Ryukyuan outlooks.

Ryukyu King Sho Nei began subverting his new fealty once he returned from his time as a captive. If Satsuma’s invasion of the kingdom slowly built up over a century of increasing feudal contact, then the time after the war shows a continued cat-and-mouse game between the two governments, allowing Ryukyu additional years of independence. In 1613, Satsuma used the kingdom as a courier to China, sending a demand for trade with the empire or face an invasion. Sho Nei and his government refused to deliver the

¹⁴⁹ Haring, 171.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Matsuda, 24-25.

letter.¹⁵² Shuri further undermined its masters in the coming years by publicly announcing it cut off ties with Japan and then informing China of a possible Japanese invasion of Formosa.¹⁵³ Sho Nei's successor, Sho Ho, came close to downright exploiting the situation. Realizing that Satsuma and the rest of Japan was famously "closed off" to foreigners, he understood that his overlords needed him to funnel trade to the mainland. Sho Ho used mainland capital to maintain his kingdom, and his realm's merchants would trade Satsuma goods to the empire, giving the Japanese the worst material in return. Later, Sho Ho noticed that Satsuma and the rest of the key islands developed a huge demand for Chinese goods, so the king notified his ambassador to the empire to increase the outflow of goods to Naha.¹⁵⁴ Popular literature today portrays the mainland imposing steep taxes on average farmers on the island with surprisingly low crop totals over the second half of Ryukyu's history, but Sakihara argued against this heavy suppression nearly thirty-five years ago, showing that studies measuring stagnant production of rice appear suspiciously like a pre-cash version of undocumented income to dodge heavy taxes.¹⁵⁵ Satsuma found its hands tied if it wanted to crack down on Ryukyu's tactics. It could not depose the king, since China officially decided who ruled the kingdom. Withdrawing funds from the money pit into which Ryukyu unexpectedly developed was a dead end since its sailors were the only ones who could conduct the trade. Additionally, Satsuma received another blow for its plans when the Ming Dynasty collapsed, shattering

¹⁵² Matsuda, 28.

¹⁵³ Smits, "Recent Trends in Scholarship on the History of Ryukyu's Relations with China and Japan," 3 February, 2006, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Smits, 12-18.

¹⁵⁵ Mitsugu Sakihara, "Ryukyu's Tax-Tribute to Satsuma," Modern Asian Studies 6 (1972), XXX.

commerce.¹⁵⁶ Far from dooming Ryukyu, the invasion may have given the kingdom extra time.

Ahead of its decline and annexation by Japan in the nineteenth century, Ryukyu actually became more culturally akin to China. Sho Shoken, who became prime minister in 1666 and was trained by Chinese scholars,¹⁵⁷ later limited the powers of the *noro* priestesses to further his status.¹⁵⁸ Sai On, tutor and later adviser to Sho Kei¹⁵⁹ (r. 1713-1751),¹⁶⁰ sought to undermine the native religion and Buddhism and replace it with Confucianism to strengthen the royal government.¹⁶¹ Eventually, Sai On's work completely transformed the religious underpinnings of Shuri's status; the king ceased being a semi-divine and became a "Confucian sage,"¹⁶² though the old religion remained popular among the common folk.¹⁶³ Sai On's bureaucratic skills included an ambitious plan of tree planting that limited wind-caused erosion, improved agricultural output, and staved off a feared timber shortage.¹⁶⁴ The sage's timber stands created a lasting imagining that reverberated into the twentieth century. Kerr noted that the United States' civil government in the occupied Ryukyus translated and disseminated Sai On's observations on forestry in 1952. Smits quoted a notable passage from Kerr that shows the power of trees many centuries later: "Here and there gnarled old pine trees arch the roads and line the crests of mountain ridges in 20th-century Okinawa, thanks to Sai On's policies. A grove planted at Sai On's direction on Tarama in distant Miyako still serves as

¹⁵⁶ Smits, 12-18.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1999, 51.

¹⁵⁸ 103.

¹⁵⁹ Kerr, 199.

¹⁶⁰ Gregory Smits, 163.

¹⁶¹ 8.

¹⁶² 103.

¹⁶³ 114.

¹⁶⁴ 103-109.

a model for new windbreaks established to protect the precious topsoil.”¹⁶⁵ The line of shifting nationalism can be seen from Ryukyu to Chinese to American and back to Ryukyu. The independent days of the kingdom show that while it did not express nationalism in the modern sense, it created a series of imaginings that were used in later generations.

The Creation of the Sacred

Smits is correct when he wrote “That early-modern Ryukyu was not a nation in the modern sense of the term as described by scholars such as Anderson and Gellner should be obvious at this point.”¹⁶⁶ The scholar is also right in his next sentence when he noted that the royal government “advanced” the idea of Ryukyu into an imagined community.¹⁶⁷ The independent days of the island state created no nationalism, but it created a series of cultural memories and artifacts for later generations to embrace. Unified government effectively established Okinawa’s modern borders; set up its basic relations with Japan, China, and, as a later chapter will show, the United States; and forged the tools for a sense of Ryukyu-ness in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Sai On fashioned it in his windbreaks, Sho Nei through his guile, and King Sato with his political savvy. These men did not mean to create a nation as we recognize it today, but they helped forge the framework that would fill out into nationalism as basic concepts about states and people changed.

The tricky question of historical ambiguity remains, one since decade’s “proof” of long-term good relations with Japan becomes evidence of mainland imperialism the next, but nationalism is an evolutionary process. The rise of Chuzan and Ryukyu could be

¹⁶⁵ Kerr, 207.

¹⁶⁶ Smits, 161.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

safely seen as nationalism, but one scholar speculated that the three realms' wars and trading abilities could only come from the riches carried by refugees from a Japanese civil war,¹⁶⁸ leading to the possible conclusion in a pro-mainland moment that it's "Therefore possible the 'golden age' predated contact with Ming Dynasty."¹⁶⁹ The hallowed moments of Ryukyu's history are selected by scholars and activists in later years, but these ghostly imaginings were first fashioned by the past and sit ready for appropriation. The nature of two-track nationalism shows that the grandness of history can be seen in ordinary objects as much as monumental ones. A stand of pine trees serves as an agricultural project in the 1700s and a simultaneous beacon of everyday knowledge and an echo of independence 200 years later. *Noro* helped forge Gellner's upper strata in and around Shuri, it served as Smith's myth-symbol complex in every village, and acts as a comparative mechanism for the masculine domination of American armed forces. Okinawa can be expressed in castle walls, whether they sit in ruins by the road or if a person climbs out of their vehicle and visits the grounds of former warriors and kings. History creates the grand and the banal, and though the objects may be reinterpreted, their permanence as vehicles of identity remains.

¹⁶⁸ Shunzo Sakamai, "The Heike: From Defeat at Dannoua to a Golden Age in Ryukyu?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 27 (November, 1967): 115-122.

¹⁶⁹ 120.

Chapter 4: Imperial Subjects

The Mandibles of Nationalism

Okinawa endured the push and pull of nationalism during the era of Imperial Japan before the advent of World War II,¹⁷⁰ forging a modern identity by forces within and outside the islands. Additionally, the archipelago served as a key engine for Japanese nationalism, from the empire's first moves to fully take over the islands in 1871, through the official annexation in 1879, and the decades of quasi-colonial status. The Ryukyus served both as the opening gambit of Japanese expansion and its final spasm, and the era laid the basic foundations for modern Okinawan nationalism. Islanders became a subject people; underwent quantification through surveys, tax plans, and centrally run bureaucracy; served as an "other" to the mainlanders; the first academics specializing in the region began writing; and a diaspora spread across the Pacific Rim. In many ways the contradictions of nationalism permeate this period in history. Tokyo tried introducing pro-Japanese measures, but these only separated the Ryukyans from the nation-state. Japanese people often stereotyped Okinawans as filthy but resented their upward mobility in the diaspora. The islands were taken in as a fully fledged prefecture, yet it was treated as a colony. And when it was treated as a possession, Okinawa was too small to receive the large influx of development money and expertise in acquired territories such as nearby Taiwan. Smith's myth-symbol complex developed as Gellner's agro-literate polity evolved into an industrial society.

The idea of two-track nationalism buoys this conflict. Today's use of the Japanese language links the islands with the nation-state, though the differing accents imply

¹⁷⁰ Japan's militarism and its role will be examined in Chapter 5.

separation. Ultimately, the mainland's written language serves as the medium that Okinawans use as they debate their own history. The Japanese air force plane flying near Naha serves as an ordinary occurrence and with its famed red circle on the wings, brings back memories of militarism. The road signs pointing to a castle ruin imply the great and the ordinary, the link with Japan and the ties to the independent past. The confusion can be found in one of the oral histories taken in Women of Okinawa. Junko Isa reflected on her student days before World War II, and the shifting perspectives of "us" and "them" becomes hard to untangle. When talking about the war "they were fighting battles all over Asia, and winning. We never dreamed Japan would lose in the end."¹⁷¹ Yet in the next sentence, the description of the nation changed from the external to the collective. "All through the early 1940s, we heard nothing but reports about the success of our soldiers... That's why the teachers at school used to encourage us students to study so hard. 'In the future you're going to be the leaders throughout East Asia!' they insisted."¹⁷² In that passage the echoes of the myth-symbol complex arises through militarism and the banal through its constant drum beat. The images of the era between 1871 and the stirrings of the Second World War create two paths for local identity; they also create a series of artifacts that are at once humdrum and sacred. This may appear a bit confused, but the high-track nationalism creates vivid artifacts, and the low-track indicators suggest how they were, are, and will be interpreted. There is a risk in extrapolating one interpretation of the Imperial Japan's impact on Okinawan nationalism, since so many indicators and renderings are always being created, but for now these serve

¹⁷¹ "Junko Isa," 5.

¹⁷² Ibid.

as current prevailing interpretations of the region's pre-war history under the Japanese flag.

The Road to Annexation

If the space between two leading Asian nations left Ryukyu geopolitical room for its continued survival, then the consolidation of Meiji Japan acted as a sponge that absorbed the islands into the empire. By 1871, Ryukyu maintained some form of international status, already holding treaties with the United States, the Netherlands, and France¹⁷³ along with its traditional relations with China, Korea, and Japan. In 1868, the Shimazu clan ceded its control over its territories to modernizing Tokyo. In turn, the head of the family was named governor of Satsuma and Ryukyu by the central government. Three years later, the Meiji government ended the old feudal realms with the modern prefecture system, calling Ryukyu's status into question.¹⁷⁴ A Ryukyu tribute ship caught in storms crashed into Formosa, where locals—usually called aborigines—killed fifty-four sailors, while the seven survivors straggled into a Chinese community on the island.¹⁷⁵ From this moment, the wheels of modernization worked their way through the fading feudal system and brought the kingdom within Japan. According to Kerr and most observers, Ryukyu complained to its overlord, Satsuma, which in turn, notified the central government. Japan, acting as Ryukyu's owners, pressed China to strike against the Formosans.¹⁷⁶ The northern kingdom also declared Ryukyu a former kingdom within the empire in September, 1872; named King Sho Tai a member of the Japanese aristocracy; and began assuaging the Western nations that the old treaties would retain

¹⁷³ Edwin Pak-Wah Leung, "The Quasi War in East Asia: Japan's Expedition to Taiwan and the Ryukyu Controversy," *Modern Asian Studies* 17 (1983): 259.

¹⁷⁴ Kerr, 353.

¹⁷⁵ 354.

¹⁷⁶ Kerr, 356.

their validity.¹⁷⁷ When Beijing did not actively respond to Tokyo's request for punishment against "their" ship, and a proposed Japanese invasion of Korea fell apart, the Meiji government struck at Formosa in 1874.¹⁷⁸ Pressured and weak, China signed a treaty with Japan that virtually gave up any rights to the Ryukyu Kingdom.¹⁷⁹ Another view states that Ryukyu never formally complained through what it saw as the feudal chain of command,¹⁸⁰ the 1874 negotiations did not settle the issue in Chinese eyes,¹⁸¹ and Beijing pressed its claim on the islands until 1880.¹⁸² The talks and conflicts between Japan and China in the 1870s show the ambivalence of the Ryukyuan position and the future paths for nationalism. The events—and the different perspectives they created at the time and still foster now—show the possibility of joining Japan, staying independent, or even allying with the Chinese. Certainly these actions largely affected an agro-literate society as seen in Gellner in an increasingly Westernized Asia, but future events will eliminate the strata.

Outside these greater geopolitical struggles, signs existed that Ryukyu was drifting from China to Japan. Sho Tai accepted his new rank as a Japanese peer in 1873, though he retained his crown for the time being, and the taxes that in previous years went to Shuri were now delivered to Tokyo.¹⁸³ The kingdom shelved the Chinese-style calendar for the western calendar adopted by Japan, much to Beijing's concern; western-style medicine came into vogue; the burgeoning empire sent portraits of the emperor and empress to Ryukyu; and the imperial government took over the old Satsuma

¹⁷⁷ Leung, 258-259.

¹⁷⁸ 358-359.

¹⁷⁹ 359-360.

¹⁸⁰ Leung, 266

¹⁸¹ 270.

¹⁸² 277.

¹⁸³ Kerr, 364.

ambassadorships.¹⁸⁴ Through the 1870s, Ryukyuans began adopting Japanese names.¹⁸⁵ The bonds of feudalism were broken, but the ties were merely federalized. As Tokyo transitioned from overlord to owner of Satsuma, the process would repeat in the Ryukyu Islands.

In many ways, Japanese print-capital nationalism finally transformed the region from the semi-independent Ryukyu Kingdom into the Okinawa prefecture. The kingdom continued its middle path by submitting to Japanese demands for fealty but still sending tribute to China in 1874. In response, Tokyo demanded that Shuri shut down its mission in China and accept reduced ranks within the Japanese government.¹⁸⁶ When Ryukyu sent representatives to the capital for negotiation, the Japanese press began reporting on the meeting, noting the southerners' seemingly odd clothing and the weakness of the national government to bring them to heel.¹⁸⁷ Newspapers performed two key acts for Okinawan nationalism, though through the backdoor of Japanese identity: It began casting the Ryukyuans as an "other," and it forced a newly centralized government to act quickly. Shuri's centuries-old strategy of playing the two powers off each other through relative isolation and wrong-footing became a trap. Japan reacted to the criticism and the apparent weakness by implementing demands that would fit in with Anderson's views of the quantifying aspects of colonialism to create future countries. The Ryukyuans were told to have their king thank the emperor for its role in the Formosa incident; the kingdom must drop Chinese names, take Japanese ones, and celebrate northern holidays such as the emperor's birthday; adopt Japanese law; allow Tokyo to revamp the Shuri

¹⁸⁴ 365.

¹⁸⁵ Sakamaki, "On Early Ryukyuan Names," *Ryukyuan Names* ed. Sakamaki, 1964, 19.

¹⁸⁶ 366-367.

¹⁸⁷ 367-368.

government; and send scholars for training in Japan. Additionally, the Meiji government announced that it would gift a steamship to the kingdom to improve communications and would station imperial forces in the islands.¹⁸⁸ The southern ambassadors stalled, soft-pedaled and gently rejected the demands, but clearly modern nationalism was on its way to Ryukyu.

Japan took more aggressive tactics in the coming years. Troops landed on Okinawa Island in 1875, established a garrison, turned the liaison office into a branch of the domestic government, and demanded the king visit Tokyo. As the Ryukyu government felt increased northern pressure, anti-Japanese riots began around Shuri and Naha.¹⁸⁹ The descendants of the Chinese traders saw the Meiji northerners as backsliders from the region's tradition.¹⁹⁰ Similar turmoil bubbled up in Japan as the samurai lost their status and financial power, leading to rebellions across the nation in the late 1870s,¹⁹¹ possibly giving Ryukyu the illusion that it would shake off this latest challenge as it had in previous centuries. By 1879, the revolts ceased, China's appeals for arbitration over the matter made little headway, and the last remaining territorial question for Tokyo was the southern islands. A Japanese delegation arrived in March, announced that Ryukyu Kingdom was now Okinawa Prefecture, the royal family would become part of the Japanese aristocracy, and Sho Tai must travel to Tokyo.¹⁹² Not that Ryukyu could offer much resistance, a cholera outbreak killed thousands in 1879, and the government was broke.¹⁹³ By May, the king left his now-former realm,¹⁹⁴ and resistance slowly faded

¹⁸⁸ 368-369.

¹⁸⁹ 372-373.

¹⁹⁰ 373.

¹⁹¹ Edwin O. Reischauer, "Japan: The Story of a Nation," 4.

¹⁹² Kerr, 381.

¹⁹³ 393.

¹⁹⁴ 383.

away. As one writer put it, “The conquest of Okinawa was also the first step toward extensive Japanese rule over Micronesia (Nan’yo).”¹⁹⁵

On one level, it is easy to see how Japan acquired Okinawa. The old kingdom held established feudal ties to both Tokyo and China. Meiji Japan quickly consolidated its position as the Beijing-based empire declined. The strength of the era’s modern technology led to centralized government, and cohesion led to a geopolitical need for definitive borders. While it provides no comfort to modern Ryukyu nationalists, islanders who feel that the mainland bullies the region, or people who sympathize with historic underdogs, the hardening of Japan ended the vacuum in which Ryukyu existed. The ruins of old castles and local lore place Okinawa as a once-independent nation. Yet the communities around Naha, Shuri, and the Tomari wharves, with its agro-literate polity, could not compete with the industrial society. With little in natural resources and far removed from major manufacturing places such as Southern China or mainland Japan, the lore of the Ryukyu Kingdom places Okinawa in an odd position. It possesses the culture and history of a nation, but it lacks the modern tools to become one. The story of the old kingdom shows the fragile nature of a sub-state nationalism seemingly capable of forever holding a martyred status.

Otherness

The temptation to deem the Okinawans as an instant “other” feels irresistible. Japan, once it packed away the Ryukyu king, suddenly absorbed a prefecture—not a colony or territory—with a different language, a rural economy, a reputation for pacifism, and a very different climate during the Meiji Era. Roots of otherness can be seen from the Japanese perspective. Satsuma, and by extension the nation, saw Ryukyu as a

¹⁹⁵ John Lie, Multiethnic Japan, 97.

troublesome backwater that appeared close to a money-making situation but usually created nothing but lost funds. As mentioned above, the Japanese press already portrayed the southern ambassadors as rustics. Kyoto, and later Tokyo, saw the islands as rightfully theirs, but Shuri played the mainland off its longtime foe, China, for centuries. Even if the newly dubbed Okinawa served as a Japanese administrative unit, the sense of it serving more as an acquired possession appears to have not been a surprise. For the islanders themselves, Japan's sense of territorial expansion set the tone for them to be treated as an outside group within the nation.

The first, clearest differentiation between Okinawa and Japan comes through language and pronunciation. This provides a highly banal version indicator of difference since it came in everyday conversation and provided an impetus for Tokyo to engage in the “Japanization” of the islands. And yet even then, there was no blanket Ryukyu language across archipelago when the mainland began administering the prefecture. Different isles produced different styles of speaking and idioms. As a whole, the Ryukyu dialect is an offshoot of Japanese, but to mainland speakers, it sounded nothing like the national language.¹⁹⁶ The differences included a bevy of vowel shifts—in one example, the town that was called “Nagu” was now officially pronounced “Nago”—and a few changes in consonants.¹⁹⁷ Before the takeover, Ryukyuan placed their given names ahead of their surnames, contrary to mainland practice. In February, 1880, Tokyo mandated that Okinawan name order comply with the rest of the country.¹⁹⁸ Any time an islander came into contact with a mainlander or took an exam, their status as an “other” on less-than-equal terms became immediate and striking.

¹⁹⁶ Sakamaki, “On Early Ryukyuan Names,” 11.

¹⁹⁷ 11-14.

¹⁹⁸ 19.

If the measuring stick of becoming a colony is the massive production of raw materials unavailable in the mother country, then the Okinawan sugar industry indicates the islands' subservient status over a long period of time. On one level, sugar may be seen as an artifact of a perceived golden age. The product arrived in the islands most likely in the sixteenth century, after the peak of Ryukyu's trading power, but it came in from probably China or possibly Southeast Asia.¹⁹⁹ Despite this small link to independence, however tenuous, it more emphatically binds the islands to the mainland's economic might. As Satsuma's gambit for controlling the China trade quickly faltered, and better sugar extraction methods worked their way to the islands from China, sugarcane became a crop for the northern market by the end of the feudal realm's first century of overlordship.²⁰⁰ The Shimazu clan added a sugar tax, private land started its first development on the island to meet Satsuma's desire for cane, and Shuri created incentives for citizens to begin raising sugar, though royal families reaped most of the profits.²⁰¹ The arrival of full incorporation into Japan furthered the trend to something close to a classic colonial situation. The new monetary economy and the development of private property created a strong demand.²⁰² Sugar production soared by 800 percent in the first 35 years, and the land used for the product increased sixfold. Food staples such as sweet potatoes and rice declined as the main island's best land switched to the cash crop. Marginal lands augmented the boom, and Naha became a sugar port.²⁰³ Between

¹⁹⁹ Charles Lawrence Clark, "The Okinawa Sugar Industry: Some Effects of Government Activity on Industrial Location and Economic Development" (M.A. thesis, California State University-Long Beach, 1975), 18.

²⁰⁰ 19.

²⁰¹ 84-86.

²⁰² 28.

²⁰³ 20-24.

1903 and 1914, output tripled and acreage doubled.²⁰⁴ Yet this surge proved illusory. The addition of Formosa in 1895²⁰⁵ meant larger lands and that better resource management shifted to the larger colony. Soon, Taiwan's sugar cost half of Okinawa's, and the islands' product was also 50 percent more expensive than imports from Java.²⁰⁶ The outgoing sugar was sold in Osaka, with the profits reaching mainland traders.²⁰⁷ Today's small sugar plot, its tall cane growing next to an apartment building or house, serves as a banal reminder of Japanese high-handedness and modern land shortages due to the American bases. It also serves as a cash source and even a beautiful sight when the tops turn white during the winter harvest. Its fullest meaning is in the eyes of the beholder.

A third indication that Okinawa served as a prefecture in name only comes from tax flow during its early years in Japan. Through the 1920s, more public moneys flowed out of the islands than into them. In 1921, 7,430,000 yen traveled to the central government, while Tokyo only spent 1,910,000 yen in the prefecture.²⁰⁸ Hokkaido, the northern most main island, contemporarily opened up to Japanese settlement and served almost as an Asian version of the American West. Mainlanders poured into the sub-arctic north in search of natural resources, pushing aside the native Ainu peoples. The central government brought in significant amounts of money and dispatched some of its best bureaucrats and administrators. The subtropical south saw poorly trained government workers and little national investment for infrastructure.²⁰⁹ Perhaps this is an unfair

²⁰⁴ 24.

²⁰⁵ Reischhauer, 125.

²⁰⁶ Clark, 112-113.

²⁰⁷ Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, 148.

²⁰⁸ Smits, 149.

²⁰⁹ Kerr, 402.

comparison since the Ainu were far more displaced by Japan's Westernization than Ryukyans, but the investments show that Tokyo saw Hokkaido as a place for its people to live while Okinawa served as a place of extraction.

Ultimately, many mainland-wide reforms, though some of these measures do not quite match the positive meaning in the word "reform" to modern eyes, came much later to Okinawa. Tax codes based on land ownership predated full acquisition of the Ryukyus, finally took form in the south between 1899 and 1903. Municipal and prefectural government only began functioning thirty-nine and forty years respectively after the rest of the nation-state adopted these forms of law in 1879. Military conscription, a plan adopted fairly early the Meiji era, entered the prefecture in 1898. A legislative body for the region was elected 1909, and parliamentary races finally took place in 1912, well after these citizen-based decisions began on the mainland in 1890.²¹⁰ Clearly, Tokyo did not see Okinawa as just another regular prefecture on the civic level.

The discrimination helped culturally unify the archipelago. Kerr noted that during the days of the kingdom, people living Shuri saw other main islanders as rubes. In turn, the main islanders turned up their noses at the people living in outer isles. The region's inhabitants thought of themselves more in terms of their villages than in the sense of a Ryukyuan nation.²¹¹ The Japanese looked down on everyone. As Kerr put it, "In terms of 'colonial treatment' they were all 'Okinawans.'"²¹² Smits wrote that a key part of Japan's absorption of Ryukyu concerned a new emphasis on "race" rather than religion or

²¹⁰ Miyume Tanji, "The Enduring Myth of Okinawa Struggle: The History and a Trajectory of a Diverse Community of Protest" (Ph.D. diss., Murdoch University, Australia, 2003), 53.

²¹¹ Tanji, 56-57.

²¹² Kerr, 394.

philosophy for group identity.²¹³ Certainly physical differences played into the sense of otherness. The United States' Office of Strategic Services, in a briefing book on Okinawa written during World War II, mentioned repeatedly in one section on how much barrier the Ryukyans were in relation with the mainland.²¹⁴ Perhaps the most blatant individual example of the Japanese unifying the Okinawans as a lesser group came at the Fifth Industrial Exhibition held in Osaka in 1903. Two island women were placed along side outright conquered people such as Ainu, Koreans, and Taiwanese.²¹⁵ Smits noted that the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper objected not to the central government displaying colonials as bumpkins ripe for civilization, but that the Okinawans were included among them: "The inclusion of people from our prefecture alongside Taiwanese aborigines and Ainu from the northern seas makes us appear comparable to primitives and Ainu. What could possibly be a greater insult to us?"²¹⁶ Okinawans, at least those in the upper strata reading the local news, idealized themselves as part of the Japanese nation-state, but the nation-state itself held other ideas. The fundamental question of whether Okinawans could strive for equality or accept otherness in new ways was set. Within a generation, the question of Japan constituted a "we" or a "they" already reached its ambivalent state.

The idea that Ryukyu nationalism existed in the modern sense appears farfetched, but the Japanese annexation of Okinawa clearly showed that they were considered a separate people taken in by a superior civilization. The question of whether one was hairy or dark or less modern than mainlanders served as both a high- and low-track way of establishing a difference. Honoring the Meiji Emperor rather than the Sho Dynasty

²¹³ Smits, 161.

²¹⁴ Office of Strategic Services, Okinawan Studies No. 3: The Okinawans of the Loo Choo Islands A Japanese Minority Group, 1944, 7.

²¹⁵ Smits, Visions of Ryukyu, 150.

²¹⁶ 150-151.

clearly served as a bended-knee style changing of identity, as would the new Japanese civil service that descended on the region. Being hairy could be an everyday difference or a symbol of potential backwardness. In the right circumstances, it also shows regional pride. The honoring of the imperial family could serve as a nearly daily ritual or a sacred altar to Japan-ness. The myth-symbol complex tied the Okinawans to the Ryukyu Kingdom, but the expansion of the nationalist community from the upper strata to the masses placed the islanders both within and outside of Japan.

The Intellectual Reaction and the Creation of Ryukyuan Studies

Scholarly enquiries into a people serve as the higher-minded complement to the more populist creation of the “other.” Both efforts largely homogenize a group in relation to the nation-state, but often this second tack takes a more sympathetic tone. The enduring nature of Okinawan or Ryukyuan studies in its earliest incarnation sought a way to link the islands culturally, historically, and linguistically with the mainland and mainstream culture. This would provide a way for a distinct people in a distinct land to find accommodation with the metropole. Perhaps this middle path of promoting a distinct Okinawan culture that holds a common ancestry was doomed to not take root among everyday Ryukyuan and Japanese people in the years before 1945. The era of Japanese militarism and the time’s preoccupation with race would cause this interpretation to further the idea of an “other” rather than alleviate it. It merely created a seemingly backward minority group within the nation-state—exacerbated by the coming Okinawan diaspora discussed later in the chapter—rather than a fully fledged nation conquered by Tokyo.

The basic findings of the early scholars of the islands after annexation portrayed Okinawa “as ethnically an integral part of Japan, with evidence of remaining Japanese ancient elements within Ryukyuan society.”²¹⁷ Print-capital and the education of the few elite Okinawans in highly regarded mainland universities led to an outpouring of scholarship in the early twentieth century, often appearing in mainland publications.²¹⁸ Fuyu Iha, “the father of Okinawan studies,”²¹⁹ printed a bevy of materials, studies, and compilations of island folklore, history, and culture, culminating in his work Ko Ryukyu, sometimes referred to as Ancient Ryukyu, in 1911.²²⁰ Iha held a long career in promoting Okinawans within the Japanese nation. As a middle school student, he helped lead a strike after the prefecture’s head of the department of education dismissed the idea of higher education within the archipelago in 1894, mobilizing public support, and culminating in the director’s dismissal.²²¹ Iha found perceived links between Ryukyu and Japan, often seizing politically motivated Satsuma-era declarations of similar origins to express a “race”-based kinship along with linguistic evidence. Sai On, according to the scholar, became a forerunner of Meiji reforms with his emphasis on education, centralized government, and a document written by the historic figure that lavishly praised Satsuma that was ritually read aloud in each village.²²² According to one book,²²³ Iha aired the story that an old story that Sai On quietly said during his lifetime, “Relations with China are not so difficult. Even if some problem arises, it can be resolved. But such

²¹⁷ Tanji, 66.

²¹⁸ Kerr, 454-455.

²¹⁹ Tanji, 67.

²²⁰ Kerr, 455.

²²¹ Kerr, 442-443.

²²² Smits, Visions of Ryukyu, 162.

²²³ As with a few publications, this one appears in manuscript form at the Camp Butler library.

is not the case with Japan. We cannot be careless about a single bit of paper.”²²⁴ An American scholar quoted Iha promoting the idea that these sentences passed down through the years within the confines of Shuri Castle and received renewed prominence within court circles when Japan began its long process of annexation. Scholars such as Iha saw a common kinship with Japan, but one cannot help but notice that it still separated Ryukyu as a smaller, subservient nation. While the intelligencia saw an emphasis on history as a road to accommodation, it also maintained the islands as a rustic in relation with the nation-state. As a key sentence in a dissertation on Okinawan identity put it, “Defining Ryukyu as a nation through a sense of an historical ‘Ryukyuan’ subject was Iha’s major achievement.”²²⁵ Iha effectively wanted integration by simultaneously declaring the same people a separate nation, a tough task in the age of imperialism.

As interest in Okinawan history and lore increased, the region’s traditional crafts and other works stagnated,²²⁶ underlying the “backwards” status of the region. According to Kerr, interest in local artisans only began when a representative of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts began collecting local goods in 1909. Through the early decades of the twentieth century, historic houses of worship began falling apart due to lack of interest and maintenance. Some concern was placed on Japanese venues such as Shinto temples, but old Ryukyuan structures such as Shuri Castle were left to crumble or be taken down for modernization plans.²²⁷ Even when interest in the archipelago’s traditional pottery, and later lacquer and textiles, arose on the mainland after World War I—augmented by the print-capital of print and movies—it only sparked off debate among the region’s elites

²²⁴ Edward E. Bollinger, Saion, Okinawa’s Sage Reformer: An Introduction to His Life and Selected Works, 68.

²²⁵ Tanji, 69.

²²⁶ Kerr, 455.

²²⁷ Ibid.

about whether this continued the stereotype of the yokel rather than a unified upsurge in local pride.²²⁸ Interest in the islands' history peaked with the naming of Shuri Castle as a national treasure along with plans to restore it in 1928, but then the fiftieth anniversary of annexation the next year angered mainland nationalists.²²⁹ The crafts and history of Okinawa can be seen as banal indicators of colonial status or, in the eyes of art collectors, dramatic indicators of a separate nation. A piece of lacquer ware becomes both a sign of unification and distinction, a hallowed bit of old history or just a way to make some money off the mainland. Certainly any local skill in the arts met with political meaning. Tatsuko Yamada's story about her father in Chapter 2 shows that Japan's establishment was even skeptical about an Okinawan assimilating in traditionally Japanese arts. The banal indicator leads into the myth-symbol complex, and the myth-symbol complex flows into the banal. Together they create a blurred vision of Okinawa, subject to many interpretations by many people.

The role of the local elites during the first 50 years of Japanese administration performed a remarkable, if contradictory, feat. Scholars and opinion makers captured myth-symbol complexes and reworked them into objects, ideas, and shrines that simultaneously created the Okinawans as a separate nation yet tied them in with Japan. The everyday world of physical appearance, climate, accents, and assumed ethnic divisions reinforced this paradox on a banal level. Print-capital and colonial interest, even if the prefecture was not technically a colony, solidified a diverse group of islands with varying degrees of Chinese, Japanese, and indigenous influence. Unfortunately for the Ryukyans, the kingdom's reputation for pacifism and tranquility clashed with the

²²⁸ 456-457.

²²⁹ 456.

modernization and militarism springing out of Tokyo and across East Asia. The historic role now granted to Sai On, both Ryukyuan sage and harbinger of the Meiji industrialization, presents a difficult stance to reconcile. The new view of Sai On, the Chinese-trained scholar, now placed him as almost a lackey of the northern kingdom. The role portrayed the Ryukyuan as awe-struck country cousins of the Japanese, especially with printed passages from Sai On such as “It is a matter of the greatest fortune and divine protection that the country has received the great benevolence of Satsuma.”²³⁰ Okinawans sought a family reunion, but the Japanese largely did not recognize the true kinship between the islands and the mainland.

Diaspora: Heaven, Hell, and Elsewhere

The outflow of islanders across the Pacific, spurred by a lack of land and later the collapse of sugar prices, helped solidify Okinawa as a construction. The southerners—whether on the mainland, Hawaii, or South America—found themselves in comparison with the Japanese. Fear about the region’s limited space to support its population dated back to at least Sai On, and in the post-annexation era, land and tax modernization schemes at the turn of the twentieth century spurred younger members of upper-class families to emigrate, creating a fairly well-educated group heading abroad.²³¹ The collapse of sugar prices in the 1920s, as the national government’s free trade policies left Okinawans at the mercy of cheaper imports, created a harrowing time of famine known as the “palm-tree hell.” The name springing from the desperate ways islanders’ palm-tree seeds had to be eaten, and the seeds must be cooked exactly right in order to avoid

²³⁰ Sai On, “The Articles of Instruction,” in Sai On, Okinawa’s Sage Reformer: An Introduction to His Life and Works, 109.

²³¹ 437-438.

sickness, something that did not always happen.²³² This led to even more migration out of the islands,²³³ including a government-led plan to move Okinawans into the South Pacific.²³⁴ Many children of these expatriates returned to the archipelago for education, crystallizing the idea that these people's ancestors hailed from Naha or Iriomote or Kume first and not the main nation-state. The experiences of these immigrants varied across the world, from outcasts in industrial cities to the Hawaiian community's version of the stereotypical "American Dream," but the experiences sharpened the idea of Okinawanness on both a superficial level and in deeper meanings.

The contrast between Okinawans and the Japanese becomes more pronounced when some cultural distinctions come into focus. Mainlanders, and those of mainland descent, saw the islanders as unclean. The archipelago, economically underdeveloped, lacked modern sanitation. Mitsuko Inakuku, who grew up in the Osaka community and was one of the histories recorded in Women of Okinawa, described her childhood visits to her ancestral homeland:

All I knew was that it took three days by boat to get there and that on the way the scenery looked like a picture postcard. I also remembered that there weren't any toilets or electricity on the island and that people urinated and defecated outside near the pigpens. I used to see barefoot kids with runny noses squatting next to the pigpens to relieve themselves while pigs waited around to eat the feces. That's why people on the mainland didn't want to eat pork here. But for Okinawans, pork's a delicacy. Okinawans eat pigs' feet, too. The kids on the mainland used to tease the Okinawans kids about that. 'That's disgusting. You guys eat pigs' feet!'²³⁵

²³² Tanji, 56.

²³³ Steve Rabson, "Memories of Okinawa: Life and Times in the Greater Osaka Diaspora," in Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power, eds. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, 2003, 100.

²³⁴ 102.

²³⁵ Keyso, 21.

This “unclean” situation carried a cultural multiplier; Japanese outcast groups such as the Eta²³⁶, more properly known as Burakumin,²³⁷ and Shuhei worked as animal slaughterers. A vulgar gesture to a Burakumin or an Okinawan was to use the number four. The OSS briefing mentions slurs such as “not a man,” “four fingers,” or “one less” prevailing in Japan.²³⁸ Even when Japanese-Americans were placed in the Poston Internment Camp in Arizona during World War II, the government found it difficult to find a butcher since that person would feel the fear of being seen as an Okinawan.²³⁹ Additionally, the islands possessed a heritage of tattooing, a practice found among the Ainu and one other Japanese island.²⁴⁰ The meaning of pork and cultural distinction becomes blurred over time. The rows canned pork such as Spam—one commemorative can design featured a woman in traditional Okinawan dress—and other canned-pork products such as Tulip available as gift packs ahead of holidays appears as a banal indicator, yet it once stood as a powerful reminder of identity and “otherness.”

The expatriate community that developed in Osaka perhaps shows the most vivid contrast between island and mainland communities, since it occurred in the middle of Japan. In a classic nationalism-building sense, migration truly began once an established transportation line began between the heavily industrialized city, packed with other outsiders in the Japanese Empire, and Naha. Even in group’s opening years, a link with Okinawa continued, with traders specializing in Ryukyuan clothing, sugar, and *awamori*, an island spirit roughly analogous with *sake* the way whiskey compares with beer or

²³⁶ *Okinawan Studies*, No. 3, 74.

²³⁷ Lie, 84

²³⁸ *Okinawan Studies*, No. 3, 74.

²³⁹ 59.

²⁴⁰ 11-12.

brandy with wine.²⁴¹ The palm-tree hell and the Depression spurred roughly 20,000 migrants from the archipelago to Japan during the 1920s and 1930s, packing into neighborhoods with some finding white-collar jobs.²⁴² Mostly, the Okinawans found discrimination in ways both banal and striking. Darker skin²⁴³ or rounder eyes left a person “looking Okinawan.” Using an Okinawan dialect or accent caused ridicule.²⁴⁴ Islanders, seen clearly as outsiders, found themselves working for lower pay, worse conditions, and among different “others” such as Koreans. The signs in front of buildings in Osaka that barred Koreans and Okinawans²⁴⁵ served as both a banal emblem of nationalism if one was just traveling past that building or a very deep-seated one if the person wanted a job or a place to live.

The patterns found with the Hawaiian migration sees a continued contrast, though in some ways it appears the Okinawans took advantage of the situation to find prosperity. Even as the islanders took the lowest form on the social ladder in the American possession’s world of pineapple and sugar farms—one observation shows them depicted as lower than the mainlanders, Portuguese, and Filipinos during World War II²⁴⁶—the Ryukyans found a ladder for success. The OSS spoke of the southerners in very positively in terms of “their willingness to take risks in new undertakings, and their constant and successful attempts to raise themselves in the economic and social scale. A social worker describes them as ‘daring, brazen and bold.’”²⁴⁷ The clear progression in the first half of the twentieth century, servants working their way to restaurant owners or

²⁴¹ Rabson, 100.

²⁴² 101.

²⁴³ Rabson notes that today, Japanese tourists work on their tans at Okinawan beaches. Conversely, the first time my wife and I visited an Okinawan mall, Karissa was amazed by the number of skin whiteners.

²⁴⁴ 110-111.

²⁴⁵ 114-115.

²⁴⁶ Okinawan Studies No. 3, 83.

²⁴⁷ 10.

others developing pig farms, sparked resentment from the people of mainland descent.²⁴⁸ The OSS noted that Japanese-Hawaiians often mocked the Okinawan accent, “As the stage comedian speaks Yiddish,” and piled on epithets such as “hairy” and “Big Rope.” Again the comparison with the Burakumin arose. This time with the saying, “I’d rather marry a ‘four fingers’ (Eta) than an Okinawa’.”²⁴⁹ Education leveled the differences, since Okinawan-Hawaiians found themselves largely integrated in Japanese-heritage clubs at the University of Hawaii.²⁵⁰ Additionally, the Okinawan community in Hawaii took an almost confederated nature. Most Ryukyuan-based social organizations within the territory were based on locality, rather prefecture, but in one notable example, these village- and city-based clubs competed in a baseball tournament for the Okinawan-based organizations.²⁵¹ This shows an emerging, but not complete, unified identity. A portrait of the expatriate-islander community in the mid-Pacific during World War II shows continued discrimination but also tantalizing hints of future success and relative equality. People will find different situations in different locations, but despite the relative financial boon for the Okinawans, differences continued on the high- and low-track levels.

Two key nations in South America—Peru and Argentina—saw relatively close ratios of Okinawans to mainland Japanese. Again, the southerners found themselves somewhat isolated from their mainland compatriots, but relations appear a bit smoother. Argentina saw nearly equal numbers by the mid 1920s. Earlier in that decade, the main Okinawan civic association merged with the Japanese club, raising money for relief after

²⁴⁸ 59.

²⁴⁹ 83.

²⁵⁰ 75.

²⁵¹ Yukiko Kimura, “Locality Clubs as Basic Units of the Social Organization of the Okinawans in Hawaii,” *Phylon* 4 (4th Qtr., 1968), 333-334.

the 1923 earthquake that struck the mother country and gave funds to the homeland during its war with China.²⁵² The Ryukyu group revived in the 1930s, but most people kept dual membership, and Okinawans even acquired high offices in Japanese civic organizations. This reflects the high degree of assimilation found in Argentina, though in prefectural-based organizations the members spoke in Ryukyu and conversed in Japanese while taking part in national associations.²⁵³ In Peru, intermingling became a post-war phenomenon, with Japanese having little to do with Okinawans in the early part of the century. After the fighting stopped, the islanders quickly garnered high positions, reflecting the Argentine situation.²⁵⁴ As the Japanese domination was diminished, whether in political power, culture, or population, the Okinawans found themselves in a stronger position within the greater community and in relation with their northern counterparts.

Others of Invention

Off a main street in Naha, the Okinawa Professional Wrestling card features a character based on a pig. Extremely silly looking, he postures toward the crowd. He starts shouting “*A-gu! A-gu!*” The translation is, “Por-ork! Por-ork!” Or more specifically, marbled pork found in the islands. The audience begins to pick up the chant. “*A-gu! A-gu! A-gu!*” Two his moves are the “*boo boo driver*” and “*boo boo stamp.*” “*Boo boo*” serves as the equivalent of “oink, oink.”²⁵⁵ These goofy moments, bringing laughs to the fans, hold their roots in crammed Osaka neighborhoods, Hawaiian pineapple plantations, and main-island sugar farms, which in turn were fostered by Japan’s annexation of the

²⁵² James Lawrence Tigner, “The Ryukyuans in Argentina,” The Hispanic American Historical Review 47 (May, 1967), 205-207.

²⁵³ 208-210.

²⁵⁴ Tigner, “The Ryukyuans in Peru, 1906-1952,” The Americas 35 (July, 1978), 37.

²⁵⁵ Osaka Holiday Paradise.

former kingdom. Perhaps it is merely coincidence that the wrestling card is a spin off from Osaka Pro Wrestling, but the link is hard to miss. If someone finds humor in the wrestler, then this serves as a banal flagging: a casual wink-and-nod to the creation of otherhood imposed by the Japanese upon the Okinawans. If someone sees this as offensive, then it becomes a hot indicator of the horrible conditions the Ryukyans suffered at the hands of an occupying power that drove them from their land and imposed cruel conditions. “*Boo boo*” implies the subtropical isles with simple regional differences from the mainland or a searing history recalling strong arm tactics, World War II massacres, and discrimination. The imagery and its potential bifurcation could be found in the Okinawan restaurants across fashionable parts of Tokyo, the smell of hog farms on the main island, cans of canned pork, or the tourist-friendly T-shirts with pig imagery. The simple object or moment creates both sacred and profane indicators of Okinawan nationalism.

The OSS wrote in its report that immigrants from Okinawa’s main island were poorly educated, and “They were completely ignorant of the history of their islands and had little knowledge even of Japan.”²⁵⁶ But the history shows an emerging sense of nationalism and community. In Osaka, Okinawans competed for jobs with Koreans. The Japanese conquered that peninsula, but it was a nation nonetheless. In Hawaii, Ryukyans found themselves both in context and opposition with Japanese, Filipinos, and Portuguese workers. Again, the comparison is on the national level. Communication between the diaspora and the islands, and the islands dealings with the Japanese, proved that Okinawa was an “other,” and probably a conquered country. These dynamics echo today in everyday life from sacred objects to local news.

²⁵⁶ 87.

Ultimately, today's sense of Okinawan identity is each islander's personal historiography of the islands' history. The era between 1871 and 1930 serves as a crucible for each Ryukyuan's sense of his realm's relationship with Japan. One can feel that Japan serves as a usurper that snuffed out the true Ryukyu Kingdom or that the annexation process united two kindred realms, but the complexities of the past turns people into modern-day Ihas, forever merging Okinawan uniqueness within the Japanese nation-state. The pre-war years forged Okinawa-ness in the modern sense with the mainland's quantification and administration, the people's economic and political subservience to Tokyo, and the diaspora's direct comparison between Ryukyuan and Japanese. The intellectual ferment codified the idea that Okinawa existed within, alongside, or outside of Japan. Any relationship with China would not even be academic. The prewar period created a bevy of high-track indicators, but today's low-track indicators provide each person's interpretation.

Chapter 5: The Tragedy of Militarism

The Fires of Wars

The wars of Imperial Japan and the cataclysm of the Battle of Okinawa solidified the region's identity in two key ways. The “cooler” moments of military activity such as the drumbeat of Japanese militarism, the drive for conscription, and news coverage of warfare serve as the classic banal nationalism. The “hot” act of combat—Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese war in the 1890s, the horrors of World War II, and the struggle for survival during the Battle of Okinawa—show the classic high-track nationalism of searing images and memories. These two styles of identity feed into each other. The Japanese victory over China ended the islands' hope for a Beijing-based rescue and brought the region closer to the mainland in an everyday, cultural sense by eliminating China's influence and leaving the Tokyo government suspicious of the region's sympathies, spurring a need for cultural assimilation. This would feed into the constant stories of the nation-state's military heroes or the power of Japanese modernism over the ensuing decades. The arc of militarism brought the province firmly within Tokyo's sphere, gave Okinawan elites an illusory path to integration with an apparently up-and-coming world power, established that the national government did not view the Ryukyus as truly part of the motherland as the armed forces sacrificed the region to shore up mainland defenses against what they saw as an inevitable American invasion, and ultimately left the archipelago as an unexpectedly conquered realm.

The events of warfare show how Okinawa followed sub-state nationalism in all but name. History differentiated the prefecture from the mainland, but nonetheless placed it within the nation-state. An Okinawan identity continued its coalescence in opposition

to the mainland; the battle showed that the islands were only quasi-Japanese since the imperial troops mounted a defense, but the government saw the islands as expendable; and the aftermath, with a surge of American interest, cemented an independent identity as Ryukyans, but one that wanted a spot in postwar Japan. Events that occurred after the Second World War blur this conclusion, but if prewar Japan turned Okinawa into an “other,” the early postwar years saw a surge both an independent identity and yearning of reuniting with its former colonial occupier. That, more than anything else, serves as a key building block of sub-state nationalism with all of its contradictions. The progression can be seen in the history of Shuri Castle, which became a semi-abandoned site owned by the national government with an elementary school after the end of the kingdom; declared a National Treasure in 1925; commandeered as the military headquarters in the advent and actual Battle of Okinawa, leading to its virtual destruction;²⁵⁷ and the United States created the University of the Ryukyus there in 1950.²⁵⁸ Through horrible deaths and new housing, the Okinawan identity truly came into modern focus.

Imperial Power

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and 1895 effectively shut the door for a possible Chinese intervention to revive the Ryukyu Kingdom or any other plan to split the islands from its new occupiers. In many ways, the conflict continued the region’s “other” status. Kerr depicted the archipelago as the only hold out from the wave of nationalism that overwhelmed Japan as the hostilities began. Okinawans debated which side to support, and with the prospect of a Chinese invasion looming, many islanders decamped for rural

²⁵⁷ Executive Committee for Commemoration of Registration, 96.

²⁵⁸ University of the Ryukyus, “Guiding Principles of the University of the Ryukyus.”

areas.²⁵⁹ Japan's quick victory, rise in power and prestige, and new lands largely ended ambiguities in allegiance. As Kerr put it, "Okinawan interest in China faded rapidly after the war."²⁶⁰ Still, the mainland government found itself suspicious of the islanders after Beijing worked out a few back-door agreements after the war to reacquire some lost lands, sought to create a nation in Japanese-seized Formosa, and a confidence man scammed locals who favored China.²⁶¹ Additionally, new territory to the south and east of the archipelago furthered Okinawa's place within the Japanese sphere of influence. Younger people began adopting Japanese styles of dress and disregarded older, Ryukyuan clothing. The rising generation began adopting more Japanese-influenced names and furthered their use of the Japanese language and accents.²⁶² In 1898, the government stated it found the bodies of the tribute-ship sailors who were killed in 1871, setting off the Ryukyu crisis; declared they "died in service to the State;" and buried them at a Naha shrine.²⁶³ The Sino-Japanese War barely touched the southern islands, but its impact was profoundly felt in a most banal manner.

Education projected a similar situation where the outwardly banal carried serious bended-knee implications. The system the empire placed throughout its territory blended learning with emperor worship. In Okinawa, strengthening the semi-divine status of the head of state took precedence above the more politically based aspects of government.²⁶⁴ The slow adoption of the Japanese language over Ryukyuan dialects became a tool for integrating the islands within the nation-state. This education-militaristic nexus

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Kerr, 422.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² 442.

²⁶³ 451-452.

²⁶⁴ Tanji, 54-55.

permeated society. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Tokyo ordered the prefecture to build an official shrine and lesser houses of worship across the region, though the drive sputtered from lack of local interest. When war with China erupted in 1932, the central government built shrines on traditional village places of worship. This conflated local religion with reverence for the military and the emperor.²⁶⁵ Okinawan Kanna Kenwa became a vice admiral and a local hero.²⁶⁶ Fumiko Nakamura, one of the people's stories recorded by Keyso, recalled that the first thing she read in her initial Japanese reading textbook as a child was "*Tenno Heika* [His Majesty the Emperor]."²⁶⁷ She recalled a 1932 newspaper article that lauded three Japanese soldiers who sacrificed themselves as human explosives in a battle with the Chinese. People called the martyrs "soldier-gods."²⁶⁸ Soon teachers and students helped families with sons who were drafted and took part in funeral processions. Education and a state-based belief system bordering on religion provided Japanese nationalism for islanders, but it conflicted with the realities of life mentioned in the previous chapter.

Okinawan elites believed that embracing militarism could provide social betterment for the region's people. On one level this makes some sense. Education often implies improvement, and learning was strongly tied to the national government and warfare. It offered the potential of a high-track way to prove Japanese-ness while folding within the banal, day-to-day world found in the mainland. Miyume Tanji, in her dissertation on the region's sense of struggle, noted that the teaching community and the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper aggressively pushed for islanders to join the Japanese armed

²⁶⁵ Kerr, 452.

²⁶⁶ 453-454.

²⁶⁷ 34.

²⁶⁸ 35.

forces. The journal lionized Okinawans who died in combat and railed against people who dodged the draft. Tanji wrote that the archipelago's tendency to escape military duty paralleled many parts of rural Japan and also observed that islanders sat on the receiving end of discrimination.²⁶⁹ The issue of joining the military shows the split personality of Okinawa's role within Japan. Embracing the military offered a somewhat deceptive path for equality, but Kanna Kenwa offered an example of a hero that linked the islands and the mainland. Still, many Okinawans felt alienation with the military by escaping service or receiving ridicule among the ranks if they donned the national uniform. In all, conscription showed a growing, but extremely fragile, bond between the prefecture and metropole. The Battle of Okinawa smashed the armed forces-based connection.

The fragile link becomes a trickier subject when the topic of how sincere were the intellectual classes' drives for assimilation actually were is tackled. Baron Sho Jun and other effectively dethroned members of Ryukyu royalty created Ryukyu Shimpo in 1893.²⁷⁰ Ota believed that the newspaper served as a way for the old order to maintain a grip on local society, believing that they wanted to reacquire power by "feigning passionate devotion to Japanization"²⁷¹ and downplaying what they saw as less palatable aspects of the northern culture such as "personal liberties and civil rights."²⁷² Noboru Jahana—born a peasant in the southern part of the main island and rose to a high-ranking bureaucrat—clashed with the upper echelons of Okinawan life and the appointed governor over an agricultural privatization scheme.²⁷³ When this peasant-based version of improvement through acculturation clashed with the governor over democratization

²⁶⁹ 13.

²⁷⁰ Ota, Essays on Okinawa Problems, 2000, 116-117.

²⁷¹ 117.

²⁷² 118.

²⁷³ Tanji, 61-62.

through the islands, the Ryukyu Shimpo backed the mainland-born magistrate.²⁷⁴ Soon these two very separate courses for integration and improvement with the nation-state clashed through the establishment's newspaper and Jahana's rival Okinawa Jiron.²⁷⁵ Print-capital helped cement a striving vision for Okinawa within Japan, but a seemingly identical approach for the prefecture created significant antagonism. The aristocratic faction eventually broke Jahana, who became mentally ill in 1901 and died in 1908.²⁷⁶ The ties that bound Okinawa to Japan were fragile, considering the rivalry between the intellectual striver that Jahana was and the aristocrats who opposed him. Amazingly, one of the Ryukyu Shimpo's founders was in the same Tokyo scholarship class as Jahana.²⁷⁷ Not so surprisingly, Japanization simultaneously attracted and repelled the islands. Anderson wrote in Imagined Communities that the newspaper links the periodical with its market and imagines the context of world events upon the community.²⁷⁸ Likewise, Billig shows that the popular press flags identity on a daily basis.²⁷⁹ The battle between the old-line and Jahana factions conducted by the printing press created the matrix of an Okinawa as part of Japan politically, but not culturally. Each day it placed the islands with a real, but frayed and tumultuous, link with the nation-state.

Nakamura's interview shows how militarism combined with education for a way to promote Japanese nationalism within Okinawa. As a young teacher, she had to promote the war effort in town meetings, conduct rituals when a former student in her school joined the military, and even criticized a fellow faculty member who spoke quietly

²⁷⁴ Ota, 121.

²⁷⁵ Tanji, 63,

²⁷⁶ Ota, 120-121.

²⁷⁷ Tanji, 61.

²⁷⁸ 33-34.

²⁷⁹ 111-113.

against all the region's young men going off to the war with China that led to Japan's participation in World War II. "We sang at the top of our lungs!" she said when referring to the special ceremonies. Adding, "All the boys at the time wanted to be soldiers just like them. They couldn't wait to be draped in Japanese flags and to walk off proudly to the cheers of us patriotic citizens."²⁸⁰ The sense of top-track nationalism is strong. Further rituals included viewing the troops as they left the island with the classic yells of "*Banzai!*" and taking a top role in the patriotic Girls' Youth Organization, sending morale-boosting letters, and attending soldiers' funerals.²⁸¹ Despite this apparent enthusiasm for Japanese militarism, she felt fear as well. Nakamura talked of secret police, and the understanding that her job included education and propaganda. "I was forever telling the students about the glories of war, glamorizing it like the government wanted us teachers to do. Personally I was afraid of not saying those sorts of things. After all, as a schoolteacher I was responsible for being patriotic."²⁸² Nakamura appeared simultaneously sincere in both her promotion of nationalism and her sense of coercion. Her works seem to promote the nation-state, but she took part in the Okinawan diaspora, traveling with her husband to the mainland for his college education, and then when his education ended and he couldn't find a teaching job, he entered factory work.²⁸³ Her life story shows how Tokyo was absorbing Okinawa, but as a true part of and not within the Japanese nation.

The emperor-centered world of Japan's military-focused education held a significantly different implication for Okinawa's role within the empire than the

²⁸⁰ Keyso, 36.

²⁸¹ 37.

²⁸² 36.

²⁸³ 38.

examples found in Chapter 4. The armed forces and the Japanese language brought the islands within the nation-state as something more than an “other,” though the people hardly stood on even terms with mainlanders. Migration and history pushed the Ryukyans to a status as outsiders, but warfare and bootstrap-style improvement offered a path toward seemingly benign integration that did not involve worries about pigs or the status as colonials rather than citizens. This mostly focused on high-track nationalism with imperialism’s demand for ritual and ceremony, but these played out in lower-track indicators such as newspapers, education textbooks, and ordinary conversations among Okinawans. The conflict between Jahana and his opponents show the region not as a sub-state nation but as a conflict in provincialism. Both sides embraced qualified Japanization while maintaining local identity, yet these similar approaches led to repeated clashes through the 1890s. If Jahana prevailed, then the franchise would have reached the prefecture earlier, allowing a quicker way for the region to tie in with Tokyo. The aristocratic faction’s triumph helped spread imperialism, which also bound the region to the nation-state. Before studying the effects that emerged from the Battle of Okinawa, the region’s role within Japan’s militarism must be examined, and it shows that the strongest tie to the mainland came through the nation-state’s expansion.

Scorched Earth

The Battle of Okinawa with its tragic human costs showed the limitations of pre-war Japanese stewardship of the region. The agonies of combat showed how imperial troops brutally treated the islanders as disposable—reflecting the thinking from headquarters to the lowest common soldier—mirroring the status shown in Chapter 4 in heart-rendering ways, how individual combatants acted showed the philosophical limits

of militarism, and the United States viewed the archipelago as a conquered territory, reviving the name Ryukyu after the hostilities. The horrors from the spring of 1945—civilian body counts alone include a range of ghastly figures such as 62,489,²⁸⁴ 130,000,²⁸⁵ and more than 160,000²⁸⁶ out of a population of 460,000²⁸⁷—create seemingly infinite flaggings of nationalism both great and small. The destruction of the conflict was, and in some cases *is*, so great that seemingly every tree, every breath, and every family gathering serves as both a high- and low-track indicator of nationalism and identity. As this section will show, caves and shrines serve as painfully vivid reminders of how Japan seemingly sacrificed Okinawa to shore up mainland defenses. Everything is either banal or bended-knee reminders of Okinawa-ness depending on time, context, and the person itself. The battle brings reminders of horrific tragedy, and they can carry powerful meaning even if someone is driving past it on the way to work.

A quick description of the military aspects of the battle must be explained before investigating the individual struggles of Okinawans, Japanese, and Americans during the conflict. As the war in the Pacific Ocean approached Japan, Tokyo began preparing the island for combat in 1944. The 32nd Army moved into Okinawa, conscripted islanders to create badly needed infrastructure for the region's defense, conducted evacuations, and brought in residents into the Okinawa Home Guards and other, more youth-oriented organizations such as the Blood and Iron Corps and the Student Nurse Corps.²⁸⁸ The United States began its preparations for an invasion in 1943, setting a target time of spring, 1945; gathering rich intelligence on the geological conditions for landing sites,

²⁸⁴ Kerr, 472.

²⁸⁵ Ota, This Was the Battle of Okinawa, date unknown, 95.

²⁸⁶ Simon Foster, Okinawa 1945, 1994, 171.

²⁸⁷ Ota, 96.

²⁸⁸ Welfare Department, Okinawa Prefecture, An Oral History of The Battle of Okinawa, 1992, 4.

preparing an impressive dossier on Okinawa's culture and history which served as the basis for a short book for the troops; and readying themselves for a crush of refugees. Even Ota, a fierce critic of American foreign policy, lauded the United States' post-battle plans for the islands' people.²⁸⁹ The United States began bombing Naha in October, 1944, and on March 26, 1945, the Americans invaded the Karema Islands, which lay roughly 20 miles west of the main island. In the days before the battle, the former royal family evacuated all of the old Ryukyu treasures from Shuri Castle for safe keeping at the clan's home. These priceless objects did not last one week once fighting began on Okinawa itself. The American troops landed on April 1, hitting the beaches approximately one-third up the island. With most Japanese troops concentrated in the more urban, southern portion of the island, the United States moved relatively quickly northward, securing the larger, rural section by May 5. Fighting was more brutal in the south, as the combatants raged through Naha, Shuri, and ultimately into the caves that combed the land's southern tip. The Allies occupied Naha on June 13, and the on June 21, the Japanese leadership killed themselves.²⁹⁰ Still, five days later, the Japanese executed 20 people who lived on Kume Island and nine soldiers under suspicion that they were scouting for the United States.²⁹¹ The chronological account of the battle sounds precise, but accounts of the bloodshed eliminate any sense of the precise illusion found by the "armchair general" looking at facts, figures, and black-and-white photographs.

The first impact of the conflict, preceding the actual violence, was the Japanese military's treatment of Okinawa as effectively as an occupied territory. Ota hammered this argument in a book published ahead of the 2000 G-8 Summit on the island and after

²⁸⁹ Ota, Essays on Okinawa Problems, 24-27.

²⁹⁰ Kerr, 467-471.

²⁹¹ Ota, 17.

his tumultuous tenure as the prefecture's governor. He wrote of the civilian conscription in 1944, the acquisition of land, the requisitioning of public buildings and private homes, and illustrated hapless families forced into the mountains with a mere handful of possessions.²⁹² Ota did not expressly write it, but clearly he wanted to equate the actions of the army with the American occupation and its continued presence on Okinawa. Once the raids began, the Tokyo-appointed governor and his staff left the capital for a cave in Futemna²⁹³ (presumably the large cavern at the Futemna Shrine), left for Tokyo on December 25, and acquired a mainland posting the next month. Ota relayed a story in which the next governor's wife saw the position as a punishment.²⁹⁴ The debate over whether the military should have held a large role in Okinawan society in the advent of the conflict is another matter, but clearly the islands transitioned from a civic society into a militarily occupied one months before the United States troops arrived on the islands' shores.

A second, pre-combat forging of Okinawa as separate from Japan also comes from Ota. The academic, politician, writer, and veteran quotes two Japanese historians who posit that Tokyo dug in at Okinawa and Taiwan in order to give the mainland time to strengthen its defenses. This argument shows that Tokyo saw Okinawa as an expendable place while the "true" Japan readied itself for the Americans. Ota maintained that the government transferred the crack 9th Division out of the main island and on to Formosa without informing the civil government, and then compounded this military weakness by renegeing on a promise to bring in the 14th Division as a replacement. The latter remained on the mainland. The remaining troops focused on a bloodily defensive strategy—a fight

²⁹² 33.

²⁹³ 35.

²⁹⁴ 37.

to the death without surrender—focusing on the island’s southern portions aided by the conscription of local youths to their almost certain death.²⁹⁵ From a military-strategy standpoint, clearly Okinawa was something different than mainland Japan.

The horrific memories of the battle certainly created the imaginings of a unique Okinawan existence. Tomiko Higa’s popular memoir The Girl with the White Flag shows the startling horrors of that spring. Higa, a small child at the time, revealed five narrow escapes from death as she wandered around the southern tip of the island largely by herself. She slept nestled into her older brother on a beach for rest, and when she awoke, her family discovered that a stray bullet pierced his head.²⁹⁶ Separated from her siblings, she found refuge in a tall plot of grass. There she came across a tame white rabbit, possibly someone’s pet. While looking for food for her companion, whom she named after her late brother, she saw two soldiers committing suicide just outside the thicket, arousing fear that she would be discovered. When she returned to her spot in the thicket, she saw that an incendiary bomb detonated where she slept and kept the rabbit.²⁹⁷ After that she wandered from cave to cave. She found one spot that looked promising, but she was told as soon as she entered that the inhabitants were about to kill themselves. She heard an explosion as she fled the grotto.²⁹⁸ She wandered between caverns, but the people inside drove her from the shelters. At one of these places, a Japanese soldier saw her, brandished a sword and shouted, “It’s too dangerous to let you live. I’m going to kill you!”²⁹⁹ In a scene seemingly out of a silent movie, the soldier chased her to a cliff, as he swung his sword at her, the ground gave way, she passed out, and she awoke to find

²⁹⁵ 39-45.

²⁹⁶ Tomiko Higa, The Girl with the White Flag, 49-50.

²⁹⁷ 67-69.

²⁹⁸ 71-72.

²⁹⁹ 73.

herself suspended by her pants in a dead tree that grew into the cliff.³⁰⁰ This escape jarred with her childhood experiences. “My father, and the soldiers at the Signal Corps unit [near her childhood home] had always told me that soldiers were there to protect us, and here was one raising his sword to kill me!”³⁰¹ These tales only covered her brushes with death, not the bodies she discovered and destruction she recounted in her book, and the similar experiences endured by thousands of Okinawans in the caves, beaches, and scorched earth that marred the island. The horrors of warfare were felt intimately by a whole society, not physically separated by blood and paranoia.

The terrible fate of Okinawans occurred among a multitude of people. Consider three randomly selected passages from An Oral History of The Battle of Okinawa. In one, Haru Maeda, nineteen years old at the time, described her experiences in one cave in which the Japanese army physically took it from the residents of her village³⁰² to provide cover from American troops:

I asked them if anything’d happened to my Mother, and they said Mother was dead. ... What they told me was that a Japanese soldier came and asked Mother how many people were in there, but my mother couldn’t speak Japanese well, she answered, “Hui, hui?” Of course she meant to say, “Yes? What is it?,” but the soldier instantly cut her head off. The head landed in my sister-in-law Yuki’s lap. Everybody panicked. My younger sister got away, carrying the younger brother on her back, but when she got as far as Mearakagua, the soldiers caught up with her, took her inside the gate of the house and stabbed her, so she let go of her hands holding her brother. She was stabbed three times in the abdomen and her intestines came out here and there. My brother’d been stabbed and cut wide in the stomach, and all the tabled intestines came out. He died soon.³⁰³

The account continued with Maeda finding her brother and two family friends killed, her sister-in-law’s father decapitated and now covered in flies, and her uncle’s lifeless body

³⁰⁰ 72-75.

³⁰¹ 73.

³⁰² 28.

³⁰³ 29.

by a well. She cared for her brother and sister in their final hours, killed by supposedly friendly troops.³⁰⁴

A smaller account comes from Koei Kinjo, who was fourteen during the battle. His testimony consists only of five paragraphs below the picture of a dead child covered in insects. He recalled his time in a roughly seventy-two square-foot cave which provided shelter for nineteen people. He spoke of an older woman, a mother, and her two children driven from an earlier cavern by the Japanese military. The group spent two days sitting under a palm tree before Kinjo discovered that a shell killed the two adults. “The children were safe. The baby was sucking at her mother’s breast, and the older one was leaning against her body.” Three days later, he found the children dead as well, drenched in the spring rains.³⁰⁵

Yasutaka Aza’s story concerned the final stages of the conflict. As Japanese resistance faded, he visited a spring at night and noticed that the water was bad. “The next day, when I went back there, I found the bodies of several soldiers floating in the pond, and the water was red as blood.”³⁰⁶ He and his group debated whether to surrender to the Americans. When they came across nearly fifty troops, around fifteen of them killed themselves with grenades alongside soldiers “drying thir [sic] wet uniforms, while there were other soldiers who were shaving themselves, right next to those committing suicide.”³⁰⁷ Seeing that odd site, the group left their cave and surrendered to the United

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ 15.

³⁰⁶ 35.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

States. “I was ready to die. . . . Americans came, searched me, curiously examined my coins, bills and bonds I was carrying, and confiscated them for souvenirs.”³⁰⁸

Accounts like these show the large numbers of nationalist indicators across the island. Every cave, every house, every bit of land, every family gathering, and every trip by a military base, served, and often still serves, as a flagging. One American Red Cross worker who came onto the main island after the battle describes a place in ruins when she arrived after the war ended. The land now merely mud³⁰⁹ after the destruction and a typhoon that struck the region after the shooting stopped. “As I said, nothing was left there, so we first lived in tents with no floors. How devastated it was . . . a dog brought in a human skull. Just walked into the tent with this human skull in his mouth and you can imagine that was something to see.”³¹⁰ How people were still emerging from grottoes, with pale skin and women giving birth to babies beneath the surface.³¹¹ The idea that ordinary moments are banal sounds inadequate after the trauma experienced by Ryukyans, even those basic events are among the most casual and ordinary moments in a person’s life. The American and Japanese flags become rich with painful, very real symbolism. It does not matter whether the flag is waved or unwaved. It is hard to imagine the ensigns are, in Billig’s words, “mindless flags.”³¹² Flags and everyday life emphasize what Okinawa is, by indicating what it is not. Tombs and caves represent refuge and tragedy. The presence of military, whether Japanese or American, revives the sense of occupation, destruction, and human loss, whether it is the “hot” manifestations in an

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Women Veterans Historical Project Oral History Collection, “Ruth White.”

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Billig, 40-41.

accident that costs lives or banal incarnations such as traffic problems caused by people leaving bases or the noise created by air planes flying low to the ground. Banal does not quite cover these indicators. The idea of high- and low-track indicators shows the complexity of Okinawan life. Bended-knee sources, such as memorials or emotional memories feed the common moments that subtly remind islanders of their identity. The barbed wire around Kadena Air Force Base or Camp Foster Marine Base fades into the background as an Okinawan drives by it on Route 23 or Route 130, but they also reinforce tragic loss.

The Cave of the Virgins and Bathroom Books: The Battle in Memory

A land shattered in memory, identity, and national orientation leads to a jarring array of memorializing the Battle of Okinawa. The recollections of the past could, depending on the individual, place the region as an independent realm conquered by Japan; a sub-state nation; a place that is of Japan but not quite it itself; and fully within the nation-state. As Matthew Allen wrote in his essay on the Kume Island massacres, “It is war itself, rather than either Japan or the United States, that is perceived as the enemy. ... [It] could be seen as a means for people to deal with their identity as not-quite Japanese in the new millennium, while not appearing disloyal to Japan.”³¹³ He noted, astutely, that the same drive for “peace” over other identities brings the region in line with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.³¹⁴ The horrors of the battle could conceivably push the many people, under the right circumstances, to identify with the United States, while the sacrifices, with some collective squinting, draws the Ryukyuans into a stronger bond with the mainland. Actions by both powers in the postwar years largely create a sense of

³¹³ Matthew Allen, “Wolves at the Back Door: Remembering the Kumejima Massacres” in Islands of Discontent, eds. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, 59.

³¹⁴ 60.

alienation, though that will be covered in the next chapter. Broadly, a network of print-capital along with human experience keeps the memories of the conflict very much alive, and furthers the idea of an independent Okinawan identity.

One key way in which the battle leaves a sense of a timeless monument comes from the *Himeyuri* Memorial, often known in English as The Cave of the Virgins. The shrine memorializes the *Himeyuri*, which translates to the Maiden Lily Student Nurse Corps, the female students from the prefecture's two elite high schools who became student nurses on the battle's front lines. They were killed³¹⁵ or committed suicide rather than surrender to the Americans.³¹⁶ The tragedy, with its seemingly eternal themes of feminine falling to the masculine, the powerless dying for the powerful, the ambiguity of the symbolism, and the sacrifice of the virgins plays a large role in the island's identity. The anthology Islands of Discontent mentions it in three different essays, linking the memorial to mainland tourism,³¹⁷ a brutal rape in 1995 committed by three American military personnel,³¹⁸ and film imagery of the islands.³¹⁹ Another academic collection of essays on the Ryukyus, Japan and Okinawa, also includes an item that links the *Himeyuri* with the 1995 incident and a sense of Okinawa sacrificed for the mainland.³²⁰ While the fate of the young women could alienate the island from the mainland, it certainly draws the metropole to Okinawa. The nurses became a well-told tale of "loyal Okinawan sacrifice and remains a principal mainland image of Okinawa."³²¹ As early as 1953, the anti-war film Tower of Lilies became very popular in Japan, helping to enshrine the

³¹⁵ Linda Isako Angst, "The Rape of a Schoolgirl" in Islands of Discontent, 142.

³¹⁶ Aaron Gerow, "From the National Gaze to Multiple Gazes" in Islands of Discontent, 276.

³¹⁷ Gerald Figal, "Waging Peace on Okinawa" in Islands of Discontent, 65-98.

³¹⁸ Angst, 142-143.

³¹⁹ Gerow, 276-277.

³²⁰ Glenn D. Hook and Richard Siddle, "Introduction" in Japan and Okinawa, 12-13.

³²¹ Figal, 83.

brigade.³²² A Sunday afternoon drive on Route 331 takes the traveler past the Okinawa Peace Park, a large memorial and museum dedicated to the battle and post-war life, but the large crowds of mainland tourists crossing the street from the bus-parking lots and gathering in front of the nearby *Himeyuri* shrine and museum are arresting even from forty kilometers an hour. Whether the multitudes are downplaying the Japanese atrocities by paying their respects followed by a quick trip to the place that sells locally crafted glassware during their subtropical vacation is certainly debatable, but clearly outside interest propels one way of creating simultaneous high- and low-track nationalism.

The prefecture itself has taken steps to memorialize the battle and help carve an identity. The Peace Park portrays the islands as a land scorched by both the Japanese and American military since World War II. Long, carved-stone walls memorialize the people who died in the conflict, whether they are Okinawan, Japanese, American, or Korean. The museum collected and published oral histories, and helps continue a strong current through the region of looking for peace. The idea of war in itself has become an overarching “other” for the islanders to protect its identity. The introduction to a collection of oral histories published by the local government answers the question of “Why was this museum established?” by cataloguing the mass suicides by civilians, those killed by the imperial troops, and people who perished due to sickness and starvation:

Through this experience of the battle and a quarter of a century long foreign rule, the island people have learned that the only choice left for them for survival and peace in future [sic] lies in following the dictates of what is referred to as ‘Okinawa-no-Kokoro’ (literally, the heart of the Okinawan people), or ethnic wisdom and sentiment rooted in their long tradition of coexistence and hospitality. It places human dignity above anything else and refuses anything that may lead to war, always promoting peace and culture as the highest value of mankind.³²³

³²² Gerow, 276.

³²³ An Oral History of the Battle of Okinawa, 1.

The reaction to bloodshed and occupation has clearly forged a distinct identity. The government of Okinawa says in print that its society is peaceful. The Americans and Japanese are violent. This is officially sanctioned sub-state nationalism in all but name.

Still, the great ideas of nationalism never quite fit their lionized visions. An example of this comes from Ota. He became governor through the anti-military mood that sprang up during the Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, acted as a strong critic of the American bases, and served as the president of the Ota Peace Research Institute in his years after holding the post.³²⁴ A casual glance at the short author's biography in Essays on Okinawa Problems shows him as a nationalist straight out of an Anderson book. He fought as a conscript for the Japanese during the battle in the Blood and Iron Corps, received his undergraduate education in the Tokyo, his postgraduate degree in journalism at Syracuse University, and held short-term teaching positions at the University of Hawaii and Arizona State University in addition to his career at the University of the Ryukyus.³²⁵ His books include Japanese tomes such as The Okinawan Mind, Who are the Okinawan?, The Political Structure of Modern Okinawa, and The Consciousness of the Okinawan People. Glance through his work and just like a good Andersonian nationalist, he readily quotes American sources. His 1992 introduction to the oral histories encapsulates Ryukyu identity from "our ancestors were a harmonious, peace-loving people who used no weapons" to the drive for peace.³²⁶ And yet this crusader for a demilitarized Okinawa sees the power of American money. Two of his books, This Was the Battle of Okinawa and The Battle of Okinawa, contain trim accounts

³²⁴ Ota in Women of Okinawa, 151.

³²⁵ Flap, Essays on Okinawa Problems.

³²⁶ An Oral History of Okinawa, v.

of the cataclysmic event in English with short sections, but what really stands out are the photographs. The huge numbers of images are best described as the Life magazine version of World War II. The prints include the horrors of war with mangled corpses, ruins, and explosions, but they also include homey touches. An American GI and his pet parrot perched atop his rifle,³²⁷ the Marine military policeman smiling benevolently over the captured Japanese conscript barely in his teens,³²⁸ or soldiers happily banging on abandoned Ryukyuan drums.³²⁹ Ota can use the Battle of Okinawa as a searing moment in creating local identity and as a profitable way to provide reading material for American soldiers visiting the toilet. Ota truly practices the highest and lowest of nationalism's two tracks.

Memories: Past, Present, and Future

Nationalism is a two-, or more-, way street. Never does that come to mind more than when considering Higa's emergence with her story. Her wanderings through the island ended when she carried an improvised white flag, began walking toward the American lines, Japanese troops looking to surrender began following her near her journey's end, and then an American took a picture of her. Thinking the camera was a disguised weapon; she smiled, waved,³³⁰ and became a somewhat-famous picture in the American renderings of the conflict. Her memories bubbled to the surface in 1977 when she discovered the photograph in a foreign-language bookshop. In 1983, the prefecture began acquiring and preserving battle footage which was then broadcast on local television. As she and her husband watched the latest documentary films, her surrender

³²⁷ Ota, This Was the Battle of Okinawa, 54.

³²⁸ 81.

³²⁹ 92.

³³⁰ 107-111.

was broadcast. Not even her husband knew her wartime story. Soon other people's stories began to coalesce around the image until she gave her story to a local newspaper. She began looking for the photographer, hoping her participation in a 1988 New York peace march clad in traditional Ryukyuan dress and dancing to the islands' music while carrying the photograph would lead her to him. Ultimately, a mainland television network linked her with John Hendrickson, the shooter, who lived in Texas.³³¹ This story, set amidst many, shows the many poles of nationalism. Okinawan-ness trades in peace. The prefecture preserved the memories and then broadcast them to its people. It helped bring back the horrors for Higa, and she used her heritage to find the photographer through American and Japanese print-capital. Clearly, Okinawa's main "other" is war. The United States and Japan may serve as the vehicles of destruction, but they also broadcast Okinawa-ness, at once saving and destroying the islands.

Ultimately, the Battle of Okinawa creates a series of cultural artifacts from the very ground its people trod to books to every sight of an American, mainlander, or weapon that are projected into the past, present, or future to create a sense of Okinawan nationalism. All aspects of island life became spring-loaded to create a sense of uniqueness. They serve as banal and "hot" indicators simultaneously, with each pole feeding into the other. The constant and internalized commemorations of the conflict serve as the generator of memory and identity. The idea of peaceful Okinawa becomes a springboard for historic imaginings of the Ryukyu Kingdom's trading vessels or the root of the frustrations that come with the American military presence. The events of 1945 turn the United States' current armed forces into occupiers rather than military allies. To be an Okinawan is to survive the battle, whether it is in a literal or figurative sense.

³³¹ 119-124.

Chapter 6: The New Nationalisms

Occupied Okinawa Before Vietnam

The tripartite nature of Okinawan policy and politics since World War II created an odd engine for identity that slowly solidified the idea of the islands as an example of sub-state nationalism. Though the early power-war years served as a template that reached its full potency in the 1960s and 1970s, the immediate era after 1945 served as the end result of a drift created by geopolitical powers: The United States' military presence and positions traditionally pushed the archipelago toward an identity with post-war Japan, but the Japanese viewed (and still view) the region as a relatively benign version of an "other," and much of the exoticism and independent view of the prefecture can be attributed to American influence. This "triangle trade" of nationalism slowly pushed Okinawa into an interesting self-conception. The region embraced its uniqueness more and more over time, yet the ultimate goal is not independence, but social and economic equality within the nation-state. The popular view of the old Ryukyu Kingdom does not lead to the question of secession for the most part but instead leads to the oft-cited figure that the archipelago consists of less than one percent of the country's land but plays host to 75 percent of the American military presence.³³² This situation clearly places Okinawa as a distinct culture and—though not officially—a nation, but the dynamic ultimately places the islands safely within Tokyo's cultural and political realm. The Ryukyus' history since 1945 has seen a path for the foreseeable future toward a comfortable sub-state nationalism, barring major geopolitical traumas. Again, this situation became its most powerful and contentious during the Vietnam War and

³³² Laura Hein and Mark Selden, "Culture, Power, and Identity in Contemporary Okinawa" in Islands of Discontent, eds. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, 5.

afterwards, but the first 15 years after the Battle of Okinawa present a basic framework for the discourse of Okinawan nationalism. This chapter establishes the background, and the next section will show its transition from mostly low-track nationalism to very heated high-track nationalism.

The pairing of low- and high-track nationalism furthers both the flow of identity and the sub-state situation. In one example, the United States captured Japan's Kadena Airfield in some of the initial maneuvers in the early days of the Battle of Okinawa.³³³ Today it serves as the gigantic Kadena Air Force Base. It therefore serves as a major hub of American culture, think of the many meanings found on Gate 2 Street in Chapter 1, and acts as a historic mirror to World War II. Ota wrote that the facility occupied eighty-three percent of Kadena Town, squeezing the population of 14,000 people into the remaining land. He concluded, with more than a touch of hyperbole, "Under these circumstances, it is almost impossible to live as decently as humans should."³³⁴ As expected, he then tied the Air Force to Japanese imperialism, noting that when Tokyo was still in the process of acquiring the Ryukyu Kingdom, Shuri balked at a permanent mainland military presence on the island. Instantly, the United States after 1945 becomes the extension of pre-war Japan.³³⁵ The historical echoes can be found while glancing into business catering to military members across Route 58 from Kadena's Gate 1, the occasional demilitarization protest, or the odd local television station posting a camera operator outside the base or within its cultural sphere for "B-roll" footage. Sakihara, in his brief history of the islands after the war, wrote about the expansion of military facilities in response to the onset of the Cold War, the ham-handed land acquisitions by

³³³ Ota, The Battle of Okinawa, 28.

³³⁴ Ota, Essays on Okinawa Problems, 241.

³³⁵ 241-243.

United States military, the public protests in response, and its role in launching the reversion movement with the goal of returning Okinawa to Japan.³³⁶ Kadena served as a key base for the bombing missions during the Korean War. In the first year of the conflict, missions from the base unloaded nearly 24,500 tons of bombs, leading to a significant increase of the Air Force's presence on the island.³³⁷ During Vietnam, bombers out of Guam refueled at the base on their way to their targets.³³⁸ Paired with a national identity based on pacifism, Kadena serves as a striking reminder in ways great and small of the American occupation of the islands. Small and large objects reinforce Okinawan nationalism every day in every moment.

Early American Imaginings of Okinawa

The United States' initial plans for the islands show the power of the transformative properties of nationalism. The race-based world view of Imperial Japan lent itself to the American military's image of Okinawa, which in turn reinforced the region's sense of a peaceful identity. For the people who lived in the Ryukyus, this development showed a continued passive augmentation of group identity. Conversely, as the Okinawans found themselves in the crossfire of World War II, the archipelago was pushed along by the rising tide of the Cold War into a permanent American military base. The islands south of Kyushu became the islands near the new flashpoints of Korea, China, and Taiwan. The perseverance through the war became the endurance of generations. Japan's confusion over Okinawa's role within the nation-state morphed into Washington's muddle, with the military treating the islands as a colony and the civilian

³³⁶ Sakihara, Mitsugu, "Part B: Okinawa Since 1945" in *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, 2000 edition, Tuttle Publishing, Rutland, Vermont: 1958, 550-551.

³³⁷ Sarantakes, 67-68.

³³⁸ M.D. Morris, *Okinawa: A Tiger by the Tail*, Hawthorn Books, Inc., New York, 1968, 91.

world hoping that American stewardship would take on the role more as a territory with a democratic government. The United States' military pushed Okinawa toward Japan while Americans out of uniform, whether between shifts on the base or as administrators, slowly built up an independent identity.

The military's desire for permanent bases in Okinawa owes a great deal to planning for the political situation after World War II and a belief that the islands were culturally independent of Japan. As early as 1942, the JCS 183 series of papers began looking for air bases after hostilities ceased and two years later these blueprints focused on Okinawa. Cultural studies of the islands used in planning largely utilized Japanese sources—one estimate places it at ninety-five percent—and developed the idea that the islands were an imperial possession with a separate history and culture. Japanese racism against the Ryukyans became transformed during war preparations into a key point to split the islands away from the mainland. The Office of Strategic Services eagerly saw tensions between the Okinawans and Japanese through their mutual diaspora. As the battle faded on the island, the service branches understood the strategic ramifications Okinawa offered. The Navy saw the region saw it as a key location to help set up a presence in the Pacific Ocean; the Army, especially General George C. Marshall, believed that his branch of the service in the archipelago would provide a stabilizing influence on East Asia, especially as the knotty question of who controlled Formosa developed; and the Army Air Force felt it would provide a strong position.³³⁹ In a truly odd set of historic circumstances, Japanese racism boosted the notion of Ryukyuan pacifism—perhaps some Americans transformed Tokyo's label of inferiority into a

³³⁹ Robert D. Eldridge, The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem: Okinawa in Postwar U.S.-Japan Relations, 1945-1952, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York, 2001, 4-25.

cultural superiority—which in turn led the Pentagon to set up a long-term occupation in order to help what it saw as friendly islanders.

The State Department held a similar picture of Ryukyu, but with an entirely different plan. Mirroring the Pentagon, Foggy Bottom understood the archipelago's importance—in this case, its prime location on the route between China and the United States—and identified with the pacifism myth. Unlike the military, the State Department believed that the islands had undergone significant assimilation with the mainland, severing any possibility of giving China control over the territory, and sought a weaponless future for Okinawa. Either the prefecture would exist in an under Japanese administration if the international community enforced a demilitarized zone over the area, or it would be returned fully to Tokyo if the Japanese forsook its military, shed its overseas possessions, and committed itself to pacifism. Slowly the State Department's position evolved into what could be called a "soft" military presence. By 1946, this part of the government hoped to lease the bases if the area was not going to be demilitarized under Japanese rule as part of a postwar plan for peace among the four major powers, despite some Chinese newspapers calling for the region to be returned to Beijing.³⁴⁰ The State Department saw Okinawa as an "other" within Japan, but possibly one that would serve as an example for the mainland. The military and the civilian administration saw the islands as a distinct place, especially when paired with the metropole.

As the Americans dithered on what to do with Okinawa—Sarantakes used the term "drift"—some rudiments of a democratic system developed in the region, laying the governmental groundwork to give the islands a sense of self-contained government. The archipelago's politics was now no longer dominated by Tokyo, and home-grown parties

³⁴⁰ Morris, 52-56.

blossomed. Marine Colonel Charles Murray held command of the islands between 1945 and 1946 under the auspices of the Navy. Facing a decreasing military presence to run the region, eyeing the main island's strategic value, the high costs of administration, and facing a devastated economy, a member of his staff³⁴¹ proposed initiating civilian government and returning confiscated land for an increase in agriculture.³⁴²

Governmental liberalization led to city- and town-based rule by March, 1946; the United States appointed a governor the next month; and a local legislature convened, consisting of members of the prewar assembly.³⁴³ The following year, political parties developed including the anti-communist and pro-independence Okinawan Democratic League, the pro-reversion and leftist Okinawan People's Party, and the Okinawan Socialist Party, which quickly merged with the short-lived Ryukyuan Socialist Party.³⁴⁴ Unfortunately for the archipelago, the Navy ceded its control over the islands back to the Army. The land-based branch stalled the initial gains achieved under Murray, held back on funds to rebuild the main island's facilities, and the stagnation led to Okinawa being seen by soldiers as a hardship post.³⁴⁵ A few months after the initial political factions developed, the Army issued Special Order 23 which in very strong terms placed military rule over the civilian government, including provisions that banned any criticism of the American administration and any dissent from the order itself.³⁴⁶ One scholar wrote that the military "doubted frankly Okinawan competence for self government, and they still thought

³⁴¹ The staff member was John Caldwell who later ran the University of North Carolina System.

³⁴² Sarantakes, 32-34.

³⁴³ Kiyoshi Nakachi, *Ryukyu-U.S.-Japan Relations 1945-1972*, Hiyas Press, Inc., Quezon City, Philippines, 1989, 29-31.

³⁴⁴ 34-36.

³⁴⁵ Sarantakes, 35-38.

³⁴⁶ Nakachi, 35.

themselves as conquerors of an enemy.”³⁴⁷ That view appears a far cry from the Navy’s plans only a year earlier. The islands’ proto-legislature, the Okinawa Advisory Council, announced that it would resign from the military government in 1949 in protest of the Americans’ lack of cooperation, leading to a showdown in which the administration ultimately dissolved the body.³⁴⁸ These steps toward home rule appear timid and ineffectual, but it created local parties and governmental bodies that worked both in cooperation and conflict with the United States. Local government independent of the mainland had taken place for the first time since annexation.

The amorphous plans for the region finally crystallized as the United States began moving toward a permanent treaty with Japan, and the Cold War flared up with the Chinese Revolution. The American occupation evolved into an American colony.³⁴⁹ In February, 1948, General Douglas MacArthur met with the State Department’s Director of the Policy Planning Staff George Kennan, pushing his strategic aims for Okinawa. MacArthur convinced Kennan that the islands served as the most important strategic location in the region, a permanent presence would keep the American military off the mainland, and the general worried about Japanese discrimination against the islanders. Persuaded, Kennan and the State Department backed the United States maintaining Okinawa.³⁵⁰ Privately, Japanese Emperor Hirohito agreed with MacArthur’s position and advocated long-term Washington control over the archipelago. The head of state’s reasons for giving up his southernmost prefecture largely followed the American considerations with the presence safeguarding Japan proper, providing comfort for

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ 35-36.

³⁴⁹ Sarantakes, 61.

³⁵⁰ 42-44.

mainlanders worried about Soviet expansion, and he worried that rising political tensions could create a reason for Moscow to enter Japan itself.³⁵¹ The increasing conflict with the communist world furthered Washington's attention to Okinawa. In 1949, a typhoon ripped through the region—something that spurred a less-than-robust response for funds—but alarmed by the unrest in China, Congress quickly green-lighted \$50 million for rebuilding local infrastructure.³⁵² The start of the Korean War pushed the Japanese government to sign a permanent treaty with the United States, safeguarding its defense and willing to part with the island chain.³⁵³ Still, the mainland government felt severe reluctance to fully part with Okinawa. Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida wanted the mainland to have some control over the islands, since he considered them part of the nation-state. Furthermore, he was under attack from militarists who opposed giving up the territory while the left attacked Yoshida for allowing the Americans a permanent presence for its armed forces. Fearing a Japanese backlash, the United States ultimately compromised—on terms favorable to Washington—that allowed Tokyo “residual sovereignty,” giving the mainland control of the land when the United States eventually relinquished it.³⁵⁴ As the Ryukyu Kingdom once existed between China and Japan, it now sat in a geopolitical space wedged between Japan and the United States. The old patterns, whether in centuries past or the nature in which World War II arrived on Okinawa, became reinforced with the new realities of the Cold War. History once again gave the Ryukyu the historic role of big-power pawn.

³⁵¹ Ota, 84-85.

³⁵² Sarantakes, 45-46.

³⁵³ Nakachi, 47-50.

³⁵⁴ Sarantakes, 56-59.

The signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951³⁵⁵ ended one moment of Okinawan ambiguity and created another. The United States separated the islands from Japan, set up a local government, and treated it as a colony—even if that term was used softly and discreetly³⁵⁶—but it left a path for reunification with the mainland through the concept of “residual sovereignty.” The local response to American actions, chronicled in the next section, and the United States’ handling of popular opinion, continued to create and augment many forms of nationalism. Casting a ballot, a grand civic act, or seeing one of many political posters, a truly banal flagging, simultaneously created an Okinawan community independent of Japan, yet the relationship with the mainland served as the key political topic. The relative powerlessness of the local government reinforced local uniqueness. The patterns of modern-day identification began taking form with the Americans walking the streets, the gates of military bases, and the question of reunion with Japan. The United States through its inaction provided more sets of tools for Okinawans to continue forging an identity. Now the question becomes how did the Ryukyans respond to this situation?

Homegrown Japanization

As the United States laid the groundwork for a somewhat independent-Okinawan identity, the region’s citizens found themselves strongly identifying with Japan itself. The movement toward the San Francisco Peace Treaty brought political parties supporting a return to Japan, known as the Reversion Movement. Base expansion sparked popular resistance to American rule in strikes and other demonstrations. The disruption of family life caused battle and property requisition created a culture of prostitution, rape, and fear.

³⁵⁵ Sakihara, 550.

³⁵⁶ Sarantakes, 61.

As the United States slowly built up the Okinawan economy, the islanders identified with the northerners even more. Personally, people's reactions to Americans in general ranged from fearful to friendly, economic saviors to an impediment to progress. As the United States dithered, and then dug in, the Okinawans traveled from a somewhat-ambivalent state to full identification with Japan. At the same time, they slowly picked up a separate identity that would create conflicts in later decades.

Politically, the United States-Japan treaty largely saw parties backing independence evolving into pro-reversion parties. In the first popular election, held in 1950, Tatsuo Taira won the gubernatorial contest by supporting a unification of the archipelago, which was initially broken down by clusters of islands, and reversion with Japan. Taira picked up 65.4 percent of the vote, while his allies picked up sixteen of the twenty legislative seats. English-speaking Seiho Matsuoka, who backed cooperation with the American military, finished second and after the contest formed the anti-reversion Republican Party which advocated independence. After the treaty, Matusoka's party evolved into the Ryukyu Democratic Party which advocated what could be called a go-slow approach to reversion.³⁵⁷ Matsuoka's shift made some sense, a March, 1951 poll showed that eighty-six percent of respondents advocated reunion with the north while only two percent advocated a revival of a Ryukyuan nation-state. That same year, 72.1 percent of eligible voters on the main island signed a pro-reversion petition.³⁵⁸ Ota believes that the initial ideas of independence was the product of "American psychological warfare" to create "a mission of paternalism toward the backward,

³⁵⁷ Nakachi, 37-39.

³⁵⁸ 52-53.

impoverished Okinawans,” forming a negotiating weapon with Tokyo.³⁵⁹ Moreover, he believes it served as a lure to keep the mainland aligned with the United States.³⁶⁰

Clearly, public opinion began solidifying toward a pro-Japanese position in a manner that one author even described as “denial.”³⁶¹

The anger towards the United States, which showed a further activism on the part of the Okinawans, occurred after the military finally announced their monetary compensation for the land requisitioned. After the San Francisco Treaty, the authorities finally were able to issue payments for the property and announced in April, 1952 that they would pay a mere six percent of the land value per year. Citizens responded with protests. The administration reacted with a new offer of selling the land in exchange the parcels’ value plus a development plan. Okinawans also responded to this proposal with derision. A congressional subcommittee weighed the Army’s proposals and a local plan that would entail an outlay of the yearly amount of money that would have been provided by their land, but this also went nowhere. Ultimately, the government compromised, but securely on the side of the military: a reappraisal for the property, Okinawans kept ownership, people would receive one large payment, and the military could do whatever they wanted on the plots. Ryukyans, despite their traditional image of meekness, responded with massive protests—Sarantakes uses the term “exploded”—and Japanese public opinion emphatically sided with the people on the archipelago, showing some affinity between the north and south. Taken aback by local opposition and worried about

³⁵⁹ Ota, 191-193.

³⁶⁰ 219-220.

³⁶¹ Lie, 100.

mainlanders, the military yielded to some degree and offered yearly payments and occasional reassessments of the property.³⁶²

The American presence began to truly alienate its new constituents by grabbing land in a seemingly ever-more voracious manner. M.D. Morris, a former engineer in Okinawa, wrote in his 1968 book on the islands, “There was one place in this overall picture though, where the U.S. made a very basic error in judgment. It was in determination of policy with regard to land.”³⁶³ In one of Keyso’s oral histories, an interview with Mitsuko Inafuku, one can see the links between the Japanese military and the United States’ presence, the sense of powerlessness, and the conception of an invader. Inafuku chronicled how her father purchased a large plot of land in the southern section of the island complete with tombs and stables, how imperial troops appropriated the property after family members were called into the armed forces, the battle destroyed the land, the Americans acquired it, her mother felt powerless to protest in such lean years, the United States offered a pittance in rent, and how after the Korean War what was apparently a short-term lease—even if it was forced—turned into a long-term land grab.³⁶⁴ Nakamura remembered the new troops widening roads soon as the hostilities began decreasing; knocking over at least twenty graves, including her mother’s who died during the battle; and that when family members hoped to recover some of the remains, troops told them that it would slow troop movements. She concluded, “So my mother’s bones are buried somewhere in the ground up there in Motubu” and then fell silent for

³⁶² Sarantakes, 92-95.

³⁶³ 72.

³⁶⁴ Keyso, 21-22.

“several minutes.”³⁶⁵ Earl Rankin Bull, an American minister on the island wrote this evocative passage:

After June, 1945, eighty thousand (one-third wounded) crawled out of their caves hoping to locate their acres again. There were many women with babies tied to their backs, while dishes, kettles, and bedding were on their heads. The children were chewing stalks of sugar cane. In due time, they all turned back to locate the fields where they and their forbearers had long labored. However, in many cases the bulldozers of the army had pushed aside the valuable top soil [sic] in order to make way for straighter roads and army buildings. Ancestral tombs were disregarded and paddy fields were demolished. Airfields and installations took precedence over shrine land. ... The entire village of Hiza was wiped out and the rubble from the houses made good fill.³⁶⁶

Morris, with his background in the land disputes, wrote that the United States felt that all the land belonged to it during the battle and that it did not consider any form of compensation to Okinawans until 1950. “The resentment from the natives came out of the visitors’ initial and continued ignorance of their existence of people with ancient deep-rooted claims.”³⁶⁷ And ultimately, “Locals had to do with what was not needed in a U.S. military reservation.”³⁶⁸ The United States, in its retrenchment on Okinawa, clearly treated the area as a colony with its citizens destined for continued second-class rights.

The devastating effects of the land grabs and other disruptions can be seen in a paper by sociologist Yehudi Cohen, showing how two villages affected by military expansion reacted. Village A became a haven of prostitution while Village B gave new land to families which lost property, tying them into the community. Additionally, he found that over two thirds of Village A’s prostitutes lost one or more parents. Cohen’s studies, which took place in 1954 and by deciphering the physical description of the

³⁶⁵ 41-42.

³⁶⁶ 16.

³⁶⁷ 72-73.

³⁶⁸ 74.

location appears to be adjacent to either Kadena or one of three Marine bases, shows a strong and less-than-uplifting military impact. Cohen wrote that before the war, prostitution largely centered in Naha, but after the conflict it took over Village A, with half of the females working in a sex trade almost exclusively catering to Americans. All of the women were born outside the hamlet, which was south of the base, and all but one were native Okinawans working on average for just over a year. They earned much more money on the whole than Village B's women, but both locations were highly dependent on the base economy. In many ways, the United States augmented this brothel economy. Some communities possessed hundreds of prostitutes; Village B banned the practice, but allowed former practitioners who now served as mistresses to live in the community and now made up ten percent of the hamlet's households³⁶⁹; and the Americans allowed the brothels to exist under the wink-and-nod status of "cafes." Even Village B, with its stronger community and stable households was feeling some pressure from the American land grabs. By the time Cohen wrote, nineteen percent of married children living outside of the traditionally close-knit community. Both places were seeing migration to Hawaii and South America.³⁷⁰ Sarantakes cited an Air Force study that believed that 90 percent of taverns with an American clientele were involved in prostitution, and "Okinawan-run establishments [catering to the military] ... were more often than not in prostitution districts."³⁷¹ Everyday life in the 1950s saw an emerging Okinawan community, but one largely adversely affected by the presence of the United States. The neighborhood

³⁶⁹ In one interesting passage in the UNC Greensboro women's oral history project, one of the subjects mentioned that after the war "We went to Okinawa, [Japan]. ... And I left him [her husband]—I gave him to a Japanese girl."

³⁷⁰ Yehudi A. Cohen, "The Sociology of Commercialized Prostitution in Okinawa," *Social Forces* 37 (1958): 160-168.

³⁷¹ 72-73.

presence of prostitutes, or the lack of them, constituted a key indicator that the islands were far different from Japan.

Beyond the world of sex for money, American soldiers became a fearsome presence for Okinawan women who worried about rape and other forms of misogyny. One of Keyso's subjects, Nobuko Karimata began by recalling how each village rang a bell when military members wandered near the community between 1945 and 1950. "Sometimes the soldiers entered residential areas to rape women," she told Keyso. "In fact, there were so many cases of rape in those early postwar years that whenever we spotted an American on our streets, we thought for sure he was a rapist."³⁷² Mitsuko Inafuku told the interviewer that she found American enlisted men very coarse when she worked on Kadena Air Base, but all the women at her job feared serving coffee to the officers in their rooms. "... I always made sure the door didn't get locked behind me," she said. "We had a system in the kitchen: If a girl was gone too long delivering coffee, we'd go look for her. ... Personally I never had any trouble, but some girls did. My sister was one of them." The sister dated a man who proclaimed his honor by repeatedly mentioning his Christian faith. He then impregnated her sister, returned to America, and her family found out he already had a wife and children back home.³⁷³ Most grisly of all in the early years of the occupation, a military member raped and killed a six year old in 1955.³⁷⁴ These moments of violence and deceit fostered an everyday sense of otherness if one looked at mixed-race children or seeing an American in everyday life, but it also created searing memories for those raped, those whose friends or family were assaulted, and those who gave birth to a child where the father had left them after a web of lies.

³⁷² 86.

³⁷³ 23-24.

³⁷⁴ Angst, 148.

Furthermore, these sorts of crimes and dubious dealings would create echoes in later years with the 1995 gang rape of a school girl and also has a reflection in the “comfort women” secured for the Japanese military during World War II.³⁷⁵ It could be linked with the idea that Okinawa is a feminine identity that is sacrificed such as the *Himeyuri* nurses.³⁷⁶ In later years, Karimata linked the Americans with the war-era Japanese, citing a 1980s study that revealed 130 brothels for the imperial forces during the war. She said that Okinawan and Korean women were coerced into the situation, and that mainland soldiers simply took homes and property. Hardships in the 1940s and 1950s created deep, emotional impacts that were felt in later decades, but served as a mirror to the past.

The casual flaggings of these land grabs—and by extension, violence against women—can be seen in everyday life. The difference between on-base housing with its architecture appearing as a Levittown-rancher mash up—occasionally enhanced by Okinawan-style roofs of red tiles—with ample lawns, parking lots, and wide roads stand in sharp contrast with densely packed off-base living spaces. Okinawans—and to a lesser degree Americans who forgo the opportunity to live within the military’s property—in the southern third of the island possess small or no yards, packed apartment buildings, and narrow thoroughfares jammed with parked cars.³⁷⁷ Islanders without permission to travel on the military’s lands must drive around the bases, increasing time in the car and facing even longer commutes with slower traffic patterns due to tighter roads and many traffic lights. Families with tombs or small agricultural plots within the expanded bases must pass through American checkpoints, showing identification to a weapon-totting

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ 143.

³⁷⁷ Not all flaggings are negative. Inafuku recalled in the early post-war years that she “imagined it was a different world there, a dream world of sorts. It was.”

guard. A trip down Route 58, the main highway on the big island, can contain many casual flaggings when commuters see bars, shops, car dealerships, and other stores catering to the American community, especially the younger military members.

Nakamura recalled that during the American occupation, Okinawan cars and trucks were not allowed to pass the generally slow-moving American vehicles. “So we had to ride in the wake of their oily exhaust fumes,” she said.³⁷⁸ That suggests that for Okinawans in their middle aged years or older, even a tailpipe can conjure deep, evocative emotions under the right circumstances.

Interest and Intransigence: American Life on Okinawa

The United States’ long-term life on the islands appears muddled and contradictory to the modern observer, but it furthered the idea that Okinawa was a unique place in relation with Japan even as the Ryukyuan agitated for reversion. As life became better for military members and their families, and as the islands became to be seen as a plum assignment as opposed to a feared destination. Americans began taking a greater interest in Okinawan history and culture, creating a social situation that embellished the idea of a Ryukyuan society. At the same time, the military’s high command answered Japanese calls for reversion by issuing tone-deaf statements and linking the pro-mainland movement with communism. American observers found themselves bemoaning the whole situation, identifying with the islands’ plight while also finding themselves in agreement with the geopolitical reasons for the occupation. Often these turned into largely ignored calls for reform and liberalized relations between Okinawa and the mainland. In this sense, the idea that the American policy toward the archipelago was actually just a “drift” that continued beyond the pre-Korean War years. Americans kept

³⁷⁸ Keyso, 46.

seeing the islands as unique from Japan, the Okinawans themselves continued to identify ever more with the mainland, and changes occurred at a glacial pace.

As American rule stabilized into a permanent duty station, interest in Okinawan life surged as the military began improving facilities and quality of life for the military and their families. Wives hired maids, programs catered to their children, and in the words of Sarantakes, “Learning about Okinawan history and culture was extremely popular.” He credited one wife, Marian Merritt for serving as an intermediary between Okinawan workers and the Americans, setting up the Women’s Club which became a cultural exchange between the two groups.³⁷⁹ Three local tour guides for Army excursions found themselves so besieged with questions about the island that they wrote a pamphlet, which in turn spurred so much demand that they published a book in 1959.³⁸⁰ Four years earlier, Gladys Zabilka, an ambitious one-time director of the Native Culture Program for the American school system on the island, produced her own tome as a guide for schoolchildren,³⁸¹ and it evolved into its own book that reached eight printings by 1969. Inafuku recalled in her days working as a maid in the early 1950s that “[The mother] tried to fit in with Okinawan society as much as possible.” The employer regularly dragged her along to the Naha market to buy eggs (and act as an interpreter as the wife unsuccessfully haggled with merchants uninterested in bargaining) and wearing Japanese sandals.³⁸² Yamada remembered that her father worked as an illustrator for the military run Daily Okinawan, asking him to create images of prewar life as a way of

³⁷⁹ 71-72.

³⁸⁰ Isamasu Fuchaku, Gasei Higa, and Zenkichi Toyama, Tours of Okinawa, Bridgeway Press, Rutland, Vermont, 1959, 9.

³⁸¹ Gladys Zabilka, Customs and Culture of Okinawa, 1969 ed., Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont, book flap.

³⁸² 25-26.

instructing the personnel. “They wanted to know to know everything about the island from its customs and traditions, to its food and architecture.”³⁸³ Still, she understood that American interest in Okinawan culture carried an ulterior motive at times, noting that keeping islanders entertained was a key reason the administration backed local arts in the early postwar years, funding performers as each community possessed its own outdoor theater.³⁸⁴ Even as the military establishment grabbed more land and rank-and-file enlisted men were not fully trusted by Okinawan women, a sincere interest in local—not Japanese—culture emerged, and that was noticed by many people on the island. The Americans through their own personal interest and with an eye towards keeping the island peaceful helped standardize and propagate the idea of Ryukyuan culture.

Counteracting this interest in Okinawa-ness, was the military’s bullying reactions to civil government and other basic needs. Perhaps the most striking example of this in the early years came when the military tried to subvert an election which surprisingly pushed the communist-aligned Okinawa People’s Party candidate as mayor of Naha. The winner, Kamejiro Senaga, won due to two conservative candidates splitting the vote, better organization, and local resentment toward the status quo, but the United States compounded its unease by clumsily subverting Senaga’s administration. The military stopped providing Naha money, the pro-American city council issued a vote of no confidence, and opponents embarked on a tax strike. Senaga responded by issuing a new election for council, riding increased support to propel enough newly elected political allies to save him from an ouster or the city government from passing laws he opposed. Ultimately, the municipality reached a stalemate. The military government finally

³⁸³ 59.

³⁸⁴ 60.

changed the laws, allowing the city council a lower voting threshold to remove Senaga, but this only angered the public and undermined the American position on Okinawa. A socialist won the next set of Naha elections, showing the ineffectiveness of the military's actions. By then, even the pro-American Okinawa Liberal Democratic Party was advocating reversion.³⁸⁵ On a smaller scale, the United States' administration appeared paltry and ineffective. Nakamura recalled her days setting up a school in the aftermath of the battle. As the military dithered on building a facility and providing material—"thatched roof huts with leaky roofs and mud floors"³⁸⁶—the Okinawa Teachers Association embarked on a campaign for funds from the mainland. Money began arriving, but the administration blocked the head of the organization from traveling to Japan. When the northern financial contributions paid off in pianos for the run-down schools, the chastened military government finally constructed permanent structures for education.³⁸⁷ The Okinawans created their own government which locked horns with the United States while this semi-independent mindset sought political allegiance with the mainland.

Americans who sympathized with the Okinawans during the occupation come across as largely powerless in relation to the social-activist nature of the islanders themselves. Ralph J.D. Braibanti, writing in 1953, lamented that divesting from the islands would leave them vulnerable to China and that ultimately, "In a sense, history has well prepared the Ryukyuan people for their uneasy role as pawn of the Pacific."³⁸⁸ He noted that there was an "emotional and spiritual void by the governmental disconnect

³⁸⁵ Sarantakes, 96-100.

³⁸⁶ Keyso, 43.

³⁸⁷ 42-43.

³⁸⁸ Ralph J.D. Braibanti, "The Outlook for the Ryukyus," *Far Eastern Survey* 22 (June, 1953): 73.

between the islands and the mainland,” but felt that reversion would be “disastrous.”³⁸⁹ Ultimately, he desired a slow merging between the Ryukyus and Japan, allowing unlimited travel and integrating the two economies and that sometime in the future reunion between the two polities would become a reality.³⁹⁰ Bull lamented “In 1945 we won the ‘The Battle of Okinawa’, but in 1957 we are losing the respect of the people. . . . We must not permit our plans to bear the odor of Britain’s die-hard colonial policy in Cyprus or the French policy in Algeria. We must not let Okinawa shame America.”³⁹¹ Kerr wrote a highly sympathetic history of the islands in 1958, and one can see the links between the past and the American occupation. Sarantakes cited an article by retired Marine Barton M. Biggs in Harper’s Magazine that portrayed the Okinawan protests and elections as expected responses to American policy, bad conditions and morale for troops, and extensive prostitution. Biggs’ almost dystopian story—Sarantakes noted that according to health records, thirty-seven percent of the 3rd Marine Division suffered from venereal disease by 1958—set off an investigation that was hindered by military leadership on the island, ignored the 3rd Marine Division, and quietly shelved.³⁹² The military, for its part, kept the American press at arm’s length by giving off-island reporters an idealized vision of the islands and intimidating local journalists.³⁹³ The United States did provide some opposition to its Okinawa occupation, but it easily fit in with the well-established historical narrative of peaceful Ryukyu at the tender mercies of the great powers.

³⁸⁹ 75.

³⁹⁰ 78.

³⁹¹ 17.

³⁹² 103-105.

³⁹³ 106.

The American occupation's first 15 years accomplished the contradictory feat of helping to establish and codify a clear Ryukyuan culture while pushing the Okinawan people closer to Japan with mismanagement and subverting its own public ideals. In many ways, ordinary military members, their families, and journalists contributed to this feat by portraying the islanders as a people subject to the Pentagon and taking an interest in local lore and history. The family tomb or village shrine may serve as a high-track indicator of Ryukyu-ness, but the cars full of Americans visiting the monument just after a time of devastation serves as a lower-track flagging that showed that people were interested in Okinawa in general and that things might be better if it was returned to Japan. Even in their worst moments, the American military presence was contributing to the idea of an Okinawan nationalism.

The Framework Established

Sakihara, in a history book on early Ryukyu, wrote an introduction that reflected on his Okinawan identity while studying at the University of Oregon during the 1950s under an American grant. The budding academic thought of himself as Japanese, he fought and suffered a wound with the student corps during the Battle of Okinawa, but in Eugene something changed. He recalled that mainland students treated him as a fellow member of the Japanese nation, the Americans thought of him as an Okinawan. He then dwelled on the islands' government, his different passport, and his papers identifying him as an Okinawan.³⁹⁴ This internal dialogue led to an astounding series of written passages. This:

³⁹⁴ Sakihara, A Brief History of Early Okinawa Based on the Omoro Soshi, 1987, Honpo Shoseki Press, Tokyo, v.

Having been asked the same question a hundred times, I became less sure of the answer. Some Americans, upon being told that I was a Japanese, would insist, ‘but aren’t you an Okinawan?’³⁹⁵

led to this:

In search of answers, I began to read one book after another on Okinawan history. As one inevitably does, I came across the Omoro soshi, ‘Anthology of the poems of sentiments.’³⁹⁶

and ultimately these emotions on reading the large collection of poems across the Ryukyus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

I relived the joys and sorrows of the people of those bygone days. I traveled the hills, woods, streams, valleys and shores where the ancients used to live. I knew how they felt in the bright, scoring midday sun in the streets of Shuri and Naha. I knew how alluring the warm blue waters off the shores of Okinawa looked on such summer afternoons. I knew the seas, alive with multitudes of colorful fishes playing among the coral reefs. When the sun set beyond the horizon, painting the skies with flowing glittering gold, I felt the same awe that the ancients must have felt.³⁹⁷

The American effect comes through in these paragraphs. The Okinawans, whether tied to or alienated by Japan through war and culture, saw a slow attachment to the Japanese government on a sub-state level. At first, the United States’ administration augmented the Ryukyuan identification with Japan. When asked, Sakihara readily saw himself no more Japanese than someone from Tokyo while talking with an American in Oregon. Still, the military effect created a unique Ryukyuan identity that appears more as an alliance with Japan rather than an outright part of northern culture. Sakihara’s epiphany did not happen immediately, but built slowly. The coming decades will show this journey of self-discovery occurring throughout the archipelago.

³⁹⁵ vi.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ vii.

Chapter 7: To Japan and Back

The Unspoken Nation

The historic arc of Okinawan identity from the Vietnam War era, through reversion to Japan, and to the year 2000 when it hosted the G-8 summit shows that allegiance with Japan furthered the idea of Ryukyuan nationalism on the sub-state level. The “we are this, and they are that” idea of self conception—distilled as islanders are peaceful while mainlanders and the United States are cultures of violence—can be seen in the change in the tripartite politics of the region, with Japan and the United States often agreeing at the expense of Okinawans’ preference for a non-military prefecture, the mainland’s resistance to shifting bases out of the islands, and its economic consequences. This situation is not just a product of the islanders themselves; the mainland citizens have also effectively portrayed the region as an exotic “other.” Movies, television, music, and tourism portraying the prefecture as a more relaxed place in opposition to the larger cities and a world of natural beauty may be seen as stereotyping by Ryukyuan themselves, but this provides an important structure in creating a sense of nationalism. If the mainland citizens take it upon themselves to place Okinawans in opposition to them, then they become something different whether islanders feel it is justified or not. Ultimately, influences outside the islands place the Okinawan within Japan, but clearly as a separate place and culture. Nationalism is a two-way street, and the people of the archipelago and the traditional Japanese are slowly creating a sub-state conception of Okinawa within the main nation-state.

The events of the past forty-eight years in the islands hold great implications for two-track nationalism. The tour bus full of mainland tourists traveling up Route 58 to a

hotel or stopping off at different historical sights becomes loaded with symbolism. The visitors themselves and the vehicles that carry them become truly banal since people regularly see them. But these are crammed with mainlanders seeing old Ryukyu shrines and ruins, with travelers from the Japanese mainland seeing the exotic Okinawa, and these coaches usually possess some signage that presents a unique element of the prefecture such as *shisas* or the drawing of the endangered Okinawa rail. The visitors may visit battlefields or ersatz traditional villages crammed with souvenirs or simply zip along the highway to the air conditioned-beachside resort. The tour buses casually flag or become rich symbols of identity depending upon the context of the time, moment, and political environment. The mainlanders see the islands as a cultural equal, if different, from Tokyo, Nikko, and the old buildings of Kyoto, or they just want some fun in the sun at vacation villages far removed from the average Okinawan. The tourists and mass media both embrace and reject the Ryukyus and its people, but it clearly places them as a different people within Tokyo's government.

The idea of equality with the mainland, rather than independence, manifests itself in contemporary Okinawan politics. Gubernatorial politics creates a choice between candidates and administrations emphasizing demilitarization and confrontation with the national government—implying a desire for parity of a militarization and rejecting the bases' implied colonialism—or Liberal Democratic Party office seekers emphasizing investment from the metropole and job opportunities which connote economic equivalence. Parties advocating independence garner few votes, while the region's options mesh with traditional postwar Japanese politics. With unique issues and problems that place the islands in opposition with the mainland while still aligning with its political

mainstream, Okinawa is clearly creating a unique culture within the Japanese nation. It is non-autonomous nationalism.

The American Collapse and Slow Reversion

The 1960s saw the United States position in Okinawa collapse, fulfilling the islanders' wish for reversion to Japan, but also creating second thoughts about the new administrators. The term "collapse" is not used in the sense that the American position quickly fell apart in a panicked withdrawal from the area, but that in the chaos of ungovernable military members staving off reversion became impossible. "Collapse" means the loss of the armed forces' ability to govern the islands and themselves, and it means the small indicators that Okinawa served as an independent entity, with its own political parties and landmarks, ended as Tokyo slowly took over. The reversion process was hardly quick, with negotiations taking years, but the sense of its inevitability appears as a major shock to the Ryukyus' American administrators.

At the upper levels, U.S.-Okinawan relations reached its nadir and then a thaw during and immediately after the administration of High Commissioner Paul W. Caraway, an imperious Lieutenant General who was the son of United States senators.³⁹⁸ Caraway squashed any measures passed by the civilian government that tied Okinawa to Japan, bypassed the all forms of government (including the one he ostensibly ran), and bad-mouthed the idea of locally run legal institutions. The high commissioner became so noxious politically, that even pro-American factions began backing off their go-slow approach to reversion.³⁹⁹ Caraway publicly denounced moves for self-rule as a scheme, in the words of an Associated Press item, "to hide their incompetence, irresponsibility, and

³⁹⁸ Sarantakes, 112-116.

³⁹⁹ Sakihara, Okinawa, 552.

disloyalty to the community.” Government workers responded by pushing civilian chief executive Seisaku Ota relinquish his post.⁴⁰⁰ The next year, public opinion drove Ota out of the government. By the end of 1964, Washington finally responded to the increasing scrutiny by forcing out Caraway.⁴⁰¹ His replacement, Lieutenant General Albert H. Watson, opened his administration by saying pleasing words about greater self-government and increased Japanese involvement with the American decisions on the islands,⁴⁰² but two years later butted heads with the local government. After he superseded local authorities on a recent election and a tax law by proclaiming the civilian government underneath military power, angering the population, he found himself in a legal trap. Placing the military government at the apex of local law but also putting it under an executive order that guaranteed local government, American arbitrators weighed the issue and sided with the Okinawans, allowing local courts the right of judicial review. The military lost its supreme power off the bases. As Sakihara put it in his quick, usually straightforward summary of postwar history, “Okinawa did turn out to be a showcase for democracy, after all.”⁴⁰³ Under American rule, Okinawans may have felt powerless, but they learned with patience and strength to work within the United States government. A culture of successful political activism concerned with Okinawans’ rights and privileges, even if it did not appear very triumphant to the islands’ citizens, developed under the military’s administration.

As the armed forces slowly receded from its role running Okinawa, Japanese money and infrastructure began pouring in at a rate greater than American aid. The

⁴⁰⁰ Associated Press, “Okinawans Demand Ouster of General” in New York Times, 8 March, 1963, pg. 4.

⁴⁰¹ Sakihara, 552.

⁴⁰² Emerson Chapin, “Vow on Autonomy Given to Ryukyus,” New York Times, 31 July, 1964, pg. 2.

⁴⁰³ Sakihara, 552-553.

cumulative effect gave the Okinawans stronger affiliation with Japan, but still as an independent identity. In one sense, Tokyo's position early in the 1960s matched Hirohito's quiet aim for American control. Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda told President John F. Kennedy that he wanted the United States to continue in Okinawa as long as nuclear weapons were part of the American defenses, but he also felt the Ryukyus were suffering financially. The islands began falling behind the mainland prefectures during the Japanese economic expansion in terms of GNP, even though it stood far ahead of Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, and South Korea; American aid dramatically plummeted during the course of the 1950s; and the Ryukyans paid higher taxes than mainlanders. After the meeting, the Japanese government began providing aid to the archipelago and sat on a largely toothless committee that investigated the administration of Okinawa.⁴⁰⁴ Pairing the new financial contributions from the mainland—a Chicago Tribune article noted that in the three years following Kennedy's decision Tokyo contributed three times the amount of money as the contributions in the previous decade, and this still placed Okinawa well behind the allotments given to poorer prefectures—and American fears that new Japanese contributions would mean new Japanese influence⁴⁰⁵ gave the Ryukyans more incentive to align themselves with the mainland. And Kennedy's decision to allow Okinawans to display the Japanese flag during holidays celebrated both on the islands and the mainland, allowed residents of the archipelago to show their sympathies legally.⁴⁰⁶ Perhaps the people's alignment with Japan over the United States while quietly creating a stronger Okinawan identity can be seen in the footnote of an 1896 Japanese description of the islands that was republished in 1969. The American

⁴⁰⁴ Sarantakes, 119-123.

⁴⁰⁵ Samuel Jameson, "U.S. Restricts Japanese Aid to Okinawans," Chicago Tribune, 1 May, 1964, pg. 21.

⁴⁰⁶ Nakachi, 105.

editor, Douglas G. Haring, observed in the original writer's observations on the indigenous *habu* snake and commented that during the 1950s, an American organization offered bounties on killing the poisonous vipers⁴⁰⁷ while in the next decade snake-skin purses became popular in Japan, creating a lucrative market for Ryukyans. Okinawa's rural residents considered the situation and began farming the aggressive reptiles.⁴⁰⁸

The second "collapse" came from the increased rowdiness and lawlessness of American military members as the Vietnam conflict increased in violence. Karimata told Keyso that she was "afraid" of the Americans as they became rowdier, especially in Koza. The neighborhood became segregated along American racial lines, creating fights. "Seemed like we were always hearing about bar fights and robberies, rapes and traffic violations in that area," she said, lamenting that the men would flee onto the bases, escape civil authorities, and receive acquittals—"Everything from a traffic violation to a rape"—in front of friendly courts.⁴⁰⁹ Nakamura also recalled the spike in violence in association with the war and a similar lack of redress: "And we couldn't even arrest any of the GIs!" A political activist, every incident sparked a protest by her organization, the powerful Teachers Association.⁴¹⁰ Of course, unsavory activities by Americans was not new on the main island when one considers Sarantakes research into venereal disease rates or Morris recounting an incident in the 1950s in military police entering an African-American village of tough bars near Naha dubbed Perryville that ended with a murdered lieutenant trying to restore order. Morris mentioned the prevalence of "Cheap booze and

⁴⁰⁷ In the same footnote, Haring wrote that the "government," presumably he means the American one, introduced mongooses to fight curb the snakes. He drolly noted, "The mongooses, however, found chickens more accessible and tastier." The mammal itself has become a pop-cultural symbol for Okinawa on signs, in Okinawa Professional Wrestling, and in fights between the *habu* and mongoose, though these have largely been curbed by animal-rights groups.

⁴⁰⁸ Haring, *Okinawa Customs*, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont, 1969, 133.

⁴⁰⁹ Keyso, 87.

⁴¹⁰ 45.

questionable girls, both at high prices,” but mentioned the phenomenon had grown sense then. He wrote of a giant district of seedy bars and prostitutes surrounding a major Okinawan shrine known as Naminoue. “Annually, a hundred thousand people have to pick their way through all kinds of American night clubs and warehouses in order to get to a religious shrine celebration.” He then listed Koza as a *smaller* version of the Naminoue district, a “neon-lit nirvana for Neanderthals.”⁴¹¹ Peering through book Okinawa: Past and Present, which serves as an informal history of the main island and a “remember when” book for people formerly stationed in the Ryukyus, gives a hint of how important these red-light districts once were for the Americans. In the chapter entitled “The American Haunts” lists Business Center (B.C.) Street as “No longer a male’s paradise area,” while Gate 2 Street is “No longer a street of drinking establishments,” and another section of the old Koza Village is “No longer a male pleasure area. It is not recognizable. Most of the old sights are gone.”⁴¹² David R. Crews, looking back on the bar-district culture during his time serving as a GI in Okinawa, wrote that he was in a brothel within three hours of arriving on the island. He was not allowed to leave his base, but no guards were posted.⁴¹³ The American moral authority, never robust, also began unraveling. As a later paragraph in this section will show, Japanese civil authority helped curtail many of these actions. The United States could not run Okinawa, but the Japanese could keep order.

By the time of the Vietnam War, the American rule of Okinawa became untenable. Offering stability, security, and freedom in 1945, by the late 1960s, the United

⁴¹¹ 102.

⁴¹² Armando Sanchez, Okinawa: Past and Present, E.M.S. Glenny, Los Angeles, 1993, 97-99.

⁴¹³ David R. Crews, “A Wild Start: Okinawa in the 1970s,” Japan Policy Research Institute Occasional Paper 36, June, 2006.

States could only offer the latter of these three options, and only then when the ultimate authority over the region was placed out of its hands and American offenders did not flee onto the bases. The civil-liberties struggles of the 1960s can be bended-knee indicators when thinking of the region's history as a grand struggle or landmark moments, but a banal indicator when sizing up elections and the family talk of politics. The treatment of women reflects backward to the *Himeyuri* nurses or the idea of the sacrificed Okinawa, and it also provides a link to the 1995 and 2008 rape incidents. Certainly, day-to-day life among the brothels and bars, especially during the day when they were largely shuttered and quiet, serves as a casual flagging of Okinawan identity. At night, they served as high-track projections of self-awareness. With the American position in tatters, what was needed was revamped Okinawan agitation against Washington's administration and Japanese leadership with the negotiating skills to prize the archipelago from the Americans.

Japanese, and Then Not Japanese

As American colonialism devolved into a tangled mess, the Japanese drive showed an initial affinity between Okinawa and the mainland, but ultimate disappointments divided the north and south. Eisaku Sato, Ikeda's successor, actively proclaimed the region a true part of Japan by embarking on a dramatic trip to the main island, saying the right things, crying at the right times, and beginning reversion negotiations. As the Okinawans saw their goals within their grasp ever-so-slowly coming true, the war in Vietnam served as a flashpoint of anger. The historic echoes to the destruction that racked the island a quarter-century earlier, the contrast with the pacifism myth, the conception of a peaceful people occupied by great powers, and the *Raj*-like

aspects of American rule as it was ending ratcheted up public discontent with the United States. As the Japanese conceded a continued heavy military presence on the main island, the oneness with the main islands began eroding. What was seen as disappointment on the rainy day when Tokyo assumed control of the islands actually served as sub-state nationalism.

From a strictly political perspective, Sato's drive for reversion was a winner. Right- and left-wing parties in the Diet, and to a lesser degree factions within his ruling LDP, wanted the islands back in the nation-state.⁴¹⁴ The new prime minister appeared on shaky ground as he replaced his cancer-weakened predecessor, Lyndon Johnson resented a Japanese drive to build up its military, and the United States feared that reversion would mean leaving its bases, so Washington largely ignored Sato's initial pleas in 1965 for the return of Okinawa, even a compromise measure that would let America retain the main island in the chain.⁴¹⁵ That summer, Sato kept applying pressure on Washington by visiting the islands themselves. Sarantakes considers the head-of-government's trip to the region "an unqualified success" by having him taking the reins of the reversion movement, giving the dramatic public statement "The postwar era will not end until the return of Okinawa to the homeland is realized" during the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Japan, crying at the Cave of the Virgins, and sobbing again when he saw the large crowds that came out to see him. He also, unwittingly, met with the members of the local legislature and promised more economic aid, allowing more cash to flow into the island, bypassing American attempts to halt the flow of capital, and linking the islands to the mainland on a proto-prefectural level. Still, after this "unqualified success," one can see

⁴¹⁴ Sarantakes, 129.

⁴¹⁵ 133-137.

the coming breakdown of the reversion movement. A coalition of Okinawan left-wing groups led by the formerly harassed Mayor Senaga, suspicious of the LDP's allegiance to American foreign policy, held a large rally that became a mob. The throng advanced on his hotel. Threatened while he was at an event for him at the Fort Buckner Marine Base, Sato was forced to take refuge aboard the military facility.⁴¹⁶ Even as Sato actively and emotionally began tying the archipelago with the mainland, the opposition forces began hitting him on two fronts. The United States through its delays ensured that its influence on the islands would continue even as it waned, and the Okinawan left, the traditional and surprisingly powerful engine of reversion and civil liberties, began expressing dissatisfaction with the traditional Tokyo power structure. This is what happens when compromise, the lifeblood of politics, clashes with the sacred, high-track ideals of Ryukyu identity.

Buoyed by the largely positive reaction, the Sato government ramped up its reversion efforts. The four years following his visit saw a minimum of a forty percent increase in annual Japanese aid to Okinawa, this was compounded with an earlier statement declaring the mainland would protect the islands from attack and created a cabinet-level post on the reversion issue.⁴¹⁷ This "*Ittaika*," or "integration," policy led to a second initiative with the Johnson administration. The government would push for a full reversion of the islands and delay any major decisions on the American military presence. This new approach led to little success,⁴¹⁸ though Sato walked away with Washington's agreeing to quickly return the Bonin Islands, an archipelago east of the

⁴¹⁶ 137-139.

⁴¹⁷ 139-140.

⁴¹⁸ Hong N. Kim, "The Sato Government and the Politics of Okinawan Reversion," *Asian Survey* 13 (November, 1973): 1023-1024.

Ryukyus that included Iwo Jima.⁴¹⁹ Opposition began building against the prime minister. The United States finally allowed gubernatorial elections, and in a close contest, the leftist Choboyo Yara on a reversionist platform defeated the Okinawa Liberal Democratic Party standard bearer Junji Nishime and his go-slow approach, secretly aided by American money. The results showed the American government that reversion was inevitable.⁴²⁰ The mainland left also began driving for a non-nuclear Okinawa, an issue that resonated with Japanese voters.⁴²¹ The islands clearly began merging with Japan—the gubernatorial elections saw mainland political figures stumping for their Ryukyuan counterparts⁴²²—but the core of an independent political landscape remained an active engine of Okinawa’s destiny.

A major issue with the Americans dragging their feet on the reversion issue came from the main island’s role in the Vietnam War, but this too showed the power of the area’s political activism. Islanders thwarted the Pentagon’s plans for the region as a combat air base, with protests stopping a 1965 move to locate B-52 bombers at Kadena and a similar attempt at the end of the decade. Okinawa became a major logistical outpost for the United States military,⁴²³ but not the attack vanguard expected of it when planners forecasted the islands’ role in the 1940s. Similarly, the war was highly unpopular in Japan itself.⁴²⁴ While an American historian downplayed the archipelago’s role in the Vietnam War, local memory tells a different tale. Nakamura described Okinawa as a “launching pad,” and that the Teachers’ Association protested the war heavily. “It was

⁴¹⁹ Sarantakes, 158-162.

⁴²⁰ 162-164.

⁴²¹ Kim, 1024.

⁴²² Sarantakes, 163.

⁴²³ 142-144.

⁴²⁴ Morris, 184.

our way of saying we opposed the military existence here and felt it threatened us rather than protected us like it was supposed to,” she said, adding, “The B-52 bombers used to fly down really low, low enough for us to see the pilot’s face. I’ll never forget the roar of those planes! We used to scream at them, ‘Go home Americans!’ loudly as we could.”⁴²⁵ The United States promoted the idea of Okinawa as a separate nation from Japan, but it succeeded in a way it did not anticipate. The promotion of the nonviolent myth led to serious opposition to the American administration and successful clamoring for reversion.

As tensions continued increasing in the islands, the incoming Nixon Administration felt that the time was ripe to return Okinawa to Japan. This came not out of any altruistic sense, but from political realities. Nixon, and by extension Henry Kissinger, believed that Tokyo’s economic growth demanded respect. Blocking reversion would alienate a rising player in international affairs. The new president backed off the American demands for a continued nuclear presence in Okinawa in exchange for continued military facilities and more active Japanese support for American foreign policy.⁴²⁶ As the two countries finished off details such as nuclear weapons—to where the United States would remove them and would it have to ask Tokyo’s permission to bring them back to the islands—and issues over Japanese textiles, Sato left for Washington under a blizzard of anti-war protests. Japan became further tied to the United States and accepted the military bases, but it received Okinawa. The two nations agreed to reversion in November, 1969 with full transfer taking place in 1972.⁴²⁷ As Sarantakes put it, the drive for reunion culminated in “a diplomatic triumph for Japan *and* the United

⁴²⁵ Keyso, 45.

⁴²⁶ Sarantakes, 165-169.

⁴²⁷ 172-173.

States.”⁴²⁸ But after reading that sentence, perhaps what actually happened was that the Ryukyus served as a pawn in great-power politics yet again; the need for alliances and respect for commerce replacing the classic formulations of military might and imperial grandeur. Okinawa, again, served as the third wheel.

Compromise serves as a key part of negotiations, but Nixon and Sato’s agreement showed deal making between two parties in a three-sided situation. The negotiations continued after the initial agreement largely ignored Okinawan concerns. The major deals, finished in 1971, included American retention of 88 key military facilities and returning 46 smaller places, islanders would give up most of their land claims, and Tokyo would beef up its armed forces. Ultimately, 6,800 Japanese Self Defense Forces members would arrive on the island in 1973.⁴²⁹ Sakihara, writing on the time for an American audience described the “euphoria” after the 1969 communiqué was fleeting. “Okinawans asked for ‘affluent Okinawan without military bases’ but what they received was ‘affluent Okinawa *with* military bases.’”⁴³⁰ Nakamura, reflecting on the reversion, felt even more negatively than Sakihara. “We thought our problems would go away after we were reunited with the mainland,” she said. Then she bemoaned the continued American presence and stated that prosperity did not arrive in the islands.⁴³¹ Yamada said that after reversion “nothing changed on the island.” Adding, “It was like we’d been betrayed by the Japanese. Suddenly all of those *Hinomaru* [Japanese flags] disappeared from the island. ... [W]e Okinawans were double-crossed by mainland Japan.” The situation could be summed up by one last comment from her. “I sort of feel like a third party, a spectator

⁴²⁸ 175.

⁴²⁹ Kim, 1028-1029.

⁴³⁰ 554.

⁴³¹ 46.

here sometimes.”⁴³² Yamada, unlike many people, had mostly good relations with the Americans during the occupation. None of her family’s land was confiscated,⁴³³ and yet the whole experience for her still placed Okinawa as a political entity on the outside of two other powers.

Perhaps the most memorialized opposition to the final reversion came in Koza. Tensions over reversion, the war, and American immunity from the local laws were exacerbated when an American who killed a woman in a hit-and-run accident was acquitted in a military court on December 11, 1970 in a verdict that even surprised the military.⁴³⁴ In the wee hours of December 20, an American military member and drunk driver hit a pedestrian, also heavily under the influence of alcohol, causing deep bruises and a projected ten-week recovery period. As a mix of American military police and civilian law enforcement officials tended to the accident and victim, a large crowd began gathering, shouting about the hit-and-run verdict.⁴³⁵ The situation quickly devolved as the mob began growing yelling things such as “Put him under the people’s trial,”⁴³⁶ and then began attacking the vehicle. As the driver and his passengers were led away, the Okinawans began assaulting the MPs and then their cars when they tried to escape. The mob kept growing and began charging at other American-owned cars, recognizable by their yellow license plates. Another U.S. driver, seeing the crowd and threats and he drove toward the crash sight, hit his breaks to avoid hitting people, but ran into an Okinawan-owned vehicle in the confusion.⁴³⁷ The mob began shouting “Kill him” and

⁴³² 66.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Christopher Aldous, “‘Mob Rule’ or Popular Activism?” in Japan and Okinawa, 157.

⁴³⁵ Okinawa City, Koza Riot, 20 December 1970, date unknown. 19-22.

⁴³⁶ 22.

⁴³⁷ 22-26.

“Don’t let him go.”⁴³⁸ The crowd attacked the second driver, began throwing stones, cut the second driver, and mushroomed to 7,000 people. MPs arrived on the scene to protect the American, fired their pistols in the air, and tried to spirit the man away, which in turn caused a full riot between American military personnel and rock-throwing Okinawans.⁴³⁹ The horde broke into two groups; one attacking Kadena while the other burned cars owned by armed forces members in Koza. Sarantakes believes the disturbances were caused by frustrations with the reversion plans. The moment when peaceful Okinawa turned violent—the mob that attacked the airbase burned a school⁴⁴⁰—has become memorialized. At the time, the Okinawa Human Rights Association sided with the rioters, as did some anti-war airmen stationed at Kadena.⁴⁴¹ Okinawa City has printed a book with primary documents from the events, including police reports, memoranda, press accounts, and pictures. In a three-sided conflict, the moment when “peaceful” Okinawa attacked is worth noting. It becomes sacred.

Nakamura remembered the hollow feeling when reversion finally came on May 15, 1972. Heavy rain pelted the main island, the realization that reunion was not going to be a cure-all for the region’s troubles set in, and the Americans were not leaving.⁴⁴² “For us Okinawans, that day was one of the saddest days in our history.”⁴⁴³ Her description of the day showed the modern flow of local identity. The big-picture moments showed a stronger Ryukyuan identity. It, poetically, rained on the day of reversion. The Japanese flag remained a symbol, but now it stood for oppression or perhaps misguided faith. The

⁴³⁸ 26.

⁴³⁹ 26-28.

⁴⁴⁰ 176.

⁴⁴¹ Nakachi, 157-158.

⁴⁴² 46-47.

⁴⁴³ 47.

island emphatically, perhaps even more than ever, became a third party in the U.S.-Japan-Okinawa dynamic. Yet the small scale indicators showed new affiliation with the mainland. The yen replaced the dollar, Japanese chains stores began replacing local business,⁴⁴⁴ Route 1 became Route 58, and by 1978, Okinawans began driving on the left side of the road, just like the mainlanders.⁴⁴⁵ The Japanese passports replaced the American documents. These small changes began when Tokyo began granting more money to the islands, but the emotional impact furthered the idea of a unique Okinawa.

The Friendly “Other”

The events after reversion, but before the 1995 rape crisis, show a basic melding between Okinawa and Japan. The islands, no longer the nationalist object of desire for the mainland, became a colorful part of the country, providing vacation destinations, music, and an alternative way of life. The idea that the Ryukyus were different persevered, but it found a somewhat uneasy home within the nation-state, priming it for the explosive outrage followed by pained ambivalence that descended upon the region in the mid 1990s. The leftist politics of agitation generally waned in the 1970s and 1980s, but revived at the end of the century. With reunion completed, the historiography of the old Ryukyu kingdom changed from serving as an extension of Japan into a Chinese-affiliated region. American rowdiness dwindled after the transfer, but fear lurked beneath the surface. Okinawans watched Japanese television, voted in national elections, and became integrated with the mainland economy, but these nation-friendly low-track indicators were balanced by exoticism of the region in mainlanders’ eyes, new historical trends, and political issues for the archipelago.

⁴⁴⁴ 46-47.

⁴⁴⁵ Sanchez, 76.

Broadly, Okinawan politics from 1972 until the end of the Cold War saw a shift toward conservative government and stronger ties with the establishment LDP. Yara, the first popularly elected governor in the islands' history, was reelected when the Japanese took over the prefecture. He ran on an anti-base platform, and a socialist succeeded him in 1976. The national government—less-than-thrilled with opposition parties—did not fully cooperate with these chief executives. With the left-wing parties appearing weak, and the economic situation deteriorating in the late 1970s, the conservatives took power in 1978 under the pro-business Junji Nishime. The new head of the islands worked closely with Tokyo bringing in economic incentives, public works, and ambitious schemes that saw mixed success.⁴⁴⁶ This political dynamic placed Okinawa clearly as a subservient to Tokyo. A survey taken in 1972 showed that fifty percent of Okinawans wanted the national government to develop the region's economy, as opposed to seventeen percent thinking improvement was dependent on the islanders themselves.⁴⁴⁷ Nishime won reelection in 1982 and 1986 by bringing home more of the Diet's money, before finally falling from power during the run up to the Gulf War in 1990. Nishime's defeat in many ways served as a precursor to the unrest that hit the islands in 1995.⁴⁴⁸ Overall, the 1970s and 1980s saw Okinawans adopting a political view that tied with the Japan and its establishment.

A second possibility that sent Okinawans voting for right-wing candidates may have come from a lessening of the American problem. One scholarly article quoted a former judge in the pre-reversion government who said, "The U.S. military who used to oppose reversion in the past now liking it as the heat is off them, and they think the

⁴⁴⁶ Sakihara, 555-556.

⁴⁴⁷ Douglas H. Mendel, Jr., "Okinawa Reversion in Retrospect," *Pacific Affairs* 48 (Autumn, 1975), 401.

⁴⁴⁸ Sakihara, 556.

Japanese officials are doing a good job suppressing GI drug traffic...⁴⁴⁹ The judge later said that narcotics charges declined precipitously, “from 50 per month down to 3.”⁴⁵⁰ He attributed the decline to the Army’s clamping down on trips to Bangkok and servicemen frightened of Japanese prisons.⁴⁵¹ It is not cited in any articles, but reversion roughly coincided with large-scale troop withdrawals from Vietnam, and the war served as a key instigator of American unrest. Secondly, the land issue became more confused after reversion. The Japanese government took over payments, increasing the stipend by a lucrative 600 percent, and in the words of one observer, “used underhand methods to discourage objectors.”⁴⁵² This alienated resistors to the American presence. As Inafuku, a land owner weighing her income and the feeling of military invasiveness told Keyso, “Personally, it’s hard for me to say if I’d like to see the U.S. bases removed from the island.”⁴⁵³ The anti-base movement and violence committed by overseas troops did not stop during the early post-reversion years, but the sense of urgency created by these flashpoints in Okinawa politics became muted, and in the case of land ownership, highly ambivalent. Still these issues continued their roles within Ryukyuan discourse on life, albeit at a lower level, continuing the idea of Okinawan being peaceful and the outside nations being warlike.

Reversion also brought mainland tourism, investment, and interest to the islands, opening up the question of who decides what Okinawa-ness is. The surge in vacationers, as Sakihara observed, transferred the dependence on American bases into to a need for

⁴⁴⁹ Mendel, 400.

⁴⁵⁰ 411.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Tanji, “The Dynamic Trajectory of the Post-Reversion ‘Okinawa Struggle,’” in Islands of Discontent, 169.

⁴⁵³ Keyso, 31.

the mainland travelers with side effects including surge in land costs and ecological damage. The 1975 Okinawa International Ocean Exhibition,⁴⁵⁴ a miniature world's fair conducted on the tip of the bucolic Motubu Peninsula, was considered one of a string of “spectacular failures” in the efforts spark the islands' economy.⁴⁵⁵ Additionally, it placed a significant force in the conception of Ryukyuan into the hands of mainland print-capital and travel agents. “Put simply, Okinawans are inscribed as the non-threatening, laid-back and relaxed ‘exotic’ islander, ever ready to burst into song and dance, happily supportive of the status quo and the warm relationship with the mainland,” wrote Hook and Siddle in the introduction to their collection of essays on recent issues facing the prefecture. “Mainlanders can thus enjoy the exoticism of the Other within the geographically inscribed, sovereign space, Japan, without reflecting on the question mark—‘Japan?’”⁴⁵⁶ The authors may be right to wonder who controls the construction of the Ryukyuan identity, but perception exists in a matrix, not a one-dimensional product of the islands. The grand symbolism of tourism as visitors saw old castles, World War II shrines, and sunny beaches largely steered the perception towards an “other,” and under the right circumstances, a different country, yet this strongly tied Okinawa in terms of national construction and economy with the mainland.

The kitschy 1974 movie Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla shows this exoticism within the nation-state. The brushstrokes of Okinawan culture present it as an “other,” perhaps even a slightly disgruntled sub-state nation. The islands possess their own *shisa*-like monster—named King *Shisa*, King Caesar, or King Seeser, depending on the context and translation—who protects the formerly royal Azumi family. The deposed house now

⁴⁵⁴ 555.

⁴⁵⁵ Hook and Siddle, 5.

⁴⁵⁶ 6.

performs dances for tourists and offers up shamanistic visions of doom amidst familiar tourist landmarks, lush scenery, and ancient Ryukyuan prophecies. The doddering Azumi patriarch even hopes that King *Shisa* will restore his clan to power in Okinawa, while his young granddaughter looks pained by this expression of Ryukyu revivalism. The mostly mainland protagonists, conversely, show the islands integrating with the nation-state, bringing their own car on a Japanese ferry to the island and coordinating between Okinawan and Japanese scientists. In an early scene, one mainlander says he's spent so much time in the region, "I'm almost an Okinawan by now!" The one Ryukyuan-based academic among the heroes is a flighty female, while the mainlanders are all male, except for the supportive daughter of a professor, reinforcing the male-female dynamic between Japan and Okinawa. The climax shows the Ryukyuan monster, summoned by the granddaughter's poppy yet mystical singing, and Godzilla teaming and defeating the antagonist.⁴⁵⁷ The effect leaves sensation that the archipelago is the overly imaginative kid brother to the more mature mainland Japan.

This conflict in identity can be seen in the surge of hard rock bands that headed up the Japanese pop charts in the years after reversion. This wave of rock music began under the American occupation in dive bars in the Koza. The Okinawans had to play well if they wanted to please the Vietnam War-era troops known for their rowdiness, but they also learned to perform the popular, hard-edged music of the late 1960s. "Audience members, who often threw beer bottles if the music was bad, judged the talent," Ehman wryly noted.⁴⁵⁸ Murasaki became the first Koza-based band to find fame on the mainland, riding underground copies of their performances into a massive concert in Osaka, a

⁴⁵⁷ *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*, dir. Jun Fukuda, 84 min., 1974, digital video disc.

⁴⁵⁸ 106.

record contract, a number one single, and ultimately disbanding in the course of three years.⁴⁵⁹ Rival off-base bands such as Condition Green (this term referred to a military ruling that kept Americans off base in times of tension⁴⁶⁰) and Mari with Medusa also found success.⁴⁶¹ Is the brief rock explosion the result of Japan's commoditizing of Ryukyuan culture as Hook and Siddle may wonder, a product of the American influence on the islands culture, or something else. Ultimately, it shows how the United States affected Okinawan culture, and that a unique identity created success within the Japanese nation-state. The nation's public made sure Murasaki was, literally, "number one" in Japan.

As Okinawa carved out a cultural niche within the nation-state, Smits wrote that the historiography of the archipelago underwent a shift from a pro-Japan view of the region's past to a greater focus on the old Ryukyu Kingdom as a relatively independent actor. Scholars before 1972 dwelled on Okinawa's position after annexation and before World War II, focusing on the Ryukyu Kingdom's relationship with Satsuma, and downplaying Shuri's tribute trade with China. Historians aggressively looked for links between the islands and the mainland, often criticizing Satsuma's overlordship for driving a wedge between the two polities. Japan was termed "the motherland" or "our mainland" while China was often whitewashed from history. This view began changing in 1976, and further in 1980, when scholars wrote that the Ryukyu Kingdom was an independent entity absorbed by Satsuma. Sources spread from the Japanese language to Chinese, touching off a new wave of scholarship and extrapolations from well-known

⁴⁵⁹ 106-107.

⁴⁶⁰ Aldous, 163.

⁴⁶¹ James E. Roberson, "Uchina Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Popular Music" in Islands of Discontent: Okinawa to Japanese and American Power, 197.

material. China's influence became more studied and took on a greater role in the conception of Ryukyuan history.⁴⁶² The need to link Okinawa with Japan waned after reversion, and the "correction" of scholarship along with the broadening of Okinawan studies gave a more bended-knee view of the Ryukyus as an independent kingdom. Whether the old realm was a nation in the modern term is doubtful, but for modern Okinawans, the sacred past began looking starkly different than the one that portrayed it as a part of Japan.

The years after reversion tied the islands economically and politically with mainland Japan, but curiously, unification created a greater emphasis on separating the Okinawan culture from the main islands but within the realm of the nation-state. Islanders became distrustful of the Tokyo government, while people in Kyoto and Osaka began seeing the southern islands as exotic destinations rich with a different culture, foods, music, and climate. This transition still lacked the idea of placing the Ryukyus as an equal part of the Japanese nation. Mainlanders saw Okinawa and thought of sun, bonhomie, and Americans, not necessarily the glories of Shuri Castle or traditional dances. The tensions between Okinawa, the United States, and Japan continued in a more muted form. A series of flash points that began in the late 1980s and reached its peak in 1995 would codify the sub-state nationalism and bring back the raw wounds of the post war years in a most visceral fashion.

The Nationalist Nineties

The fiery events of the 1990s, from the rape to the minute roll back of the American military, culminated with the G-8 summit in 2000 in which Okinawa was portrayed—officially, yet not in name—as a sub-state nation. Politically, the islanders

⁴⁶² Smits, "Recent Trends in Scholarship on the History of Ryukyu's Relations with China and Japan," 2-8.

saw the limits of their power. They drew what could be called cultural compromises such as Shuri Castle being depicted on the 2,000-yen bill or government recognition of traditional art forms, but a left-wing surge crested by bumping up against the national government. The progressive wave receded with documented appreciation of the Ryukyuan culture and tradition, but a clear subordinate role within the nation-state. In many ways, the decade mirrored previous periods of agitation in the prefecture: big crowds, high passion, and ultimately a compromise favoring the established powers. If a people keeps receiving concessions over many years, then the balance of power ever-so slowly swings in their direction. It may not feel emotionally satisfying for the people of Okinawa, but they carved out the truest sense of sub-state nationalism: a clearly defined culture with a history, but one that holds limited power in the national government.

The prologue to the decade came in 1987 when for the first time the prefecture played host to the annual National Athletic Meet, or *Kokutai*, held at the Prefectural Athletic Park. On one level, the event marked the fifteenth anniversary of reversion, would have Emperor Hirohito become the first Japanese head of state to visit the islands, would serve as an emotional benchmark for ending the post-war era, and drew enthusiastic responses from both Okinawan conservatives and the national government. The Ryukyuan left opposed the *Kokutai*, linking it with pre-war nationalism, Japanization, and the right's politicization of the games. Ota, calling the opposition groups "reformist parties," stated that tensions eased when Hirohito underwent surgery and was replaced by the man who is now Emperor Akihito,⁴⁶³ but that is not really true. A second nationalist issue arose over the *Hinomaru*. During the reversion struggle, the flag served as a vivid emblem of reunion. Serving as the Billig's "waved" flag in his

⁴⁶³ Ota, Essays on Okinawa Problems, 78-81.

visions of “hot” nationalism, Okinawans defied the laws to display it, and as mentioned earlier, Kennedy finally allowing the flag to be displayed on national holidays. Yamada recalled remembered the nationalist banners, especially a rally on the main island’s northern tip, the closest the occupied territory was to the motherland.⁴⁶⁴ After unification, the *Hinomaru* declined in use, reflecting the alienation with Tokyo. Rarely seen, it became an invisible version of Billig’s “unwaved flag,” a casual reminder of disappointment. Ahead of the meet, the national government began pushing for more flag waving and playing of the national anthem. Ultimately, large sections of Okinawans did not rise when the *Hinomaru* was sent up the flagpole at the National Athletic Meet, and most of the people singing the national anthem came from outside the prefecture.⁴⁶⁵ Shoichi Chibana, a store-owner and activist who built a memorial to the civilians who died in the Battle of Okinawa, burned the *Hinomaru* just before the meet. In response, Japanese nationalists attacked his monument and his business.⁴⁶⁶ The soft changes in identity became active again.

The decade began with a major shift from the conservative 1980s when Ota defeated Nishime in the 1990 gubernatorial election, showing that the Okinawan electorate now valued equality of military burden over equality of economy. The peace advocate and anti-base activist rallied the left as the islanders found the conservative Nishime’s backing of Operation Desert Shield “an anathema.”⁴⁶⁷ The confrontational new leader’s Okinawa now resumed its tripartite relationship with Washington and Tokyo, where he possessed few allies. Using the Battle of Okinawa and post-war

⁴⁶⁴ Keyso, 65.

⁴⁶⁵ 90-91.

⁴⁶⁶ Smits, “The Post-Reversion Era, 1972-1990” in Okinawa in Postwar Japanese Politics and the Economy.

⁴⁶⁷ Sakihara, 556.

Japanese pacifism as a backdrop, Ota visited the American capital twice during his first of his two administrations in an attempt to remove the bases and began conducting talks with the Japanese government, effectively asking the mainland for it to pay its fair share in playing host to American military facilities.⁴⁶⁸

The revived three-way view of Okinawa's relationship with the world became codified with the creation of the Cornerstone of Peace, a World War II monument with a museum of the region's history from the Battle of Okinawa onward. Opened in June, 1995, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the conflict, the facility includes a museum, the names of people killed in the battle in long rows, and an eternal flame. The Okinawan names in the memorial are expanded, so it ranges from the 1931 start of hostilities with China through the end of the war itself.⁴⁶⁹ A casual walk inside the museum clearly places the island as a different realm from the mainland. After the harrowing displays on the battle and the oral histories available in English and Japanese for the visitor to read, the displays portray the Americans as hard-hearted occupiers. The reversion movement is remembered, but ultimately as a disappointment. Sections on the United States occupation include guarded gates, barbed wire, and other artifacts of discrimination. In short, the Cornerstone of Peace serves as vivid a shrine to an Okinawa's unnamed sub-state nationalism, even if it occurs in Japan proper.

The slowly building revival of Okinawan activism and the emerging Ryukyuan identity reached a flashpoint on September 4, 1995. That day, two marines and a Navy corpsman kidnapped a twelve-year-old girl, bound her, took her to a beach, viciously raped the girl, and then abandoned her. Captured, public outcry forced the military to turn

⁴⁶⁸ Takayoshi Egami, "Politics in Okinawa Since the Reversion of Sovereignty," *Asian Survey* 34 (Sep., 1994), 838-839.

⁴⁶⁹ Gerald Figal, "Waging Peace on Okinawa" in *Islands of Discontent*, 65-98.

over the three suspects to Japanese authorities, where they received a conviction in their trial.⁴⁷⁰ Opposition to the American presence, especially under its current guise, exploded. Ota, and municipal assemblies, demanded that Japan and the United States revise the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) which places Americans under a different jurisdiction than Okinawans. Ambassador Walter Mondale and the head of the United States military in Japan, Lieutenant General Richard Myers, apologized to Ota,⁴⁷¹ also confirming a three-way relationship between the polities in the heat of anger and accusations. A protest rally drew 85,000 people, followed by an official visit to Tokyo by members of the Okinawan prefectural assembly asking for reforms.⁴⁷² The American position further deteriorated when the commander of the Pacific naval forces, Admiral Richard C. Macke, said about the rapists, "... for the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had a girl."⁴⁷³ The event, according to one scholar, echoed the *Himeyuri* students and rapes by Japanese soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa, historical echoes that furthered the alienation from the nation state.⁴⁷⁴

This anti-military wave peaked and then crested within four years, culminating into a compromise that placed Okinawa firmly within Japan politically, but its culture became a distinct nationalism within the nation-state. Ota pushed for the removal of the American military facilities, but his efforts achieved little. His speech before the Japanese Supreme Court accomplished nothing. A 1996 ballot measure that called for the removal of the bases passed with 89 percent responding in the affirmative, but turnout was a

⁴⁷⁰ Angst, 136-137.

⁴⁷¹ Andrew Pollack, "Rape Case in Japan Turns Harsh Light on U.S. Military," New York Times, 20 September, 1995, pg. A3.

⁴⁷² Ota, 286-288.

⁴⁷³ Eric Schmitt, "Admiral's Gaffe Pushes Navy to New Scrutiny of Attitudes," New York Times, 19 November, 1995, 14.

⁴⁷⁴ Angst, 142-144.

surprisingly low 59 percent.⁴⁷⁵ That same year, the Japanese-American Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa offered plans to reduce the American land use by 23 percent, but as Ota noted, it would replace these losses with continued or new locations on the island.⁴⁷⁶ Additionally, other parts of Japan were not looking to give their own ways of life to transfer the United States' military presence.⁴⁷⁷ Two years later, LDP standard bearer Keiichi Inamine upset Ota in the 1998 gubernatorial election on a platform of renewed financial support from Tokyo. The Japan Policy Research Institute wrote that this outcome was due to the prefecture "already worn down by the relentless pressure of the Pentagon, seem to have settled for money instead of the ideal of self-government,"⁴⁷⁸ but clearly the events of the mid 1990s saw that a strong anti-base stand can garner sympathy, but it will not break the bonds of federalism. Additionally, during the recession that racked Japan through the decade, Okinawans switched from the equality of pacifism to the equality of economy. Ota, anti-base activists, and the Japan Policy Research Institute may not like it, but self-government might disagree with their plans for Okinawa.

As the prefecture's voters largely backed down from a political three-way view of Okinawa, Japan allowed a new cultural vision of the region, bringing a sub-state nationalism within the country itself. Ahead of the G-8 summit held on the main island in 2000, Shuri Castle received UNESCO World Heritage status,⁴⁷⁹ and Tokyo unveiled a 2,000-yen bill that sported the gate outside of Shuri Castle.⁴⁸⁰ Released with the

⁴⁷⁵ Sakihara, 556.

⁴⁷⁶ Ota, 290.

⁴⁷⁷ Sakihara, 556.

⁴⁷⁸ JPRI Staff, "The LDP Takes Over in Okinawa," *Japan Policy Research Institute Critique* 5 (December, 1998).

⁴⁷⁹ Hein and Selden, 11.

⁴⁸⁰ Japan Policy and Politics, "Japan Unveils Design of Planned 2000 Yen Bill," 1 November, 1999.

expectations of becoming a very popular currency, the Shuri-based money floundered.⁴⁸¹ Still, it showed that the national government now recognized Ryukyuan history. In 1996, the Tokyo government gave its backing to a national theater dedicated to the traditional Ryukyuan dance *kumi odori* after a decade of requests. The granting of this art form, in the words of one writer, was “a tangible symbol of importance Tokyo attaches to its most distant prefecture” during uneasy times.⁴⁸² The medium—which shows short performances with dialogue and music—came from the classic Ryukyuan blend of Chinese and Japanese culture.⁴⁸³ As the writer put it, “To see *kumi odori* (and other Okinawan performing arts) at the national theatres is to get the unmistakable sense that the presentations are intended to prove to the people of Okinawa that they and their culture are officially recognized as occupying an important place within Japan.”⁴⁸⁴ Tokyo clearly acknowledged, perhaps even embraced, the nationalist status of the Okinawans as long as it did not challenge its governmental primacy.

The Ryukyu Revival

The arc between the drive to reversion and its disappointment can be seen in two documents. The first, a tiny guide in English produced by the prefecture’s education commission for the Ocean Expo, shows the height of Japanization. Welcoming the world to Okinawa, the introduction features a brief sentence on the past, noting that before World War II many objects and places were listed as national treasures by Tokyo.⁴⁸⁵ A generation later, the local government produced a book ahead of the G-8 summit that

⁴⁸¹ Japan Update, “Okinawa Rallies in Defense of Beleaguered Y2,000 bill,” 30 July, 2008.

⁴⁸² Barbara E. Thornbury, “National Treasure/National Theater: The Interesting Case of Okinawa’s Kumi Odori Music Dance-Drama,” Asian Theater Journal 16 (Autumn, 1999), 230-231.

⁴⁸³ 232-233.

⁴⁸⁴ 241.

⁴⁸⁵ The Education Commission of Okinawa, Cultural Assets of Okinawa, 1975, i.

portrayed the region as a starkly different region from Japan with a very different history and identity in a series of essays. The first writer, Tatsuhiro Oshiro, became famous during the American years for his book called *Kakuteru paatii*, which translates as the cocktail party. The work showed a rather ambivalent relationship between Okinawa and Japan, but the work's narrator criticized Kerr's history of the region for serving as a justification for America's splitting the region from the mainland.⁴⁸⁶ As the world's press descended on the islands, Oshiro with the backing of the prefecture, showed no middle ground. The prose, though it mentions the common linguistic ancestors between the Ryukyuan and Japanese languages, runs thick with nationalist identity as he reflects on Shuri Castle:

In appearance the walls seem to represent a denial of the concept of the castle as a building intended for waging war. There was certainly a fair measure of civil strife on the island up to the beginning of the sixteenth century; the castle walls may have come in useful in this connection. Nevertheless, Shuri Castle should surely be thought of primarily as a palace rather than a castle. ...

On a visit some time ago to the Forbidden City, as the former Imperial Palace in Beijing is known, the sight of the main building in this complex, the Hall of Great Palace, immediately put me in mind of the state hall of Shuri Castle. I was struck by the obvious similarities between the Chinese and Ryukyuan buildings. Although the Chinese building is on a vastly grander scale than its Ryukyuan counterpart, the atmosphere of the two buildings is indeed remarkably similar.⁴⁸⁷

Throughout the book, the Ryukyuan world is separated from the mainland. Oshiro mentions the weaponless myth⁴⁸⁸ and its supposed role in the fall of the old kingdom to Satsuma.⁴⁸⁹ He summarized with another paean to the castle. "This potential is inherent in Okinawa's culture of grace and gentility, a culture symbolized by the curved walls of

⁴⁸⁶ Sarantakes, 148-149.

⁴⁸⁷ Okinawa Prefectural Government, The Traditional Culture of Okinawa, 2000, 7.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ 11.

Shuri castle and the lack of any hint of militarism in the royal palace.”⁴⁹⁰ Another section mentioned the proto-entrepot past and its role on traditional dance.⁴⁹¹ The reader learns that local cooking was influenced by both China and Satsuma at the Shuri court,⁴⁹² and that Japanese rule before the war delivered huge blows against traditional crafts only to revive as people wanted reversion.⁴⁹³ With the blessing of the Tokyo-backed government, Okinawa portrayed itself on as a sub-state nation for the world’s press, even if it does not expressly say it. That shows the power of unspoken but official sub-state nationalism.

The events of the past 50 years show a shift in the high-track indicators of nationalism into an acknowledgement of a separate Okinawan nation. A visitor merely has to visit Shuri Castle, the Peace Park, and read modern history books to show that bended-knee visions of the region hark to the Ryukyu kingdom and its echoes today, even if these are constructed by modern politics and context. The low-track flaggings of identity show an ambivalent picture, but with a noticeable lean toward the mainland. The idea of the equality of pacifism enters the prefecture into a subservient relationship with the national government. The question becomes “What can we as Okinawans do in Tokyo?” The equality of economy creates the issue of bringing mainland money into the islands. Yet these discourses return to the sacred past. The Ryukyu Kingdom, allegedly, was weaponless. It also served as a trading center that brought together Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. Taken together, barring a major trauma to the political situation, the discourse since World War II creates a Ryukyu nation, but within the Japanese nation-state.

⁴⁹⁰ 13.

⁴⁹¹ 17.

⁴⁹² 54-55.

⁴⁹³ 77.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

“We Get Invaded”

One afternoon, Camp Butler librarian Aiko Kuniyoshi pulled books for me out of the locked special collection on Okinawa and Japan. Kuniyoshi said she did not know all that much about the region’s history, and felt a little bit surprised that an American would even show much interest in the Ryukyuan past. I explained to her that I was studying Okinawan identity and nationalism, and then asked her, “What’s the ‘We’re this; they’re that’” for people? She looked flustered for a second amid the books that mostly hailed from the 1950s and 1960s that helped solidify the archipelago as a distinct identity, and then said, “We get invaded.” That statement shows that Ryukyuan identity is nationalist in nature. Other countries, Japan and the United States, land on these shores. The results are seen as catastrophic for both local identity and day-to-day life. Kuniyoshi said her grandparents, due to the Battle of Okinawa, do not even know their own birthdays since the carnage destroyed records. She said her family talks very rarely of history and, for that matter, the idea independence. Her family sees the latter as impossible with the archipelago’s size. That places Okinawa within the Japanese nation-state, as long as Tokyo pursues a policy that does not completely drives away the islands. The sub-state nationalism is real—even among those who do not consider themselves historical scholars—and as Chapter 7 showed, this partially comes from official channels in Naha and the metropole.

This situation on some level still places the region as an equal or possibly junior partner with the mainland for the islands’ cultural destiny. The Okinawan historical discourse, with myths of pacifism and the American impact, holds strong power over the

islands' self-conception. If the national government begins alienating the archipelago, then the idea of Ryukyuan political independence will not seem so implausible. But if Tokyo gives the region equality of culture and-or equality of commerce, then it will shift ever-more-easier into the country as a whole over many generations. The fact that Okinawa is just one of many prefectures—and yet it holds such a strong cultural identity—shows the power of Ryukyuan nationalism, but it could evolve into a very strong provincialism.

The Train and Its Tracks

The idea of two-track nationalism posits that these seemingly separate takes on identity work in tandem such as the two rails for a locomotive or the two vertical planks on a ladder. In Okinawa, the high track mostly showed an ever-increasing sense of an independent identity. Castles, World War II monuments, and the prevailing historiography of Ryukyu's past portray the region as an independent nation in the cultural sense. The history with Japan is related, but not the same. The link between the islands and the mainland becomes a bone of contention. An opponent of American foreign policy may feel as though the United States' promotion that the northerners exploited the subtropical south was an imperialist drive to take the islands misses the larger point. The fact that it actually happened is ultimately more important than the why. The shift in Ryukyuan historiography in the 1980s hails from Okinawa and Japan, not the United States. Hirohito asked MacArthur to take the islands for safekeeping. The Pentagon's scholars noticed that mainlanders in the nation-state and across the diaspora thought of the Okinawans as dirty rather than creating the discrimination. Washington's impact came not from the creation of the Ryukyuan revival, but it served as an important

print-capital medium that amplified it. In all, the American contribution to Ryukyuan self-conception shows the energy generated by two-track nationalism. Japan, in a high-track incident, absorbed the Ryukyu Kingdom. This spurred emigration into the mainland and the Americas, a low-track indicator. The prejudice the islanders faced from Japanese in these new areas worked its way back to war planners, returning the imaginings to the high track. The cycle will continue.

The low track produces a much more ambivalent effect, with a slight trailing toward provincialism. Everyday flaggings show a unique Okinawa in relationship with the mainland—from my porch I see clear waters, sugar cane, license plates indicating American car ownership, tropical plants, *goya* in the summer, local tombs, and even the manhole covers featuring stylized hibiscus flowers—but these also connect with the main government through currency, language, the majority of print-capital, sports, and the role of Ryukyu culture as an interesting part of greater Japan. The low track in many levels serves as a more important indicator than the bended-knee view of self-perception since it leaves a path to a grand accommodation with the nation-state, and it creates strong economic ties. The spectre of comparison becomes two-fold with the comparison as a nation combining alongside the comparison as a prefecture. Examined in a context with the entrepôts Hong Kong, Singapore, and Macau or the histories of pre-modern Japan and Korea through the treasure trove of materials in Naha, Tokyo, and Beijing, then high-track nationalism leaves Okinawa as a nation. But compared with Japan or Taiwan, then Kuniyoshi's small-track feeling that the islands are just too small takes precedence. The upper rail's view of identity has shifted from Japanese to Ryukyuan, but the lower track has consistently eyed the mainland's prosperity and civic freedoms for nearly a century.

Implications for Study

The juxtaposition of Okinawa's history, identity, culture, and nationalism on a two-track axis calls for further investigation. A trove of riches exist for comparative studies, from a review of sub-state nationalism in Britain to the conception of Indonesia's many islands and cultures to other polities playing host to American military bases. Japanese, Okinawan, and other scholars with literacy in those languages and Chinese possess the opportunities to further this thesis with a larger selection of works and greater perspectives on the situation. Dissertations and theses tucked away in university-level libraries around the world offer new sources of materials and perhaps could be reexamined under the parameters laid out for this study of Ryukyuan history. Two-track nationalism may be the start of a new view of the islands with the right scholarship and expanded scope.

The questions of where else to apply the central two-track approach offers no one answer, but a variety of possibilities that are rich in subject matter even if they do not connote the usual political science equivalents. The possibility of Okinawa's sub-state nationalism slowly becoming codified lends itself to Britain's smaller polities such as Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales since these have wrestled with their identities for centuries. These also involve similar agents of the push and pull of identity such and a sometimes antagonistic and romanticized history, the sense that the peoples are culturally kin but not exactly the same, a sense of grievance, and even the possibility of sports and theater to level each identities' relationship with each other. The Western Europe focus expands into Belgium's recent troubles, Spain's treatment of the Basques, and revisiting the unifications of Italy and Germany. Okinawa is far removed culturally and historically

from these parts of the world, but the investigative system employed in this paper would be a good medium for revisiting these political situations. Closer to the islands themselves, the two-track format could be applied to the coalescence of the Koreans after the fall of Imperial Japan, and China's plans to acquire, control, and then end the nationalism or sub-state nationalism of Macau, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Taiwan. Indonesia's mix of religions, ethnic identities, and colonial past along with its invasion of East Timor, chronicled in Anderson's works, lends itself to Okinawa's blur of religions and its own uneasy place in the Japanese nation-state. Finally, Tanji concluded in her dissertation that the study of Okinawan self-conception serves as a potential window into civic actions against an American military presence in the Philippines, South Korea, and the United States' own sub-state nation in Puerto Rico.⁴⁹⁴ The two-track nationalism and its effect on Okinawa should not be pigeonholed by region, and it provides a wide scope of possibilities.

Above all, this investigation into Ryukyuan nationalism serves as a starting point and not a conclusion. A bevy of sources exist in Japanese and a scholar fluent in Chinese can study earlier documents. Additionally, dissertation-level work exists across the United States and the world that covers some of the issues investigated in this thesis in heavier depth than what is available for an English speaker in Okinawa. These include recent works such as The U.S. Military Occupation of Okinawa: Politicizing and Contesting Okinawan Identity 1945-1955 by David John Obermiller, Narrative Acts of Resistance and Identity in Modern Okinawan Fiction by Davinder Leslie Bhowmilk, and The Planning Implications of the Politics of Cultural Difference: The Case of Okinawa,

⁴⁹⁴ 307.

1995-2000 by Keisuke Enokido. Much work remains to be done, and it might take place at the doctoral level in the near future.

Okinawa Going Forward

The combination of the two track leads to a series of civic-wide compromises. As Okinawan self identification increased, its economic ties with the mainland grew. The 1998 election and the subsequent 2000 G-8 summit showed one deal: mainland investment, infrastructure, and cultural recognition in exchange for economic and political alignment with the LDP. The reversion of Okinawa saw the exchange of the pacifist ideal for increased rents for the bases. These show the give-and-take of high- and low-track nationalisms in the political sphere. As one powers the other, so they can be exchanged for stability and equality. This places additional responsibility on the nation-state. The national government's attempt in 2007 to remove any mention of the Japanese troops inducing Okinawans to commit suicide during the Battle of Okinawa created opportunities to move the high and low tracks either away from, or closer, to the mainland. The prefecture's protest ultimately restored the historic incidents over the objections of mainland nationalists.⁴⁹⁵ This furthered the bended-knee approach to Okinawan identity by placing it in opposition to a nationalist campaign to downplay Japan's atrocities during its expansionist era. The day-to-day view of Okinawa-ness brings it ultimately closer to the mainland, since it succeeded. The agitation worked. Had the education ministry continued with its plans, then the lower track would have pushed the islands further away from Tokyo and would have brought more potency to the high

⁴⁹⁵ Norimitsu Onishi, "Japan Textbooks to Restore Reference to Wartime Suicides," New York Times, 27 December, 2007.

track. Successful sub-state nationalism requires responsibility from the metropole, even if it goes against prevailing opinion.

The combination of the two tracks shows that Okinawa wants cultural independence safely within the nation-state. This ultimately leads to provincialism. The prefecture's politics, sports, arts, and role as a peaceful land occupied by the United States underlie this. The question of the proto-entrepot past leads to the economic gap between Okinawa and the mainland. By becoming Ryukyu again with a weaponless realm and serving as a global marketplace, then the prefecture becomes just like prosperous Japan. The reversion movement was predicated on a unique identity wanting to return home. Okinawans may resent mainland tourists visiting the islands for an exotic vacation, but these people buying anthropomorphic pineapple dolls or T-shirts with the word "pork" on it are furthering the islands' identity.

For now and the foreseeable future, Japanization is Ryukyuization.

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