

# THE RYUKYUANIST

A Newsletter on Ryukyuan/Okinawan Studies

No. 38

Autumn 1997

I visited Okinawa in May-June 1997. My previous visit was in March 1995. Over a little more than two years, the political climate of Okinawa had dramatically changed; what was only implicit in March 1995 had surfaced with a vengeance. In March 1995 and before, very few Okinawans openly advocated Okinawa's independence from Japan. By the summer of 1997, the demand for independence had appeared in numerous publications and media programs as well as at forums, rallies, and symposia. Below I attempt to make sense of rather confusing cross-currents of diverse thoughts and arguments related to Okinawan independence.

## A Reinvigoration of Political Debate in Okinawa, 1995-1997

The idea of independence from *Japan* was taboo ever since the Meiji Japan incorporated the Ryukyu Kingdom and downgraded it to Okinawa Prefecture in 1879. Advocacy for a Japanese political subunit's independence amounted to a major crime against the state. For a long time, the fear of a cruel punishment had driven the independence idea under ground.

In February 1997, the long repressed idea of Okinawan independence attracted attention at the highest level of Japan's state apparatus: the Diet's House of Representatives. A long-term representative (a Social Democrat) from Okinawa, Mr. UEHARA Kōsuke, asked in a meeting of the House Committee on the Budget: "Suppose Okinawa becomes independent; what are the necessary *legal* measures [that we should take]?" The Minister of State in charge of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau answered: "The Constitution has no provision about it; under the present Constitution, an action like that [independence] cannot be legal."

The exchange of views between the Cabinet minister and Representative Uehara sounds like a mere rhetorical exercise on a hypothetical question. But the fact that an Okinawan-elected representative went on record with the idea of Okinawan

independence is an important milestone in the evolving relations between Okinawa and the Japanese state.

In April 1997, a minor coup occurred in the publishing world. Mr. OYAMA Chōjō, a former mayor of Koza (now Okinawa City) and a leader of the historic Reversion Movement, published a book titled *A Declaration of Okinawan Independence*, which became an instant best seller. Its subtitle says it all: "Japan was not the fatherland to return to." "Japan: Our Fatherland" was a sacred principle which inspired the Reversion Movement of Okinawa in the 1960s.

Now, a ranking reversion leader of those days presents a book-length bill of grievances against Japan and urges fellow Okinawans to unite for independence. At a minimum, the book is an illuminating exercise in comparative cultural anthropology at a popular level highlighting major irreconcilable differences between Okinawa and Japan (*Okinawajinron* counterpoised to *Nihonjinron*). Mr. Oyama's perspective and perceptions are largely identical with Governor Ota's, presented in *The Ryukyuanist* No. 35.

May 15, 1997, the 25th anniversary of the Reversion, was a sad day for many

Okinawans, as the day of reversion 25 years ago was. In the 1960s, Okinawans created and sustained a vigorous mass movement for reversion. But the terms of reversion negotiated by Japan with the United States betrayed Okinawan expectations on many key issues including, above all, the U.S. military bases in Okinawa. By May 1972, the Reversion Movement had almost changed into an anti-reversion one.

Okinawans felt that by allowing the American military presence in Okinawa at a level many times above what was tolerated in the mainland, Japan was "reverting" to its historically well-known discrimination against Okinawa. A quarter-century after the Reversion, the "5-15" anniversary generated a number of protest marches, rallies, and meetings, which all held the Japanese government culpable for its failure to reduce the American bases in Okinawa and pointed to Okinawan independence as a step for Okinawa's own policy on the bases.

Why the Japanese government continues to use Okinawa for hosting a great majority of the American forces stationed in Japan is the basic question that calls up all the ugly historical instances of discrimination and mistreatment Okinawans have suffered at the Japanese hands.

There are other reasons for the popularity of the independence idea. For example, the suffocating regulations that characterize Japanese life are perceived to be harmful to Okinawa's socio-economic progress based on a fuller utilization of Okinawa's international geopolitical potential.

#### *A few problems*

Political and administrative independence alone does not make Okinawa a truly independent, self-reliant nation-state. For a long time, Okinawa has been out of practice in running an independent state within the global community of nations. Japan has done

its best to destroy Okinawa's ethnic and cultural distinctiveness and to brain-wash Okinawans out of their international experiences and capability.

This means that Okinawans must catch up with their own past as a pre-requisite for choosing a meaningful future. The task Okinawans face is nothing less than fresh nation-building. Transforming a dependent area of an empire into a self-reliant, active member of the global community of nations is a daunting task. Whether or not Okinawa *should* become independent is no longer the question. Practically everyone agrees it should. Debate now moves to how and when Okinawa can become independent as well as whether it can really function as an independent nation-state.

Ideal self-government implies a full-fledged "sovereign" nation-state. This is the dream of the Okinawan advocates for independence. But critics point out that sovereignty requires certain qualifications including a country's ability to defend itself against external aggression, ability to establish and carry on diplomatic relations with other states, ability to generate sufficient socio-economic growth and equity for domestic peace and so on.

"Realists" who are skeptical about the feasibility of an independent Okinawa put a considerable weight on Okinawa's lack of military competence. Advocates for independence denounce it as a 19th-Century *Realpolitik* and suggest that in the 21st Century, Independent Okinawa will be far from defenseless; its defense will be an unwavering commitment to peace and tireless efforts to maintain friendly relations with neighboring countries.

If skeptics further chide the partisans of independence for naivete about the ambitions of the well-armed Asian countries, they reply that they are willing to take a chance trusting their neighbors.

Regardless of views on fine points, a widely shared perception is that Okinawa's status today is degrading. Okinawa is at the mercy of opaque and narrow-minded politics of the over-centralized Japanese state and under the partial, but domineering occupation of the United States' armed forces. Okinawa's self-esteem needs an independent, peaceful Okinawa free of foreign domination and assured of its place among sovereign equals of the world. Peace and stability in East Asia would be better served by an independent Okinawa that is neither armed nor subject to any country's armed forces.

Once nations around Okinawa are equally deprived of the "privilege" to seize it for geopolitical advantages, conflict among them may be reduced substantially. De-militarized Okinawa should therefore be a giant step for East Asian peace. Proposals have been made that Okinawa should advocate and promote an East Asian mutual non-aggression treaty.

#### ***Forces favoring independence***

Many perceive that Okinawa has a great potential for turning its geopolitical advantages (currently exploited exclusively for military purposes by Japan and the U.S.) to peaceful uses as a hub of international activities. The prefectural government, though under severe constraints of the Japanese state system, has been steadily extending its "informal" diplomacy with different levels of foreign governments.

Okinawa has forged friendly ("sister") relationships with the State of Hawaii, the Province of Fujian, and the Island of Cheju. Cities, schools, citizen groups, and individuals have also been active in international cultural exchanges. Many Okinawan municipalities and islands have found their "sisters" overseas; e.g., Naha and Fuzhou, Miyako and Maui, etc. Okinawa's commercial liaison offices have been

founded in major Asian cities. The human dimension of Okinawa's internationalization is also fascinating. There are nearly 10,000 foreign residents in Okinawa, without counting the 30,000 American troops and their dependents or equally numerous Japanese mainlanders. Decades of the American presence has added about 10,000 persons of mixed parentage to the Okinawan population.

Outside Okinawa, there are 300,000 persons of Okinawan ancestry all over the world (not including Japan, where a similar number of Okinawans can be assumed) with relative concentrations in Hawaii, California, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia. The prefectural government regularly holds ethnic festivals in which overseas Okinawans participate in large numbers. There are more than hundred informal ambassadors of Okinawa appointed or posted in the Okinawan diaspora communities throughout the world.

#### ***Economics for independence***

Okinawa's international trade, investment, communication, and transportation are greatly inconvenienced by Japan's external policies and internal regulations. Okinawa's trade and investment are characterized by large net imports of goods counter-balanced by large net service exports (tourism) as well as the Japanese government's expenditure on infra-structure and Japanese companies' investment in service facilities (hotels, resorts, stores, etc.)

The need for diversification of Okinawa's external economic relations has been recognized. The principal obstacle is the mercantilist policies and regulations of Japan with emphasis on reserving the domestic markets for Japanese businesses, encouraging exports and discouraging imports of goods and capital. The barriers are keenly felt by Okinawans and Chinese in Taiwan

because of the geographical proximity of the two areas that is not matched by equally close economic and social reciprocity. Various measures for eliminating the barriers and building an Okinawan economy on the basis of free international movements of goods, services, information and persons have been proposed. Several trade and investment missions from Taiwan have suggested what should be done to increase the flow of trade and investment between Taiwan and Okinawa.

In the event post-reversion Hong Kong falters as an international center, Okinawa aspires to succeeding Hong Kong. This implies an area wide open for all kinds of international economic transactions; i.e., *laissez-faire*.

Okinawa Prefecture has adopted a proposal for turning the whole prefecture into a "free trade zone" (FTZ), a replica of Hong Kong and Singapore. This implies that as far as international economic relations are concerned, Okinawa desires to be detached from Japan and made into a system of its own, Japan becoming "one country, two systems." The idea certainly sounds radical in light of the Japanese preferences for a uniformly administered, centralized state system.

It is perhaps ironical that international *laissez-faire* is consistent with Okinawa's aspirations to an independent nation-state. Desire for independence comes together with nationalism, and nationalism's international economic policy is usually anything but *laissez-faire*. But in Okinawa, *laissez-faire* perfectly fits the Okinawan brand of tolerant nationalism with a motto "ichariba chōdē" (a chance encounter is the beginning of brotherly [and sisterly] relationship). Okinawa's is an exact antithesis of the xenophobic, exclusionist nationalism of Japan.

International *laissez-faire* and domestic deregulations are bound to hurt the weak, uncompetitive Okinawan businesses that owe their survival to the existing Japanese trade barriers and regulations. They are already voicing opposition to the prefecture's FTZ plans.

### **Conclusion**

Serious analytical efforts are required to make sense of what is going on in post-1995 Okinawa. I have chosen one central theme, Okinawan independence, and tried to organize disparate events and forces around it in search for a discernible pattern. The whole essay runs the risk of misperception or misinterpretation of Okinawa's political, economic, and social dynamics. But, at least, it can be regarded as a refutable hypothesis. If refuted, it still serves the purpose of scientific inquiry.

### **Publications (XXIV)**

The following gift of publications from various benefactors is gratefully acknowledged.

Caraway, Paul W. 1963. "Remarks by Lieutenant General Paul W. Caraway, the High Commissioner of the Ryukyu Islands, at the Regular Monthly Dinner Meeting of the Golden Gate Club." 9 pp. Generally believed to be a statement of historic significance concerning the degree of autonomy the U.S. was willing to allow Okinawa to enjoy-- ZERO: i.e., "Autonomy is myth." The speech was made at the Harborview Naha, Okinawa, on 5 March 1963.

*Japan Echo*. 1996. Vol. 23, No. 3. Of special interest is the section under the heading "Okinawa and the Security Treaty." Four papers are included in this section: "The New Security Setup and Japan's Options" by Inoguchi Takashi,

"Interview with Governor Ota: Japanese Democracy on Trial" (from *Sekai*, July 1996), "The Okinawan Threat to the Security Treaty" by Takubo Tadae, and "China's Place in the International Community" by Kokubun Ryosei. The interview with Governor Ota anticipates much of what he later testified at the Supreme Court (see *The Ryukyuanist*, No. 35). The article by Takubo Tadae comments on the deep-seated Okinawan desire for independence from Japan as an ultimate threat to the U.S.-Japan mutual security arrangement. It shows how the "public interest" of Japan collides with the "public interest" of Okinawa and suggests that Okinawa must yield to avoid a showdown. This article can be read as a Japanese warning in case Okinawa goes "too far."

Nankurugumi, ed. 1996. *Okinawa ga dokuritsu suru hi* (The Day Okinawa Becomes Independent). Tokyo: Natsume Shobō. 221pp. A series of satirical speculations on how governments and individuals react to hypothetical independence of Okinawa. It demonstrates how things drastically change by a simple change in the political status of Okinawa from a sub-unit of Japan to an independent sovereign state. Language is humorous, of the type that Japanese teenagers speak. Serious facts and topics are annotated on the margins. Many cartoons. Okinawa's independence is a great thing for Okinawans. It is only a minor irritation for the Japanese. The United States gets a huge headache because it now has to treat Okinawa as a sovereign equal and find a new way of dealing with its military bases there.

NLI Research Institute. 1997. *NLI Research*, No. 102 (April). A major feature: "Okinawa and Taiwan in the Asia Economy," pp. 3-25. Forecasts Okinawa's

and Taiwan's economic growth over the next 20 years. Discusses interactions between the two economies. Comments on Okinawa's "Cosmopolitan City Formation Concept." NLI stands for Nippon Life Insurance Co.

Okinawa Prefectural Government, Military Base Affairs Office and Public Relations Division. 1997. *A Message from Okinawa on Military Bases, Peace, and Culture*. 23pp. Topics cover Okinawa's history, culture, and performing arts; the Battle of Okinawa and postwar Okinawa; crimes committed by U.S. military servicemen before Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972; the U.S. military bases and their adverse impacts on Okinawa's civilian life; measures taken by the prefecture; the people's demand for the reduction and realignment of the bases; the final report of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa; cosmopolitan city formation concept for Okinawa's 21st century; a vision of base-free, peaceful Okinawa. Numerous high-quality color photos, maps, line drawings, graphics. A major merit: up-to-date information on U.S.-Japan-Okinawa actions on the U.S. bases in Okinawa.

OTA, Masahide. 1997. *Hitasurani heiwa no sōzō ni mukete* (Toward the Creation of Peace, Single-mindedly). Tokyo: Kindai Bungeisha. 213pp. The author is the incumbent governor of Okinawa elected in 1990. The book is a collection of essays, talks, and comments on topics related to peace (and war) written or spoken within, with a couple of exceptions, a few years before running for governor. An excellent source on where he is from, by birth, upbringing, career, and values. Each piece reflects his unwavering commitment to the cause of promotion of peace supported by many years of thorough research. The author

was professor of journalism at the University of the Ryukyus for many years.

ŌYAMA, Chōjō. 1997. *Okinawa dokuritsu sengen* (A Declaration of Okinawan Independence). Tokyo: Gendai Shorin. 206pp. The subtitle of the book, in translation, reads "Yamato [Japan] was not the fatherland to return to." The author is a former mayor of Koza (now Okinawa City), now in his 90s. The book is a bold statement of why Okinawa should be independent of Japan, from Okinawan perspectives. Its historical interpretation of Okinawa-Japan relations is widely shared among Okinawans and may be considered an Okinawan orthodoxy, which for the same reason would be rejected by the Japanese.

Smits, Gregory. 1997. "Unspeakable Things: Sai On's Ambivalent Critique of Language and Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 24/1-2: 163-178. From the title, the reader might infer that Sai On's critique of language and Buddhism is "unspeakably" bad, for that is the first feel of the word, "unspeakable," in ordinary usage. Not so in a more aesthetic or philosophical use of the word connoting that language ultimately fails to describe the true understanding of the essence of things and experiences. In other words, though this is not Smits' point, Sai On anticipates Western "phenomenology" of the 19th Century. How remarkable a philosophical achievement this is hardly requires emphasis. But let us leave the West out. Smits carefully contextualizes Sai On's Confucianism-based thought in the 18th-Century East Asian intellectual climate made of elements from Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and orthodox as well as heterodox derivatives of these main streams. By a close textual analysis of Sai

On's writings, Smits establishes at what point of verbal discourse language clearly fails to advance comprehension of things under discussion. To simplify, once words begin to describe something, no amount of subsequent description will ever generate perfect understanding. Thus, description by language ends up in incompleteness or even in falsehood by standards of "true" understanding of the subject in question. Language reaches an impasse, and one is left speechless, at which point mind-and-heart suddenly attains true understanding of the "unspeakable" essence of things. If this is the nature of understanding, an accomplished person in his mind-and-heart understands things before, not after, these are described. Many quotations from Sai On and Smits' eloquent interpretations will give the reader an "unspeakable" delight.

Tokyo Okinawa Keizai Kenkyukai. 1997. *Bunka tsūshin*, Nos. 62 (January), 63 (March), 64 (May) 8 pp. each. No. 62 contains valuable comments by Professor YAMAZAKI Shinshu on litigations arising from the powers of the central government, under the Local Autonomy Law, to order prefectural and local governments to carry out duties delegated to them (Article 151, para. 2). This provision of the law was invoked against the governor of Okinawa, and the Supreme Court ruled it valid. (See *The Ryukyuanist*, Nos. 35 and 36.) According to Professor Yamazaki, this provision destroys local autonomy by making prefectural and local governments mere sub-units or agents of the central government. No. 64 features an interview with Mr. HARAJIMA Hideki, first "ambassador" of the Japanese government to Okinawa.

### **In memoriam: Professor Martin Bronfenbrenner, 1914 - 1997**

Martin Bronfenbrenner, Duke University's first Kenan Professor of Economics, died of pancreatic cancer at his Durham home on June 2, 1997. He is survived by his wife, Teruko Okuaki Bronfenbrenner; a son, Kenneth Bronfenbrenner of New York; a daughter, June K. Bronfenbrenner-Walker; and a grandson, Brian J. Walker, both of Severna Park, Md.

Professor Bronfenbrenner received his Ph.D. in Economics in 1939 at the University of Chicago and began his long, distinguished academic career at Roosevelt College. He taught, lectured, or conducted research at many universities in the United States and abroad. He also served in the SCAP in Tokyo, the Federal Reserve Banks, and the Department of the Treasury. He authored numerous books, monographs and journal articles. He taught, nurtured, and mentored generations of younger economists and researchers.

Professor Bronfenbrenner's contributions to economics were widely acclaimed during his lifetime and will continue to be honored for years to come. We were all impressed with his rigorous analytical approaches to a wide range of problems, his superb literary skill with unique style and taste, and his spirit of responsible citizenship. His students vividly and gratefully remember what an outstanding, inspiring and dedicated teacher he was.

This mourner was one of Professor Bronfenbrenner's students at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1950s. I treasure the memory of those days. Attending his lectures was a major part of my routine then. He usually came to class ahead of the hour and filled the blackboard with fascinating, multicolored diagrams, tables, and equations for use in his lecture. In each course, I copied everything from the blackboard, took extensive notes of his lectures, and after hours reworked the diagrams, data, notes, etc., which by the end of a semester grew into a small book. I worked with special care this way when I took his famous course on income distribution.

I also actively sought his advice on many theoretical issues whether related or unrelated to the courses I was taking with him. No doubt, I was using up too much of his time, but he was never annoyed by my persistence. He always generously engaged me in theoretical argument and problem-solving. Unfortunately, my rewarding days at Wisconsin were cut short. The U.S. Army, my ultimate sponsor, would not grant me any more extension of stay in the United States. While waiting for another chance to return to graduate work in the U.S., the notes from the Bronfenbrenner courses were my closest companion keeping my hopes alive.

Professor Bronfenbrenner was a world class economist riding high at the frontier of economic theory. At the same time, he was also keenly interested in practical problems. For example, he maintained his interest in the Ryukyuan/Okinawan economy all his life beginning with his participation in a SCAP mission to Okinawa in 1949. ~~The readers of *The Ryukyuanist* will remember his essay, "An Airport Economist in the Ryukyus (November 1949)," (No. 9, Summer 1990). He single-handedly fixed the exchange rate for the Type B military yen currency (B-yen, Ryukyuan currency, 1950-58) at 120 yen to a U.S. dollar.~~

In *Who's Who in Economics* (1983), Professor Bronfenbrenner is cited as having "assisted in keeping general economics alive and making Japanological economics respectable." His "Japanological economics" was as rigorous as his general economics except for the use of different institutional and behavioral postulates derived from Japanese practices. It was still theory-driven economics and quite different from "economic Japanology" of the Japanese studies variety.

Quite fittingly - if one may say so in hindsight - Professor Bronfenbrenner's last paper was on Japan's growth and recession, presented at a meeting of the Japan Economic Seminar in

November 1996, a few weeks before symptoms of his illness began to appear. He continued to teach until the end of March 1997.

Alas, he is no longer with us. We sorely miss his presence. He taught us to strive for an ever higher standard of scholarship combining rigorous economic analysis and sustained concern for justice and fairness. We will honor him by efforts worthy of his memory. (K.T.)

*The Ryukyuanist*, a quarterly newsletter on Ryukyuan/Okinawan studies, is edited by Koji Taira at the University of Illinois Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations (504 E. Armory Ave., Champaign, IL 61820, U.S.A.) and published by Emiko Utsumi at the Okinawa Labor and Economic Research Institute (1-1 Higashimachi, Naha, Okinawa 900, Japan).