

Okinawan Perspectives on the Formation of Japan's Neo-Patriotism

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Summary

The more one learns about Okinawa, Japan's distorted politics come into one's view.
More Japanese mainlanders ought to realize this fact and raise their voice!

– Toyoko Yamazaki¹

Abenomic Jingoism versus Okinawa

A new form of Jingoism that can be attributed to what Samir Amin calls the “return of fascism in contemporary capitalism” (Amin 2014 : 1) is being permeated in Japan, and Uncle Sam is on its side this time! Latest steps taken by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and his Cabinet to safeguard Japan's corporate-military expansion in the global market are apparently building up a system of oppression which demonstrates a deeply disturbing pattern of escalating infringements on civil liberty, democracy, Peace Constitution, and even basic human rights in the name of national interests. Yet, unlike administrations of North Korea, PRC, and Syria for that matter, this “emergent reactionary dictatorship” receives no apparent restraint from the US government since it is highly committed to the US-Japan Security Alliance (日米同盟), and particularly the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Securi-

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¹ A final passage from *A Destined Person* (運命の人), a 2009 novel turned television drama.

ty between the United States and Japan.²

My aim in this article is to examine this emergent system of “Abenomic Jingoism” (hereafter AJ) in reference to Okinawan perspectives – in order to expose the local emphasis on its bureaucratic absurdness and harmfulness to humanity. A sense of crisis built along such a line of thought is being shared by a greater number of Japanese citizens and their overseas sympathizers by this time in our course of history, thus my more specific interest here will be to uncover the cultural logic of AJ that coats its loyalty to the US-Japan Alliance – and by extension the pro-American system of military capitalism – with an old cultural paradigm of Japanese nationalism in order to revive Japan in its own image. While such a political configuration of imagined community, alias “Japan the Beautiful Nation (美しい国日本)” (Abe 2013), effectively speaks to the corporate mindset of Japanese nationalists, or the collective sense of nationalism within Japan’s privileged populace, its supreme, exclusive and perhaps outdated attachment to national security at the cost of cosmopolitan engagement with cultural diversity is being condemned by a greater number of citizens who feel that Japan ought to overcome what may be more properly called “Abenorisk” and make a serious change towards inter-/national recuperation (e.g., Uekusa 2013).

Motive of the Current Investigation

My reference to Okinawa is motivated by the fact that this region of Japanese colony with its distinct ethnic identification is becoming internationally recognized to be unjustly oppressed by the Japanese state. The Abe administration continuously imposes approximately 74% of the total acreage of all US military facilities in Japan, which sums up to approximately 18% of its total land areas, and corresponding neglect of local autonomy. This, along with assimilations of Okinawan industry, economy and lifestyle to the system of Japanese marketing, has been realized in Okinawa as the “structural discrimination (構造的差別)” upon the lives of Okinawan people. As native Okinawan scholar Yasukatsu Matsushima contends :

The stimulation and development plan of the government was intended to narrow the

2 This treaty was signed in 1952 and amended in 1960 in order to “maintain peace” in East Asia, and it allowed the United States to exert its power on Japanese domestic quarrels. The latter article was deleted in the amended version, and was replaced by articles that demarcated mutual defense obligations.

economic gap between Japanese and Okinawans, but since Japanese enterprises claimed leadership rights in terms of conception and execution, the gap has widened all the more. The government's stimulation and development plan was also linked to the consolidation of American military bases in Okinawa. The Okinawans, who had been made dependent on the stimulation and development plan, were threatened with a decrease in aid money (the "stick" in the "stick and carrot" approach), if they expressed opposition to the military bases, or were led to expect increases in aid, (the "carrot") if they agreed to land reclamation or extension of the stimulation and development plan. In this way, the authorities destroyed the harmony of local communities and labor unions and undermined resistance to the government. The colonial tactic of "divide and rule" is alive and well in 21st century Okinawa! (Matsushima 2010 : 189, 190)

Such a perspective is shared by the people of Okinawa with a catchy phrase of "colander economy (ザル経済)," which signifies subsidized economy that causes more damage than bring benefits to the local society.

Added to this is the Cabinet's attempt to interpretively amend Japan's Peace Constitution and exercise military power in the name of "proactive contribution to the world peace (積極的平和主義)" on July 1, 2014, enforcement of Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets (特定秘密保護法) on December 10, 2014 (an act that rejects people from being politically informed), as well as the administration's undemocratic railroading of security bills (安全保障関連法案) through the Diet by September 19, 2015. This series of events, which meant that Okinawa is to be continuously treated as "a riprap of Japanese nation-state (日本の捨石)", rekindled fury among a large number of the concerned people in Okinawa, generating anew a public outcry that accelerated the extant "struggle with the cooperation of all Okinawan islanders" or "all Okinawa struggle (島ぐるみ闘争)" in short : a mass-scale civil protest against AJ and corresponding rise of public concern on the wellbeing of Okinawa and its future positioning in Asia as well as the rest of our global community (Figure 1).

Okinawa is currently playing a greater symbolic role than ever before in the growing series of nationwide civil movements to "rebuild Japan into a truly peaceful national community" – to borrow the words of Yoshikazu Tamashiro, leading activist, member of Okinawa's prefectural assembly and co-founder of the Committee for All-Okinawa Struggle (島ぐるみ会議). With its 400 years of ethnic struggle against external influences and 130 or more years of annexation by the Japanese government, alongside the painful memories of those who underwent immense suffering during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, the ma-



Figure 1. A scene from the general assembly of All-Okinawa Struggle, held in Nago on September 17, 2015 (photo taken by the author).

majority of people in Okinawa had enough of the “world full of war” (戦世). The “will of Okinawa” to attain a peaceful world (甘世) in which all people coexist in mutual respect is demonstrated to the world as mightier than ever, and such a collective will – often signified by the principle of “bridging all nations (万国津梁)” – is gaining external understanding and sympathy as it attracts public attentions outside of Okinawa.³ In effect, the phony quality of “Japan the Beautiful” is highlighted, inviting more and more Japanese citizens to be collectively conscientious about their political standing, and become critical about AJ and the administrative status of their nation-state.

As an acquaintance of Henoko area in the northern part of Okinawa’s main island since 2005, I have been conducting fieldwork amidst the controversial relocation of US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to the Henoko district of Nago City (辺野古基地移設問題), putting to practice participant observations and interviews on popular protests and mass movements. I am ethnically Japanese, so my analytical focus in the current investigation

3 The idea of “bridging all nations” comes from the part of inscription that appears on a bronze bell that was cast in 1458 to be hung at the main hall of Shuri Castle in the capital city of Naha. The entire inscription reads “The Kingdom of Ryūkyū is a splendid place in the South Seas, with intimate relations with China, Korea, and Japan, between which it is located, and which express much admiration for these islands. Journeying to various countries by ship, the Kingdom forms a bridge between all the nations, filling its land with the precious goods and products of foreign lands; in addition, the hearts of its people emulate the virtuous civilization of Japan and China.”

will be on the reflexivity of Okinawan perspectives on Japan's civil society rather than Okinawan perspectives themselves.

Revisiting Imagined Community

Theoretically speaking, the current investigation is intended to elaborate on the interconnectedness of nation, affect and aversion in post-Cold-War Asia in which we the citizens of global community are witnessing inclinations toward nationalism in various parts of Asia (as much as elsewhere). To better map this out, I wish to revisit Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of "imagined community" in order to evaluate the applied significance of the idea of nationalism to the current relationship between Okinawa and Japan. In proposing the idea of "imagined community," Anderson tried to illuminate nations and nationalisms as sociocultural products of a particular state of modernity, and corresponding state of capitalism, in which people become preoccupied with political identification of a specific kind: i.e., the envisioning of affective bonds within a political territory in which these people are considered to operate as "nationals" – whether or not they actually recognize each other or directly engage in social exchanges with each other. Print media play a crucial role in this national configuration: i.e., facilitating and modulating the imagination of people towards inhabiting the same, discretely measured, homogeneous community called "the nation-state." As Anderson argues:

[Nation] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism (1983: 6-7).

Agents of print capitalism – be they publishers of newspapers, magazines, novels, textbooks, or ads – aggravate national consciousness by upbringing geopolitical issues (fully or partially) in their publications as these agents try to attain a greater number of readers and maximize their profits. People are encouraged to become "national readers" (so to speak) as they participate in the growing market of print capitalism, and in so doing ac-

quire a common language, alias “national tongue,” even though their vernaculars may vary locally. Thus, they become “nationally literate” as they engage in the act of ensuring a coherent, meaningful and homogenous national community (Anderson 1983 : 37, see also Higson 1998 : 355). According to Anderson, all this are part of “becoming native” in our modern nation-state.

This apparently pro-establishment projection of national imagination to be revolving around the cultural logic of print capitalism is subject to a critical revision : however suggestive it may be, Anderson’s emphasis on nationalist literature prevents him from exposing the way conservative administrators co-opt the extant cultural logic in order to keep the system running (and thereby not willing to make any change with respect to public demands), or what happens when nationals do not take the establishment for granted – which makes the current example of Okinawa as a phenomenon representing “struggle for nation” worthy of critical investigation.

What is currently happening in Japan’s civil society that revolves around Okinawa recalls a series of national liberation movements which occurred in Algeria against French colonial subjugation upon the Black people in 1950s and ’60s, which provide us with an insight that nation is not simply a politically-moderated phantom in which collective consciousness manifests itself, but it can be carved out of struggles between the dominant and the dominated classes of people. In such a setting, national consciousness – as an amalgamation of various perspectives and experiences – is constantly formulated, deformed, and reformed through political and symbolic interactions between human agencies with differentiated social standings within one and the same community.

In all fairness to Anderson, his exposition of nationalism as a cultural logic rightly indicates the need of common language in modern nation-state – as a shared means to publicly disseminate the senses of national identity and affect. I would like to relate this indication to Franz Fanon’s demonstration of “oppressive language” in Algeria (Fanon 1961 : see also Zahar 1974) : the one and only coercive language to be imposed by the oppressor (French in the case of Algeria and Japanese in the current case of Okinawa) upon the colonized (Algerian vernaculars or Okinawan “dialects”), against which the colonized ought to fight back in order to reformulate their identities and work in the direction of liberating themselves. In the political economic language of Japanese imperialism, voices of the Okinawan people have long been inaudible – as much as their subaltern subjectivities have been invisibly “invited” into the national imagination of Japan, officially speaking.

Today, after more than 140 years of Japanese colonialization, the people of Okinawa are no longer quiet, and those who have been resisting the idea of “invited Japanese agency”

are managing to raise their voice more loudly than ever before against the oppressive language of AJ, which signifies Japan's continuous treatment of the Okinawan nation as its colony. These disseminated voices from Okinawa are internationally exposing how distordedly and coercively Abe administration tries to conserve the imagined community of "Japan the Beautiful," simply for the sake of insisting upon what dominant bureaucrats, politicians and privileged merchants in Japan today wish to maintain as "safe and secure (安心と安全)" – thus wanting no change which may threaten their positions to occur in the established pro-American system of Japanese politico-economy.

Voices from Okinawa and the Collective Imagination of New Japan

Movements in Okinawa toward the public re-appropriation of Okinawan vernaculars and corresponding collective self-empowerment of the people of Okinawa are growing in face of the increasingly oppressive stance of AJ, and according to my fieldwork observation, some of these movements are hostile toward outside influences (esp. Japanese influences) while others are more or less generous and inclusive. Centered in these movements is a small group of Okinawan ethnic-nationalist intellectuals who engage in organizational- and lobbying activities that aim to attain independence of the people of Okinawa, or Lewchewans (琉球人), from Japan and the US. These activists developed programs by and for Okinawans to revive their own languages and study their heritage : programs that are now widely known as "movements to speak in Islanders' vernaculars (島くとうば運動)," and are being increasingly practiced among educational institutions and local media throughout Okinawa. These activists also publish culturally, socially and politically informed pamphlets and books on related subjects. They send delegates to the United Nations General Assembly in order to register Okinawa on the list of global body's decolonization, and participate in events that aim to build ties with other indigenous peoples of the world. And, in May 2013, they established The Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lewchewans (ACSILs) with the vision of achieving the long-sought goal of Lewchewans to "becoming a sovereign island of peace and hope that exists in friendship with other countries, regions and nations of the world".⁴

4 One may refer to ACSILs homepage (<http://www.acsils.org/>) for greater details of ACSILs. "Lewchew" – after the Kingdom of Lewchew (琉球) – is a cover term the organizing board of this institute use to refer to all people with ethnic origin or lineage in Okinawan archipelago. The quotation comes from a declaration which appears at the outset of ACSILs homepage.

Other more open and collaborative groups of Okinawan and Japanese activists try to generate supportive ties and networks that can eventually develop into a colossal wave of national liberation from AJ in Japan. Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) was perhaps the most solid, well-organized example of these networks.⁵ Its former body came into being as Students Against Secret Protection Law (SASPAL) in 2014, and one of the group's focal activities until its dissolution in August 2016 has been to initiate mass demonstrations against the governments' attempts to relocate Futenma Air Base to Henoko in Okinawa. The Lewchew branch of SEALDs operated between August 2015 and August 2016, co-activating a series of campaigns to fight against AJ with other branches throughout Japan – including the massive protest against security bills in front of the National Diet on August 30, 2015 in which “voices from Okinawa (沖縄の声)” or “Lewchewan outcries (琉球の叫び)” were put forth and recognized by Japanese sympathizers who participated in the mass-protest.⁶

My interview with Tomoki (male, 23 years old, pseudonym applied), one of the leading members of SEALDs Lewchew, in August 2015 revealed that voices of Okinawa he and his colleagues wished to disseminate from Okinawa to the world encompassed three major visions : i.e., “the world in which we the people could decide what is good for ourselves (自分たちのことが自分たちで決められるような世の中),” “the transformation of public sphere from the ‘world full of war’ to the ‘world full of peace’ (戦世から甘世への公共構造の転換),” and “the establishment of a new society in which the principle of ‘reverence for life’ is well implemented (<命どう宝>のプリンシプルが浸透した社会)”.

Fueling these actions are recognitions and supports from artists, intellectuals and prominent activists abroad. In January 2014, leading scholars, peace advocates and artists from North America, Europe, and Australia, including linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky, film directors Oliver Stone and Michael Moore, Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire, historian John Dower, former US military officer and diplomat Ann Wright, and United Nations Special Rapporteur for Palestine Richard Falk, released a statement opposing the construction of the US Marine base at Henoko, and by extension supporting the people of Okinawa in their struggle for peace, dignity, human rights, and protection of the environment. In Japan, 22 scholars, including the Nobel Prize winning novelist Kenzaburo Ôe, Shun'ichi Teranishi, specially-appointed professor at Hitotsubashi University, Ken'ichi Mi-

5 For greater details of this organization, one may refer to its homepage (<http://www.sealds.com/>).

6 For greater details of SEALDs Lewchew, one may refer to the organization's official website (<http://tamutamu2011.kuronowish.com/sealdstyukyu.htm>).

yamoto, emeritus professor at Osaka City University, and Osamu Nishitani, professor at Rikkyo University, released a statement on April 1, 2015 seeking an immediate discontinuation of the new base construction at Henoko. They encouraged other academics to sign the online petition, and aimed to submit collected signatures to the government as well as to send “the Alarm of Peace (平和の警笛)” from Henoko to the rest of our world. Hayao Miyazaki, animator and one of the most outspoken proponents of anti-war policy in Japan, announced on May 7, 2015 that he will officially join the Henoko Fund (辺野古基金), which is a foundation sponsored by a team of Okinawan politicians, CEOs, NGOs and citizens to prevent the relocation of the Futenma Air Base to Henoko. By the time of Miyazaki's participation, the foundation raised over 100 million yen (\$834,064) – part of which was used to support Okinawan Governor Takeshi Onaga to address the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) at its 30th session in Geneva, Switzerland (September 14 - October 2, 2015).⁷

Upon his visit to Okinawa on August 15, 2015, Johan Galtung, Norwegian sociologist and the founder of Peace Studies who introduced to the world the concept of “positive peace” as a way of proclaiming that peace does not only consist of the absence of overt violent conflict but must also incorporate dialogs and mutually collaborative relationships that range anywhere from interpersonal level up to the interstate level (Galtung 1964), criticized Abe administration for plagiarizing his idea in developing the governmental stance to “proactively contribute to the world peace”. Galtung professed that Abe is trying to do exactly the opposite, using the idea of “positive peace” to justify Japan's greater participation in the maintenance of global security, and therefore related implementation of military power as well as Japan's greater involvement in the businesses of warfare. The statement, made during his newspaper interview in front of US Marine Corp Camp Schwab in Henoko in support of protestors, casted doubt on the credential of AJ.

In my group interview in August, 2014 with three female members of a regular protest (Figure 2) taking place outside of the main gate of Camp Schwab (one Okinawan and two Japanese, all in their 60s), the need for Japanese citizens to reclaim positive peace was stressed. As one of these members Kayo (63 years old Japanese, pseudonym applied) said :

7 For greater details on this matter, one may refer to the article by Scott Wilson, ‘Hayao Miyazaki joins Okinawan anti-military base fund’, which appears on the May 10, 2015 issue of Japan Today (www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/hayao-miyazaki-joins-okinawan-anti-military-base-fund on line).



Figure 2. A scene from a mass protest that took place in Henoko on August 23, 2014 [left], and a flyer calling for this rally [right] (photo taken by the author).

Japan's political misbehavior in Asia and elsewhere is becoming truly intolerable from the standpoint of democracy, and even as more Japanese people are starting to realize this, and are raising their voice by coming to Okinawa like myself, it does not seem to be enough. We should cherish our Peace Constitution, act out its principle positively, and recreate our nation-state before it is too late. I am here with a determination of not giving up such an idea – no matter what!

Toshiko (Okinawan local resident, exact age unrevealed, pseudonym applied) nodded as Kayo was speaking, and added her perspective onto the statement above :

As an Okinawan I appreciate the fact that so many supports for Okinawa are being developed in and outside of Japan, but all of these supports are not enough to move the Japanese government towards listening to the people's voice, unfortunately. Unless those members of the administration admit what they are doing, and side with the people, I think that Japan will never become a truly peaceful nation – no matter how eloquently the idea of "Japan the Beautiful" is politically accentuated.... We all urgently feel that Japan ought to change into a truly democratic- and constitutional nation!

Thus, the need for reimagining Japan on a democratic basis was reminded.

Summary

Through the current preliminary investigation of the superimposed image of “Japan the Beautiful Nation” (and relevant imagination) in this era of post-imagined community, I tried to uncover how Okinawa stands as an oppositional emblem of internal diversity that the state cannot ignore – should it wishes to uphold its democratic- and constitutional legacies. Abe’s attempts to counterfeit Japan to be virtuous by replacing the nation-state’s democratic stance with neoconservative leadership, and amending its Peace Constitution interpretively in the direction of pro-security militarism in the name of “positive peace” is becoming heavily criticized by a greater number of Japanese citizens and their overseas sympathizers than ever before. Abe’s response to impose the idea of “Japan’s positive involvement in the maintenance of world peace” through militarized capitalism is refuted by the proponent of the very idea of positive peace to be “dangerous” after all. In effect, the characteristic of Japan’s national image as an ideological veil to cover up the administration’s ugly moves to militarize the country for the cost of people’s lives is becoming all-too-apparent with respect to popular voices from Okinawa that demand the state to live up to the imagined peaceful community.

I hope to have shown in the light of Okinawan voices against AJ how a “post-imagined community” may evolve as a critical alternative to the political fabrication of imagined community by the dominant group of national administrators : the media, ranging anywhere from newspapers, televisions programs, books, and fliers to blogs and SNS (dominant and alternative alike) certainly play an important role in the public configuration of such a community, but the community (and its collective imagination thereof) can be more properly understood as being carved out through concrete actions and collaborative interactions among willed citizens who wish to engage in networking, solidarity building, and working together in the direction of social change. In such a social setting, the sense of nation, which consists of affective ties between concrete individuals, is far from an ideological phantom that the government tries to project.

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