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President Clinton and Ryukyuan studies

When President Clinton visited Okinawa to attend the G-8 Summit last July, he first gave a talk at the Peace Memorial Park before he joined the other heads of government at the summit. From his podium, he faced a small audience of Okinawans. Behind them, he saw a sweeping panorama of rows and rows of granite slabs inscribed with the names of Americans, Okinawans, Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, and others, totaling nearly 250,000, who perished in the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. The solemn and somber setting where the dead outnumbered the living in the audience called for a speech that properly honored the dead and comforted the living.

After the obligatory "I am honored to be...", President Clinton struck the right note by saying:

We come to remember those who lost their lives on this island half a century ago, and to honor what must have been their last wish: that no other generation would be forced to share their experience or repeat their sacrifice.

The president united the living and dead by a common wish for peace, appropriate to the setting for his speech. The content of the speech may have fallen short of expectations with respect to practical matters, but even the harshest critics of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa were impressed with the quality of the speech.

The speech ended by recounting a scene from the dramatic demise of the Ryukyu Kingdom: "In 1879, Sho Tai, the last king of Ryukyu, left Shuri Castle for the very last time." As narrated by President Clinton, the deposed king said in a poem attributed to him (in translation): "The time for wars is ending/and the time for peace is not far away/Do not despair/Life itself is a treasure."

Then the president implored:

May Sho Tai's words be our prayer as well as our goal here today.
May the treasure that is our friendship and the spirit of peace continue to guide us in the months and years to come...

Comments

President Clinton's reference to King Sho Tai's poem was a surprise to many Okinawans. No one expected a president of the United States to honor Okinawan history as a source of inspiration in thinking about such world-class values as peace and friendship. Certainly no major Japanese politicians have ever cited anything from Okinawan history for guidance on moral values. The politically much maligned Okinawans have also been conditioned not to attach much significance to their own history. President Clinton's apparently respectful recollection of a part of the Ryukyu Kingdom's legacy sent mysterious shock waves through the dreary psycho-political ambience of Okinawa. (--> p. 4)

Siting Okinawa in Songⁱ

James Roberson

From August 1988 to December 1990, I lived in the Tokyo-Yokohama area, conducting research for my Ph.D. dissertation on working class Japanese.ⁱⁱ During this time there was also a boom in interests among younger Japanese in “ethnic” foods and goods and in “world music.” And, just at that time CDs had been released by Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, The Rincken Band, and The Nenesⁱⁱⁱ which initiated a “boom” in new Okinawan music.

This “Uchinaa Pop” has often been interpreted as “Japan’s contribution to world music,” and generally refers to music which combines traditional Okinawan musical elements (scales, songs, language) and instruments (especially the *sanshin*) together with Western, popular music instruments (electric guitars, keyboards) and elements (rock and reggae beats and scales). My initial interests in Okinawan music were stimulated by the publicity surrounding the original “big three” Uchinaa Pop groups. I too was attracted to the fun, creative “world music” of Uchinaa Pop.

However, I have since come to believe that views of Okinawan music that persist in being fascinated only with its colorful and commercially appealing ethnic “otherness” fail to understand that contemporary Okinawan music and its performance may be “important sources for articulating Okinawan identity” and “means of struggle and resistance.”^{iv}

PLACE, PRIDE AND PROTEST

In “Uchinaa Pop” music, Okinawa is constructed - in the music, its performance, and in lyrics - as a “champurū” (mixed) hybrid

place and as different from Japan. There are also more directly voiced constructions of cultural pride and political protests.

A number of songs follow in the tradition of the folk song “*Jidai no Nagare*,” constructing Okinawa as caught betwixt and between powerful outside forces. The Rincken Band’s “*Yu-Yu-Yu/You-You-You*,”^v in addition calls for listeners not to “forget your gentle kindness.” The concluding lines are:

Yu-You, ah Okinawa
Yu-You, eternally
Yu-You, Japanese era
Yu-You, whatever era
Yu-You, whatever place’s era
Yu-You, whoever’s era
Yu-You, your world
Yu-You, a happy world
Yu-You, celebration world
Yu-You, care free

This bright optimism is put in dramatic relief in Rincken’s movie “*Tink, Tink, Tink*,” in which an energetic live performance is preceded by views of a slow, silent drive down Okinawan streets dominated by the English language signs of businesses which cater(ed) to American soldiers; and, afterwards, by scenes leading to the Mabuni area, site of the Memorial Peace Park.

Other songs construct Okinawa as a hybrid place but, with their points of reference, they remain more fully within Okinawa itself. In “*America Dōri*,”^{vi} performed by the Nenes, a champuru of different peoples, languages and cultures is celebrated. “*America Dōri*” creates a dream-like Okinawa that does not really exist but that, perhaps, could - where American military jets don’t make noise or crash into elementary schools and where GI’s don’t rape 12 year-old girls.

Okinawa becomes more an unbounded cultural space in songs of diaspora. At the same time, Okinawa - where cultural home, family and

friends are - is held close in heart. Songs like "*Ikawū*"^{vii} describe the narrator's feelings on departing (for Argentina), while songs such as "*Nmarijima*"^{viii} describe the longing to return home to Okinawa. Several recent songs - for example, "*Saudade de Uchina*"^{ix} about third-generation Okinawan-Brazilians - sing of returnee members of the transnational Okinawan diaspora.

Many of the hybrid elements of "Uchinaa Pop" simultaneously mark Okinawa as different from mainland Japan. This is heard in the use of Okinawan scales, instruments and songs - including remakes of traditional Okinawan songs. There are also references to aspects of Okinawan culture, for example, *Eisaa* dances. Other songs emphasize Okinawa as a place of natural, and often peaceful, beauty. Though not worn by all, costumes can mark a culturally distinct Okinawanness - traditional hairstyles or *bingata* and Okinawan folk kimono often worn by women and *Eisaa*-style costumes by men. While some songs are written in Japanese, many are written and sung in Okinawan. Because Okinawan dialects are largely unintelligible to Japanese listeners, language is an especially distinctive marker of Okinawan otherness and self-identity. Use of Okinawan dialects also proclaims Okinawan cultural difference and survival in the face of historical assimilationist pressures.

A number of Uchinaa Pop songs, such as "*Shima-gwa Song*"^x by Kina Shoukichi, should be heard as songs of cultural resistance, calling for audiences not to lose or forget their Okinawan identities and language in the face of Okinawa's post-war re-integration into the Japanese state and economic and cultural spheres of influence. Other recent events and current conditions in Okinawa have also been more directly commented

on and protested against. In response to the September 1995 kidnapping and rape of a 12 year-old Okinawan girl by three U.S. Marines, Kina composed a song called "*Shōjo no Namida ni Niji ga Kakaru Made*."^{xi} While not explicit in the lyrics, the "young girl" and the reason for her tears are obvious within the Okinawan context. In 1997, the Nenes (under the guidance of China Sado) released a CD^{xii} which included a number of songs with peace as their theme. "*Nasake Shirazuya*," for instance, excoriates Japanese politicians and "America" for being so uncaring about the lives of Okinawans, even 50 years after the end of World War II.

Daiku Tetsuhiro, meanwhile, gained much attention for his 1997 re-recording of "*Okinawa wo Kaese*."^{xiii} The context of the song includes both the 1995 rape case and the heightened struggle to have U.S. military bases returned to Okinawa and Okinawan landowners. The song begins simply, with *sanshin* and *taiko* - making it more fully Okinawan - and is sung with apparent anger. The refrain also includes an important change, from "*Okinawa wo Kaese*" to "*Okinawa e Kaese*," which transforms the meaning from "Return Okinawa!" to "Return [it] to Okinawa."

CONCLUSION

Uchinaa Pop may, I believe, be heard and seen as part of the expression and construction of contemporary Okinawan cultural politics of local pride and protest. Uchinaa Pop is fun, colorful and different, carrying on and transforming distinctively "Okinawan" music traditions. But, if we listen carefully, we can also hear that it sings of Okinawa's place in the world, celebrates Okinawan difference and at times cries out Okinawan protests.

i A much longer version of this paper, under the title "Uchinaa Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music," is scheduled for publication in a special issue on Okinawan identity in the January-March 2001 issue of *Critical Asian Studies*, formerly the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*.

ii James E. Roberson, *Japanese Working Class Lives*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

iii See: Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, *NiraiKanai Paradise*, (Toshiba EMI, TOCP 6270, 1990); Nenes, *Ikawá*, (Akabana, APCD 1001, 1994); Rincken Band, *Arigatou*, (Wave, EVA 2016, 1990[1987]).

iv Ota Yoshinobu, "Appropriating Media, Resisting Power: Representations of Hybrid Identities in Okinawan Popular Culture," in *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, ed. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 165.

v Teruya Rincken, *Tink-Tink-Tink*, (Tokyo: Sony Records, SRVM 463, 1994).

vi Nenes, *Koza dabasa*, (Ki/oon Sony Records, KSC2 83, 1994).

vii Nenes, *Ikawá*, (Akabana, APCD 1001, 1994).

viii Rincken Band, *Arigatou*, (Wave, EVA 2016, 1990[1987]).

ix Ton Ton Mi, *Saudade de Uchinaa*, (Fukuhara Records, FCD-104, 1998).

x Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, *Kina Shoukichi and Champloose*, (Japan Records, 25JC-357, 1989 [1977]).

xi Kina Shoukichi and Champloose, *Subete no Buki wo Gakki ni*, (Columbia, COCA-14509, 1997).

xii Nenes, *Akemodoro*, (Antinos Records, CDORBD 096, 1997).

xiii Daiku Tetsuhiro, *Chibariyó Uchinaa*, (Ongaku Center, CCD760, 1997).

(Continued from p. 1)

In Okinawan, Sho Tai's poem reads as follows:

Ikusayu n sumachi
Mirukuyu n yagati
Nagikunayo shinka
Nuchi du takara

The last line corresponds to President Clinton's "Life itself is a treasure." This phrase rings as true today as it always has. Having lost so much life in the Battle of Okinawa, the survivors and their descendants have affirmed and reaffirmed the paramount importance of life.

Today Okinawans continue to live under life-threatening insecurity and instability of East Asian geopolitics. The last treasure they have, that is life, can be lost in an unpredictable explosion of hostilities endemic to the tenuous balance of terror in East Asia. When Okinawans chant **Nuchi du takara**, they are reminding the powers that be: "Don't take away our last, and only, treasure that is life itself. Not again!" Despite the last king's best effort to comfort his subjects by hoping for **mirukuyu**, today's Okinawans still "despair" of peace.

Publications (XXXV)

We are grateful for the following gifts of publications, papers, or materials:

Asahi Shimbun. 2000. **Japan Quarterly**, vol. 47, No. 3 (July - September). 120 pp. 1,260 yen. Considerable space devoted to Okinawa. "Okinawa as Pacific Crossroads" by Inamine Keiichi (Governor of Okinawa). "Tales of Henoko (A Photo Essay)" by Nakai Masakatsu. "Soul of Okinawa" by Ōe Kensaburō. "Selected Reading on Okinawa and Security." A review of Chalmers Johnson, **Okinawa: Cold War Island** by Jeff Klingston. Ōe's article is a long, elegiac narrative of the intellectual and social climate of today's Okinawa, a must read for anyone wishing to understand Okinawa's problems in depth.

Gabriel, J. Philip. 1999. "Shimao Toshio's Quest for Yaponesia," **Japan Quarterly**, vol. 46, no. 2 (April-June), pp. 50-59. An interpretation of Shimao's discovery of geo-cultural diversity of Japan. Unlike the "official" Japan as an emperor-centered unitary state of a homogeneous race and culture, Shimao visualizes Japan as a group of islands with distinct cultures, histories, and languages; hence Yaponesia. Shimao owes this new vision to his life in Amami with his Amami spouse. Okinawans have developed an ideological and political interpretation of Shimao's literary inspiration.

Gajumarū. 2000. No. 16 (March). 114 pp. A cooperative publication by "exiles" in Japan from Kikaijima (as perceived by themselves),

edited and published by Yukio Yoshimoto. Yoshimoto reports on his trips to Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama. He found his father's name engraved on the Cornerstone of Peace. Prof. Koriyama writes English poems and translates Kikaijima folksongs into English. The protest against the Japanese SDF's planned "elephant cage" on the island continues. Many more essays, research reports, musings, short stories, etc. by established as well as new writers.

Hōsei University, Institute of Okinawan Cultural Studies. 2000. **Okinawa Bunka Kenkyū** (Studies in Okinawan Culture) No. 26. 379 pp. A collection of papers on historical and ethnological subjects by well-established scholars. Harada Nobuo debunks the description of Ryukyu in the **Song shi** (Song History). Sun Bi (Sun Wei) explains early Ming policy toward Ryukyu with reference to the emperor's gift of the "36 surname groups" to Okinawa. Fukazawa Akito describes in great detail how Ryukyuan embassies to China were organized and managed in the 19th century. Uezu Yasuyuki writes about how Ryukyu's traditional boat race, **Haryūsen kyōsō** (dragon-boat race) was conducted in the pre-modern period. Kawabata Megumu writes on the shaping of the prefectural government after 1879, while Miyahira Shinya comments on the investigation of Okinawa by a leading constitutional scholar of Meiji

Japan, Ichiki Kitokuro. Two papers are ethnological: Kato Masaharu on the rite of beach outing, and Yoshinari Naoki and Shobu Noriko on the diffusions of certain crops via Ryukyu.

Idem. 2000. **Ryukyu no hōgen** (Ryukyuan dialects) No. 24. 131 pp. Examines dialects of Okino Erabujima (Ueno Zendo), northern Ishigakijima (Nishioka Satoshi), Taketomi (Kajiku Shinichi), and Miyako-Nishihara (Nakama Mitunari). Also, Tei Ho (Ding Feng) reconstructs Ryukyuan words from Li Dingyuan's Chinese transliterations in his 1800 book.

Idem. 2000. **Ryukyu ōfuku monjo oyobi kanren shiryō** (II) (Documents exchanged between Ryukyu and Japan and related historical material). 205 pp. Covers the period from 1609, the year of Satsuma invasion of Ryukyu to post-Haneji Reform years (1680s), a dark period before a renaissance in the 18th century. Satsuma even suspended, in 1636-1712, the Ryukyu king's use of the royal title, demoting him to "governor" (kokushi).

Ifa [Iha], Fuyu (1876-1947). 1911. **Ryukyu jinshu ron** (On the race of Ryukyuan). Naha: Ozawa Hakuaidō. 40 pp. From similarities of Japanese and Ryukyuan languages, Ifa Fuyu, a pioneer in Ryukyuan studies, infers that Japanese and Ryukyuan belong to the same **jinshu** (race?). In Ifa's time, discourse on **jinshu** was intuitive and misdirected. Ifa's argument has no scientific merit today. One can only pity the Okinawans of his

time who desperately wanted some excuse for identifying with Japanese.

Idem. 1916. **Ryukyugo binran**. Tokyo: Tōgyō Kenkyūkai and Maruzen. 124, 14, 7 pp. 60 sen. The English title explains: **A Hand-book of the Luchuan Language for the Use of Tourists and Residents**, "subtitled "Being a Guide to Conversations in the Standard Luchuan, to which is added **Ryūgo kaishaku** [an interpretation of Ryukyuan words] written by Giwan Chōho the last Statesman of old Luchu." The main feature is a reproduction of a 1880 classic, **Okinawa taiwa** (Conversation in Okinawan and Japanese) designed for teaching Japanese to Ryukyuan. By 1916 when this book was published, its role had been reversed: now it was useful for teaching Ryukyuan to the Japanese or for helping modern Okinawans re-learn "standard" Ryukyuan (upper class Shuri speech). Ifa Fuyu corrected errors in the original edition and romanized the Ryukyuan pronunciation. More examples of conversation were added from Basil Hall Chamberlain, **Essay in Aid of a Grammar and Dictionary of the Luchuan Language** (1895).

Ijichi, Sadaka (1826-1887). 1877. **Okinawa shi ichimei Ryukyu shi** (Okinawa notes; alias, Ryukyu notes). 5 books. Maps, illustrations, appendix. Ijichi, Japanese government official, frequented Okinawa during the last decades of the Ryukyu kingdom. These notes are products of field work and documentary research. Book I on geography; Book II on

administration and economy; Books III-V on history. The title page prominently displays the copy-editor's (?) name, Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827-1910), together with the author's. Shigeno was a great scholar who later became a professor at Tokyo Imperial University. He also contributes a foreword (one of three) to the Ichiji work. The foreword amounts to a defense of Japan's territorial ambition, which was gathering momentum while these notes were being written and culminated in the 1879 annexation of Ryukyu.

Japan Institute of Labour.
2000. **Japan Labor Bulletin**, Vol. 39, No. 6 (June). "Special Topic: Unemployment Among Young People in Okinawa," pp. 5-10. A useful, statistical description of the state of employment and unemployment in Okinawa. Serves as a framework for more specialized inquiries such as Zenchuro's mentioned below.

Majikina, Anko (1875-1933) and Shimakura, Tatsuji (?-?). 1952. **Okinawa issennen shi** (A millennial history of Okinawa), 4th edition. Fukuoka: Shin Minpōsha. 651, 15 pp. Photos, illustrations, appendix. 600 yen + tax. A standard-setting general history of Okinawa/Ryukyu. Its author, Majikina, is one of the three "founding fathers" of Ryukyuan studies. (The other two are Ifa Fuyu and Higaonna Kwanjun.) Shimakura Tatsuji, who was in Okinawa as chief prosecutor of the local court when the first edition was published in 1923, helped finance the publication. He also contributed a foreword, grossly distorting the book's significance, purposes, and

contents. The new publisher's afterword records why Majikina consented to Shimakura's "co-authorship" (p. 650). The earlier editions even listed Shimakura as the first-named co-author. Either a curious practice of the time or an expropriation of a subject's intellectual property by an imperial official!

Nobori, Shomu (1878-1958). 1949. **Dai Amami shi** (History of Greater Amami). Kagoshima: Amamisha. 576 pp. 850 yen. Ethno-cultural history of Amami Islands. While documentary history is not neglected, emphasis is on the collection, preservation, and systematization of folklores and oral histories. An unusually favorable view of the Ryukyu period of Amami, 1266-1609, in contrast to an equally strong negative view of the Satsuma period, 1609-1871. The author, of Amami origin, was a world-class specialist on Russian literature, greatly appreciated even by the Soviet Union. Driven by a quest for identity, the author collected historical and cultural materials on his native country all his life and poured them into this book after a long successful career as a Russian expert.

Roberson, James E. 2000. "The Okinawans of the Ryukyu Islands," in **Endangered Peoples of Southeast and East Asia: Struggles to Survive and Thrive**, edited by Leslie E. Sponsel. Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, pp. 173-193. A remarkable perception and formulation of life-and-death problems faced by peoples

(e.g. Ryukyuan/Okinawans) lacking military power to fend off inroads of other better armed peoples (e.g. Americans and Japanese). After a review of Ryukyu's geography and history, the author discusses "threats to survival" of Ryukyuan/Okinawans (military, political, economic, environmental, cultural), followed by a narrative of their struggles against extinction including efforts to strengthen and use cultural resources (language, music, song, etc.) for resistance and survival.

Sakaguchi, Tokutaro. 1921. **Amami Ōshhima shi** (History of Amami Oshima). Kagoshima: Sanshudo Shoten. 496, 10 pp. Maps. 4.20 yen. Generally credited as pioneering work on Amami history, though marred by an excessively didactic style under the influence of the emperor-centered statism characteristic of the author's time. He taught middle school in Amami Oshima before promoted to instructor at a Kogoshima normal school. His adoration of Satsuma/ Kagoshima/Japanese history grossly distorts Amami history.

University of Okinawa, Institute of Regional Study. 2000. **Annual Report** (for AY 1999), No. 13. 107 pp. Papers and proceedings of the symposium to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Institute. Under the basic theme: "The future of Okinawa in the Asia & Pacific Region," four panels were presented, each featuring several speakers: (1) Economics in Asia and Okinawa, (2) What a

university should be, (3) The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and responsibility in the 2nd World War, and (4) Environment in the world and Okinawa. Panel 3 is a dialogue between former Nagasaki Mayor Motojima Hitoshi and Professor Arasaki Moriteru. (Text in Japanese)

Zenchūrō Koyō Taisaku Shitsu (U.S. Military Base Employees' Union, Employment Policy Project). 2000. **Okinawa beigun kichi rōdō to koyō kankyō no seibi ni kansuru chōsa hōkokusho** (Report on the Investigations Concerning Employment on the American Military Bases in Okinawa and the Improvement of the Employment Environment Thereof). 47 pp. A study of the employment status of Japanese nationals and their disadvantages on U.S. military bases in Okinawa. Payroll and other expenses for them are borne by the Japanese government. But their "bosses" are U.S. military personnel, giving rise to confusing "labor-management relations." Further, in the social climate where the public opinion favors reduction and elimination of the bases, the base employees suffer from job insecurity. The report makes a number of policy proposals for the elimination of their anxiety.

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