

Re-Mapping the Configuration of Regional Identity in Ryukyu Islands*

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I. After the G8 Okinawa Summit

The G8 (G7) Summit was held in Okinawa from July 21-23, but perhaps no one knows exactly what was at stake at this meeting and what contributions it made. It is really historical irony that such a conference criticized by the British media as the squandered Summit was held in Okinawa. Japan, as chair, could not play a leading role in the conference, and was only concerned with showing Japanese hospitality and following the schedule, not addressing the accumulated problems. In addition the Japanese government spent an enormous amount of money, 81 billions JPY (810 million USD), on this summer party during which the inadequacy of Prime Minister Mori was revealed. That is 100 times as large as the Birmingham or Koeln (Cologne) summit. The Japanese government summoned approximately 22,000 policemen, 100 guard boats, 40 special boats, and military airplanes (P3C) in the sky and instituted surveillance nets for this Summit. This could have been reaction to the outbreak of protest at the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle. This summit bore no fruit despite the absence of storng protest (except the human chain demonstration by 27,000 people which circled Kadena air base).

Apart from the inadequacy of the Japanese Prime Minister, what was most regrettable was that Mr. Clinton, the first U.S. President to come to Okinawa since its hand over in 1972, re-corroborated the military importance of Okinawa to the U.S. armed forces. He went to the Cornerstone of Peace Park and made such a statement at the cliff, the very place where the inhabitants of Okinawa who were cornered by both the U.S. military and the Japanese military in the last World War committed suicide. I was dismayed and felt that the significance of regionalism in Okinawa against the presence of the U.S. military was seen as an outrage by all watching this scene on TV. Still, 75% of the U.S. bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa which occupies only 1% of the Japanese land mass. Now, it is well known that the Japanese government intended to host this summit to uphold the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.

The Japanese government certainly aimed to quiet the movement of regionalism in Okinawa which had soared during the protest against a rape incident by Marines that occurred in 1995 and which developed into the revision of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement. To do this, they decided to host the summit in Okinawa and to invest 100 billion JPY (1 billion USD) for

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the promotion of the northern part of Okinawa main land. Of course, I think neither the government attained its intention nor the sympathy of the Okinawan people. But we must remember how the Okinawa prefecture and its Governor acted as hosts to the G8 summit and negotiated with the government. I will explain the reasons why Okinawans had such attitudes during the summit although they were placed in peripheral and marginalized positions in Japan, by presenting the recent counter-hegemonic discourse of conservatives.

II. Historical Revisionism in Okinawa

Before assessing the conservative discourse, we must understand its target, liberal discourses. Almost all Japanese recognize that for about the last 5 years Okinawa was led by Masahide Ota, the former Governor of Okinawa Prefecture. He served two terms, 1990-1998. He is known as a famous investigator of the Battle of Okinawa in the Pacific War and was a professor of mass communication study at the University of Ryukyus (e.g. Ota 1967). Everyone recognizes him as an advocate of peace. He negotiated with the Prime Minister at that time, Ryutaro Hashimoto, on the leasehold problem of U.S. facilities in Okinawa under his slogan Okinawa without military facilities. A typical remark from the liberal side is as follows:

Okinawan people have suffered miserable experiences, as one third of noncombatant inhabitants died in the last Okinawan battle, but today, 75% of the U.S. facilities in Japan still exist in Okinawa. We never hear the end of incidents caused by U.S. soldiers and can still not arrest criminals under the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement. In the first place, Okinawa Islands are peaceful, people go unarmed and they hate war. Actually, in the pre-modern era, we went to many Asian countries to exchange not only commodities but also culture. Today, we must seek the way of diplomacy. We think there is no necessity for military facilities in Okinawa. They must be removed...

The hegemony of the liberal side, represented by Ota, rose to a peak in September 1995 when the rape incident occurred and descended in February of 1997 when Ota refused to accept an alternative site for Futenma Airbase.

This refusal hardened the Japanese government. Consequently, the Japanese central government became reluctant to promote Okinawa prefecture. Ota failed to maintain the support of the people and lost his seat in November 1998. Keiichi Inamine who was the President of the Okinawan Association of Economic Corporations became the next Governor of Okinawa Prefecture. He and his planners are regarded as conservative. A typical conservative remark is as follows:

Mr. Ota and his adherents always say 'peace, peace', but they did not think about ways of improving much employment despite the fact that the prefecture has the worst unemployment rate in Japan. Of course, peace is precious, but reaction to the government creates no products for us. If the government continues to reduce financial support to us any longer, what shall we do? Our number one priority is to make a living!

This is too practical an opinion. However, along with these opinions, a cultural aspect was

added to the discussion in 1997 by Inamine's planners to challenge liberal discourses flavored with greater historical backgrounds and taste and problematizing its very way of recognizing Okinawan history. It states we must be aware of the logic rather than the pathos in exploring our future: from collective enthusiasm to cool analysis. And they, the three professors of the University of Ryukyus: Kurayoshi Takara, Tsuneo Oshiro, and Morisada Maeshiro, manifested this orientation as the Okinawa Initiative in the Okinawa forum of the Asia Pacific Agenda Project held in March, 2000. I will first summarize this manifesto, and then criticize it.

III. Okinawa Initiative: What is it?

Preamble: They said:

In the powerful Unitarian frame centered on Tokyo in modern Japan, Okinawa was seen as an outfield or islands which have at first glance a different culture from Japan, or are regarded as the military hub, or a tropical island resort. Okinawa could not brighten its own light autonomously. We three (Takara, Oshiro, Maeshiro) hope Okinawa will become a new intellectual power in the 21st century and thereby offer a view point which is needed to reappraise the potential of Okinawa. We think Okinawa must muster its own initiative to improve its conditions and surroundings.

The Historical sense of the Okinawan people

We think it is for the specific historical sense Okinawan people have that Okinawa can present its overpoweringly unique stance in Japan. We divide this into seven points for simple explanation as follows:

1. Building a pre-modern particular state of the Kingdom of Ryukyu

In 1429, the political power which was based on Shuri unified the Okinawan islands and established the Kingdom of Ryukyu. While maintaining its close relationship with China, it developed diplomacy and trade with Japan, Korea and south-east Asian countries and prospered as a staple trade state of east Asia. However it was invaded by Japan in 1609, and became subordinate to Japan while ostensibly keeping its relationship with China. In 1879, Japan, as a modern nation-state, purged the king of Ryukyu from Okinawa, applied the prefecture system, and established Okinawa as a formal part of its territory. A series of these processes gives Okinawan people two reasons for being historically recognized. First is that they have a unique background which established an independent and different pre-modern state from mainland Japan and they had a tradition of acting as an independent member in the Asian world. Second is that originally they were not a member of Japan, and became the latest member through the gradual process of inclusion.

2. Having unique culture

Though the building of a unique kingdom and the cross-fertilization with Asian countries, Okinawa developed particular cultures which were different from mainland Japan. In addition, folk cultures matured in each island added to the condition of traditional Okinawan cultures and developed its uniqueness compared to other Japanese prefectures. This cultural situation caused Okinawan people to develop two consciousnesses: one is of a differentiation of themselves in that they differentiate themselves as We (Okinawan natives) from They (people in other prefectures of Japan): namely, Uchinaanchu and Yametonchu. Another is that we must be proud of our own traditional cultures and should hand them down passionately. In another sense, that Okinawan culture

is not a completely foreign culture to the Japanese and originally had the same root. They departed from ancient Japanese culture, and then varied to Okinawan and mainland Japanese culture. That is to say, if we look at our cultural origin, these two cultures begin to look similar, however if we emphasize historical results, we could conclude that the two cultures should be distinguished from each other.

3. Discrimination by mainland Japanese

These peculiar cultures of Okinawa have been used by the people of mainland Japan (Yamatonchu) to underestimate and discriminate against the local people considering them as backward. Modern Japan negated its Asian character and centered its state development on the models of Western advanced countries. Okinawan culture was seen as Asiatic and low-grade. The experience of losing their pride and confidence in their own cultures and having been discriminated against as Okinawan people who had their peculiar culture has stigmatized the people.

4. Unforgettable damage suffered in the last Pacific War

The Okinawan battle at the tail end of the Pacific War left the Okinawan people with unforgettable historical scars. Because *the homes of the people became a battleground, many inhabitants were entangled in fierce battles and about 25% of them died. The landscape or cultural heritage which represented Okinawan unique history and culture was ruined. The most cruel thing was that the Japanese soldiers discriminated against Okinawan inhabitants even though they were also Japanese. They came down on them, and behaved brutally, pushing inhabitants toward their death. Through these severe experiences, inhabitants became to hate war and fervently seek peace.

5. Experience of domination by other nations

Since the end of the war in 1945, Okinawa prefecture was separated from Japan and put under the governance of the U.S. until 1972. This is a very important factor in people's sense of history. The U.S. government's definition that Okinawa holds an important position for military strategy is a one-sided definition without asking the peoples' opinion. Under the overwhelming power of the U.S. military, Okinawa turned into an island of bases and the corner stone of the Pacific.

6. Wishing to return to Japan

The Okinawan people never despaired of Japan, even though it sold Okinawa to the U.S.. Through the process of criticizing the issues deriving from the U.S. control of Okinawa, the Okinawan people discussed which nation Okimawa belonged to, and most wished to return to Japan. The reason for this is that they had been part of Japan for 70 years and their cultural identity supported the feelings of belonging to Japan. Though this region had built the Kingdom of Ryukyu and had a tradition of developing its own peculiar culture, Japan was still culturally familiar to Okinawa. Okinawans felt a unity with Japan. Therefore, they thought that Japan was their homeland and that they could solve their ambiguous position by regaining it. The political expression of this took the form of a movement to regain unity with Japan. Eventually, on May 15, 1972, the Okinawan people chose Japan as the country to which they belonged.

7. Experiencing the inequality in facility sharing

After unification, however, Okinawa did not cease being an island of bases. Okinawa was re-defined in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and it was estimated that it would be a crucial function for this alliance. In the national interest of both countries, Okinawa was authorized as the island of bases. Before considering the significance of the Japan-U.S. relationship, many inhabitants denied the

actuality that about 75% of the facilities of the American military in Japan were located on this small island and that they incurred many sufferings because of the bases. Indisputably, the sense of inequality compared to other prefectures occurred here. The matter of the base problems, which arose from a rape incident committed by a U.S. marine in September 1995, shows again the marked gap between the inhabitants and the national interests and casts a large shadow on the operation of the Japan-U.S. alliance.

IV. Criticisms of historical senses

This summary of Okinawan history is, of course, biased. I shall return to this point later, but now continue to follow the professors. They point out the problems of their historical sense as follows:

In many cases, these historical senses have overlapped and mixed like a cocktail and form the regional identity of Okinawa. Although we three respect this regional identity which is based on historical senses, we demarcate a logic which resulted from excessive accountability to history. Certainly, history should be respected, but we think this matter must be distinguished at once from the problem of responsibility which we undertake it to be today. What is important is not to remain under the control of history but to set in history and the future by grounding our own responsibility and subjectivity as people today. The only people who have the ability to undertake the whole history are ourselves at the present time. In addition the regional property which is offered to the future by history will only be actualized, if the people of the present inherit it. Therefore we make some remarks as follows:

1. Generalization of Self-evaluation

The regional identity based on the historical question should not be confined to the problems related only to Okinawa. Rather we should be aware that we are called on by our efforts to generalize it to the whole of Japan or Asia Pacific countries. For example, when we insist that we are not dealt with fairly inside Japan, we need to ask what kind of relationship the problem has to the actual circumstances and the degree to which it occurs in the whole of Japan from the viewpoint of the region. When we support the idea of anti-war or the idea of peace which was generated from our experiences of suffering by war, we should strive to tell them using a broader (nation-wide or worldwide) context and in universal language. Universal language here means to give rationality and logic to the language with which we can speak up for ourselves and persuade others, and to appreciate the power of language, that is, to communicate, to negotiate and solve, thus illustrating that language is a powerful weapon. Particularly on the question of the bases, we take the needs of this universal language and power of language to heart.

2. Evaluation of Okinawa as a base

There is a deep-seated political anti-base feeling/emotion in Okinawan inhabitants due to the heavy burden associated with the bases. The issues examined in the question of the bases, however, are not presented by either the historical problem or the issue of the damage caused by the military bases, and are not developed by insisting on the search for peace and negation of war. We must consider the degree of security for Japan as a member of international society and how to realize peace in the world.

3. Okinawa as an intellectual power

When we strive to displace the historical question with universal language or power of language, its central activity would be an excellent intellectual infrastructure which characterizes this region of Okinawa. We Okinawans have pride in our own history and culture, we share the pains of being treated as an ethnic minority, we hate wars, we love peace, and we have the will to let everybody know what we are. Speaking out about all these is our most precious treasure and intellectual power. We do not want to confine this intellectual power within a national area. Today, when the concentration of administrative, political, economic, and cultural power in Tokyo is reduced and a new form of regional division of governing power is sought, we Okinawans should also regain control and re-establish our own way of governance. In doing so, it is important that we overcome the historical problem and participate in the creation of a new national image of Japan for the 21st century. We have to evaluate ourselves in this way, and take our own responsibility as part of a new Japan.

V. Political Context of the Manifesto

I have outlined the ideas of the three professors who presented their new perspective of the Okinawans' identity in the Okinawa Initiative. As it clearly stated, they emphasize that Okinawa is part of Japan, and they are trying to establish its role in Japan and to revise Okinawans' historical consciousness which they regard as an obstacle to this goal. Among the three professors, Takara plays a particularly important role. He is a widely known historian who represents Okinawans. He is engaged in enthusiastic writing activities and has published numerous works on the pre-modern history of Okinawa which is his specialty. He has not only presented new findings by revealing previously unknown historical data but also has criticized and challenged an earlier mainstream historical view on Okinawa through re-examining historical data. Professor Takara was actively involved in the rebuilding of the Shuri Castle as the main project of the 20th Anniversary of Okinawa's Reunification with Japan, and he was the expert consultant for *Wind of Ryukyu*, the historical drama produced by Nippon Hoso Kyokai (the Japanese Broadcast Association). In short, he has been the central figure in the studies of Okinawan history for the last 10 years. During this period, he has established his status as an academic representing Okinawa by publishing books on Okinawan history through major Japanese publishers (Takara, 1980, 1987, 1993). Since the mid-1990s, his discussion has adopted the tone of conservatives ideology (Takara, 1997). Although I am not sure of the reason why he moved in this direction, it may be partly because he made more contacts with administrators of the Japanese central and the Okinawan local governments through involvement in projects related to the 25th Anniversary of Okinawa's Reunification with Japan. Professor Takara himself commented, "Many Okinawan historians tend to describe Okinawa and Okinawans as victims but I am trying to focus on something which cannot be seen in such a definition."

Some of Takaras main criticisms of the historical consciousness in the Okinawa Initiative had already been revealed in a book entitled *Okinawas Self Examination; Discussions on Transformation from the Pathos to the Logic*. Hirotaka Makino, one of the authors of this book, became a vice-Governor of Okinawa Prefecture after its publication. The book criticizes in detail the policy of Ota, a former Okinawan Governor, in particular his three requests to the Japanese

central government; the Action Program to Remove the U.S. Military Bases from Okinawa; the Plan to Build an International City; and the Request to Develop Industry and Deregulation of the U.S. Military Bases. What we have to pay attention to is the timing of the publication of this book. It was published in February, nine months before his election as the vice-Governor of Okinawa Prefecture. In this light, we can surmise that this book is more or less aimed at publicizing the political ideology of Inamine's group which was trying to gain control of the government of Okinawa. In his election campaign, Inamine adopted the catch phrase, *Kensei Fukyo*, i.e. economic depression was caused by the previous government. Inamine's group employed a famous advertising agent who created this catch phrase, and then blamed Ota's group for the problem in the way that candidates of the U.S. presidency behave, and Inamine eventually won the seat of the Governor of Okinawa. Inamine's group used an impressive strategy. Although poor preparation and miscalculation by Ota's group would have been important factors in bringing about this result, Inamine's affluent resources gained through support from the Association of Management Executives of Okinawa Prefecture made a great difference in his election campaign.

VI. Examining the Historical Revisionism

When we take this political context in which the Okinawa Initiative was presented into consideration, we can understand that the Okinawa Initiative was intended to ruin the plan that the previous Governor of Okinawa and his team developed and to support Inamine's policy. We can also understand that the Okinawa Initiative is the geopolitical discourse which represents this intention. For example, in their article *Geopolitics and Discourse*, O Tuathail and Agnew (1992) state that a historical characteristic which is seen in geopolitical description from that time to today is the assertion that geopolitics is confronted with idealism, ideology, and the human will. This tendency of geopolitical description is exactly what we can see in the Okinawa Initiative. This is nothing else but a geopolitical Practice, in the sense that while focusing on one particular region it ignores the ideal and the will of the people, takes the viewpoint that it was the natural environment and the geographical setting of a state which exercised the greatest influence on its destiny (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 191), and tries to replace the ideal and the will of the people with geopolitical logic. Those who take a conservative position about Okinawan identity and politics always emphasize reality rather than an ideal. They are caught in the image of international relationships which is based on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and overlook the potential that this image might be merely an historical construction.

Liberals had a hegemonic power at the time of the referendum in Okinawa Prefecture on the Revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and Reduction of the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa held on September 8, 1996. The proportion who voted for this referendum was 59.53 %, and the ratio of people who voted was 10:1 for the position of the liberals. This was the peak of liberals political power ruling Okinawa. However, because the Japanese central government regarded this result as a protest against the national policy, it strengthened its oppressive attitudes towards Okinawa and suspended aid for industrial development which was once promised to Okinawa. Due to this action of the Japanese government, the feeling of helplessness in economic and

political arenas spread in Okinawa because it had no strong industrial infrastructure to independently develop its own economy. Conservatives have taken advantage of this situation, articulated their opinions, and developed their political power.

As well as this political and economic context, we should also pay attention to rhetoric adopted in the discourse of the Okinawa Initiative. This is an actual manifesto to call for national unification and this is a familiar type of discourse to us. For example, in 1930 Okinawans organized the Movement for homeland Education (*Kyodo kyoiku undo*). Although Okinawans became more aware of their own individuality, specialty, or peculiarity through this movement, their folklore was simply regarded as the secondary part of the national character of Japan. By taking this into consideration, we can say that the premise of the manifesto in the Okinawa Initiative was that Okinawa's initiative was merely practiced within Japan and that Japan was the only stage on which Okinawans could demonstrate their unique character.

This reminds us of Althusser's theory of ideology (Althusser, 1970). According to him, the subject cannot exist without the Master. Only by responding to His call can his/her subjectivity be established. It seems that the authors of the Okinawa Initiative speak to Okinawans to re-identify themselves in the relationship of the subject/subjects and to appreciate what guarantees the Master/the subject. Taking this understanding of the formation of the subject, Okinawa as the subject can be established only by responding to the call of the nation state, that is, Japan. Akira Arakawa, an Okinawan journalist, warns us of the danger of the Okinawa Initiative. He states that it is the policy of Japan to integrate Okinawa, and it will be accomplished in a more perfect form by gaining Okinawa's acceptance not from its economic perspective which emphasizes material satisfaction but from its false academic and intellectual point of view.

The Okinawa Initiative is the manifesto which has both positively and negatively influenced and stimulated Okinawans in reconsidering their historical consciousness. At the same time, it has provided others, non-Okinawans, with great opportunities for understanding the Okinawans' plurality in their identity and political and historical understanding. The historical perspective which views Okinawa as a victim, represented in the discourse of Ota, previous Governor of Okinawa, still has its hegemonic power in Okinawa. This view is problematic because by emphasizing Okinawa as a victim it hides the fact that Okinawans actively participated in the war (see for example, Yoshida 1993). Osawa (2000), a rising sociologist, recognizes the importance of this fact in his discussion with Shun Medoruma, a young novelist who won the Akutagawa Award which is one of the most highly regarded literature awards in Japan. Medoruma, who was born in the 1900s, listened to the experiences of his grandparents and parents about the war. What is important here is his position as a listener of two different stories; one about firsthand historical experiences and the other from a dominant ideological historical view on these experiences. The recognition of the gap between these two stories is the underlying theme of Medoruma's novels. I, too, belong to his generation and had similar experiences. However, we do not have direct experiences of the war. We are responsible for examining this historical perception and viewing ourselves, and Okinawa, as victims from a relative perspective, and uncovering and exploring the forgotten fact that we also had a part in invading others. The three professors, Takara, Oshiro, and Maeshiro, the authors of the Okinawa Initiative, fail to recognize

this point. They focus only on the form of a nation-state and ignore the academic historical examination of its substantial meaning and content. Thus it is reasonable that Takara, a historian representing Okinawa Prefecture, is now subject to severe recurring criticisms.

Before concluding, I would like to outline the likelihood of discourse on the Okinawan conservatives and its meaning in the future study of Okinawan regional identity and historical perspective. Responding to the dynamic situations in the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. military arrangement in East Asia may drastically change. This will probably have a considerable influence on the future of the U.S. bases in Okinawa. In this light, it seems that the political understanding of Okinawa's future from a conservative perspective, which simply accepts the regime based on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, is not prepared for such a potentially radical change in military balance. Furthermore, looking at domestic issues, since the recent election of members of the House of Representatives, the national community has started calling for a radical reform of distribution of public investment. This is the critical reaction of people to the Liberal Democratic Party which generously provided financial support all over Japan in order to collect votes without thinking of the results. If the LDP loses power to other parties at the national level due to this criticism, what are the Okinawan conservatives going to do? Such changes in regional political climates in East Asia and in the balance of political power within Japan may lead to reform in the enormous amount of financial allocation which Okinawa has gained and enjoyed from the central government through political negotiations. When we predict these political changes, which of course may not happen, we can more clearly see the short-sighted character of the professors in the Okinawa Initiative. In other words, the main aim of the authors is blaming the Ota government, and their claim for revising Okinawa's position in a wider context has now become the weakness of their own vision of Okinawa.

VII. Conclusion

In this presentation, I have focused on a critique of the conservatives in Okinawa. In further research I would like to explore the rhetoric used in the conflicts over hegemonic power around the politics of difference and the effectiveness of essentialism from historical and political angles. This is, however, not limited to Okinawan issues. There are many other regions in which regional identities are reinforced under the development of globalization. Everybody seeks to improve their regions position. Consequently we should not discard the Okinawa Initiative as a mere agitation, but we need to compare different views and claims within it. We should probe the issues around the identities of people within regional boundaries and their position through a careful exploration of conflicts and hybrid construction of geopolitical de-/re-boundarization or integration or differentiation.

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Table: Chronology of the Issues around the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa

Date/Month	Year	Incidents
Mar. - Jun.	1945	The Okinawa War
15 Aug.		Japans surrender to the Allies
1 Apr.	1952	The establishment of the Ryukyu government
28 Apr.		The U.S.-Japan Peace Treaty, The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty
15 May		The enactment of the Law of Special Requisition of Private Land for the U.S. Military Bases
Apr.	1953	The start of compulsory requisition of private land
Jun.	1956	The rise of resistance against compulsory requisition of land all over the Okinawa islands
11 Nov.	1968	The first election of a Governor of the Ryukyu government. Chobyō Yara was elected for the first Governor.
21 Nov	1969	The Sato-Nixon Announcement
20 Dec.	1970	The outbreak of riots in Koza
17 Jun.	1971	Agreement on the reunification of Okinawa with Japan
15 May	1972	The reunification of Okinawa with Japan
17 Nov.	1990	Masahide Ota was elected as Governor of Okinawa
20 Nov.	1994	Ota was re-elected as Governor of Okinawa
4 Sep.	1995	A U.S. soldier in Okinawa raped a 12-year old local girl
21 Oct.		The Okinawans held a meeting to support the decrease and removal of U.S. military bases in Okinawa (85,000 people attended this meeting)
Jan.	1996	The Okinawa government presented the Action Program of Removal of the U.S. military Bases
Nov.	1998	Inamine was elected as Governor of Okinawa