

**Liminal Island:
Academic Essays on Yonaguni**

Edited by Patrick Heinrich

Introduction

Yonaguni is a remote place. It marks the southwestern end of the Ryukyu Islands and the end of Japan. Not only is Yonaguni geographically remote, also the sea that flows along its shores is rough. The powerful Kuroshio current presented once a mighty obstacle to reach Yonaguni. As an effect of its isolation, Yonaguni has often been described as a world of its own. However, there is also another story about Yonaguni. The island is also a liminal place. The academic essays that are collected in this catalogue thematize Yonaguni's liminality rather than its remoteness. Remoteness is, after all, simply a matter of perspective. For many Yonaguni Islanders of the past, this isle in the open ocean has been the center of their life. There are many islanders for which this still holds true.

Despite its remoteness, outsiders have always imposed change on Yonaguni. The following articles are mainly tales of contact and change. The island's status has changed from an independent island community to a part of the Ryukyu kingdom before it was absorbed into the modern Japanese state. Yonaguni Islanders, Dunantu in their own language, had never asked for these changes, nor were their opinions ever consulted. After 1945, Yonaguni was first under US occupation and was then 'reunited' with Japan in 1972. Between these ruptures are periods of transition and uncertainty. We call these experiences liminoid, and the places where they take place liminal spaces.

A typical example of a liminal space is a hallway. It marks the transition from one part of a building to the next. In similar fashion, Yonaguni went through liminal phases in its transition from an independent community half a millennium ago to its present state as the 'end of Japan' in the west. Also today the situation in Yonaguni is one of uncertainty. More change is on the horizon, but liminality is a process that **it will** always eventually dissolve. A new situation will stabilize. What this new situation will be like is not clear, though. Neither to Yonaguni Islanders nor to scholars studying Yonaguni's culture, society, language, or history.

In our essays, we look back, take stock of the present, and we look ahead. We explore political, cultural, societal, educational, and linguistic transformations. All included periods of uncertainties pertaining to various aspects of life. Hierarchies, knowledge, rituals, education, and language have changed, and we report about these transformations. Many things have been forgotten, other are on the verge of getting lost. We have witnessed efforts to maintain them, and we have listened to and recorded regrets about this. As we publish these essays, in 2021, Yonaguni is at a threshold. Liminality is a reality in Yonaguni today, and this implies that we do not simply observe a transition from one state to another, but that we witness a separation from a reality as we once knew it. Liminality in this sense is all around. It can be

heard, seen, and observed. It can be captured in photos, films, sounds, interviews, sketches, and transcriptions.

Yet, there is no clear-cut segmentation of Yonaguni's past. Feudal practices and attitudes, for example, survived long after the dissolution of the Ryukyuan kingdom. Elderly in Yonaguni often told me how severe their grandparents had been. These grandparents had been born in the period of the Ryukyu kingdom. While the kingdom is by now almost 150 years dissolved, these grandparents had shaped the elderly with whom I and other authors of this section have interacted during our sojourns on Yonaguni. They were hard and humble workers, and they were regretful if not critical of many changes they have had to live through.

Experiences and attitudes do not align easily. Each generation on Yonaguni had their own formative events in their youth. War, language oppression and economic boom years for the old, depopulation, social ageing and stagnation for the middle generation, and the arrival of the military base, the subsequent division of the community, and the development of high-sea fishing and scuba-diving tourism for the young. The very same present is therefore experienced differently. The elders see the new military base as a reminder of the past. Some associate it with air raids, death, malaria outbreaks, other remember the economic boom in the postwar years when Yonaguni had also seen outsiders arrive. Those who lived through the stagnating decades after 1960, see the construction of a base in Yonaguni as a major rupture. All they have known is outmigration and decline. For the young, the war, the postwar boom, work in the fields or the Dunan language is but anecdotes of a remote past. They have never known such a world. They have never been part thereof.

The transitions and the various experiences of change and liminality are sedimented differently in individuals. People note this. The young are seen to lack knowledge of the past, while the old are seen to be out of touch with the present day. Of course, this is the case pretty much everywhere across the modern world, but Yonaguni has also seen a deviation of such intergenerational pattern in recent years. We find in Yonaguni today a wide-spread concern that only elderly members are in possession of much local knowledge and their accompanying skills. There is a sense that these have been abandoned too quickly. The rapidly decreasing number of experts on language, religious ritual or ancestral practices is perceived with a sense of alarm today.

The Yonaguni community is diversifying at the same time. Most young people leave after middle school, but there are also newcomers to the island. Spouses, diving instructors, seasonal workers, mainland Japanese retirees, military personal and their family are nowadays a common feature of Yonaguni's society.

The new demographic make-up of Yonaguni is also an effect of liminality. The relations between Yonaguni Islanders and newcomers, between young and old are malleable and fluid. Novices become experts, students become teachers, outsiders become insiders. The best new speaker of the local Dunan language, for example, is from the Japanese mainland. He arrived in Yonaguni after he graduated from high school and stayed. That was 30 years ago. In general, however, people come and go. Some come and go all the time. Today, the sole remaining priestess arrives by plane for important ceremonies. The airfield has become one of the main places where one runs into an acquaintance nowadays.

Yonaguni has also been a liminal experience for us academics writing here. We have studied and experienced some of the changes that are discussed in the following. We have also studied Yonaguni or developed an interest in it at some point in our careers, and we then moved on to other places and other topics. There are not that many people around who could write an academic essay on Yonaguni. I am therefore grateful for everybody who took up the task to look again at Yonaguni, returned to the studies they once conducted, and shared their knowledge about this green island surrounded by a raging sea. I have not talked with my colleagues about this, but I assume that they miss Yonaguni, too: its people and horses, beaches and landscapes, inns and shops, its graveyards and natural shrines. It has been a pleasure to return to Yonaguni by writing, and I am glad that we have been given the opportunity to write these essays that accompany an art exhibition on Yonaguni. I hope that we can contribute to the appreciation this exhibition deserves, and, more than anything else, that we do justice to Yonaguni and its people.

Japan Far-out:
on the Island of Yonaguni

WHY YONAGUNI?

An art project about an island where I did serial fieldwork across a period of three decades grants me the opportunity to try out another lens for viewing the island: From afar and with a look back on anthropological fieldwork itself.

Yonaguni is the south-westernmost island of Japan and proximate enough to Taiwan for that island’s central mountain massif to be visible on days when the haze above the sea lifts. With daily air services to Ishigaki in the Yaeyamas when I first arrived in 1976, I realized that this was an island far less shut off than that of Izu Aogashima far to the northeast where—a few years before—I had experienced regular steamer service only twice a month. In the whole area of maritime East Asia, where I also did fieldwork among the Yami on the Taiwanese island of Lan Yu, the Black Current (*Kuroshio*) encumbers casual island-to-island travel to a considerable extent. But even so, the Yami group of people off the southern tip of Taiwan build ocean-going canoes. They are skilled divers; they equip themselves with goggles and drive-in nets for fishing. Islanders in the northeast, on Izu Aogashima and islanders far south, on Lan Yu, gain sustenance from the seasonal schools of migrating flying fish. In Melanesia, to stretch this juxtaposition of island places by some degree, people go from one island place to the other, by canoe, without having to battle constant ocean currents. Moreover, they make use of such ease of access for trade and barter. Yonaguni differs in all these aspects.

AWAY FROM THE SEA

In Japan, it is quite common to hear the phrase *shimaguni dakara* when cultural character is the topic: “because this [Japan] is an island country.” The shared experience could be one of being locked in by the sea rather than being inspired by the vista it offers for opening up.

Yet, unlike feudal Japan, the Ryukyus cultivated trade links across a wide Asian maritime expanse. A dynastic power upheld a seat at Shuri, Okinawa Island, between 1429 and 1879. Tribute trade enabled seafaring status. The Ryukyu king paid obeisance to the Chinese emperor to make himself worthy of this privilege of region-wide trade. The Black Current posed no hindrance: the seaworthy junks built on Okinawa Island traveled along the Asian sea-lanes with the seasonally shifting monsoon winds. It is hard to imagine any other contact with the Asian continent than via the harbor at Naha on Okinawa Island, from where the pan-Asian trade network could be accessed. Yonaguni had no client status of its own within this maritime order; the sea-lane from the island pointed northward only, toward the harbor at Naha on Okinawa Island.

I arrived at Yonaguni in May 1976 and took up residence in a vacated farmhouse that had branched off from a *daamutu*, an Origin House. House identity is a primary factor of identity in Okinawa Prefecture as in Japan itself. The branched-off house retained its integrity even if vacant. My occupation of the homestead would make it easier to perpetuate its ritual status. One aspect of this was sweeping the coral-sand covered front yard soon after daybreak. People in my neighborhood, of what was the south-coast village of Higawa (*Ndimura*), turned out to be farmers, of sugarcane and paddy rice. Paddies are sheltered from the salty spray from the sea; some have a deep, fertile mud bottom. Moreover, as I watched in the Philippines as well: Water buffaloes are more suited for plowing than motorized equipment.

This was not a mere observation; I would learn that my neighbors *identified* themselves as people of the land rather than the sea. There could be talk—also when the subject was that of annual ritual—of bounty from the fields but not of good catches from the sea. Previously, in the outer Izus on the Pacific side of Japan proper, I had been listening to talk about getting a good catch of fish. Now I learned that identity and ecology could be quite divergent matters. It was only with a contemporary influx of specialized fishers from the Itoman area of Okinawa Island (since the early 1900s) that Kubura in the western part of the island became a *fishing* village.

Few people in Higawa would go down to the white, sandy beaches. Not even children were roaming there, even with the elementary school situated right above. Sashimi (slices of raw seafood) was considered just an occasional treat: relished with chili rather than wasabi. One fishmonger set up a small household business, procuring fish from Kubura. But after some months, she gave up. Before cash was readily available, people would practice barter to get fish. Those with nothing for exchange would go to the rice fields after heavy downpours to pick up snails. Snail consumption ended with the introduction of chemical fertilizers, however.

As I could see myself, standing on overhangs with a view down to clear water: The sea was teeming with fish. Fishing with rod and tackle was considered a pastime, a luxury to indulge in between the peak activity of rice and sugarcane planting. In the shallower waters off the mangrove-covered coastline of Iriomote in the Yaeyamas, I had spotted fish-traps. The jagged coastline of Yonaguni may not have invited the application of trapping techniques. But soon I became aware of another way of obtaining edibles from the sea.

At extreme low tide during moonlit nights, people would walk out onto the coral reef flats with bamboo harpoons equipped with iron

tips. I joined. We speared fish caught up in small ponds. It struck me that we were not fishers but collectors. There was not much difference between gathering snails in the paddies and fish in shallow seawater ponds along the exposed coral reef. Later on, on the island of Ogami off the island of Miyako, I would observe such activity of collecting fish and seaweed edibles at daytime low tide. What I witnessed and took part in was probably the way Ryukyu islanders had been reaping edibles from saltwater centuries back. But like most of the other villagers of Higawa, I was more consistently preoccupied with the cultivation of crops: in a spacious kitchen garden and sometimes with my neighbor, in his sugar-cane field. I adapted to life as a farmer with a notebook, and it happened that I filled my quota of harvesting five tons of sugarcane a day.

People in a deep past may have been harvesting the reefs, so why did transition to dry ground and field cultivation become the norm? One possibility to consider would be the effect of religion: Souls of the dead pass into the sea and the realm of the *nira*. This mythic motif turned articulate in every instance I experienced of joining search parties for missing persons, and in their aftermath: When saving the souls of those who were left behind in a shocked state of mind. In one such tragic event, a woman was rescued just as the flow was reaching her legs. This made me rethink the issue of reserve toward the sea.

Were people sheltering themselves from a mind-effect of the sea, a pull from a receding swell of the ocean reaching into the very soul matter of their lives? But could such avoidance of the sea by people in Higawa be entirely a choice of their own? Gradually, however, I became aware of the somewhat terser and unquestionably non-religious possibilities.

FACING THE WORLD OUTSIDE

Pirate attacks from the sea and the transfer of entire villages to locales guarded by hills and ridges appear as motifs in narrative and ritual. The marauders were ‘alien people’, ‘large country people’ (*ikokujin-taikokujin*). The threat was real. The *wakō* sea pirates intercepting tribute trade routes from the north posed a severe threat even to the regional interests of Ming China. Yonaguni came under the sway of the Ryukyu royal rule early in the sixteenth century. The kingdom was militarily defeated in 1609 by the Satsuma clan of Kyushu Island, Japan.

Populations in the southernmost part of the archipelago were subjected to a harsh poll-tax regime demanding payment in rice and woven fabrics. This was the most strongly felt effect of the defeat. I became familiar with stories of suffering that had passed on throughout the generations. They brought attention to the

themes that people themselves wanted me to write down when the talk was conversational. One head of a *tuni*—a plot with a house offering space for community ritual—said to me while watching the moon during the lunar eight-month ritual for male guardianship. “We worship the moon for the light it shed on the workplaces when our ancestors struggled to meet their quotas of rice-payment.”

People on Yonaguni turned to field cultivation in a state of virtual serfdom imposed by Japanese feudalism. They abandoned the areas on the fringes of sandy beaches. Yet they held on to the knowledge of how to harvest the coral reef, and they accessed it not by swimming or sailing but by walking at low tide. With their cargo junks, Ryukyu royalty made a visible presence along the seaways. Yet isolation was *brought upon* the island of Yonaguni by the very same authorities that cultivated connections with distant places in Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Non-authorized visits called for reserve. One story goes like this:

I was walking along the Haibaru rice fields when some Tuu people were suddenly standing there, right in front of me. They had alighted from a ship. They had the eyes of goats. Do they really look like I do? They were saying things with their hands. I startled, for this was dangerous, dangerous!

Tuu is the word for China, but sometimes it just alludes to a diffuse outside world. Most likely, the encounter that took place was with Europeans.

I added a sub-project in the Yaeyama group for studying the kinship arrangements behind the grand annual ceremonies of masked gods arriving from far-away locations. Some of these mask cults recast an appearance of *divine* harbingers of bounty (*yuu*). I told a neighbor of mine of going to these places in the Yaeyamas. His words, after a moment of contemplation: “If I were to go there—to Kobama Island—I would finish my business as quickly as possible—heading straight down to the boat for the return.” I would repeatedly listen to a story given as a cause for such reserve:

A man from Kobama Island had saved Yonaguni from depopulation (after corsair attack in one version, after assault by a monstrous dog in another). He killed a dog who was the partner of the lone survivor, a woman.

At the time of fieldwork, this story was recited to me in slightly different versions, but a common feature was that of an end-point of events at a monumental rock with a flat (*ita*) surface. Here, the woman had been spotted embracing the bones of the

slain dog before committing suicide. For an annual observation, I joined a group of worshipers headed by female priests. The main act was that of splashing a white, slightly fermented rice mash (miti) upon the stone. The skeletal remains of the dog were associated with a linked site, the **inugang**, one that was not accessed by the priests. One woman connected the event of the past with her own life circumstance: She had declined a marriage proposal when learning that the suitor was a native of the island of Kobama.

Even with an overall experience of being Ryukyuan by descent, what matters in daily life is an attachment to localized island places and their histories. But this way of looking back does not position the flat-surfaced stone merely as an object of memorial. Along with other palpable waypoints, it is rather a mark for *breaking with* a past, in this case, one sullied by bestiality. Ancestral lives were steeped in tragedy.

But looking back can also kindle an auspicious association. I discerned a connotation with celestial power. Some islanders ascribe an overarching identity to the former apex of Ryukyu: To the dynastic king and the sun. The trope evoking such association is this: *tiida'n ganachi*, 'king of sun'. People in Higawa were facing the celestial influence in the mornings when praying at an upright stone on the eastern side of the house compound. The sun enlivens human bodies. And also, there are the stars: Seven in the sky of the north and seven in the south. I watched a guardianship from above (*ninuha'umyaa*) invoked in life-saving rituals arranged on the front side of houses. One set of burning charcoal incense sticks would intercept starlight from the north, in the zodiacal interstice of the rat; another would intercept it from the south, in the zodiacal interstice of the horse.

Rituals of extinct or existing village areas highlight the vicissitudes of bygone days. Out in the open, in inhabited as well as vacated house-compounds of Origin Houses—the *daamutu*—women flaunt swords, spears, halberds, and bow-and-arrow. The idea of protection—even as it materializes as a worship of weaponry—plays out one specific role as essential, that of woman-as-(younger) sister: the *bunai*.

Some *bunai* wear glass bead headdresses, *tama*, in these enactments of the past. Nevertheless, the tools for the duels that they stage in mimicry of battles are also identified by the same word. The basic meaning is 'gem' or 'jewel'. The *daamutu* houses defend (metaphorically in our time) against attacks by sea pirates. Tracks laid out by high spirits run across the island and even beyond. Shamans can perceive these lineaments as exuding the glimmer of silk. They connect one sacred place with another. The enacted dramas allot a role for women quite unrealizable in

the larger Japanese society. Ceremonial visits to these places take place throughout a 25-days period in the cold season. Whatever there might be of remains—such as a stone-gate or stonewall—have long since merged with thick bush. Raised stones that may still be standing there, the *bidiri*, bring to attention lives that have drifted off into the broader ancestral category of heroic ancestors, whether female or male.

The fight for survival, whether against a tax-exacting bureaucracy at the capital or an erratic enemy of pirates roaming the seas, was sublimated into a technique of stylized mimicry. The stark image of defense was enveloped by the aesthetics of ornament and the verdure of the island itself.

Arrivals from the unknown beyond the horizon were welcomed, however, if seasonal and predictable rather than erratic. One ancestral house in Sonai (*Tumaimura*)—the Umata—celebrated still in the early part of my fieldwork a past of bringing the secrets of crop cultivation and animal husbandry from the great land of *Tuu*—China. A big conch shell in the garden has a match in a distant place, I was told. The other half has been spotted in a house compound on the Fujian coast. The family treasures—*tama*—on a brief display could be touched only by women with kin ties to the house-head. (I was urged not to enter the inside of the house.) The drumming made by one member of the group escalated the ban even more.

Standing stones mark a pivot in the rear of lightly constructed bush shrines, the *ugang*. But could there be human bones buried below the sandy surfaces of these roofed frames? When a shrine—the *ndi-ugang*—of Higawa needed total rehabilitation I, and other people as well, were confronted with the actuality of sacred sites having been set up on burial sites. If true—if there really were human bones buried beneath the topsoil of a shrine compound—could it still be considered a clean place? A woman in the house next to mine, said: "You must come to the *ndi-ugang*! Bring with you your camera, for they have discovered a god!" Her husband, a carpenter-cum-sugar cane farmer had been replacing the old tiled structure on wooden legs with a concrete structure when the hole in the ground made for the foundation revealed the top of a rectangular stone slab. Those were the words I heard on-site: "A god has been found—its soul—but not its body." The absence of bodily remains brought relief. With that—no skeletal remains—the purity of the place was intact.

Bush shrines evoke the same kind of purity as the stones with glimmering surfaces. This carries some practical implications. Even if arrangements out in the open along the spirit trails during the ritual season in winter months call for festive meals, recipes would have to exclude meat. In fact, even the slightest amount

of fat from four-legged animals, as in a noodle soup, is strictly prohibited if attending the rituals. I decided that the best option for myself was to pay attention to the ban for the entire 25-day period of visiting bush shrines. After all, even the butcher on the outskirts of Sonai Village found a good reason to shut the doors of the slaughterhouse for the time being.

DEEP PAST AND NEAR PAST

Soon after arriving on Yonaguni, I would be listening to recollections from a past when the island was part of the Ryukyu kingdom. I came ninety-seven years after the fall of the Shō dynasty. But some stories took the listener's attention far beyond that event horizon emerging with the early 16th century and royal rule. I realized that people did not think of their origin as similar to that of populations in the greater maritime area of the Yaeyamas. Distant ancestors, people said in Higawa, had migrated from the south, from two islands: the *Ubudunang* and the *Haidunang*. *Ubu* means 'high'; *hai* means 'south'. Let me recapitulate some of the narrated exemplars of early life on the island.

In the deep past, people parted with their dead relatives by consuming their flesh. So the story goes. In anthropology, this is what goes by the name sarco-cannibalism. So, people do not necessarily want to paint a rosy picture of the bygone. On the Philippine island of Palawan, where I have been doing fieldwork in recent years, people take issue with the practices of their ancestors; they execute an annual ritual which decries an assumed past with child sacrifice. There is a logical twist to this: The (good) human condition can be realized only by uncovering its opposite. In both instances, Ryukyuan and Philippine, the message is this: No ritual, no human emotion. The abominable acts of a distant past play out the negative restatement: No empathy. In these islanders' versions, empathy is not a product of an inner life of the person, but rather, of an outer life of collectively enacted visualization. Some people I talked with discerned traces of that past in the way bony pork meat was included in today's Yonaguni funeral.

I would witness the opening of family tombs after a fixed lapse of years after death, for cleaning the remains and re-assembling the bones in a lidded ceramic jar. The rear of the vaulted chamber would be the final resting place. On the way to the tomb opening, an umbrella was held over the still open jar to shield the sun from the matter of death.

In one sense, the purity restrictions resemble those of Shinto religion on the main Japanese islands. For example, in the case of shrine renovation, remaining wood would be left to decay naturally in the bush around the new shrine. In another sense, it differs. From previous fieldwork in the outer Izu Islands I

could, as a male fieldworker, visit any sacred site. For women below middle age, entering the inner area of one particular bush shrine was considered not an option at all. On a revisit in 2006, this was still the rule. The gender part of the purity equation was here—in the southern Ryukyu islands—entirely the opposite. In the Yaeyamas, entry by males inside the shrine grounds, through an arched stone-gate, is thwarted by a taboo. At the sacred sites on Yonaguni, the rule is less strict. But within the sacred sites, it is always women who play the lead roles. Men would be their helpers, kin-group representatives, or community headmen just showing up to pay their respects.

The *daamutu* shrines are remains of an age when Ryukyu royalty tried to match the indigenous power structures on the island with a power structure of its own. Women performing under the aegis of the Kingdom—they could be the partners of envoys—distinguished themselves from the *daamutu* sisters by donning yellow hemp robes and affixing a turtle-shell hairpin to their coiffure. They were the *k'a*, female priests of the island. The origin house sisters, the *bunai*, donned their own Ryukyu-style stencil-dyed kimonos and ornamental headdresses. The *bunai* may be upholding an indigenous version of society order even today:

A sister may return to her house of birth anytime she likes, as when there are prayers at the raised stone in the house-compound: for the half moon and for the full moon. She is back at her house of birth, sometimes twice a month, for exerting ritual guardianship. She replenishes the evergreen leaves in two flasks flanking a stone altar, and she lights sticks of charcoal incense upon a flat stone supporting a standing stone. (The leaves connect the place with a nearby ridge or mountain.) At a high-status, daamutu house, the grander ritual arrangements call for a dual presentation of food offerings: one from the brother (the bigi-nu-ihati), the other from a sister (the bunai-nu-ihati).

I realized, while resident in the south-coast village, that while the sister of the house returns twice a month to perform a ritual function *outside*, at the stone altar (*niibai*), the wife exerts a ritual function *inside*, at the fireplace. For it is the wife of the house, never a sister, who cares for fire-god (*the chi-nu-kang*). He is no other than the Chinese kitchen-god. The local order demands a preference for woman-as-sister. The larger realm of a kingdom leaning on Chinese ceremonial imposed a priority for woman-as-wife.

A woman with sisterly privileges may herself be a member of a women's cult group (*aramidi*) celebrating, once a year, the water of natural springs. In that capacity, as well, she attaches herself not to the house of her husband but to that of her brother.

She prays at water pools along the sandy beaches or along streams in the island interior for *his* benefit. She seeks a constant effect from crystal-clean water by transferring a sample to a house-shrine. It has a set of charcoal incense sticks at the center and vases with evergreen leaves on the flanks. It intercepts the east-west axis of the house, never the one of north-south. An aesthetic element comes out in her prayer as fundamental to this magic: The trickling pattern (*min-nu-chiru*) left by freshwater upon white beach sand.

In her lifetime, a Yonaguni woman never really breaks with her house of birth. In the larger society of Japan, by contrast, there is no return. At the time of fieldwork, there was already some indication of a clash of values. One woman married to a *daamutu* head said to me that the place in house affairs accorded to the sister was like a “sin.”

The *bunai* of the island sacred sites sustain the identity of a house with a history back to an age of heroic ancestors. The hereditary female priests, the *k'a*, while keeping attention to their own maternal lineages, pray for a bounty in the whole island, especially during pre-harvest and harvest rites. They seal a belonging to the island (they are not expected to leave it for long duration) by staging an annual ritual at a watch-hut at the east cape. The purpose is safe passages of cargoes to the main island of Okinawa. Here, at the watch-hut, they are guardians of the fireplace. That is precisely the function expected of a woman-as-*wife*.

EMANATIONS FROM YESTERDAY

The *bunai* of the origin houses attend to the matter of living things, a ‘world of today’: the *sunka*. Other women act in shamanic roles, as ‘knowers’, *munuchi*. They attend to matters of dead things, a ‘world of yesterday’, the *nunka*. The shamans serve clients individually, offering protection from whatever there may be of emanations from tomb or sea. Shamans can be spoken of (sometimes with a touch of irony) as surrogate sisters. One *munuchi* had returned to the island from an extended stay on Okinawa Island.

In 1976, she was sure about here seeing faculties, but not about mastery of prayer gloss (the *usutui*). So, she was happy to glean from my notebooks when I finished the day’s work on my transcriptions. On my return during the years of serial fieldwork, she told me about how she was now on the way to achieve fluency. At one time, she suspected that my own body souls had gone astray. I had suffered a car accident while en route to Yonaguni, and she discerned—in my countenance—that something might have gone wrong.

She ordered a ritual to be staged on the white, sandy beach at

Higawa. I received a knotted hemp amulet (nine knots) to hold the souls, once caught, in place. The medium of such decisive action was a chicken that I was told to launch into the sea. It quickly made it back to the water’s edge. And with that, the case was closed. The soul-catching action was deemed successful. Fowl for soul sealed a swap with the *nira* female deity of the wet interiors: Of coral seabeds and the cavernous limestone places of the island itself. I incinerated sufficient quantities of mock celestial currency sheets in a kerosene can to ascertain such a happy outcome. It was most obviously a quid pro quo. A neighbor cooked the chicken for dinner the same night.

Some years later, she once again wanted to interview me. I was collaborating with a former chief headman of the island in verifying a map of sacred places and their proper names. She joined and took an interest in the map. “This is exactly what I have needed all along! I cannot perform my function [as a shaman] without being able to recite these place-names.” She ordered a helper at her house to draw a copy. Later on, the same day, while in conversation about the significance of cosmic directions, there was a creaking of birds outside the house. The time was nine in the evening. “This is a warning,” she said. “Go and fetch the calendar; I must know what day it is.” She scanned the calendar, the lunar Chinese edition, and ruminated for a while. “Yes, this is what I suspected; what a bad day this is.” “Please, go outside to find out where this noise comes from.” I did, and reported back to her that the birds had congregated in the trees of the next compound to the west. She asked me if I was sure there is no activity inside her own house yard. I assured her: I couldn’t see any birds there. She appeared somewhat relieved. But even so, she then exclaimed: “I know something is going to happen! Let’s just wait for it.”

The entry of divination texts after the Ryukyus became part of Japan may have heightened this sensitivity to auspicious directions. There are specialists, inevitably males—the *sanjinsoo*—who can authorize the readings of the book, the Takashima Ekidan. During early morning strolls, I noticed that many villagers start the day poring over it. I came across annually updated versions in Tokyo bookstores. Therefore, when displaying Yonaguni artifacts in a museum showcase at the University of Oslo, I put a copy alongside a pile of money for the ancestors: sheets of stamped brown paper that originally had been exported from Taiwan to Okinawa for deployment in local ancestral rites.

Alignments and your own position—at any time, any place—are crucial elements of well-being: people on Yonaguni orient themselves in space as east and west rather than right and left. I sometimes helped a neighbor in his sugarcane field. “Pick up the cane to the west,” he would say, even if ‘west’ was only a few feet away. House architecture replicates a scheme that in one version

orients the interior sacred places toward the east and in another, as in a reverse image, toward the west. Only the *daamutu* houses are expected to adopt the blueprint of west-as-sacred. However, burial places lie to the west and to the north of settlements. Then, why would the purity sensitive *daamutu* houses want to align themselves in a way that exposes them to a drag from *nunka*, the yesterday with its nefarious signs? The answer I received was quite consistently that *daamutu* places gravitate, rather, toward the great land of *Tuu*—China—which lies to the west. This is not a pull from places of death but from places of life, as it is *today*. The west releases seeds for agricultural regeneration, glass beads for ornament, and weapons for protection.

Contrary forces are at play in the lives of people, as deadly emanations from the depths of the sea, as felicitous emanations from across the sea.

CONCLUSION

In finalizing this moment of looking back, the crucial issue is not one of Yonaguni’s remoteness. It is only when the perspective extends outward from the nation’s capital and the gravity exerted by the imperial crux that Yonaguni lies somewhere out in the distant periphery. For my Higawa neighbors, the commonsensical question to ask when I returned after a visit to Tokyo was this: “Have you been to Japan again?” When it is not Mt. Fuji, but a mountain massif of Taiwan that emerges from above the mist on crisp cool-season days, the perspective might indeed be different, even for things in general, and not to forget, for women and men.

Rice Island, Satellite Island,
Border Island: Yonaguni Across Time

A language connects the people who speak it, and it divides them from those who do not. Yonaguni deserves our attention already because this small island of 28 km² has its own distinctive language. The language is called Dunan. Across its history, there have been less than 50,000 speakers of Dunan, and there are currently only about 100 speakers left. The Dunan language has given rise to a unique society, and this society is the carrier of a distinctive culture. In Dunan, Yonaguni Island is called *Dunancima*, with *cima* referring to both ‘island’ and ‘community’. The origin of the word ‘Dunan’ is not entirely clear, but it is believed to be derived from *duni*, ‘sandbank’. This is a fitting name for a small and isolated island in the Pacific Rim. There are three local communities in Yonaguni: Sonai, Higawa and Kubura. The latter was once predominantly populated by settlers from Okinawa Island, and it is today the center of scuba diving and open-sea fishing tourism.

Yonaguni is in the southern Ryukyus, which is composed of the Miyako Islands, the Yaeyama Islands and Yonaguni. Taken together, this part of the Ryukyus Archipelago is called Sakishima, literally the ‘outlying islands’. Yonaguni is last of these outlying islands. It is located more than 500 kilometers south of Naha, the capital city of Okinawa Prefecture. It is more than 2,000 kilometers to Tokyo, but Taiwan is only 110 kilometers to the west of the island. It is about 1,000 kilometers to Hong Kong. In other words, Yonaguni sits at the intersection of the Sinitic, Austronesian and Japonic cultural spheres. Yonaguni was once independent, and it was the last Sakishima island to be incorporated into the Ryukyu kingdom (1429-1879). Arguably its best time after the loss of independence in 1522 was during the short-lived Japanese Empire (1895-1945) when Yonaguni was a satellite island to its mighty neighbor Taiwan. After the war, Yonaguni became quite literally the end of Japan, and its existence as a border island coincided with its steady population decline.

Yonaguni is located in the middle of the Kuroshio current, one of the strongest ocean currents in the world. The Kuroshio constitutes a natural barrier that separates Yonaguni from its immediate neighbor Taiwan as the current flows right between these two islands. The Kuroshio then flows parallel to the Ryukyu Archipelago, which is composed of circa 180 islands, before it crosses from east to west between Amami Island and the Tokara Islands. The flow of the Kuroshio historically constituted a barrier that allowed for Ryukyuan cultures to emerge. It constrained contact between Amami and Yamato (mainland Japan) in north and between Yonaguni and Formosa (Taiwan) in the south. Yonaguni is part of the Japonic linguistic and cultural sphere, but it stands out there as its most unique and smallest subgroup. North of the Ryukyus we find the largest Japonic language, Japanese, and in the south the Austronesian languages that originated from

the island of Formosa. The Austronesian languages would spread as far as Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the south, Hawai‘i to the east and Madagascar to the west. It is therefore worthy of note that Austronesian did not enter Yonaguni, and that Japanese only entered the island at the end of the nineteenth century.

Yonaguni started to be permanently settled from around the tenth to twelfth century by migrants skilled in wet-rice farming. Before that, hunter gatherers would sometimes stay on the island. These hunter gatherers came from Formosa. Their settlement was not permanent, because Yonaguni is too small to secure the long-time survival of a hunter gatherer economy. The agricultural settlers that came to Yonaguni around 1,000 years ago arrived from the north. To be precise, they came from Kyushu Island in Yamato (mainland Japan), and they probably first remained in the neighboring Yaeyama Islands before reaching Yonaguni. Dunan is most likely the last of the Ryukyuan languages to have formed.

RICE ISLAND

While Yonaguni has been permanently settled for around 1,000 years, we know precious little about language and society for most of this time. The first document mentioning Yonaguni, its people and language is a report by fishermen from Jeju Island in Korea. These fishermen were washed ashore the island after a massive storm in 1477. Based on their information about Yonaguni, a report was compiled. This document gives us the first insights into the daily life on Yonaguni. The Jeju fishermen stayed half a year on the island before their voyage back home could be arranged. Their report must be taken with a grain of salt, given that they were not able to communicate with the Yonaguni Islanders. The fishermen stated that there was no chief on the island, that the population was illiterate, and that they silently and diligently cultivated rice. They did not observe tax collection in Yonaguni, nor do they describe everyday life in any way as particularly harsh. This general picture they provided is seen today as evidence that the island had still maintained its independence in the 15th century.

Yonaguni lost its independence in 1522 when it came under control of the Shō Dynasty of Okinawa. Until then, it was ruled as an independent nation under legendary chiefs such as San‘ai Isoba and Untura (Onitora in Japanese). Yonaguni must have been a prosperous community back then. Despite its small size, there was ample farmland, and the nearby mountains of Taiwan that reach almost 4,000 meters guaranteed regular rainfall on the island. Rice was harvested twice a year, and it therefore became the basic stable food for its inhabitants. Yonaguni was known then as Rice Island. It is remembered until today for having had four meals a day. The first meal was eaten around six in the morning (*hyari*),

the second around ten (*hiiri*), the third at three in the afternoon (*tsumadugi*) and the last meal at around nine in the evening (*dui*). Independent, and without a class of nobles or warriors of its own, Yonaguni was then an egalitarian society where collaboration and mutual help (*yuimaaru*) were deeply institutionalized.

Yonaguni was the last island to be incorporated into the Ryukyu kingdom. King Shō Shin, who reigned the kingdom from 1477 to 1526, started his invasion campaigns into the southern Ryukyus (Sakishima) in 1500. His campaign of unifying the Ryukyu Islands was completed with the invasion of Yonaguni in 1522. Under the guidance of their chief Untura, Yonaguni Islanders put up a fierce fight against the invading forces that had been recruited from Miyako Island. The Islanders had previously succeeded twice in defending their island from invasion. The first attempt had been launched from the neighboring Iriomote Island in 1450, and a second one from Miyako Island in 1500. After Untura’s defeat, his daughter was captured as a prize and taken to Miyako Island. The battle and the fate of Untura’s daughter are subject to various legends in the Dunan language.

Soon after the invasion, economic hardship started for Yonaguni Islanders. Exploitation and poverty would characterize their life for the next 400 years. In 1611, the island was surveyed by the Satsuma domain on Kyushu Island in Yamato (Japan). Satsuma had secretly gained control over the Ryukyu kingdom in 1609. It started to collect taxes from the kingdom, and this meant that commoners in the Ryukyus were taxed twice, once for the kingdom and once for the Satsuma domain. In 1637, a crushing poll tax system (*taraduna*) was imposed. This poll tax remained in place for 266 years, that is to say, for some ten generations. Every man between the age of 15 to 50 had to pay a set amount of taxes in rice irrespective of whether he was healthy and capable of work. These taxes were collected by officials from the neighboring Ishigaki Island. Yonaguni never developed a class of nobility of its own, nor any form of social stratification. The entire population were simply farmers (*hyagusu*). Control over these farmers from the outside was so strict that musical instruments were banned from the island. It was believed that musical instruments would distract them from devoting their entire energy on cultivating rice. Traditional songs on Yonaguni were performed by voice only.

SATELLITE ISLAND

In 1872, the Ryukyu Kingdom was annexed, and it was brought under control of the Japanese Meiji government in the following years. This process was concluded in 1879 with the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture. The period between 1872 and 1879 is known as *Ryūkyū shobun* in Japanese, literally ‘Ryukyu punishment’, and this punishment was imposed on these islands

for not voluntarily wanting to join the newly founded Meiji state. The incorporation of the ancient kingdom into the modern Japanese nation state had not been uncontroversial, already because Qing China also claimed rights on the Ryukyu Islands. The Ryukyu kingdom had maintained tributary relations with China, and there had been intensive and fruitful cultural and economic ties between the two countries for many centuries. The situation remained controversial from Japan’s annexation of the Ryukyus in 1872 until Japan’s victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). At some point, Meiji Japan and Qing China entertained the idea to cede the Amami Islands in the north of the Ryukyuan Archipelago to Japan, to leave Okinawa Island as an independent nation, and to grant sovereignty of Sakishima to China. Negotiation on this issue went as far as drafting a settlement. Even a date for signing the agreement had already been decided (31 October 1880), but the ratification was canceled in the last minute. It was once and for all refuted as unacceptable from the Chinese side in December 1880. This settlement draft is known in Japanese as ‘Additional clause to divide islands’ (*Bunshima zōyaku*), as it was meant to be added to revisions of the so-called Tientsin Treaty that defined Qing China’s borders. During the entire time, from the annexation of the Ryukyus, to the dissolution of the kingdom, to the forced abdication and exile of its last King Shō Tai (1843-1901), to the deliberation of splitting the Ryukyus between Japan and China, the opinions of Ryukyuan were never consulted.

The Ryukyus became part of Japan in 1879, when Okinawa Prefecture was established, but it took many more years for modernity to arrive in Yonaguni. There were two reasons for the belated start of modernity there. Firstly, the Meiji government initially imposed a policy called ‘Perseverance of Old Customs’ (*Kyūkan onson*). This policy reflected Japan’s uncertainty to what extent the Ryukyus should become part of the Japanese state (and to what extent Ryukyuan could become Japanese). Secondly, all modernization efforts arrived in Yonaguni last, due to its geographical remoteness. The southern Ryukyus remained the least developed part of Okinawa Prefecture, which was itself the least developed prefecture of Japan. Yonaguni, in turn, was the least developed island of Sakishima.

In effect, the policy to ‘preserve old customs’ meant that the Ryukyus were part of the modern Japanese nation state, but that many institutions and practices of the feudal age still remained in place. The Ryukyus were unabashedly treated as a colony under this policy. The sole reason why they were not designated the status of ‘colony’ rested simply in the fact that no Japanese constitution existed yet. The Meiji constitution was only promulgated in 1889, and until then the idea of a Japanese state, territory, people, and identity remained flexible and ambiguous.

It was only after 1889 that territories that were brought under control of the Meiji state would be designated as ‘colonies’. The Old customs at the time included issues like the absence of land privatization and, hand in hand with this, the poll tax continued to be collected in Yonaguni until 1903. In other words, Yonaguni Islanders lived a feudal life in modern Japan for three decades.

In the wake of modernization, several new institutions were set up, most notably compulsory school education and a commonly shared standard language. In Yonaguni, the first school was set up in 1885, 13 years after compulsory school education had started in Japan. School education was initially limited to four years, and teachers were by necessity recruited from outside the island. Yonaguni Islanders did not speak Japanese then. School played an important role in spreading Japanese in Yonaguni. Japanese language learning was also a key element in transforming the children of Yonaguni farmers into imperial subjects (*kōmin*). This transformation was the stated objective of school education in the Ryukyus back then. Until 1914, Yonaguni was administered by the neighboring Yaeyama Archipelago. In 1916, that is, 48 years after modernization had started in Japan, Yonaguni Islanders for the first time elected their own mayor.

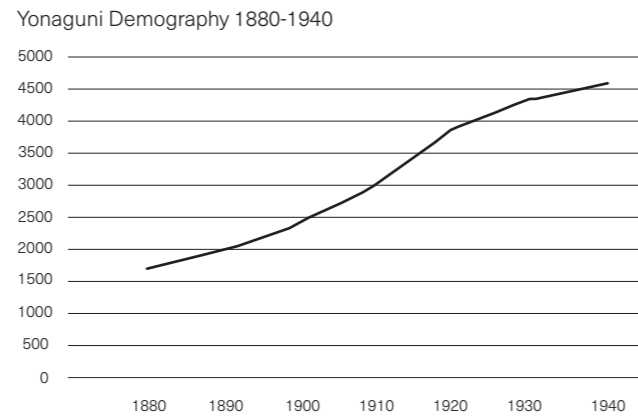
Abolition of the poll tax, land reform, and its new status as a village did not mean the end of poverty in Yonaguni. There subsequently emerged social classes of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. The former were often newcomers from the neighbouring Yaeyama Islands. While the local economy was still based on agriculture, Yonaguni society became divided as outside middlemen profited from their knowledge about trading and prices to the detriment of local farmers. During the pre-war years, there was a stark opposition and conflict between a wealthy fraction of society called *uyagintu* in Dunan and the more destitute farmers and workers called *hinsumunu*. The latter group pressed for improvements of living conditions and democratisation, while the former sought to maintain the status quo.

Modernity was thus not all about progress and improvement. Many hardships remained, and they were accompanied by natural calamities such as storms, floodings but also by diseases. Yonaguni went through a cholera outbreak in 1919 that left dozens of islander dead, and in the following year started a great famine that is collectively remembered as ‘palm tree hell’ (*sotetsu jigoku*). Scarcity of food often forced inhabitants to eat the fruit of the cycad plant (*sotetsu*). Although widely available on the island, this fruit needs to be boiled for many hours to drench it from its deadly poison.

Modernity saw an increase of population on the island, already due to improved medical services and assistances. The pre-war

demography of Yonaguni can be broadly divided into two stages. There was first a population growth until 1925. It was followed by a more stagnant phase until 1945.

FIG_1: Prewar population growth in Yonaguni



The lower population growth in the second phase was crucially alleviated by the arrival of some 150 migrants from Okinawa, mainly fishermen from the city of Itoman from 1919 onwards. This community then grew to about 500 people in the following years. Their immigration to Yonaguni was the result of a resettlement policy that had been promulgated by Okinawa Prefecture. The prefecture sought to move people from the overpopulated Okinawa Island to Sakishima. By and large, this policy failed as Okinawans preferred to migrate to the Japanese mainland (in particular to Kawasaki, Tokyo and Osaka) or the more affluent Okinawans chose to move abroad with South-America, Hawai'i and the Philippines being popular destinations. The prevalence of malaria in Sakishima, the frequent occurrence of devastating typhons, and the history of the southern Ryukyus as a place of harsh exile, made these outlying islands look unattractive to most Okinawans. Nonetheless, for the case of Yonaguni, this policy resulted in the emergence and growth of an Okinawan community. This new community spoke a different Ryukyuan language, namely Uchinaaguchi (Okinawan). Consequently, there were now three languages spoken on this small island: Dunan, Uchinaaguchi and Japanese. Japanese gradually became the lingua franca for communication between Yonaguni and Okinawa Islanders. Ikema Nae, who was born in 1919, shared the following memory in an interview with me in 2007:

I used to hear a lot of Okinawan around here in Sonai, but then they all moved to Kubura. Initially, they left from Nantahama beach to go fishing near Ishigaki and Taiwan, and they would sell their catch directly at the beach after their return. We used to speak in Japanese because you could otherwise not converse with them.

As Ikema mentioned, the Okinawan community gradually settled in Kubura, where a natural port could also be used on those windy days in winter when the northern wind pushed high waves onto the shores of Sonai village. Kubura had always been used as a temporary location to settle in winter, but it had by and large been abandoned when the first Okinawan migrants arrived in Yonaguni.

Almost at the same time as Yonaguni's belated modernity started, a second dramatic change occurred. Following Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Taiwan became part of a newly founded Japanese Empire, and Yonaguni turned into a satellite island of its big neighbor island. In many ways, Yonaguni was much closer connected to the colony of Taiwan than to the Japanese mainland. For example, Taiwanese banknotes (*Taiwan ginkōken*) were used in Yonaguni, and Yonaguni was also part of the Taiwanese time-zone (one hour behind Tokyo). Taipei was now the closest urban center of the entire southern Ryukyus, and close economic ties were formed. Some 90% of Yonaguni's trade was related to Taiwan during the days of the empire.

Yonaguni's status remained ambiguous during the days of the empire. While formally being part of the so-called inner circle (*naichi*) of the empire, neither Japanese mainlanders nor Taiwanese colonial subjects regarded Yonaguni Islanders as bona fide Japanese. At the same time, Yonaguni was not part of the outer circle (*gaichi*) to which Taiwan clearly belonged. Fact is that there existed no simple dichotomy between colonizer and colonized. This becomes evident from the case of Yonaguni and its people, who found themselves sandwiched between the inner and the outer circles of the empire. Only mainland Japanese were regarded being genuinely Japanese (*ittō kokumin*), Ryukyuan were regarded as second order (*nitō kokumin*) and Taiwanese as third order (*santō kokumin*) nationals. In practice, this meant discriminatory behavior against Ryukyuan from Japanese mainlanders in the mainland but also in Taiwan. Yonaguni Islanders failed also to pass as Japanese *tout court* in the eyes of Taiwanese, who often spoke better Japanese and were better accustomed to modern Japanese life than the Yonaguni immigrants to Taiwan.

In the 50 years that Taiwan remained a Japanese colony, young and mostly unskilled Yonaguni migrants would move back and forth between Yonaguni and Taiwan. The main bulk of them would work for Japanese families in larger cities such as Taipei, Keelung or Hualien. These young migrants were pulled to Taiwan by work opportunities and the possibility to participate in modern urban life, and they were pushed out of Yonaguni by the lack of social mobility and by the dire poverty that had remained there. Note that the period of migration falls also into

the time of the palm tree hell famine that followed the world-wide collapse of the raw sugar price in the 1920s. Outmigration to Taiwan played a crucial role in flattening the curve of population growth in Yonaguni from the 1920s onward (see FIG_1).

Work opportunities in Taiwan were limited for Yonaguni Islanders. Women usually worked in the maid service (*shochū bōkō*), with the nightlife entertainment industry being the sole other major occupation field that was open to them. 70% of all household maids employed in Taiwan were from Okinawa Prefecture, and this took to the effect that the ships operating between Okinawa Prefecture and Taiwan were called ‘maid ships’ (*shochūsen*) in popular language use. Men predominantly worked as day laborers, barbers, fishermen or factory workers. Migration was often spontaneous, temporary, quickly planned and mediated through personal networks. Mainland Japanese residing in Taiwan did not see Yonaguni Islanders as their compatriots, already because they had to first improve their rudimentary Japanese language skills. It usually took Yonaguni migrants two to three years to adapt to the Japanese language, customs, and lifestyle in Taiwan. Upon their return to Yonaguni, these migrants reported back about Japanese food, language, fashion, and the cinema. In so doing, they fanned a desire for others to try their fortune in Taiwan. Returnees were also proud of the clothes they wore, their proficiency in Japanese, and they were often the only ones in possession of money.

Taiwan was also the destination for some male islanders who sought to receive an advanced education, which could not be obtained in Yonaguni. Taiwan functioned as a social elevator for these education degree seekers, and some of these migrants later became central pillars of Yonaguni society. Ikema Eizō (1905-1971), for example, continued his school education first on Okinawa Island and then went on to study medicine in Taiwan. He afterwards returned to Yonaguni and practiced medicine there. Ikema was also an influential intellectual who wrote a history of Yonaguni and who gave lectures on democracy after the end of the war. Miyara Saku (born in 1927) is another such person. The Yonaguni native followed his family to Taiwan as a teenager, and he graduated from middle and high school there. By the time he had graduated, the war had ended. He was repatriated to the mainland and continued his education at Chūō University in Tokyo. He turned to politics after graduation. He was first active in national politics before being elected to the Okinawan Diet where he served two terms. Miyara is the author of several book on Yonaguni history, society and culture.

Both types of migrants – those working as helping hands and those pursuing an advanced education – contributed to the spread of Japanese in Yonaguni. Japanese was always used in

encounters between Taiwan and Yonaguni, and good knowledge of Japanese was crucial for securing an occupation in Taiwan, or to leave one employment in search of a better one there. Ikema Nae (born 1919), the author of a Dunan dictionary and the wife of Ikema Eizō, told me in 2007 that:

It appears to me as if everybody in Taiwan spoke Japanese then. Japanese was used a lot there. There were also constantly ships moving between Taiwan and Yonaguni, and it seems to me that the Japanese language came to Yonaguni on these ships.

The Second Sino-Japanese War started in 1937, and since Japanese advancements in China soon started to stall, a general mobilization campaign was launched in the following year. This implied for Yonaguni the start of what was called 'Imperial Subject Education' (*Kōminka kyōiku*) at school. It focussed on the history of the Emperor and on militaristic education that emphasized morality, loyalty and patriotism. Imperial Subject Education was accompanied by a highly orchestrated (Standard) Japanese Language Enforcement Campaign (*Hyōjungo reikō undō*) that oppressed and stigmatized the local language in order to spread Japanese more thoroughly.

Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the Pacific War broke out, and its effects were immediately felt in Yonaguni. In the same year, a military observation post started being built on Mt. Urabu, with 146 meters the highest elevation of the island. Also, a total of 20 soldiers were deployed on the island, three of whom were from Yonaguni. School children had to carry one brick per day up to Mt. Urabu to build a shelter. Yonaguni Islander Ukemasu Hideo (born in 1921) was stationed there and connected by telegraph wire with the post office in Sonai. In 1943, Ōmasu Matsuchi, a native from Yonaguni Island, was killed in combat in Guadalcanal Island, and he received posthumously, and as the first Okinawan ever, the highest military decoration. This led to a veritable Ōmasu-Boom in Yonaguni, and young people were encouraged to follow what was then called the 'Ōmasu spirit' (*Ōmasu seishin*).

From October 1944 onwards, the Allied Forces were in striking range of the Japanese Archipelago. Yonaguni was first bombed on 13 October 1944, and the Bonito factory next to the port of Kubura was destroyed in this attack. Allied Forces had mistakenly taken it for an arms factory. Some 30 islanders died in this air raid. A second bombing raid followed on 31 December 1944. Fearful of further attacks, many islanders hid in natural caves for several weeks afterwards.

BORDER ISLAND

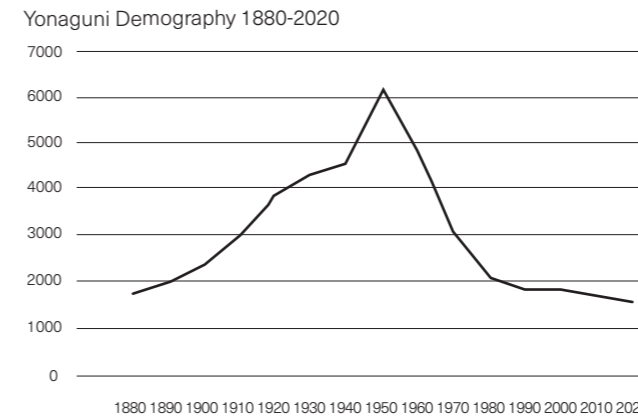
When the Pacific War ended in August 1945, there were about 30,000 Okinawans residing in Taiwan who needed to be repatriated. Some of these went to Yonaguni, causing a sharp increase of the island population. Yonaguni was an easy solution to the impasse of moving Okinawans out of Taiwan as the trip from the former colony to Yonaguni could be privately organized. Due to its vicinity and a lack of control, Yonaguni remained for several years closely connected to Taiwan. The first post-war years are vividly remembered in Yonaguni as the 'boom period' (*keiki jidai*). Outside Yonaguni, this period tends to be referred to as the 'smuggling period' (*mitsubōeki jidai*), as daily necessities from Taiwan were secretly shipped to Yonaguni and traded at a burgeoning black-market in Kubura.

Driven by internationally operating smuggling rings, the informal economic ties between Yonaguni and Taiwan helped to compensate for the lack of food and everyday products in post-war Japan. At the heyday of the black-market, as many as 80 vessels a day brought merchandise to Kubura. It would then be transported from there to Okinawa Island or to Hong Kong. Yonaguni became an international trading hotspot for rice, brown sugar, flour, cigarettes, and toiletries. Although many of the newcomers to Yonaguni who sought to make their fortune there never officially registered, and therefore do not show up in official demographic data, it is said that the population peaked at 20,000 people at one point. As a consequence, a lively nightlife scene emerged. People report that there were more than 100 bars in Kubura then. In 1947 a Miss Yonaguni competition was organized, and a perm boom is also vividly remembered from these days. A cinema called Port Theatre (*Minato gekijo*) was set up in Kubura. Islanders who experienced this boomtime report that films, trends, fads and entertainment closely reflected the experiences and knowledge that Yonaguni migrants had made during their sojourn in Taiwan.

Smuggling was tolerated by the Allied Forces until 1952. However, when patrol boats from the Chinese Communist Army started controlling the Taiwan Strait, Allied Forces enforced an end to smuggling and the black-market. Arrests were made, and the vessels operating between Taiwan and Yonaguni disappeared from one day to the other, and with them thousands of adventurers who had temporarily settled on the island. The boom came to a screeching halt, and Yonaguni's golden years ended as suddenly as they had started. While all those who experienced these years have fond memory of that time, they also tend to be embarrassed about Yonaguni having been the major nexus of international smuggling networks. 'Smuggling' (*mitsubōeki*) remains some sort of taboo word until today, and the preferred keyword to talk about this period is 'boomtime period' (*keiki jidai*).

It was only after the end of the postwar boom, that closer economic ties between Yonaguni and other Ryukyuan Islands developed. With increased logistics and contact, farming started to focus on sugar cane as a cash crop, and trade with other islands started to play a bigger economic role. Demographically, Yonaguni started to enter a phase of long and continuous decline, a trend that has not been stopped until today. Yonaguni has today less inhabitants than it had at the start of the modern period.

FIG_2: Yonaguni Demography 1880-2020



Population decline should not obscure the fact that the 1950s and 60s saw a dramatic improvement of everyday life in Yonaguni. In 1953, a first community center (*kōminkan*) was set up. Amongst other things, adult education was organized there. Radio broadcast started in the same year. In 1960, waterworks supply was completed. Malaria was eradicated once and for all in 1961. The Yonaguni airfield offering services to the neighboring Ishigaki Island was completed in 1965. The farming economy was modernized, and the Yonaguni Sugar Manufacture was inaugurated in 1967. Given the demographic decline, shortage of labor was felt already back then, and some 50 laborers from Taiwan had to be recruited to work in the sugar cane industry. In 1967, electrification of the entire island was completed, and 14 hours of electricity services were provided. TV broadcast also started in 1967 but remained restricted to one Okinawan channel. Last but not least, the modernization of Kubura Port was completed in this year, and Yonaguni could now also be accessed by larger ships.

Allied occupation in Yonaguni continued until 1972, and this meant that the entire Ryukyu Archipelago was cut off and left out from Japan's post-war economic miracle. It remained poor and underdeveloped. Following the post-war educational reforms and the popularization of secondary education, a middle school had been established in Yonaguni in 1949. While the possibility of setting up a high school was discussed for several years, this

project was never realized. This proved fatal as the lack of high school education became the main motive for the continued outmigration of young people, often in company of their entire family. Predominantly older inhabitants remained on the island, and this led to a process of social ageing. The average age of residents rose, and along with this the average, the fertility rate of the population sank. Population decline started to reinforce itself.

Modernization efforts of everyday life continued after reunification with Japan in 1972. Japanese public TV program (NHK) could be received from 1976 onwards, and the island was connected to the telephone network via sea cable in 1977. In 1981, Sonai Port was opened and in the following year a city partnership with Hualien in Taiwan was established. Regular exchange and direct charter flights between Yonaguni and Hualien started. In the meantime, the arrival of some 100 Vietnamese boatpeople in 1977 and 1978 served as a reminder of Yonaguni's geographic position between continental Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Japanese Archipelago.

From the early 1960s onwards, the Dunan language became endangered. According to the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Language in Danger of Extinction*, it is considered 'severely endangered' today, and it set for extinction by the mid-century. A language becomes endangered when it is no longer naturally transmitted to children in the family and when it cannot be learned as a second language in school either. In Yonaguni, natural intergenerational language transmission was interrupted at the end of the 1950s. Everyone being born in the 1960s and 70s is usually passively bilingual. This generation is able to understand Dunan but cannot freely converse in it. People born in these years were actively discouraged from speaking Dunan and many never tried. Yet, the frequent exposure to Dunan by listening to the conversations of older generations resulted in acquiring passive knowledge. Those born from the 1980s onwards are usually monolingual Japanese speakers as they are the children of the passive bilingual generation. All speakers of Dunan are Japanese-dominant bilingual. Just like language itself, bilingualism is a dynamic concept. Not even the most proficient speakers of Dunan are today capable of using the language in all situations. Ikema Nae, one of the best remaining speakers, often told me "I am too young to know this" when I was tapping on her knowledge of the Dunan language. Ikema Nae was born in 1919. She regretfully acknowledged that her grandparents, who had been born in the Ryukyu kingdom, spoke a Dunan that was richer in vocabulary and more nuanced in its use than her own language.

There are attempts to revitalize the Dunan language, but this is a difficult endeavor. For one, it means that older speaker should be encouraged to speak the language as often as possible. When I suggested this to Ikema Nae, she answered me "How can you

“speak if speakers are vanishing? What do you do then?” and she then continued “I am worried. Only people from my generation speak our language.” At the point of writing this article, Ikema Nae is 101 years old, and transmitting the language to new generations becomes increasingly difficult as the remaining speakers are less knowledgeable, and already for this reason do not feel competent enough to engage in revitalization efforts. At the present, the so-called Integrated Study Hour, a school subject where teachers are free to select a study topic, sometimes includes the study of Yonaguni folk songs (*minyō*). These songs have Dunan lyrics and address the geography, events and life on Yonaguni. There have also been attempts to create children playgroups involving elderly who use Dunan, but it is difficult to maintain these meetings regularly. All the while, every funeral in Yonaguni marks the passing of yet another Dunan speaker. It seems that keeping the language in use is an uphill battle at this point.

YONAGUNI HENCEFORTH

On the occasion of celebrating 50 years of Yonaguni Town in 1997, inhabitants were asked how they imagined life in 50 years’ time, that is, in 2047. Many were concerned, but there were also expressions of optimism. One person stated, for instance, that Yonaguni could become an important node in an international trade network between Okinawa Prefecture and Taiwan, just as it once had been. Others believe that technological change would facilitate life on Yonaguni in 50 years, and they hoped that population numbers would rise again. In the immediate present, it is however difficult to predict whether Yonaguni will survive as a community in the long run.

The continued demographic decline at a time when the Japanese government seeks to slim down public administration, state services and responsibilities, casted the question of whether Yonaguni could remain an independent town in the new millennium. A possible administrative merger with the neighboring Yaeyama Islands was deliberated, but the issue was settled by a referendum in October 2004. Yonaguni’s long history as an island with a distinctive history, culture and language was used as a central argument. Yet, the question how Yonaguni as an independent municipality could be revitalized remained.

Two ideas emerged how to do this. On the one hand, there was the idea of Yonaguni as a place where green and slow life should be fostered, and where IT could help bridge the difficulties of living in such a remote place. The second plan was the militarization of the island, as Yonaguni sits directly on the Taiwan Strait, a hotspot of international military tensions. In 2005, Hokama Shukichi was elected as new mayor of Yonaguni Town, and he subsequently turned into the main proponent for the militaristic option (even

though he had been campaigning on a slow life vision platform). After years of controversy that divided Yonaguni into a military pro- and anti-faction, it was decided that a base of the Japanese Self Defense Forces should be build, and that this base would bring new residents to Yonaguni and help revitalize its economy.

Let us also briefly consider a plan that was published in 2005 and titled ‘Vision of Autonomy’. It emerged directly as a reaction to the sense of crisis that had taken hold in Yonaguni at the turn of the new millennium. This initiative envisioned that the people of Yonaguni could stir a new course in the twenty-first century by retaining, protecting and promoting their specific culture, by enhanced use of media and communications networks, by building an international society through good relations with Taiwan and other Asian countries and by establishing a free trade zone. Establishing Yonaguni as a brand was another central idea of this plan. Main products to be associated with the Yonaguni brand came from fields of natural medicine, healthy food, healing (*iyashi*), longevity and green tourism. The vision explicitly included the objective of reviving local culture, and while the Dunan language was not explicitly mentioned, the introduction of Chinese language education in Yonaguni was deliberated.

15 years after the publication of the plan, not much of these visions have been realized. Yonaguni has now a military base, and the presence of military personnel has for the time being halted the demographic decline. There are currently 160 Self Defense Force servicemen stationed in Yonaguni, and many of them are accompanied by their families. The number of children in Yonaguni has also been growing due to the presence of these families. In 2020, these amounted to 39 children in Kindergarten, 137 in elementary school, and 48 in middle school (Muramatsu 2020, personal communication).

All the while, the number of native Yonaguni Islanders (*dunantu*) living in Yonaguni continues to decline. The vast majority of young Yonaguni Islanders do not return to Yonaguni once they leave for high school education outside the island. Those who want to return have difficulties in finding employment there. Modern life and cultural heritage turn out to be hard to reconcile in real life. In order to turn around the trend of continuous demographic decline, living conditions need to be improved in Yonaguni. At the moment, the difficulties of living in this remote island appear to outweigh the benefits of a quiet life on a beautiful island that once constituted an entire world of its own.

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The Diversity of the Ryukyuan Languages

“*A language is a dialect with an army and a navy*”.

This line, popularized by sociolinguist Max Weinreich, encapsulates the plight of a large number of the world’s minority languages that lack official status. On the surface, the difference between a language and dialect appears to be trivial—many people have the intuition that speakers of two different languages cannot understand each other, but that speakers of two different dialects can. However, a closer look at what are called languages and what are called dialects throughout the world defies this generalization. Italy is one such country which boasts linguistic diversity. While Sicilian, Ligurian, and Sardinian are considered dialects of Italian, they are no less different from Italian as are other Romance languages such as Spanish and French. A line from the Lord’s Prayer serves to illustrate this difference:

Standard Italian (italiano)	<i>Dacci oggi il nostro pane quotidiano</i>
Ligurian (ligure)	<i>Danne ancö u nostru pan cutidian</i>
Sardinian (sardu)	<i>Dona nos oe su pane nostru de ònna</i>
Sicilian (sicilianu)	<i>Dàtannillu a sta jurnata lu panuzzu cutiddianu</i>
Spanish	<i>Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada día</i>
English	<i>Give us this day our daily bread</i>

These ‘dialects’ are shown by linguists to be different languages. Ligurian is closer to Spanish and French than it is to Standard Italian, while Sardinian separated from the other Romance languages early on. Even Sicilian, which is the closest language to Standard Italian in this set, looks quite different.

On the other end, there are also various cases of languages that are officially separate but that are mutually intelligible to a high degree. The breakup of Yugoslavia led to the separation of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin into different languages for both sociopolitical and national identity reasons. While these four languages differ with respect to usage of Latin or Cyrillic script, they are mutually intelligible. In fact, the first sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the same across all four languages: *Sva ljudska bića rađaju se slobodna i jednaka u dostojanstvu i pravima* “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Of course, to call these languages ‘dialects’ would be to deprive these nations of their autonomy.

Now perhaps we want to say that politics drives the labeling of languages and dialects arbitrarily, but that we can still abide by the

mutual intelligibility criterion to *linguistically* define languages and dialects. However, even that is not so simple! Take the case of Scandinavian languages—while Norwegians understand both Stockholm Swedish and Copenhagen Danish fairly well, Stockholm Swedes and Copenhagen Danes actually have trouble understanding each other. If we were to call Norwegian and Swedish the same language and Norwegian and Danish the same language because of mutual intelligibility, then by transitivity, Swedish and Danish must be the same language too. But this is clearly untrue if we go by the same mutual criterion! Thus, we find ourselves in a bind. This situation in which two languages do not understand each other, but both understand a third language that in turn understands them is actually not uncommon in the world. In fact, sometimes there is even unidirectional comprehension—Portuguese speakers may understand a fair bit of Spanish, but Spanish speakers do not generally understand Portuguese. These situations are known as *dialect continua*. Romance languages lie on a continua, as do dialects of German and Dutch.

As Weinreich’s quote alludes to, the labeling of a variety of speech as a language is tied to nationhood and power. Along with this comes a common assumption that varieties of speech within a nation are dialects of the national language. Japan is one country for which the misconception of ‘one nation, one language, one culture’ persists in the present day. Everyone is Japanese and everyone speaks Japanese. However, Japan is not and has never been monocultural nor monolithic. This myth has contributed to the erasure of the minority populations of Japan. In the north live the Ainu, an indigenous group that has been edged northward and whose language is now spoken by no more than a handful of people. To the south live the Ryukyuan, a diverse group of people who speak a diverse set of languages and who are the focus of this article. While Japanese people do understand that Ryukyuan are a different group to some extent, they still mistakenly view them monolithically. Ryukyuan are called 沖縄人 *Okinawa-jin* (‘Okinawans’) by the Japanese, as they live primarily in Okinawa Prefecture. However, this is a misnomer, as the Okinawans are only one subgroup of the Ryukyuan. This double layer of mischaracterization as another group (by the Japanese as Okinawans and by the non-Japanese as Japanese) is emblematic of the erasure that Ryukyuan have long experienced. Few outside of Japan even realize that the Ryukyu kingdom was once an independent state. This erasure is a major obstacle in the preservation and revitalization of the Ryukyuan languages.

Before delving into the diversity of the Ryukyuan cultures and languages, we must first backtrack to prehistory, before the groups differentiated and fanned out. While there is archaeological evidence that the Ryukyu Islands have been inhabited for at least 30,000 years, the original cultures are not contiguous with

modern Ryukyu culture. The agricultural ancestors of modern-day Ryukyuan and Japanese speakers, the Proto-Japonic speakers, migrated from the Korean Peninsula into Kyushu, the southernmost of the four largest islands in Japan, approximately around the beginning of the Common Era, bringing rice farming technology. From there, Japanese speakers pushed northward, displacing the indigenous Ainu. Meanwhile, Ryukyuan began to differentiate from Japanese on the island of Kyushu and by the beginning of the second millennium CE, these speakers began to sail southward into the Ryukyuan Islands, first populating the northern part of the archipelago down as far south as Okinawa. A second expansion later populated the southern part, known as the Sakishima Islands, stopping at the island of Yonaguni, just short of Taiwan. These migrations coincide with the establishment of 城 *gusuku*, Okinawan-style stone fortresses that exist all over the Ryukyus. This era marked a rapid replacement of the original hunter-gatherers with the Ryukyuan agriculturalists and the shift of society from the coasts inland on the Okinawan mainland.

A unified Ryukyu started to take shape when the central kingdom of Okinawa, 中山 *Chūzan*, conquered its neighbors to the north and south in 1429 and established 琉球王国 *Ryūkyū Ōoku*, the Ryukyu kingdom. The capital became the city of Shuri and the speech there became the standard Okinawan language of the Ryukyu kingdom, Uchinaaguchi. By the following century, it absorbed the Sakishima Islands and subsequently, the northern Amami Islands 1571. While paying tribute to China, the Ryukyu kingdom used its strategic position in the Pacific to establish itself as an intermediary trading point between East and Southeast Asia for approximately two hundred years. Okinawa’s dominance, however, was not accepted without resistance. Unhappy with the policy of paying tribute upon incorporation into the Ryukyu kingdom, the Yaeyaman Islands in Sakishima launched a rebellion in 1500, led by Oyake Akahachi of Ishigaki. This plan, however, was thwarted by Nakasone Tuyumuya of Miyako (the nearest Sakishima Island to Okinawa), who defeated Akahachi and proceeded to conquer the furthest island of Yonaguni, cementing Ryukyu domination over the Sakishimas. While Akahachi’s rebellion ultimately failed, he is still seen as a hero in the Yaeyamas and plays dramatizing the events are still put on frequently in the region, a marker of lingering pride in Yaeyaman identity as unique in the Ryukyus.

The sovereignty of the Ryukyu kingdom was not to last long, however, as the 薩摩藩 *Satsuma-han*, a domain of feudal Japan, advanced southward and invaded and absorbed the Amami Islands by 1611 and turned the rest of the Kingdom into a vassal state. As a direct consequence, the seat of government imposed high taxes on the Sakishimas, particularly the Yaeyamas as punishment for insubordination a century earlier. Further

suffering came a century later, when the 明和の大津波 *Meiwa no Ōtsunami* (‘Meiwa Mega-tsunami’) of 1771 wiped out half the population of the Sakishimas. Saltwater from the tsunami caused agricultural conditions to deteriorate, leading to famine and further depopulation. Hit hardest was the village of Shiraho on southeastern Ishigaki that bore the brunt of the tsunami. To repopulate the village of only 28 survivors, the Ryukyu government forced 418 people from Hateruma, an island approximately 50 kilometers away, to migrate. The modern Shiraho variety of Yaeyaman is thus closely related to that of Hateruma, which is highly divergent from the varieties on Ishigaki.

As Japan began to establish itself as an imperial power in East Asia during the Meiji Restoration, one of its first victims was the Ryukyu kingdom, which was invaded and turned into a feudal domain of Japan, 琉球藩 *Ryūkyū-han*. Ryukyu-han was officially turned to Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, with the Amami Islands becoming part of Kagoshima Prefecture, the southernmost prefecture of Kyushu. From this period on began the forced assimilation of the Ryukyus, leading the diverse cultures and languages of the Ryukyus down the path of homogenization, conformity, and gradual erasure.

Absorption into the Japanese empire led to a shift in the power dynamics. As the Ryukyus were no longer independent, the languages became subordinate to Japanese, a status shift that set off a chain of events leading to the present-day endangerment. School was made compulsory on the islands, such that Ryukyuan could learn Standard Japanese and communicate with their new rulers. Educators emphasized similarities between Ryukyuan languages and Japanese, relegating Ryukyuan languages to 方言 *hōgen* (‘dialect’) status in order to foster a sense of loyalty to Japanese identity. As the Japanese empire invaded Taiwan and Korea in 1895 and 1910, respectively, Ryukyuan began to feel greater affinity toward Japan, no doubt fueled both by similarities in culture and language inherited from common ancestors and a sense that Taiwan and Korea were much more different from Japan than they were.

The leadup to World War II fueled Japanese nationalism, leading to further suppression of Ryukyuan languages, knowledge of which was seen as a hindrance to unity. Schools were once again at the forefront of promoting standardization, meting out punishment to students who spoke Ryukyuan languages. The most notorious punishment, still vividly remembered by elderly speakers in the present day, involved forcing students who spoke in a Ryukyuan language to wear a 方言札 *hōgen fuda* (‘dialect tag’) as a kind of badge of shame. Other manipulations included forcing students to repeat that *hōgen* was the ‘enemy of the nation’ daily as well as writing any Ryukyuan words one was caught uttering in school

on a shirt and washing it off. These psychological punishments created feelings of shame and fear around the use of Ryukyuan. In the public sphere, those who used Ryukyuan languages in a public space could be denied a public service or fined. Matters escalated during the wartime, when use of Ryukyuan could lead to execution under the pretense of espionage.

Use of Japanese came to be associated with modernity, progress, and development of the Ryukyus. The success of the Japanese government in fostering the conception of learning Japanese as a public good and the devaluation of Ryukyuan languages sowed the seeds for pro-Japanese sentiment to carry into the postwar era. Okinawa Prefecture became a territory of the United States between 1945 and 1972, a separation that theoretically could have been an impetus for either a movement for independence or for shifting alliance to the US. However, pro-Japanese sentiment turned out to be at an all-time high. A majority wished to be returned to Japan, and despite American attempts to stimulate Ryukyuan pride as a separate entity from Japan and encouragement to switch to schooling in Ryukyuan languages, the lack of any foundation for such a system, such as a unified orthography or resources, meant that these attempts were futile. 方言札 *hōgen fuda* were even reinstated to further promote usage of Standard Japanese. The 1950s were a turning point as the Ryukyuan languages began to no longer be passed on to the next generation. This era marked the beginning of Japanese monolingualism in the Ryukyus.

In the present day, active suppression of Ryukyuan languages is no longer enforced. In fact, Ryukyuan culture is even taught to some extent in schools and Ryukyuan ceremonies are still carried out. However, the language situation has actually reached a dire point. Language ability and attitudes have shifted to a point at which revitalization of Ryukyuan languages is an uphill battle. Since Ryukyuan languages had already ceased to be passed down to future generations about 70 years ago, many of the languages have few fluent speakers under the age of 70. Most of these speakers are in the grandparent or great-grandparent generation and have a smaller role in raising newborns. Even though many younger Ryukyuan these days have a neutral or positive view about Ryukyuan languages, they themselves are mainly understanders or passive speakers of Ryukyuan languages and so cannot play a direct role in transmitting the languages to their children.

Language ideologies also play an important role. Propaganda from the 20th century painting Japanese as modern and Ryukyuan as outdated yielded effects that trickled to the present day. Younger people view what their grandparents speak as 方言 *hōgen*, dialect that outsiders happen to not understand, but one would be hard-pressed to hear someone call it 言語 *gengo*, language. The use

of the word 方言 *hōgen* inevitably places it in a subsidiary and peripheral relationship to Japanese, which has status as 言語 *gengo*. This relationship, however, does not actually translate to disdain in the present day, but rather to limitation. The domain of Ryukyuan languages has become primarily ceremony—song and dance, religious and cultural festivals. It is seen as the language of tradition and of the distant past. Dialogue in Ryukyuan languages is sprinkled into school plays, memorized, and recited by schoolchildren, but soon forgotten afterwards. Ryukyuan languages are no longer seen as the speech of everyday life and activities, but as the speech of ritual. In immigrant communities around the world, while it is a given that the immigrant language is not generally the language of the public sphere, it tends to at least survive as the language of the home. In the Ryukyus, Japanese has become the language of most homes. It is even not uncommon to see elderly couples switch from their common Ryukyuan language into Japanese often when speaking with each other. Sometimes they even exclusively use Japanese with each other. Strangers on the street can no longer assume that one another will understand anything other than Japanese.

How quickly the language situation has shifted cannot be understated. One speaker in his eighties that I worked with described his marvel at how much had changed over his lifetime. He told me that his mother would refuse to pick up the phone because she had a weak command of Japanese and was primarily a speaker of Ssabumuni, the 白保 Shiraho variety of Yaeyaman. The speaker himself grew up speaking both Ssabumuni and Japanese. His children exclusively speak Japanese but can understand Ssabumuni. His grandchildren, however, are completely monolingual in Japanese and do not understand Ssabumuni. This rapid change was accompanied by a sweep of modernization in the region. This same man recalls the ten kilometer trek he would take every day in his wooden *sapa* (‘sandals’), to get to school, before making the entire journey back. He remembers the excitement of seeing a bicycle for the first time. As a child, he experienced hunger very frequently, but these days, he can reach into the refrigerator and pull out a can of Coca-Cola. To him, it is amazing how connected to the rest of the world youth are these days with this tool known as the ‘Internet’.

The modernization and globalization described by this speaker have been a double-edged sword for the Ryukyus. Among the Ryukyuan languages, those in the Yaeyama subgroup are in the most dire situation. Various contributing factors exacerbate the situation beyond the consequences of Japanese policies that had affected the entirety of the Ryukyus. One significant factor is the pull of economic growth; the tourism industry is a large source of income for the region. Tourism is largely driven by the breathtaking scenery of the Yaeyaman Islands—from the emerald

seas to the vibrant coral reefs to the verdant mountains to the biodiverse jungles. The New Ishigaki Airport on Ishigaki Island, the population center of the Yaeyamas, was opened in 2013, replacing the previous strictly domestic airport. The international terminal serves flights from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This development has greatly bolstered Ishigaki’s tourism industry but had originally met with resistance from many locals, as the location by the Shiraho coast would pollute the coral reefs there. This tension between modernization and preservation has persisted. As recently as 2019, protests have arisen against the development of a new resort on Kondoi Beach on Taketomi (a small island that neighbors Ishigaki) on the grounds that it would pollute the sea and disrupt the livelihood of the islanders who wish to avoid the hustle and bustle of a mass of tourists.

This tug-of-war between economic growth and preservation of the natural beauty of the Yaeyamas is mirrored in the pull between the growing influence of global languages and preservation of indigenous ones. The quickly expanding tourist industry makes Ishigaki an attractive spot for entrepreneurs, particularly as the new airport has brought in an influx of Taiwanese and Hong Kong tourists—both these places are a 45 minute and 2-hour flight away, respectively, a closer trip than much of mainland Japan. As a population center, many residents of Ishigaki are also migrants from other Yaeyaman islands, other parts of the Ryukyus, and mainland Japan. Japanese mainlanders in particular come to take part in commerce and tourism. Many businesses in downtown Ishigaki are owned by migrants. As the language of the nation, Japanese is also naturally the language of business. With the growth of international tourism, Chinese is becoming a popular second language to learn as an alternative to English. While attitudes towards local languages have swung to the side of appreciation, the attraction of international languages is strong. As the Yaeyamas find themselves in a position to cater to the global market, knowledge of widely spoken languages becomes a priority and pushes revitalization of indigenous languages further into the background.

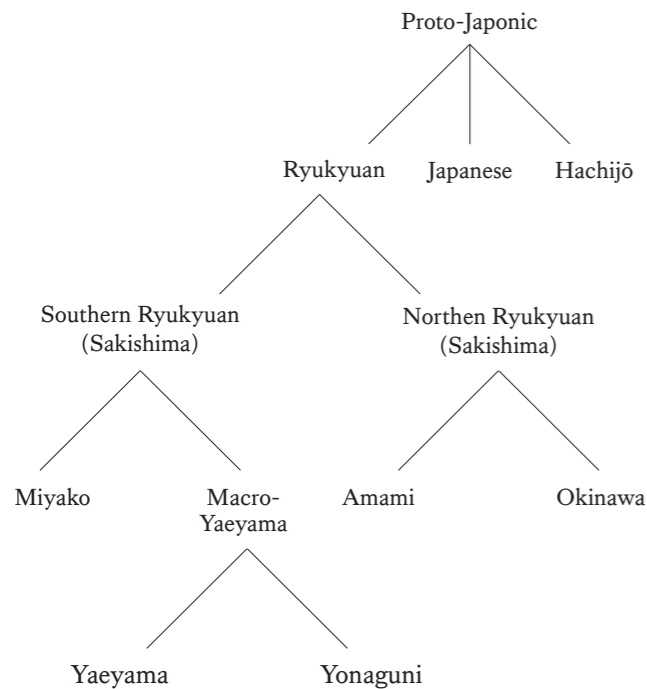
The migrant situation also has ramifications for language use in the household. A non-trivial number of households consist of couples who cannot speak to each other in a Ryukyuan language, as they either speak differing mutually unintelligible Ryukyuan languages or one member only speaks Japanese. As a result, Japanese is left as the only option with which to communicate. Even within the Yaeyamas, language diversity is high enough to the point that couples who speak different varieties of Yaeyaman may have difficulty comprehending each other’s variety. This vast diversity is unfortunately invisible to the average Japanese mainland. Many Japanese who come to Okinawa Prefecture for vacation or for business hold the misconception that the only

unfamiliar speech there is the Okinawan dialect of Japanese, known as Uchinaa-yamatoguchi. This assumption is reflected in some tourists’ use of Okinawan phrases such as *haisai* and *nifeedeebiru*, ‘hello’ and ‘thank you’ in Okinawan, rather than the corresponding Ishigaki phrases *mishaaroorunneeraa* and *nihaiyuu*, when visiting Ishigaki. The homogenized view of the languages is even reflected in naming practices of some businesses. The use of Ryukyuan may be used to provide an ‘exotic’ flavor to draw in customers. One such business is a hostel in the heart of town, named *Churayado*, composed of *chura*, ‘beautiful’ in Uchinaaguchi, and *yado* ‘inn’ in Japanese. Had the owner wanted to be linguistically appropriate, they may have opted to incorporate the Ishigaki word for ‘beautiful’, *kaishan*, instead. The misuse of Uchinaaguchi in the setting of Ishigaki conceals one of many differences between the cultures.

The various obstacles mentioned above seem to paint a bleak future for Yaeyaman languages in particular, but not all hope is lost. One Ryukyuan language that has maintained some stability is Meeramuni, the 宮良 Miyara variety of Yaeyaman Ryukyuan, which is spoken by a fair number of people in their 50s. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, conservatism has played a role in the preservation of Meeramuni. Compared to other villages on Ishigaki, Miyara is a relatively closed society—outsiders are not welcome to witness certain festivals and marrying someone outside the village is comparatively rarer. When men do marry women from outside, the women are taught at least basic Meeramuni by the 宮良婦人会 *Miyara Fujinkai* (‘Miyara Wives’ Association’), who have published a website with basic vocabulary and sentences (Miyara Fujinkai n.d.). Young men are taught Miyaran traditions from a young age by elders and through this learn at least some Meeramuni. In fact, some men in their 30s and 40s appear to be able to speak Meeramuni with a high level of fluency. However, young people’s Meeramuni is criticized by elders for not using polite and honorific language correctly. Simplification and loss of parts of a language is a common occurrence in endangered languages. Unfortunately, this yields a common attitude: *if you cannot speak the language properly, do not speak it at all*. This desire for linguistic purity is a barrier to continued usage of the language, as it breeds lack of self-confidence in speaking the language. These younger speakers certainly have a grasp of the language, even if it differs from that of their elders. However, intergenerational difference is a given in *any* language—even speakers of languages such as Japanese and English do not speak the same as their parents or grandparents. Willingness to accept change is key if a language is to be revitalized.

Archipelagos are hotbeds of linguistic differentiation. Much like Darwin’s Galápagos finches, the Ryukyuan languages are a trove

of diversity, differing both minorly and majorly in many distinct ways. Natural barriers such as oceans, jungles, and mountains, which are difficult to traverse between, are conducive to isolation and subsequently to both linguistic and biological diversity. When we think about how languages change and diversify, a biological analogy is once again apt. As time passes, organisms differentiate—mammals diversify into rodents and primates. Rodents diversify into mice and squirrels; primates into humans and apes, and so on. In the same way, Proto-Japonic, as spoken on Kyushu, split into Ryukyuan and Japanese and over time Japanese diversified into the various Japanese regional dialects. Ryukyuan split into Northern and Southern groups and those groups further changed. So we can think of modern Ryukyuan languages as distant cousins from one another and even more distant from Japanese dialects. The tree below is a proposal by linguist Thomas Pellard of the splits of the language family (Heinrich et al. 2015:14).



We can see that there are various modern Ryukyuan languages—split into at least five languages: Amami and Okinawan (Northern Ryukyuan) and Miyako, Yaeyaman, and Yonaguni (Southern Ryukyuan or Sakishima). Each of these languages, however, is better characterized as a dialect chain, in which dialects at the extremes are not mutually intelligible. A quick look at the simple sentence ‘Where are you going?’ in a number of Ryukyuan languages and Japanese show how different they are from Japanese and also from each other.

SUBFAMILY	LANGUAGE	SENTENCE
Northern Ryukyuan	Shuri Okinawan	<i>maa-nkai ichu-ga</i>
Southern Ryukyuan	Ishigaki Yaeyaman	<i>zīma-nkai-du haru</i>
	Kabira Yaeyaman	<i>duma-hee-du paru</i>
	Miyara Yaeyaman	<i>zīma-ge-du haru</i>
	Taketomi Yaeyaman	<i>maa-ī-du hari-ya</i>
	Kuroshima Yaeyaman	<i>maa-ha-du paru-ya</i>
	Iriomote Yaeyaman	<i>zan-tti ngi-rya</i>
	Shiraho Yaeyaman	<i>za-go-du ngo</i>
	Yonaguni	<i>nma-nki hiru-nga</i>
Japanese	Tokyo Japanese	<i>doko-e iku-no</i>
English	Standard English	<i>where are you going?</i>

Even looking at the sentence in different varieties of just Yaeyaman, one can see how rich the variation is. The differences are large enough such that there is not even much of a unified sense of ‘Yaeyaman’ being a language or a cohesive identity. When asking speakers how they identify, they will primarily bring up the village they are from. Thus, a speaker of Ssabumuni (Shiraho Yaeyaman) will say they are *Ssabupitu* ‘a person from Ssabu (白保 Shiraho, in Japanese)’. While the common word for Yaeyama is *Yaīma* or *Yeema*, few call themselves *Yaīmapitu*/*Yeemapitu*. Even varieties on the same island, such as Ishigaki, Kabira, Miyara, and Shiraho, can be quite different from one another, as can be seen in the sentences above. Speakers of Ssabumuni say that they cannot understand speakers of Meeramuni and vice versa. While those in the older generation express strong feelings about these local identities, the feelings do not percolate to those in the younger generation, who tend to identify primarily as Japanese, showing a trend towards homogeneity.

The sentences above also show that although the Ryukyuan languages and Japanese differ in word choice and sounds, word order remains quite stable. One way in which we can see the diversity of Ryukyuan languages is in the number of vowels. Japanese dialects have 5 vowels: *a, i, u, e, o*. Ryukyuan languages, on the other hand vary in the number of vowels they have. Some, such as Yonaguni, have as few as 3 (*a, i, u*) and others, such as Amami, have as many as 7: the same 5 as Japanese plus *i*, a vowel similar to the *e* in *roses*, and *ē*, which is similar to the *a* in *about*. Some languages, such as Teedunmuni, the Taketomi variety of Yaeyaman, also have nasal vowels like Portuguese, as in the Brazilian city of *São Paulo*.

The sounds of one Ryukyuan language in particular, Dunan (the Yonaguni language), have changed so much that it can be difficult to recognize, without deeper knowledge, words that actually derive from the same source as their counterparts in other Japonic languages. Below are a few examples comparing the Dunan word with the same word in Yaeyaman, its closest relative (specifically the Meeramuni variety) and with Japanese.

DUNAN	MEERAMUNI	JAPANESE	MEANING
<i>n̄ni</i>	<i>p̄uni</i>	<i>hune</i>	‘boat’
<i>ttu</i>	<i>p̄itu</i>	<i>hito</i>	‘human’
<i>kkurun</i>	<i>sikurun</i>	<i>tsukuru</i>	‘to make’
<i>n̄nu</i>	<i>kinoo</i>	<i>kinō</i>	‘yesterday’

The main reason Dunan looks so different is because it has lost *i/i* and *u*, which can still be seen in Japanese and Meeramuni, between some consonants, followed by blending of the preceding consonant into the following one. For example, in ‘yesterday’, *i* dropped out and *k* blended into the following *n*. The loss of these vowels and blending of the consonants has led to Dunan developing a series of double consonants at the beginning of words, a feature that makes it quite distinct from Japanese, which does not allow any double consonants at the beginning of words. Dunan shows us how quickly and drastically language can change over time.

One feature that is common in many languages, and indeed across the Japonic languages is the distinction of words by pitch. In Japanese, the words 今 *ima* (‘now’) and 居間 *imá* (‘living room’), where the acute accent (´) represents a high pitch, are differentiated by where the high pitch is on the word. Dunan is also a language that makes use of pitch to distinguish words. We can see this difference in the three sentences below. Subjects can be omitted in Japonic languages and instead inferred from context—I have put a possible subject in parentheses in the sentences below for clarity. Here, the acute accent represents a high pitch as well, while the circumflex (ˆ) represents a falling pitch.

n̄ni-du buru (They) look alike.
n̄ní-du buru (Someone) is dying.
n̄n̄i-du buru (Someone) is watching.

[FIG_1]
 [FIG_2]
 [FIG_3]

At the end of the chapter are pitch tracks for the three sentences. The boundaries for each sound in the word are demarcated on the horizontal axis, while the pitch at each point in time is marked by the position on the vertical axis. As can be seen, the pitch

patterns for both the words *n̄ni*- ‘to look like’ and *n̄n̄i*- ‘to die’ are both relatively flat, but is higher for *n̄ni*-. The pitch pattern for *n̄n̄i*- ‘to look at’, on the other hand, shows a pattern of rising sharply before falling. These three words are minimally different, distinguished only by the pitch pattern of the word.

Some Yaeyaman varieties are unique in that they distinguish grammatical meaning by pitch as well. The use of pitch to mark *grammatical meaning* is relatively rare in the world’s languages. Most of the languages that do so are found in West Africa. To see this process at work, we can compare how Funeemuni (spoken in 船浮 *Funauki* on Iriomote Island) distinguishes the non-past tense from the present progressive with how Japanese and English do so:

LANGUAGE	NON-PAST	PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
Funeemuni	<i>ukiru</i>	<i>ukiru</i>
Japanese	<i>okiru</i>	<i>okite iru</i>
English	<i>gets up/will get up</i>	<i>is getting up</i>

[FIG_4]
 [FIG_5]

The bolding represents the part that distinguishes the present progressive from the present. In Funeemuni, it is merely the high tone on *i* that does so. In Japanese and English, however, both the verb itself changes and another word is also added, showing how different the strategy is between the two languages. Below are two sentences that show the meaning difference in the verbs more clearly. In both the word and full sentence examples, there is a clear fall in pitch in the present progressive form. Meeramuni uses this same strategy to distinguish these meanings as well.

minaa-ra-du ukiru (Starting) now, I will get up
minaa-du ukiru I am getting up now

[FIG_6]
 [FIG_7]

In Ssabumuni, pitch is also used to distinguish grammatical meaning. Once again, the progressive is involved, but the contrast is instead with another form known as the resultative. To understand the meaning of the *resultative*, let’s take a look at the following sentences and the pitch tracks.

ami-n-du feru-rá Oh, it must have rained.
mi-n-du féru-rá Oh, it is raining.

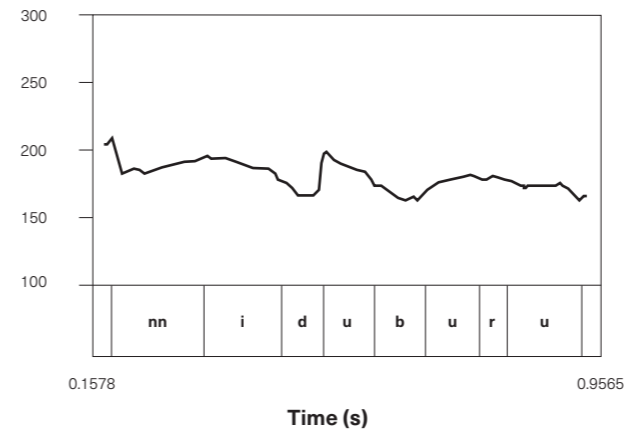
[FIG_8]
 [FIG_9]

First let's observe the pitch trajectory. When the *e* in *feru* does not have a high pitch, the drop is slight in the following syllable *ru*, before rising for the high pitch in *-rá* (an ending that expresses that the speaker has observed something). If there is a high pitch on the *é*, there is a steep drop in the following syllable, much like in the Funeemuni examples. The resultative meaning is used when the speaker infers that something must have happened. Imagine a situation in which a speaker exits a building and sees that it is wet outside, although it is not raining. From seeing the wet ground, they infer that it must have rained, and say the first example sentence: *ami-n-du feru-rá*.

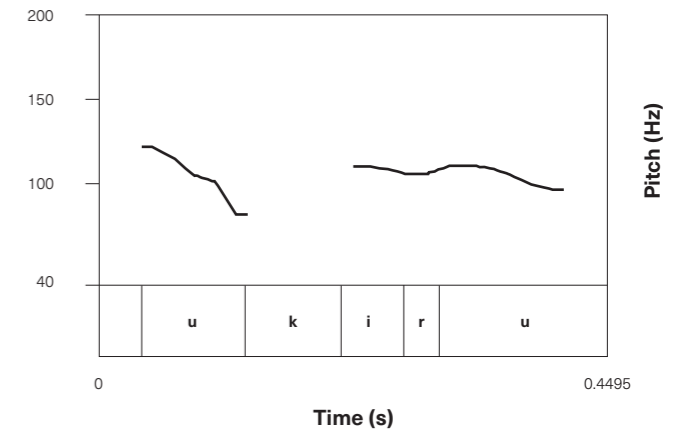
We can see that the diversity of the Ryukyuan languages helps to provide not only a better understanding of Japanese but also of language in general. Just as the loss of species is a blow to biodiversity and a better understanding of life, the loss of Ryukyuan languages would be a blow to linguistic diversity and a better understanding of how language works. While revitalization is an uphill battle, it is not an impossible one, and there have been various efforts at encouraging usage in the Yaeyamas. One activist is 半嶺まどか Madoka Hammine, a young member of the Miyara community who has endeavored to learn Meeramuni, her heritage language. Madoka has undoubtedly faced obstacles and frustrations, having encountered elders who found it amusing that she was trying to speak Meeramuni or who did not want to respond to her in Meeramuni at all. However, the fruits of her efforts have paid off, as elders have turned around to being appreciative of her devotion and are now happy to converse with her and touched that a young member wishes to learn the ancestral language. Madoka has also proceeded to teach elementary schoolchildren basic words and phrases in Meeramuni. As schoolchildren are pivotal in the revitalization of language, Madoka and I wanted to find ways to captivate their interest. Inspired by hearing a series of translations of Disney songs into local Japanese dialects and Uchinaaguchi, I worked with 山根慶子 Keiko Yamane, an elder speaker of Shikamuni (Ishigaki Yaeyaman), to translate *Let It Go* (from the movie *Frozen*), a heavily popular song among youth at the time, into her language (Miifaiyu 2017). Madoka worked with elders to translate this song, titled *Duu-nu Assoo-taanaa* 'In one's own way' (Ooritaboori 2018a), as well as *How Far I'll Go*, titled *Ikooba-nu* 'How far' (Ooritaboori 2018b), from another Disney film, Moana, into her language. Her covers sparked the excitement of the elementary students she taught. At the societal level, there are community members with much pride for their language who hold sessions to study, learn, and practice the language—attendance to these sessions by children is gradually growing. Annually, the Yaeyamas (as well as other Ryukyuan islands) also hold 方言大会 *hōgen taikai* ('dialect speech competitions'), in which participants perform a speech in their language to an audience. All these contributions play a role

in redialing views of Ryukyuan languages from *negative* and *old* to *positive* and *modern*. However, in order for revitalization to occur, there must be *intergenerational transmission*; that is, proficient speakers must be able to pass the language on to the younger generation. As mentioned, one large barrier is that proficient speakers are not the primary caretakers of the new generation. Because of this, measures must be taken beyond the home to provide spaces for elderly speakers to use the heritage language with young people. Among language revitalization efforts across the world, the 'language nest' (*kōhanga reo*) model for Māori, the indigenous language of New Zealand, has been one of the most successful. In this model, children are immersed in the language by being taught in primary school by fluent elder speakers. This model has been replicated in Hawai'i (called *pūnana leo*) and would certainly be a useful system in the Ryukyus as well. Some small-scale attempts have been made. For example, the village of Tamagusuku on Okinawa established an *Uchinaaguchi* space for elderly speakers to socialize with young people in Okinawan. Nothing comparable yet has been established in the Yaeyamas. While all these attempts thus far are but seeds that have been planted, they will hopefully play a role in the larger goal of revitalization, a feat that will require resources, support from governmental bodies, and long-term commitment to the cause.

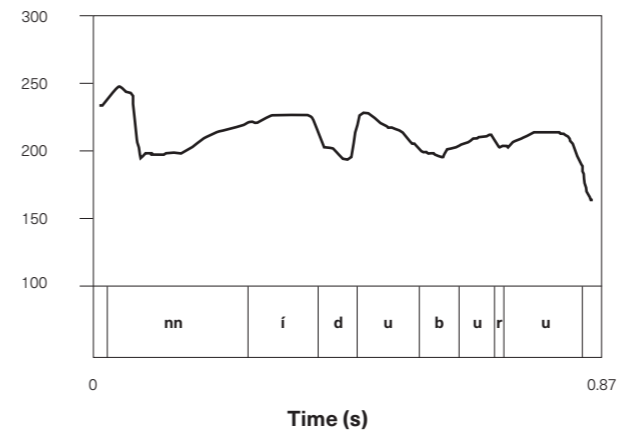
[FIG_1]



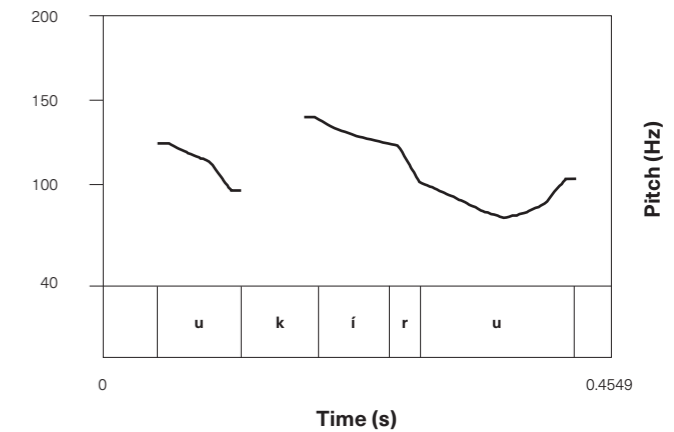
[FIG_4]



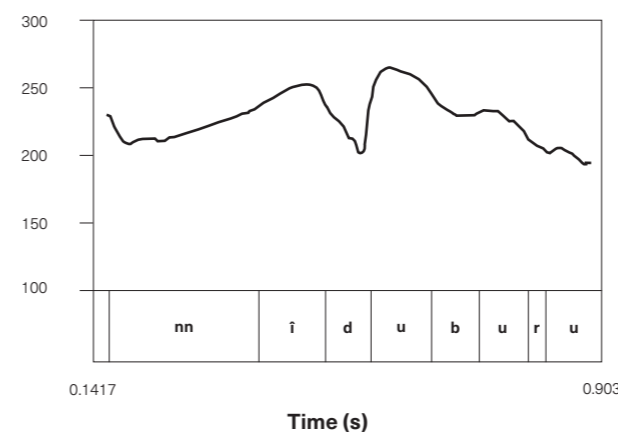
[FIG_2]



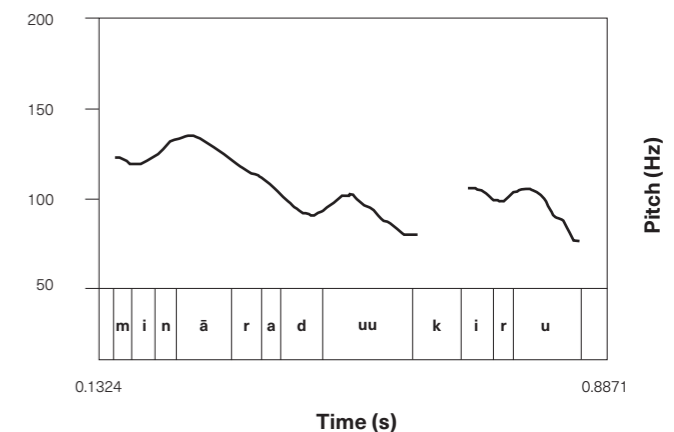
[FIG_5]



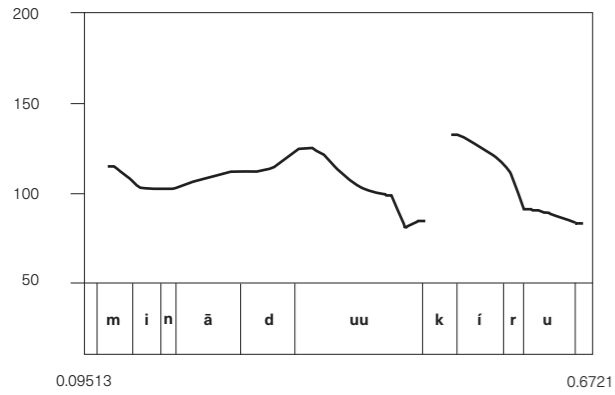
[FIG_3]



[FIG_6]



[FIG_7]



VIDEOS

Miifaiyu (2017) Duu-nu asunya [Let it go, Ishigaki version].

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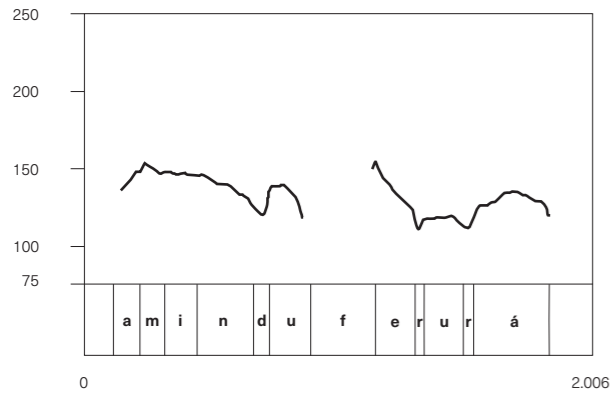
Ooritaboori (2018b) Ikooba-nu [How far I'll go, Miyara

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[FIG_8]



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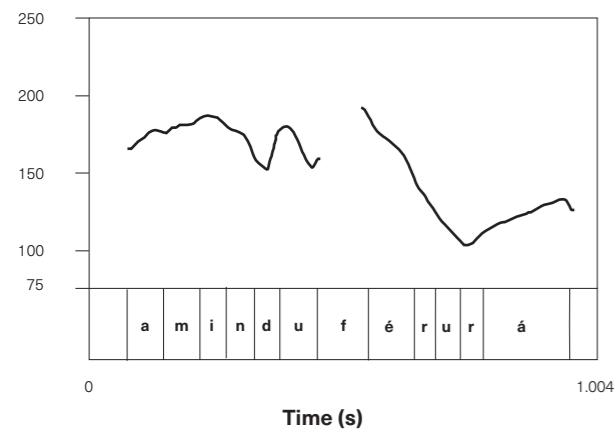
[Fostering brides who can speak local language].

Online available at:

www.terra.dti.ne.jp/~miyara/hogen/hogen_index.html

(accessed 14 March 2021).

[FIG_9]



Kaida writing
in Yonaguni

In the Yaeyama Archipelago, and in particular in Yonaguni Island, a writing system called *kaida* developed before the onset of modernity. *Kaida* writing in Yonaguni represents the most complex stage of native writing that developed in the Ryukyu Islands. Yonaguni Islanders have made important innovations to this writing system – innovations which parallel those of other civilizations, and which gradually brought *kaida* writing closer to transcribing speech.

The first reports we have from Yonaguni are from Korean sailors whose boats drifted to Yonaguni in 1477 after a massive storm. Upon their return, these sailors reported that the natives had no tradition of writing and were illiterate. We can therefore estimate that some form of written symbols came into use only after 1477. Writing could have developed after 1609, the year of the Japanese Satsuma invasion into the Ryukyu kingdom, or around the mid-seventeenth century when the tax regime of the Ryukyu kingdom was extended to Yonaguni. *Kaida* writing was certainly in use before 1814, when we find it first mentioned as a recording system. By the late 1800s, when the tax regime became increasingly harsher, we can find many documents applying *kaida* writing to keep records of who was required to pay what to whom.

It is also around this time that *kaida* writing first caught the attention of outsiders. One of the first was Sasamori Gisuke, a Japanese adventurer from Aomori who spent nearly six months in the Ryukyus in 1893 after a visit to the Aleutian Islands. The results of his surveys led to a compilation of reports and to a first publication on Yonaguni *kaida* writing. Uezu Yūkyō, a local schoolteacher, provided Sasamori altogether 29 distinct pictograms of *kaida* writing. These consisted mainly of symbols for physical objects, mainly foodstuffs, plants, and animals, but also six abstract characters representing units of measurements, and over a dozen Chinese-style characters, including numerals up to 100, dates, and non-native measurements units.

The next person to draw attention to *kaida* writing was the celebrated Tokyo University professor Basil Hall Chamberlain who traveled to Okinawa in 1894 to examine the relation between the Okinawan and the Japanese language (Chamberlain 1895). His study of Okinawan grammar was an influential contribution to the study of Ryukyuan languages, and it laid the groundwork for many works to follow. However, unable to conduct research on islands other than Okinawa itself, Chamberlain had to rely on informants, interpreters, and government officials at Naha to provide him with much of the information he gathered. It is in such an indirect way that he first became aware of the *kaida* ideographs in Yonaguni.

The next scholar to explore these written symbols was Charles Leavenworth (1905), an American-born history professor

affiliated to Imperial Nanyang College in Shanghai. Leavenworth explored the Ryukyuan Islands in the summer of 1904 and was, he reports, “the first foreigner to set foot on [Yonaguni] for twenty-five or thirty years.” Relying primarily on Chinese interpreters, Leavenworth recorded many aspects of Ryukyuan culture, ranging from government, economy, and foreign relations to agricultural production, average temperatures, and education. In Yonaguni he also recorded 27 *kaida* symbols, referring to them as:

[...] some hieroglyphic characters used by the older inhabitants. These are rather curious. They evidently give the form of the object which it is desired to represent. In this way they approach more closely the ancient Egyptian form of writing than to the ideographs of the Chinese written language.

[FIG_1]: Leavenworth’s collection of *kaida* symbols



HIEROGLYPHICS



Research into *kaida* writing attained a new quality with the studies of Yamuro Ki'ichi who spent several years studying Okinawan mathematics after being dispatched to teach at Okinawa Prefectural School in 1911. He thereby devoted much attention to number words across dialects of Ryukyuan languages. He also studied different practices of recording concepts, again with particular emphasis on numbers. After describing the various ways in which different patterns of knots could be tied into a rope to record quantities, Yamuro also made transcriptions of four symbols denoting Yonaguni family homes (so-called *dahan*). He found these written on postal packages that had originally been sent from Iriomote Island to Yonaguni Island. He neglected, however, to convert these symbols into the actual family names. To gain more insights into *kaida* writing, Yamuro consulted Ishadō Sonryō, an elementary school teacher from Yonaguni. Ishadō provided him with 32 *kaida* characters that denoted objects, plus a complete series of numerals up to 1,000 along with several measurement characters. Ishadō also told him that these Chinese numeral style characters had only come into use in the last 60 to 70 years, and that knotted ropes for recording numbers

(*ketsujō*) had been used before. He furthermore informed him that these characters had not been invented on Yonaguni, and that the pictograms called *kaidaji* (*kaida* characters) were still in use, albeit only for the purpose of referring to simple things. *Kaidaji* were falling out of use at the time, because compulsory education had started in Yonaguni and pupils acquired literacy in Japanese.

The next chronicler of Yonaguni writing was Kawamura Tadao, a Kobe-based sociologist. He made his first visit to the southern Ryukyus in 1936. The insights he gained thereby were published in a book he titled *Nantō bunka no tankyū* ('In Search of Southern Culture'), which is an illustrated compilation of folklore, language, and family relations in various parts of the Ryukyu Archipelago (Kawamura 1939). His investigation of Yonaguni writing, while short in analysis, contains the most complete list of characters so far. He compiled a total of 43 ideographs, which included numerals from one to ten, and a character for 'one half' in addition to six basic local measurement units.

In 1959, Ikema Eizō completed a history of Yonaguni, a work that had taken him almost two decades to complete. His book included information on history, local customs, songs, and a table of *kaida* characters with Japanese equivalents attached (Ikema [1959]2007). This table of characters was based on material that had been written down by Shinzatu Manna in 1893. However, the *kaida* characters we find in Ikema's book show more stylization than those of any previous record. Ikema Eizō died in 1972, and his wife Ikema Nae is one of the very few islanders who maintained a traditional knowledge of *kaida* writing.

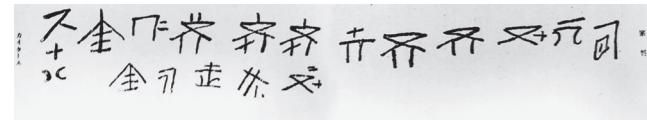
KAIDA AS WRITING SYSTEM

Let us consider *kaida* as a writing system next. Writing in Yonaguni contained several different types of glyphs which can be combined into a text. While Yonaguni Islanders refer to all these types as *kaida* (sometimes even with Chinese *kanji*-based characters included), writing in Yonaguni involved three distinct sets of characters with different origins.

Probably the most ancient feature of *kaida* writing, and also the element that continues to be most widely known today, are the signs for marking homes. These are called *dahan*. Each Yonaguni family created a symbol for their house, and this symbol was then also used on documents that indicated the ownership of goods or animals. There are at least 333 different *dahan* on Yonaguni, and they may at times still be used on personal items. These *dahan* markings go back to a time when the islanders carved distinctive notches into the ears of the animals they owned. Made on various parts of the animals' ears, these notches were called *minhan* (ear marks). They were composed from twelve basic types of incisions.

Sakihara Toshi, who was born in Yonaguni in 1925 and lived there until 1944, reports that in the 1930s, *minhan* and *dahan* were more commonly known than *kaida* writing among members of her family and among her friends: “My father cut our *minhan* in the ears of our animals and carved our *dahan* into wood. He taught his sons how to do this. They practiced it by cutting samples into the tick leaves of the Fukugi tree.” Cattle were the most valuable animals, she added, in particular cows that had already given birth. People from the neighboring Ishigaki Island would travel to Yonaguni to buy them. When one family split into distinct family branches, then a new *dahan* would be created. The new symbol would loosely resemble that of the original family. Usually, only an extra line or dot was added. Let us consider some concrete examples to illustrate *dahan* symbols. The following list consists primarily of *dahan*. They have been stored in the personal archives of Nishime Yukio.

[FIG_2]: List of *dahan* from the Nishime Archive



First row, right to left: (unknown), Ubunaka, Mada (?), Tayata, Tayata, Murindata, (next four characters unknown), Nagachima. Second row: Mada, (two unknown), Dibuya (?), Nagachima. At far left and in small *kaida* fonts: 18 people.

Dahan have not completely disappeared in contemporary life in Yonaguni. One can occasionally still see them written on a basket or on bottles of Yonaguni’s famous *hanazake* liquor in bars and restaurants where patrons leave their bottle behind to be consumed on their next visit.

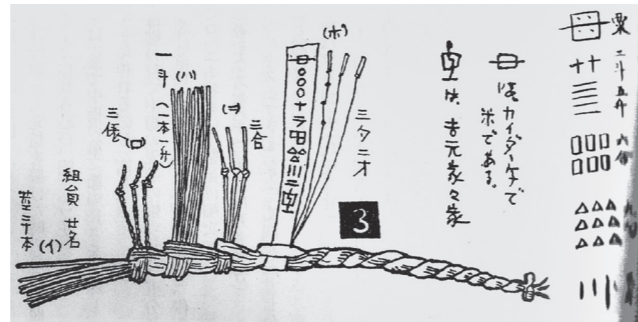
A second element of *kaida* writing are geometric characters that are used to count and measure things. These characters were developed from the knotted ropes called *ketsujō* that were used to indicate quantities of mainly tax-related items. Knitted ropes had been used in this way since ancient times across the Ryukyus. The shapes that result from making these knots are called *suuchuuma*. The term *suuchuuma* probably originates from Taiwan. It refers to number symbols that were used in China many centuries ago. *Suuchuuma* comprise a full series of numerals up to tens of thousands and they are used to count various items, including money. Multiple number units exist and can be repeated up to four; five is indicated by cutting the next higher unit in half. The *kaida* variations of these rope representations were used in the Yaeyama Islands when money was not widely used. By relying on these geometric *kaida* symbols people could create accounts of barter and ownership. In the case of Yonaguni, these basic forms are as follows.

[FIG_3]: System of ‘geometric’ *kaida* derived from knot patterns

	YONAGUNI	JAPANESE	METRIC
○	<i>tara</i>	<i>yō</i>	180 liters
+	<i>tu</i>	<i>tō</i>	18 liters
—	<i>su, bagachi</i>	<i>shō</i>	1.8 liters
□	<i>gu</i>	<i>gō</i>	180 milliliters
△	<i>sagu</i>	<i>shaku</i>	18 milliliters
	(<i>sai</i>)	<i>sai</i>	1.8 milliliters

These characters can be repeated to indicate multiple or larger units. Thus, four *gō* is written <□□□□>, <≡> is three *shō*, and <△△△> is three *shaku*, etc. In the next two examples, *kaida* characters are added to knotted ropes. One can easily recognize from these examples that less effort is required using *kaida* as compared to doing knots.

[FIG_4]: Rice record from Yonaguni Island and Taketomi Island



The example above is from Taketomi Island in the Yaeyamas. It is easy to read once it is established that the first character <≡> means ‘millet’. The remaining characters denote quantities.

In Yonaguni we find an innovation where Chinese *kanji*-based numerals are used in a way to further simplify record keeping. Numerals were written after units of volumes to abbreviate overtly long representations. Hence, six *gō*, written <□□□□□□> in *kaida* writing, becomes a simple <□六>. The ‘6 *gō* 9 *shaku* 3 *sai*’ record on the board on Taketomi on Figure 4 could thus simply be written as <□六△九 | ラ>. We can find many such examples of these numbers being used after pictographs to depict the quantity of livestock or items that were being recorded in Yonaguni.

The third element of *kaida* writing are pictographs. We can still find them today printed on the T-shirts, bottles, packages, and other local products and souvenirs from Yonaguni. These pictographs feature various levels of abstraction. Some symbols such as those for ‘rice’ or ‘bamboo’ are highly stylized, while others are close to being drawings of the items they represent. As before, consider some concrete examples first.

[FIG_5]: *Kaida* symbols and the Yonaguni nomenclature for some food staples

⊖	rice	<i>nni</i>
⊖	millet	<i>aa</i>
⊖	bean	<i>mami</i>
⊖	sake	<i>sagi</i>
⊖	salt	<i>masu</i>
⊖	grain	<i>mainuhi</i>
⊖	barley	<i>mun</i>
⊖	red bean	<i>agamami</i>
⊖	yam	<i>sunggaru</i>
□	oil	<i>anda</i>

Several conventions become apparent when looking at the *kaida* symbols depicted in Figure 5. First, items traditionally carried in wooden boxes are drawn in square shapes to indicate the box, and above the representation of the box, something is added to indicate the specific item that is contained therein. While it is easy to identify the box, the item inside the box is often tricky. Reading these characters requires learning the conventions that are applied to *kaida* writing. Also, the notion of ‘boxed items’ is not without its problems either. Oil, for example, may or may not belong in this group. Furthermore, two more items which appear to belong in the ‘boxed category’ are soy sauce and vinegar, but their forms no longer contain box shapes. However, the symbols that represent soy sauce and vinegar seem to have evolved from proto-forms that had once been boxes. There exists also a variant form of ‘sake’ which contains only a zigzag line across the top. That is to say, the part that indicated the box has been completely abbreviated. It is possible that the symbols representing soy sauce and vinegar underwent a similar process of simplification.

[FIG_6]: *Kaida* symbols and the Yonaguni nomenclature for some liquids

ㄥ	soy sauce	<i>suyu</i>
ㄥ	vinegar	<i>hairi</i>
ㄥ	sake variant	<i>sagi</i>

The second major group of locally designed characters involve living animals. We find the following main characters for them in Yonaguni.

[FIG_7]: *Kaida* symbols and the Yonaguni nomenclature for some animals

⊖	funa	<i>funa</i>
⊖	fish	<i>iyu</i>

⊖	fish vertical variant	<i>iyu</i>
⊖	mare	<i>miinma</i>
⊖	male horse	<i>biginma</i>
⊖	cow	<i>miuuchi, naamya</i>
⊖	bull	<i>bigiuchi</i>
⊖	goat	<i>hibita</i>
⊖	hen	<i>miimita</i>
⊖	rooster	<i>bigimita</i>
⊖	pig	<i>wa</i>
⊖	person	<i>tu</i>
⊖	(cricket ?)	[unknown]
⊖	shrimp	<i>tarungga</i>
⊖	octopus	<i>tagu</i>

It is not entirely sure what <⊖> refers to in Yonaguni. Some have speculated that it corresponds to Japanese *kōrogi* (‘cricket’). A straightforward and easy-to-grasp convention is that male animals tend to have full outlined bodies, while female animals are depicted with a thinner body shape. In Ikema’s above-mentioned chart, the full body has morphed into a body with a short horizontal line on the top.

We also find characters for vegetables and edible plants in the *kaida* system. These, too, share a similar form:

[FIG_8]: *Kaida* symbols and the Yonaguni nomenclature for vegetables and edible plants

⊖	bamboo	<i>tagi</i>
⊖	long gourd	<i>nabira</i>
⊖	gourd	<i>chibui</i>
⊖	thatch	<i>kaya</i>
⊖	asparagus bean	<i>furumami</i>
⊖	burdock	<i>gunbu</i>
⊖	vegetable	<i>nanuha</i>
⊖	garlic	<i>hiru</i>
⊖	carrot	<i>kindaguni</i>
⊖	scallion	<i>rakkyu</i>
⊖	pumpkin	<i>nankuu</i>
⊖	large root	<i>ubuni</i>
⊖	peanut	<i>dimami</i>
⊖	sweet potato	<i>tumaikuru</i>
⊖	potato	<i>unti</i>
⊖	rice plant	<i>nni</i>
⊖	watermelon	<i>chikka</i>
⊖	spring onion	<i>chinda</i>
⊖	kelp	<i>kubu</i>
⊖	water	<i>min</i>
⊖	mountain	<i>dama</i>

Several other kinds of foods are also conventionally expressed through *kaida* symbols.

[FIG_9]: *Kaida* symbols and Yonaguni nomenclature for other food items

♡	miso	<i>nsu</i>
○	egg	<i>kaiŋu</i>
↔	noodles	<i>sumin</i>

Finally, we also find many other artifacts for which *kaida* characters have been created.

Figure 10: *Kaida* symbols and Yonaguni nomenclature for various artifacts

≡	house	<i>da</i>
𦨭	yanbaru boat	<i>maranni</i>
┆	scale	<i>hagai, paŋai</i>
┌	board	<i>it'a</i>
⊗	wara rope	<i>baranna</i>
⊗	black rope	<i>anŋuinna</i>
⊗	grave	<i>haga</i>
□	paper	<i>kabi</i>
⊕	tawara (measure for rice)	<i>tara</i>
⊕	pot (with numeral inside)	<i>chibu</i>
⊕	handled pot	<i>minchibu</i>
⊕	fabric	<i>nuŋu</i>
⊕	firewood	<i>timunu</i>
⊕	canoe	<i>it'anni</i>
┆	kin (measure for 600 g)	<i>kin</i>

With these characters, it now becomes possible to express a variety of issues that exceed the recording of quantities of things like the rice or millet. While animals were not generally used for tax payments – they were considered too important and indispensable, Yonaguni Islanders had nevertheless many reasons to keep a record of them. We therefore find many *kaida* expressions related to the ownership of animals. Usually, the symbols for the *dahan* are thereby combined with symbols for animals and numbers.

The fourth and last type of characters employed for *kaida* writing are glyphs that have been either influenced by or are imitations of Chinese characters known in Japanese as *kanji*. Numerals from 1 to 10 are the most frequently used characters and in *kaida* script they are written as follows: < 一ニㄥ六七(八九十 > and 100 and 1,000 are written < ㄩ > and < ㄩ >, respectively. Japanese observers were quick to notice that Yonaguni Islanders wrote these characters without paying attention to stroke order or stroke

direction. Stroke order and direction of the stroke is an issue that is always strictly emphasized in learning *kanji* in Japan. Frequently used characters usually also developed into abbreviated styles that are specific to Yonaguni. We can therefore infer that *kaida* characters were not learned in a formal way and that this in turn was responsible for the idiosyncratic forms of these symbols.

Other than characters representing numerals of up to 1,000, *kanji* characters for ‘month’ and ‘day’, < 月 > and < 日 > respectively in *kaida* script, were often employed. Also, the measurement unit *kin* (< 斤 > in *kaida*) was also frequently written by *kanji*. Probably during the mid-nineteenth century, these numerals came to substitute the practice of using knotted strings. We find further local innovation in the practice of merging *kanji* numerals with various *kaida* signs. By combining the *kaida* sign for ‘pot’ < ⊕ > and a number (inside or above), it was possible to quickly record the quantity of liquor contained inside a container. Numbers could also be combined with the *kaida* character for ‘board’ < ┌ > to indicate the length of an object.

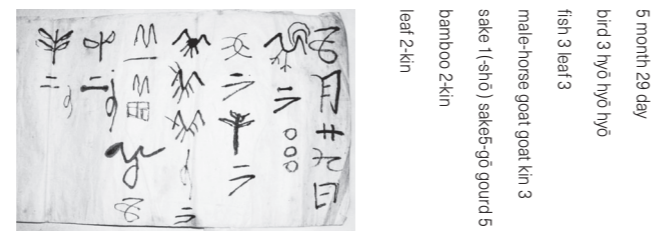
ANALYZING Kaida DOCUMENTS

Kaida were also used to compile entire documents. Let us examine two examples in more detail. Archived at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, these documents were not discovered and deciphered until recently.

Example 1: The May 29 sheet

The document I call here ‘May 29 sheet’ contains no *dahan*, but it records the possessions or obligations of a single family on May 29 of an unknown year. Using various materials, including the collection of characters above, it can be read as seen on the right in FIG_11.

[FIG_11]: May 29 document



The document first notes the date in the first line: 5th month, 29th day. Following the date, we find the symbol for bird (chicken) and the numeral 3. The three circles underneath it in line two presumably represent a quantity of three bushel (*hyō*) of rice. The third line shows three *kin* (one *kin* = 600 gram) of fish and three *kin* of vegetables. The fourth line shows a male horse

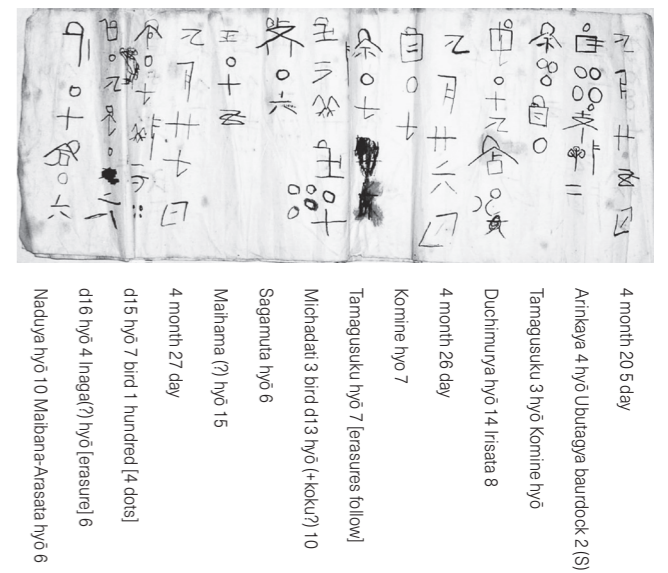
and two goats. This is followed by the *kaida* for meat and the number three (3 *kin* of goat meat). The character for sake in line five has an unorthodox form. As discussed before, foodstuffs are usually stored in wooden boxes that are represented by characters containing square boxes plus a distinctive mark on the top. Sake, for example, is a box with a zigzag line on top < 𠄎 >. In this document, however, the box is omitted, and sake is reduced to a zigzag line < ㄩ >. Another innovation we find in this document is the connection of five squares to represent five *gō* (one *gō* = 180 milliliter). Usually, a single square plus a numeral is used to express a five *gō*, e.g. < 𠄎 五 > or < 𠄎 五 >. Strictly speaking, the second sake character is superfluous, because 1 *shō* 5 *gō* can also be expressed with < ㄩ 一 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 >. We should however not discount the possibility that the scribe has used separate entries for separate containers here. Be that as it may, the items after sake are again easy to decipher. We find here five gourds, two *kin* of bamboo and finally two *kin* of vegetables. All in all, this document is an easily readable record of what someone held or owed on a specific date in Yonaguni.

Example 2: A three-page document containing records from multiple families

The next document I would like to discuss here consists of separate pages that seem to have formed one document at one point. They contain many different *dahan* and record the holdings or obligations of several families in one village in Yonaguni. All *dahan* in the document are from Sonai, on the northern shore of the island. Unfortunately, some *dahan* readings are no longer known. For this reason, I have assigned to them the letter ‘d’ for *dahan* followed by a provisional number for identification. The local pronunciation of the *dahan* is given, where possible.

The document is one of the longest remaining materials that contain *kaida* writing. It has a total of 172 characters, and it is quite complex. It includes *kanji*-based dates, *dahan* family markings, *suuchuuma* numerical quantities as well as pictographs for animals and foodstuffs. A feature that is not seen in other *kaida* documents is the addition of small circles attached to some of the *dahan*. A large circle, in general, indicates one *tawara* (about 60 kilo) of rice, but the circles in this document are significantly smaller. It might be possible that these circles were used as checks to indicate which families had completed their payments.

[FIG_12]: First sheet of the document

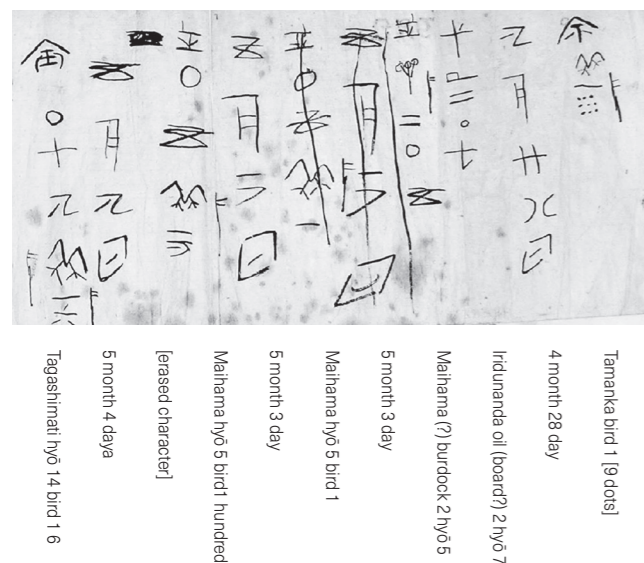


This record also begins with a date: April 25 < ㄩ 月 廿 五 日 > of an unknown year. As in most *kaida* documents, the year is not indicated. It starts by recording that the Arinkaya (Japanese: Tōgei) family owned 4 *hyō* of rice. The next *dahan* is that of the Ubutagaya (Japanese: Ōdaka) family whose possession was 2 units of burdock. The *kaida* character for scale < ┆ > appears next to the burdock. A more cursive version of this character is < 𠄎 > which was conventionally used to express the measurement unit of *kin*. It is likely that this symbol is used to indicate that the item in question was to be measured on a scale, and that the subsequent number expresses the weight in *kin*. According to the same document the Tamagusuku family has 3 *hyō* and the Komine family has 1 *hyō* of rice. The next line shows that the Duchimurya (Japanese: Duchimuta) family has 14 *hyō* and the Irisata family 8 *hyō*. The last information has been corrected by the writer who initially had noted 6 (六) but then crossed this number out. Later in the same month, on April 26 < ㄩ 月 廿 六 日 >, the Komine and Tamagusuku families appear again, this time both with a possession of 7 *hyō*. This is then followed by two *dahan* (d13 unknown and the Sagamuta family) which have been erased before creating two new records for d13. The first of these notes 3 < ㄩ > followed by the sign for bird < 𠄎 >. We then see a second instance of the same *dahan*, this time with the sign for *hyō* and the number 10, with four more *hyō* circles inserted on the left. If the four additional *hyō* are to be added, the final amount is 14 *hyō*. Next, we find the Sagamuta family, who had been erased in the preceding line but is now listed as having 6 *hyō*. The final record of the day is the Maihama (Japanese: Ōhama) family with 15 *hyō*. The third and last date on this document is April 27 < ㄩ 月 廿 七 日 >. We find there an unknown family (d15) with the

following record <〇七~~ニ~~一~~ニ~~十>. This family has thus 7 *hyō* of rice and then we find a record that is somewhat unclear as it shows scale to the right of bird, then 1, then 100, and an arrangement of four dots in a 2x2 square. This could be read as birds 1x100 followed by whatever the four dots represent. Other documents show that the 100 character is either used alone (for the value 100) or repeated (for multiple hundreds), without a leading 1. Note also in this context that in the Yonaguni language (Dunan) one hundred is *hyagu* (literally ‘hundred’ and not ‘one hundred’). This works against the hypothesis that this entry could be read as 100 birds. Hence, it may be possible that only the numeral 1 applies to the bird. The dots also appear in patterns of two (horizontally), six (3x2), and nine (3x3) on the following page. In several cases, such dots appear after the bird pictograph. A small circle or oval is known to represent an egg in *kaida* <〇>, and the combination <~~ニ~~〇> is known to mean bird and 100 eggs, implying that eggs can be counted in hundreds. It is also known that a small dash attached to the oval-shaped pictograph for egg was used to indicate ten eggs and that eggs were often carried in amounts of ten in a sling-like holder made of rope. If these smaller circles represent each ten of eggs, then we arrive at a record of 140 eggs. The remaining lines are again straightforward and simple. While the family names of three of the four *dahan* that appear next are unknown today, we can note that d16 has 4 *hyō*, d17 has 6 *hyō* (corrected from an initial 4 to 6), d18 has 10 *hyō*, and the Maibana (Japanese Maehama) family has 6 *hyō*.

Next, we have a single detached sheet which is dated April 28. Given the similar handwriting to the sheet analyzed before, I will analyze this page under the presupposition that these sheets were originally one document.

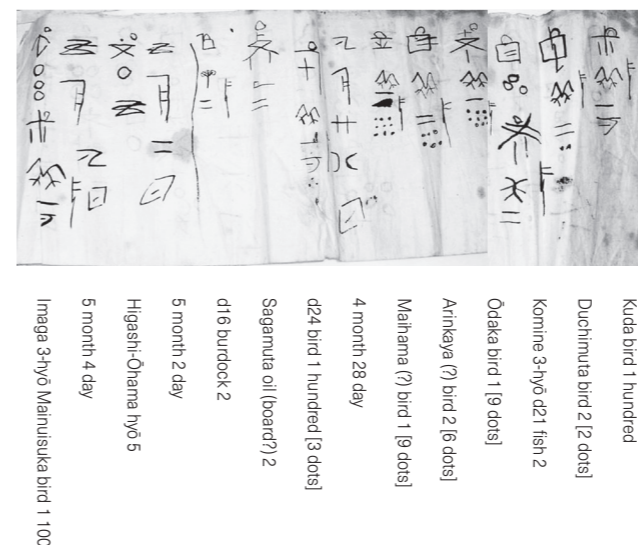
[FIG_13]: Second sheet of the document



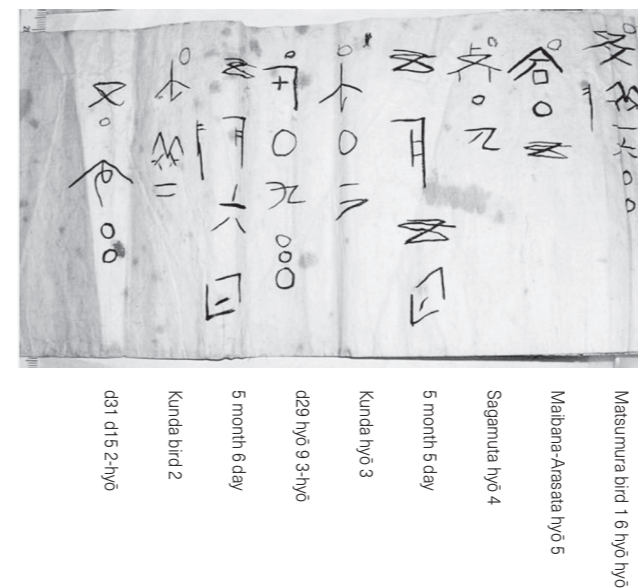
If this is part of the same document, the date would again be April 27. The document shows that the Tamanka family has one bird and then a nine-dot pattern which would represent ninety eggs. Then we have a new date, April 28, where the Iridunanda family is recorded with two units of oil and 7 *hyō* of rice. It is not entirely clear though if the character is question is <□> (oil) or <←> (board). A subbranch of the Maihana (Japanese: Ōhama) family has two *kin* of burdock and 5 *hyō* of rice. This is then followed by two crossed-out lines that are substantially identical with the corrected lines that follow them. They note that on May 3 the family has 5 *hyō* of rice and bird 100, that is, 100 chicken eggs. The 100 character was never reached in the first two iterations that were crossed out. The only other difference between the crossed-out lines and the new record is the position of the small vertical line ascending from the top of the body of the *dahan*. Usually such a line is added when a descendant family forms a separate household, and the house name has the diminutive suffix -ti appended. In this case, the scribe is replacing a record for one branch of the Maihana family with one for another branch. We already had the main line of the Maihana family (with 15 *hyō* of rice on April 26) on the preceding page. On April 28 we saw a branch of the family whose *dahan* has two small ticks added. In this line, we now see a family whose *dahan* demands only a tick on the left side to mark it as a sub-branch of the Maihana family. For the sake of correctly positioning one small line on the *dahan*, the scribe went to the trouble of erasing the entire record rather than just redrawing the character. Immediately to the left of this corrected *dahan*, we see what could be the original (unticked) Maihana *dahan* which has been erased. The next date we find is May 4 <ニ月 兀 日> where we have again an easy record. The Tagashimati (Japanese: Tamanka) family has 14 *hyō* of rice, then ‘bird 1 6’ with the ‘scale’ character on the side.

This brings us to the third page of the document. Just as in the two pages before, we find many more entries with dot patterns. Kuda family bird 1 hundred; Duchimuta family bird 2 (20 eggs); Komine family 3-*hyō*, d21 fish 2; Ōdaka family bird 1 (90 eggs); Arinkaya family bird 2 (60 eggs); Maihana family bird 1 (90 eggs)

[FIG_14]: Third sheet of the document



[FIG_15]: Fourth sheet of the document



This final page contains a single instance of the scale or *kin* character which is appended to the left of a pictograph. In addition, its form is horizontally reversed, resulting in a kind of mirror image. All *dahan* except d15 in the last line have small circles appended. The unknown *dahan* d29 resembles to the *dahan* of the Neritaigu and Agura families. The *dahan* d31 in the last line looks almost exactly like the *dahan* of the Kubamati family, except that the latter has small serifs at the end of the diagonal lines. Given that this family’s subbranch character contains the junior-house suffix -ti, we may be able to posit an unrecorded original Kubama family whose *dahan*, as above, would then have no serifs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We can see in the discussion of these documents and the conventions that underlie them that many advances were made in *kaida* writing over the time. As an effect, *kaida* became increasingly able to represent language. However, the far superior expressiveness of the Japanese writing system marginalized *kaida* writing from the moment that the first Japanese school was established in Yonaguni in 1885. Literacy in Yonaguni was achieved through Japanese and not through the Dunan language of Yonaguni which underlies *kaida* writing. *Kaida* writing reflects the many influences that Yonaguni has absorbed in its history as a rather isolated community. People on Yonaguni have consistently embraced fragments of different scripts that had reached them. Simultaneously, Yonaguni Islanders also employed their own innovations. In the form of the *dahan*, writing extended virtually to everybody on the island. Today, *kaida* writing retains mainly artistic and aesthetic characteristics. It also serves as a source of pride to Yonaguni Islanders who, against all odds, had developed and practiced their very own and unique way of writing.

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A Brief History of Japanese Language Education
in Yonaguni Island and the Yaeyama Islands

1879: CHANGES IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

In 1879, the Japanese government forcefully abolished the Ryukyu dynasty (Ryukyu kingdom) and established Okinawa Prefecture with military backing. The Japanese government appointed as the first governor of Okinawa Nabeshima Naoyoshi, a Japanese feudal lord from Saga Prefecture in Kyushu. At this time, the people of Okinawan, especially the former ruling class of the Ryukyu kingdom, resisted all actions of the Japanese government. The transformation from the Ryukyu dynasty to Okinawa Prefecture was felt in many ways, and it also affected education in Yonaguni and the Yaeyama Islands. Consider first the ancient ways. After the 18th century, under the rule of the Ryukyu dynasty, an institution of elementary education called *Kaisho* (literally, ‘meeting place’) was established in Ishigaki Island, the main island of the Yaeyama Archipelago. It was an educational institution reserved for the ruling class, and it focused on Confucian ethics, reading, writing and reckoning. This kind of education served the purpose of training officials for their future responsibilities. There was no such institution on Yonaguni Island which was administered by Ishigaki Island then. If learning to read, write and calculate meant having an education, then people in Yonaguni and everybody who was not part of the ruling class in Yaeyama remained ‘uneducated’. This notwithstanding, everybody living there was obviously educated to learn and transmit the local knowledge that was necessary for everyday life. Everyday life and the necessary informal education it required was entirely conducted in Ryukyuan languages. To be precise, the entire lives were conducted in Yonaguni-Ryukyuan (Dunan) and Yaeyaman-Ryukyuan, respectively.

It was in addition to this informal transmission of local knowledge that Okinawa Prefecture established school education. In February 1880, it established a school called *Kaiwa denshūjo* (‘Conversation school’) in the ancient capital of Shuri on Okinawa Island. This school was then reorganized into a teacher training facility and renamed ‘Okinawa Normal School’ in June of the same year. In the first half of 1880s, Okinawa Prefecture set up many elementary schools across Okinawa, including in Yonaguni and in the neighboring Yaeyamas. Yonaguni Elementary School was established in June 1885, and Okuda Yu from Hiroshima was assigned to the school as its first teacher. 43 students, all boys, were enrolled in the first schoolyear. According to statistics compiled by Okinawa Prefecture in 1885, there were 51 elementary schools across Okinawa and two-thirds of all teachers in Okinawa Prefecture originated from the Japanese mainland. Nabeshima Naoyoshi, the first governor of Okinawa, stated that it was an urgent task of Okinawa Prefecture to adapt language and customs in Okinawa to those of the Japanese mainland, and he stated in no uncertain ways that there was no other way to do so

but through school education. Okinawa Prefecture thus explicitly aimed to spread Japanese language and customs across Okinawa through school education.

1880s: JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION STARTS

In order to spread Japanese in Okinawa, the Academic Affairs Division of Okinawa Prefecture compiled a two-volume Japanese language textbook called *Okinawa taiwa* (‘Dialogue in Okinawa’) in 1880. The teachers at elementary and normal schools used these materials to teach Japanese. They made their students recite alternately Japanese and Okinawan sentences. Nomura Shigeyasu from Saga Prefecture in Kyushu, a teacher at Nakagami Elementary School in central Okinawa Island, looked back at these times as follows:

My students and I suffered because we were not able to understand what we said to each other. This was not only the case during class hours but also outside of class, and so I made my students recite ‘Dialogue in Okinawa’. In this way they slowly came to understand what I was saying.

The first task of Okinawan schools was thus to ensure that teachers from the mainland and Okinawan students could communicate. As we have already mentioned, most teachers were initially from the Japanese mainland, and they were not able to understand Ryukyuan languages. In the ‘Dialogue in Okinawa’ textbook, Japanese was written in large characters and Okinawan was added next to it in smaller fonts. Japanese teachers from the mainland never learned to speak Ryukyuan languages. This means that the responsibility to close the communicative gap rested entirely on the part of the students. It is in this practice that we can find a colonial character of school education in modern Okinawa. This unequal relation between Japanese mainlanders and Okinawans extended to all relations between Okinawan and mainland Japanese.

THE EARLY 1900s: INTRODUCTION OF THE ‘DIALECT PUNISHMENT TAG’ (*HŌGEN FUDA*)

Teachers in Okinawa thus taught Japanese language by using ‘Dialogue in Okinawa’ and through translating Ryukyuan languages into Japanese. Japan’s military victory in the 1894/95 Sino-Japanese War caused changes to this educational practice. After Japan’s victory, Taiwan was ceded to Japan which ruled the island as a colony until 1945. The Treaty between Qing China and Japan also implied that the possibility of resurrecting the foregone Ryukyu dynasty disappeared. Until 1895 many Okinawans had hoped that Japanese rule would only be temporary, and that China would support Okinawan ambitions for independence. As an effect

of the political changes in 1895, officials in charge of academic affairs and schoolteachers began to insist that Okinawan students had to speak only Japanese at school. The Ryukyuan languages now became seen as an obstacle to carry out Japanese language education, and steps were being taken to suppress their use.

From the early 1900s onwards, teachers began to aim for lessons where Ryukyuan languages would no longer be employed. While Okinawan students continued to speak only Ryukyuan languages before they entered elementary school, teachers now tried to make them speak only Japanese at school – except for the very early stage of elementary school when pupils had no command of Japanese whatsoever. Teachers required that Okinawan students would not speak Ryukyuan languages. By 1900, schoolteachers in Okinawa came from both mainland Japan and from Okinawa. However, most school principals still originated from the mainland then. Many mainland teachers believed that Okinawan students ought to speak only Japanese to cultivate a national character as Japanese. Okinawan teachers, on the other hand, mainly thought that Okinawan students had to speak Japanese to avoid being discriminated against by mainlanders. The effect was the same, school became a domain where only Japanese was used.

Consider two concrete examples of these attitudes. Takada Utaro, a secondary school teacher from Kyoto who worked in Okinawa, stated that Okinawan people should respect the Japanese national language and that Ryukyuan local languages should be banned entirely. He thought that such a practice would cultivate their national character as Japanese. On the other hand, Tatetsu Shunpo, an elementary school teacher from Miyako Island working at schools in Okinawa Island, stated that if Okinawans did not speak Japanese, but only Ryukyuan, then this would inevitably result in Japanese perceiving Okinawans as foreign. Hence, he thought Okinawans ought to speak Japanese. It is worthy of note that despite such significant differences between mainland and Okinawan teachers, both agreed that Okinawan students should speak Japanese, that this shift of language use should be achieved through school education, and that banning or suppressing Ryukyuan languages would contribute to this objective. It is in this context that schoolteachers in Okinawa created a dialect punishment tag called *hōgen fuda*. It was employed from the early 1900s onwards as an instrument to suppress the use of Ryukyuan languages and to thereby make Okinawan students speak Japanese.

The dialect punishment tag was used in the following way. The student who had to wear the wooden tag around the neck was responsible for handing it on to the next student who spoke Ryukyuan. Students had to monitor their own language use and that of their classmates. Student who had the tag were punished

in various ways by their teacher. For example, they were beaten, asked to fold their legs under themselves and sit in uncomfortable positions, or they had to clean the classroom at the end of the day, and so on. The customs of making people wear a punitive tag had existed in Okinawan villages since the time of the Ryukyu dynasty. Back then, the tag was used to make the residents follow the rules of the village, and offenders were put to shame by having to wear a punitive tag. This ancient custom was now applied to Japanese language education in Okinawan schools. The dialect punishment tag continued to be used until the mid-1970s, despite the fact that Okinawa was separated from the mainland and placed under US occupation between 1945 and 1972.

OKINAWAN STUDENTS AND THE DIALECT PUNISHMENT TAG

Those who attended school in Okinawa Prefecture, including pupils in Yonaguni Island and in the Yaeyamas, often recall memories of the dialect punishment tag. These recollections offer precious information on how they behaved in their schooldays and how they dealt with the practice of the dialect punishment tag. In general, we can state that memories share many parallels, even when analyzed across time and regions in Okinawa.

Let us thus consider some of these memories in Yonaguni and in Yaeyama. The oldest reminiscence of the tag that has been confirmed so far is that of a person who entered Tonoshiro Elementary School in Ishigaki Island in 1906. He remembered the following (note that ‘dialect’ refers to the Yaeyaman language here):

Because wearing the dialect punishment tag around our neck was a great dishonor, we tended to be consciously silent in the classroom. If we ended up having to wear the tag, we hoped to hand it to another student as quickly as possible. When I happened to be so unfortunate to have the tag, I often deliberately stepped on somebody’s foot, and then this student would say aga (‘ouch!’) in the Yaeyaman language. I could then report that this student had spoken dialect and rid myself from the tag.

We find lots of similar recollections of that time. Many Okinawans remember taking ‘self-defense measures’ such as not speaking in the classroom to avoid punishments. Such behavior reveal that students resented being handed the dialect punishment tag. Okinawan students understood that if they kept silent, they could avoid the dialect punishment tag, and punishment by the teacher after class. At the same time, students also felt that it was difficult to stay silent for a long time. Faced with this dilemma, Okinawan students came up with an implicit rule between themselves that allowed them to use Ryukyuan languages regardless of their

teachers' intentions to suppress these languages in the classroom. Students would pass on the dialect punishment tag if another student declared beforehand 'to now speak in Ryukyuan'. Students learned to use indirect speech for themselves. Here is what a former student remembers about his time as a third-grader in Yonaguni Elementary School in 1928:

Beforehand I declared 'From now on I speak in Yonaguni language', and then I began to do so. My classmates allowed me to speak this way, and they would not give me the dialect punishment tag. If I forgot to declare this, I would be given the tag.

Through statements like this we understand that students at this elementary school spoke mostly in the Yonaguni language during their break time, but that doing so required them to find a way of circumventing the practice of handing on the dialect punishment tag. Many people also recall the routine of deliberately stepping onto another student's foot in order to pass on the tag. Since Okinawan students still led predominantly Ryukyuan language lives by then, it was only natural that spontaneous exclamations such as *aga* (ouch!) were in Ryukyuan. All in all, we can see a desire to pass on the dialect punishment tag as quickly as possible to escape humiliation and the punishment that was to follow. This was obviously not what the teachers had hoped for. Their intentions had been to have their students speak Japanese instead of Ryukyuan languages, but the use of the dialect punishment tag did not result in having Okinawan students trying to speak Japanese at school all the time. Students came up with various ways of how to deal with the tag.

TEACHERS AND THE DIALECT PUNISHMENT TAG

In 1915, Okinawa Prefecture started to engage in more purposeful efforts to strictly enforcing students to speak only Japanese in school. The Okinawa Prefectural Education Society (*Okinawa-ken kyōiku-kai*), which consisted of educational administrators and teachers, deliberated new teaching approaches towards this end. They submitted a report in which they listed what schools, families and local communities could do to have students shift from Ryukyuan to Japanese. The main feature of this report was that the Society asked Okinawans to not ridicule Okinawan students who tried to speak Japanese in their families and local communities. This implies that Okinawans still felt that it was normal for them to speak Ryukyuan languages outside school then. This report makes also clear that schoolteachers had not developed a systematic method of instruction that made Okinawan students speak Japanese. The Society also stated in its report that while the practice of the dialect punishment tag was to be tolerated for practical reasons, its use was detrimental to educational principles. Schoolteachers in Okinawa did not

consider the use of the dialect punishment tag a good method to teach Japanese. They knew by experience that its use simply silenced their students, and that pupils were preoccupied with passing on the tag to the next students. In view of an absence of a systematic method for teaching Japanese, the Society had no other advice to offer but to teach Japanese patiently. This point was repeatedly stressed in the report.

Let us consider another historical source of information, namely a short work of fiction by the title *Ninkimono* ('A popular person'). It was written by an author with the pen-name Sakura Ryuji and was published in 1935 in volume 235 of Okinawa Prefectural Education Society's monthly magazine *Okinawa Kyōiku* ('Okinawan Education?'). *Ninkimono* of fiction described discussions among teachers during staff meetings on how to best enforce Japanese among students. At first one teacher says that Ryukyuan-speaking students should be penalized with the dialect punishment tag. Other teachers ask him questions about this proposal, and most of the schoolteachers attending the meeting reluctantly accept the idea. However, at some point in the discussion another teacher states that teachers ought to better understand why students do not speak Japanese. He eventually goes as far as arguing that the dialect punishment tag should not be employed in school. At the end of the meeting, almost all teachers support the idea of not using the tag. This story was published at a time when Okinawa Prefecture took a new direction in its language policy. From around the mid-1930s, the prefecture aimed to have Okinawans speak Japanese in their daily life. Ryukyuan languages were sought to be entirely banned then. This work of fiction again reveals that schoolteachers in Okinawa had not found an effective way of how to teach Japanese. In other words, they continued to somehow fumble through their classes. It is insightful to see that all teachers embraced the idea that the educational goal should be that of having Okinawan students speak only Japanese at school. How to best achieve this was far from clear though, and it is only on this point that can find conflicting ideas. Not all schoolteachers agreed on the use of the dialect punishment tag as a method. However, as they could not develop a distinct and effective methodology, they simply kept using the tag, and consequently schools became linguistic spaces that were distinct and isolated from local community life in Okinawa.

FROM THE END OF WORLD WAR II TO THE PRESENT DAY

Although neither Yonaguni Island nor the Yaeyamas had seen any ground battles at the end of World War II, Yaeyama and Yonaguni experienced a severe malaria outbreak that took a heavy toll on the local population after the war. The United States ruled the Ryukyu Islands until 1972. In practical terms this meant that an

administrative body was set up for each island, and from 1952 onwards a Ryukyu government was established to oversee the entire administration of Okinawa.

Despite the detachment of Okinawa from mainland Japan between 1955 and 1972, school in Okinawa continued to be modelled on the Japanese educational system. For example, a 6-3 school system was established, i.e., six years for elementary school and three years for junior high school. Furthermore, also the textbooks authorized by the Japanese Ministry of Education were used in Okinawa. The curriculum was based on the course of study in Japan. It is important to note in this context that the Ryukyu government did not have free discretion over its educational administration. The United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands had the last word on these matters, just as in all other issues.

Textbooks used in Okinawa were written in Japanese, and Japanese language education in Okinawa continued after 1945. The Okinawa Teachers' Association (*Okinawa kyōshokuin-kai*), which included all teachers in Okinawa, continued to encourage Japanese language education. Japanese language education was now seen as an important means to end US occupation, to achieve a reversion of Okinawa to Japan, and to increase students' academic achievement. Reversion to Japan was the most important political and social issue at the time, and students' academic achievement in Japanese was linked to this political project. Since the academic achievements of Okinawan students was lower than that of Japanese students, teachers in Okinawa aimed at improving this situation. Speaking Japanese like mainland Japanese and having the same academic achievements was meant to prove that Ryukyuan were Japanese and that the Ryukyus should be reunified with the Japanese mainland. Based on academic achievement surveys of Okinawan students in the mid-1950s, the Okinawa Teachers' Association concluded that teachers had to make their students speak Japanese. Suppressing Ryukyuan languages became once again a major means through which this was believed to be best realized. Thus, in Okinawan schools from the 1950s until the mid-1970s, teachers placed much emphasis of teaching their students to speak only Japanese. This included 'correcting mistakes', that is, 'correcting' the use or interferences of Ryukyuan languages. We can see this in historical records such as the 'Chronicle of Historical Events' (*Enkaku-shi*) of Yonaguni Elementary School where the following entries were noted:

January 19, 1952: Week of 'Strictly enforcing to speak Japanese' (Hyōjūngo reikō)

December 12, 1953: 24 students received the 'Standard Japanese Encouragement Award' (Hyōjūngo reikō hyōshō).

It was under these educational conditions and with these objectives that schoolteachers in Okinawa continued using the dialect punishment tag. When interviewing people who went to school between the late 1940s until the mid-1970s, one can often encounter reminiscences about the tag experience. Here is the recollection of Gushiken Yōkō, a world boxing champion in the late 1970s, who went to Ishigaki Elementary School in the mid-1960s:

If we spoke dialect at our school, we had to wear the dialect punishment tag made of wood around our neck. Since I was a Yamanguh ['rough guy' In Yaeyaman], I just spoke dialect continuously, and so I used to have the tag around my neck every day.

Around the time when Okinawan reversion to Japan occurred and Okinawa became a Japanese prefecture again in 1972, almost all teachers in Okinawa ceased using the dialect punishment tag. Schools in Okinawa continued Japanese language education, but it was also around this time that some schools started considering Ryukyuan languages, too. As early as 1977, a speech-contest named *Tadunmuni* ('Taketomi language') was organized in Taketomi Island in the Yaeyamas. *Tadunmuni* has been organized annually ever since, that is, for more than 40 years now. With the organization of such kind of events, the transmission of Ryukyuan languages has caught attention, and efforts to pay more attention to local language has spread in various forms across the Yaeyamas and Yonaguni Island.

When we looked back on the history of Japanese language education in Modern Okinawa, we can see that schoolteachers made various efforts to make their students speak Japanese. These efforts were in line with the educational policies of the Japanese government and of Okinawa Prefecture. The dialect punishment tag was part of these efforts. The tag was employed for many decades with the intention of banning Ryukyuan languages. This notwithstanding, we have also seen that students continued to speak Ryukyuan while learning Japanese. We can recognize a gap here between the intention of the teachers and the actual language lives of Okinawan students. Because of this gap between educational objectives and actual linguistic practices, teachers needed to permanently emphasize and encourage their students to speak Japanese. Unable to find efficient ways how to do so, they tended to simply discourage or prohibit students from speaking Ryukyuan. As a result, the dialect punishment tag remained in use from the 1900s until the mid-1970s. I believe that the present-day efforts of maintaining and revitalizing Ryukyuan language need to be placed and understood within this historical context.

FURTHER READING

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Yonaguni/Dunan
Island

THE FRONTIER

Northeast Asia, with the great cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, is commonly regarded as the dynamic heart of the global economy. Yet in its midst lies a chain of islands known in Japan as the Frontier or Southwestern Islands, which have been largely left behind by the dynamism. They stretch for 500 to 600 kilometers between Okinawa Island and Taiwan. Farthest is Yonaguni (properly speaking in the local language *Dunan* or *Dunancima*)¹. Small enough to be able to walk around in a day or so, it is around 2,000 kilometers from the national capital in Tokyo, 510 from the prefectural capital of Naha, 370 from the China coast city of Fuzhou, and just 110 from Taiwan, whose mountains may be seen on a clear day from Yonaguni's shore.

For roughly 500 years to 1879 the then Ryukyu Kingdom, of which Yonaguni was a part, paid tribute to both China (Ming and Qing) and Japan (which effectively meant Kagoshima, capital of the Satsuma domain). When Japan's modern (Meiji) state unilaterally abolished the Ryukyu Kingdom and severed its long links to the Beijing-centred world, China naturally protested (for details, see Hane 2011: 166). Japan sought a comprehensive revision of the Japan-China treaty that opened relations between the two countries in 1871. It wanted the same unequal treaty rights ('most-favoured nation' status) in mainland China as were enjoyed by the established imperialist powers. To accomplish it, it offered China a remarkable deal. In return for the rights, it sought it would cede to China the southwest frontier Ryukyu islands of Miyako and the Yaeyamas (including Yonaguni). At talks between the two sides conducted in Tientsin and then Peking in 1880, to Japan's two-part deal China responded, with evident reluctance, offering its preferred alternative, a three-part border settlement: territories to the north of Okinawa main island (basically the Amami island group) to Japan, Okinawa main island for a restored, independent Ryukyu kingdom, and islands to the southwest (Miyako and Ishigaki, including Yonaguni) to Qing China. It was highly unlikely either that Japan might seriously contemplate restoration of the Ryukyu king that it had just deposed, or that China would contemplate the splitting of Ryukyu territories given the long history of close and friendly relations between the two and the presence in Beijing of prominent Ryukyu government representatives bitterly opposed to such division. The then pre-eminent Chinese leader Li Hungzhang is said to have objected that "Ryukyu is neither Chinese nor Japanese territory, but a sovereign state" (Utsumi 2013). However, China was under pressure on multiple fronts at the time and in due course a deal was done, and a 'Ryukyu Treaty' was agreed in October 1880. China granted Japan extraterritorial rights while ceding to it the southwest frontier islands (Hane 2011; Kurayama 2013). The agreement once reached, however, was never signed or implemented. It remains a

phantom treaty and is commonly forgotten in Japan because of its embarrassing implication: the frontier islands Japan now insists are its 'intrinsic territory' were just 140 years ago regarded as something that could if necessary be traded for the benefit of the Japanese state.

Though geographically close to Taiwan and China, Yonaguni lacks direct transport or communications links with either. Throughout the Cold War what distinguished it (and indeed the other South-Western Frontier islands, including Miyako and Ishigaki), was the absence of military installations. Two policemen, a handgun apiece, were responsible for keeping order. undefended, unthreatening, Yonaguni was also unthreatened.

Under the state structures set in place by the US occupation and subsequent San Francisco Treaty of 1951, Japan was divided into peace state mainland and war state Okinawa, the latter under direct US military control, in confrontation with the 'communist world'. Military bases were established throughout, but heavily concentrated in Okinawa (then known as Ryukyu) and especially on the main island of Okinawa. There was little scope for initiative of any kind on the part of small frontier islands such as Yonaguni. Victory of the Communist forces in the Chinese civil war (1949), 'reversion' of Okinawa to Japanese administration (1972), 'normalization' of Japan-China relations (also 1972), the launch of modern China on its reform and opening path (1987) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) were all momentous events, weighing heavily on state capitals of the region but having remarkably little impact on the frontier islands such as Yonaguni. Twenty years were to pass from adoption of the San Francisco Treaty in 1951 that supposedly settled the issues of the China and Pacific wars before the administration of Okinawa as a whole 'reverted' to Japan.² During these decades, the strip of islands between Kyushu and Taiwan, including Yonaguni, remained for the most part free of military installations and little affected.

Already nearly 60 years have passed since that 'reversion' of Okinawa to Japan. Basically cut off from exchanges with its nearest neighbour territories, and distant even from the prefectural capital of Naha, Yonaguni through that long period faced severe fiscal, demographic, social, and economic decline. Its population peaked at around 12,000 in the wake of the Asia and Pacific wars as state power lapsed on all sides (leaving a thriving black-market) and since then fell steadily, to 1,850 around the turn of century and a nadir of 1490 as of early 2016.

ALTERNATIVES

Here and there in post-Cold War (from the 1890s) Japan there were attempts to negotiate 'normal' relations across the East (or East China) Sea and so shed the Cold War, San Francisco

Treaty frame of dependence on the United States. Four cases may be mentioned: on the part of the national government under Hosokawa Morihiro when the Liberal Democratic Party monopoly on government was broken in 1993-1995 and a national post-Cold War blueprint for the future was drawn up in the form of the Higuchi Report³ of 1993 (Bōei Mondai Kenkyūkai 1994), a similar but much more dramatic repeat of this process under the Hatoyama Yukio Democratic Party government in 2009-2010 (McCormack and Oka Norimatsu 2018); a similar effort on the part of the Okinawan prefectural government under Governor Ota Masahide in the form of his 'Cosmopolitan City' (*Kokusai toshi keisei kōsō*) design project in the 1990s; and – for purposes of this paper must importantly even though at the lowest level of government – on the part of the people and the Town of Yonaguni between 2004 and 2012. All were subjected to intense pressure by reactionary bureaucratic forces and by the government of the US, and all in due course failed. The outcome was for Japan's dependence on the US and confrontation with China (and North Korea) across the East (East China) Sea to be reinforced.

From 1993 the US insistence that the Cold War frame be maintained and reinforced was made clear in the stream of directives from Washington initiated by the so-called '[Joseph] Nye Report' of February 1995. East Asian security depended on the 'oxygen' of US military presence and the base system had to be preserved and reinforced (Department of Defense 1995). There could be no East Asian security, Nye insisted, without the 'oxygen' of US hegemony, and it had to be revived by the long-term stationing of a 100,000 US soldiers in Japan and South Korea. While the Higuchi Report was set aside and forgotten, the Nye Report was adopted as policy frame in both Washington and Tokyo. When Hatoyama made a fresh attempt in his government from 2009 to re-negotiate the relationship of Japan with the United States, China, and the world, he was quickly slapped down as required by the Nye doctrine. I have written a lot about this remarkable, turbulent period and will not revisit it here (see McCormack and Oka Norimatsu 2018: 54-88).

The second, Ota Masahide's Okinawa 'Cosmopolitan City' or 'International City' project, was a design within the 'Higuchi Report' frame to turn the prefecture and the island's traditionally negative qualities of isolation and remoteness into positive qualities through adoption of the frame of regional inter-connectedness. This project had a policy twin, the 'Action Plan' to demilitarize Okinawa, removing the US bases that had dominated the prefecture ever since 1945. That, however, was anathema to Liberal Democratic Party governments in Tokyo, which from the return of LDP governments in 1996 completely dropped the aspirations of Higuchi and moved to adopt unconditionally the Nye and Washington 'Japan handler' agenda under which

there could be no post-base, demilitarized Okinawa. Instead, militarization had to be stepped up. Ota was ousted from office in 1998 by a central government that in the end refused even to talk to him and insisted above all on preservation and reinforcement of the bases.

THE YONAGUNI PROJECT

Yonaguni being a mere town, and a small one at that, perhaps should not be compared with the projects of the nation state or even the prefecture of Okinawa, yet it has much in common with them. Under the Koizumi Junichiro government (2001-2006) Yonaguni and other small islands experienced the cold winds of neo-liberalism as the central government slashed block grants for administration and (on Yonaguni) abolished branch offices of national justice and immigration departments and the local weather observation stations. With population slowly but inexorably falling, to devise a survival plan was urgent.⁴ Yonaguni decided first, by referendum in October 2004, that it did not want to merge with neighbour islands in a larger, more economically and politically centralized and rationalized administration; with its unique language and distinctive history Yonaguni would remain Yonaguni.⁵ Proceeding then to imagine what sort of future the island would aspire to, the 'Vision' was built around core themes of autonomy, self-governance, and symbiosis (Okinawa-ken Yonaguni-chō 2005). There was no reference to military matters, much less to any sort of military base, for the simple reason that there were no military facilities on Yonaguni, or the other frontier islands, at that time, and no thought of introducing them.

The idea of closer links with close neighbour countries and territories had long been on Yonaguni minds and following the end of the Cold War ended various initiatives were taken. The island had opened limited communications with Hualian county in northern Taiwan in 1982, later expanded in 1999 to include other adjacent counties of Yilan and Daito. A 'Joint Agreement on Border Exchange Promotion' was reached in 1999 by the mayors of the three Okinawan islands (including Yonaguni) and their three Taiwan counterparts with a view to establishing regular air links and building closer cross-border ties in tourism, education, and trade. However, despite hopeful reference to the relationship as one "linking two regions across national borders but maintaining family-like closeness", exchanges had remained at modest levels. By the 'Vision' statement, Yonaguni sought the freedom to pursue and develop those links, complementing them with similar links across the East China Sea to Fuzhou.

For that to be possible, however, and for Yonaguni to be simultaneously incorporated into a regional community as well as the Japanese state, it would be necessary for the strictures of the

nation state to be loosened. The ‘Vision’ formula, calling for combination of island autonomy and cooperation with neighbour states in a relatively ‘open-border’, regional cooperation frame, was a radical, and indubitably post-Cold War, prospect.

Such a locally generated, ‘bottom up’ vision was extremely rare in the context of the highly centralized modern Japanese state.⁶ The national bureaucracy was ill-disposed to it from the outset. They objected in 2005 to the Yonaguni project as they had objected a decade earlier to the Ota ‘Cosmopolitan City’ project, and they were not attracted by the ‘one country, two systems’ formula, bruited at the time as the blueprint for the reversion of Hong Kong to China and a possible model for a loosening of the ties of national integration on Japan’s part. The island’s Sonai port did not qualify as a ‘major’ or ‘open’ port and its opening to international traffic would call for complicated immigration, health and quarantine measures, as well as standards to meet the requirements of the ILOS (International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea) Convention. As they gave the thumbs-down to the Higuchi Report in 1993, the Ota design of 1996 and the Hatoyama agenda of 2009 so they did with the 2006 ‘Vision’ agenda for Yonaguni. It remains, nevertheless, a remarkable document, one that deserves more attention than it has received (for one attempt to formulate a ‘special zone’ (*tokku*) connecting Taiwan with Okinawa and China (Fuzhou), see Okada (2015: 79-86).

From 2007, a very different kind of ‘vision’ for Yonaguni’s future began to take shape. In June of that same year, two US mine counter measures ships, the USS Guardian and the USS Patriot, docked in Yonaguni’s (civilian) Sonai port for the first time since reversion in 1972. What then took place under the pretext of a port visit for ‘crew rest’ was a US covert mission to collect intelligence and advance a design to militarize Japan’s China frontier and embroil Japan in the China-Taiwan confrontation. In a secret dispatch later released by Wikileaks, the US Consul General in Naha, Kevin Maher, reported that the “operationally significant” port visit set an important “precedent [...] for USN [US Navy] port calls to civilian ports in Okinawa”, and that the port was deep enough to accommodate four “USN mine countermeasures ships” at one time, while its commercial airfield was close by and could be used by support helicopters “in the event of a contingency in the Taiwan Straits” (Wikileaks 2011). A Yonaguni branch of the Defense Association (*Bōei kyōkai*) was formed shortly after the covert US Navy visit and began to press for a Self Defense Force (SDF) centred future for the island (Ryūkyū Shinpō 2012). Precisely as Maher had urged, other US military port visits also followed, to Ishigaki Island in 2009 and Miyako Island in 2010, and Maritime Self Defence Force vessels also visited Ishigaki and Taketomi (Yaeyama Mainichi Shinbun 2019). Hokama Shukichi, elected Yonaguni

mayor in August 2005 as a ‘Vision’ proponent, came to favour such an SDF presence. Between June and September 2008, a petition calling for adoption of such a path was drawn up by the Yonaguni Defence Association and drew 514 signatures. A resolution to invite the SDF to the island was then adopted in the Town Assembly in September [4:1]. In June 2009, Hokama approached the Ministry of Defence and the GSDF [Ground Self-Defence Forces] command to issue a formal invitation on behalf of the island. In August he was re-elected as mayor, by a substantial majority [619:516].

The timing of the Yonaguni initiative was significant. With the collapse of the Hatoyama (2009-2010) agenda of close relations with China and construction of an East Asian Community, the national government from 2010 was increasingly concerned about the rise of China and its potential military threat. In September 2010, Ishigaki City, Yonaguni Island’s closest and most important island neighbour, elected a conservative mayor and City Assembly, thereby ending 16 years of ‘reform’ government. Its new mayor, Nakayama Yoshitaka, opened his island port to MSDF [Maritime SDF] port visits and began to issue calls to enforce Japanese sovereignty and control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (a major source of Sino-Japanese conflict from this time). Democratic Party national governments from 2009 - and especially post-Hatoyama - shared the view of China as threat. The National Defence Program Outlines adopted by Cabinet in December 2010 identified the military modernization of China as part of the “security environment surrounding Japan” and outlined a “dynamic defence force” to substitute for the existing “basic defence force” concept (Ministry of Defense 2011). In August 2011 the Democratic Party government announced the decision to deploy small units of SDF (including a GSDF coastal surveillance unit) to Yonaguni as part of “Japan-US dynamic defence cooperation” designed to close “windows of deterrence” against China. By late 2012, defence of the South-Western islands (including Yonaguni) was accorded “the highest priority” (Harlan 2012).

Opposition to the base project was slow to mobilize but it gradually coalesced around a ‘Yonaguni Reform Association’ formed in 2010 by anti-base residents who preferred to hold to the principles of the ‘Vision’. In September 2011 556 people (roughly 46 per cent of the electorate) signed a Reform Association call for the invitation to the SDF to be cancelled. What they sought was in essence a return to the principles of the ‘Vision’. When that had no effect, in July 2012 a petition calling for a plebiscite on the issue was drawn up and signed by 588 people (Yaeyama Mainichi Shinbun 2012).⁷ Tasato Chiyoki, then a member of the Town Assembly and prominent opponent of the base project, moved a motion in the Town Assembly calling for a plebiscite.

He began by saying:

Through the 67 years of the post-war era, not one single inch of Yonaguni Island was ever given over to military base purposes. Our forebears built on this island a distinctive culture and an island of peace, striving to live in harmony with the richness of Yonaguni, overcoming all sorts of difficulties [...].

Tasato referred to the US Navy visit of 2007 and the idea raised at that time in the Secret US despatch of “making Yonaguni a mine-sweeping base for the contingency of any crisis in the Taiwan straits” as the “beginning of Yonaguni’s tragedy” (Tasato 2012). Although his motion for a plebiscite was defeated [5:3] his clear and unequivocal words well spelled out the seriousness of the dilemma the island faced.

A 26-hectare site of city-owned grazing land on the southern corner of the island was identified as preferred site. In negotiations between mayor Hokama and the national government over implementation of the base plan, Tokyo initially offered five million for annual rental fee but Hokama demanded twelve million yen plus a ‘nuisance’ (later changed to ‘cooperation’ or ‘special subsidy’) fee of one billion yen. For such a small island this was a very substantial sum. In due course Hokama dropped the lump sum payment demand and the two sides came to agreement on a rental fee of 15.01 million yen, justifying the three-fold increase on grounds of change in the zoning category of the land from ‘agricultural’ to ‘residential’. The leasing agreement was confirmed [3:2] on 20 June 2013 by the Town Assembly. The Okinawan daily, *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, marked the occasion with the following sombre analysis (Ryūkyū Shinpō 2013a).

Members of the Yonaguni Town Assembly have unanimously passed a bill leasing land owned by the town to the Ministry of Defense. This will enable the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to station a coast guard unit on the island. We question such a plan being pushed forward, with almost half of local voters opposing it. [...] Is it acceptable for the municipal office to be swayed by money politics into accepting this plan to station an SDF unit on Yonaguni?

While the town claims that the unit will bring benefits to the island and revitalize the local economy, the SDF states that this will reinforce the defense in the southwestern region. The town and the ministry are working toward different goals [...]. It is an illusion to think that an SDF unit on the island will promote the local economy [...].

We would prefer to support the proposal from the town in 2005 of creating a special zone for exchange with Taiwan,

but the Japanese government dismissed this idea. It is distorted politics that the central government forces Yonaguni to accept an SDF unit. An island located on a national boundary should be promoting international exchange. It is counter-productive to cause conflict by stationing a military force on the island.

Mayor Hokama was returned in August 2013 for a third term as mayor by a slim majority [553:506]. He insisted that his motive in calling for an SDF presence was local development, not national security. It was not, he always insisted (as to this author in November 2011), that he feared any ‘China threat’, simply that there was no other way to focus national attention on the island and to bring in new blood in the form of young people who would stimulate local businesses and help keep the island economically afloat.⁸ Benefiting from national government subsidies tied to the acceptance of the base, he promised free school lunches, a waste incinerator, town water and sewerage systems, a sports ground, and an optical fibre internet connection (Ryūkyū Shinpō 2013b).

The leasing agreement on the ‘South Ranch’ base site was settled in March 2014 and works begun in April and in August the town assembly again confirmed the agreement [3:2]. In elections that followed in September, however, the opposition forces gained ground. With the balance of forces at 3:3], and because of the requirement that the former provide a speaker for the first-time anti-base forces held a majority [3:2]. Although substantial works were by then underway, the assembly resolved in October to conduct a plebiscite. When it was held, in February 2015, the result was a decisive ‘Yes’ to the SDF (632 votes to 445) in an 85 per cent poll. It was a surprising outcome, suggesting a significant shift in island thinking and it was likely influenced by the hopelessness of standing up against the determined nation state, the daily sight of large-scale site works and the fatigue from years of struggle. Barracks and other works eventually completed, a 160-strong Ground Self Defence Force (GSDF) ‘Coastal Surveillance Unit’ marched in early in 2016. Throughout the discussion leading to the deployment the official line was that this was to be purely an ‘intelligence’ operation, years later it was revealed that this was not so, a powder magazine had been built into the site (Okinawa Times 2019). Yonaguni island’s new residents were soldiers, not civilians.

It remains to be seen what long-term effect the base presence will have. Thanks to the coastal surveillance unit and their families Yonaguni’s population suddenly ‘jumped’ in 2007 from a pre-base figure of around 1500 to 1715. Island revenue was boosted by around 58 million yen (base land rental), to which resident taxes would be added, and there were 13 additional children attending the island’s elementary school. At a mundane but

significant level, the block of around 250 voting age soldiers and their spouses could prove decisive in future local government elections (Asahi Shinbun 2017). However, the soldiers having now moved in will not easily, or perhaps ever, be moved out.

MILITARIZING THE FRONTIER?

Few 'local government' contests in recent Japanese history had been as consequential, as fiercely contested, and as narrowly determined as the Yonaguni Island contest that roiled the small island community over these years. The handful of votes that determined the mayoral election of 2013 (and the outcome that was confirmed by subsequent elections and referendum) changed the character of the island. The participation in hostile surveillance of China was a far cry from the vision of East Asian community that had inspired the idealism of just a decade earlier. As the Yonaguni GSDF unit began the surveillance of Chinese shipping and other communications, those who remembered the consequences of an Okinawan role in defence of 'mainland' Japan in 1945 contemplated the new arrangements with deep misgivings. Whatever else Yonaguni gained, it could be assured of a place on missile target lists in Chinese contingency plans.

The Yonaguni SDF deployment has to be seen in the context of the overall militarization of the Frontier Islands, from Kyushu to Taiwan. Taken separately they are mere toeholds, contesting/containing China's claims in the region, but they can only grow over time. Furthermore, both US and Japanese authorities, including (as of 2020) presumed 'anti-base' Governor Tamaki Denny, have expressed support for the principle of 'inter-operability', so that in future whatever language is spoken among the soldiers who will occupy the southwestern frontier island bases, and whatever flag fly above them, they will be subject to direction from Washington, and they will serve US interests. By the painful choices they made between 2004 and 2014, the people of Yonaguni delivered up their future to the will or whim of the US government (whose president as of 2020 likely has never heard of it or of other frontier islands).

As military planners in Washington and Tokyo see it, the key *raison d'être* for the Okinawa islands as a whole is as a joint US-Japan bastion projecting force where required for the regional and global hegemonic project, in the first instance for any Korean peninsula contingency and beyond that for 'containing' China. Apart from Yonaguni, Miyako, Ishigaki and Amami islands are now all at various stages of negotiation towards the introduction of 500-800 person security and missile forces (Yamashiro 2019). Miyako (6-times Yonaguni in area and 27-times in population), Ishigaki (8-times Yonaguni in area and 29-times in population) and Amami Oshima (152 times Yonaguni in area and 20-times in population) are to house substantial GSDF surface-to-ship or surface-to-

air missile and anti-missile forces. Miyako's civil Shimoji airport (with a little-used 3,000 metre runway) has also from time to time been noted as a potential site for further military expansion despite pledges at the time of its construction that this would never happen.

Military plans are predicated on Sino-Japanese hostilities occurring, most likely in the East China Sea area, and quickly embroiling the islands. In such an event, the islanders would find themselves in the line of fire as happened last in 1945.⁹ The role of the island bases is to prepare to close the Chinese naval route to the Pacific Ocean, bottling Chinese forces up within the First Chinese defensive line and blocking their entry or egress to the Pacific via the international waters of Miyako Strait (between Okinawa Island and Miyako Island). That of course would be an act of war, inviting devastating Chinese retaliation. Japanese bases on these frontier islands are to supplement and reinforce the American ones concentrated till now on Okinawa Island, notably Futenma Marine Air station and Kadena Air Force base. The sad truth is, as Yonaguni's Tasato Chiyoki points out "Japan's defense policy is made in the Pentagon, with Japan's Ministry of Defense merely adding detail to it. Japan is not a fully sovereign state but a client state of the United States."¹⁰

Japan today would find outrageous any suggestion that its claim to the Yaeyama's, Miyako and Yonaguni islands was less than absolute. Yet, ironically, in the draft Sino-Japanese 'Ryukyu Treaty' of 1880 Japan had been ready to assign to China those very southwest frontier seas and their islands, including the now hotly contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islets. The islands and islets and their seas were seen then as of no intrinsic worth, no more than a card to play when seeking greater stakes. They only remain in Japan's hands because China then had second thoughts.

Perhaps the highpoint of the connection to date, showing just how close the islands of the east China Sea are and giving a faint taste of the potential for grassroots ties between them, was the visit to Yonaguni by a group of 35 Taiwanese, surfing onto Yonaguni beaches on water-ski boats for a brief friendship encounter in 2012. It was of course a rare moment, but it was suggestive. Sooner or later, the agenda of island community, subject so far only of abortive attempts, will have to be addressed and the current moves towards militarized confrontation reversed. Initiatives from below, led by those who actually live on the islands, will then be crucial. The broader frame of reference will be to revisit the failed projects of the Japanese state under Hosokawa in 1993 and Hatoyama in 2009, and of the prefecture of Okinawa under Governor Ota in the 1990s. When that happens, the people living around the East China Sea in territories that are formally part of the sovereign states of Japan, China, and Taiwan may then turn again, with new appreciation, to the 'Vision' articulated by the Yonaguni islanders in 2004-2005.

NOTES

1) Dunan munui (Yonaguni language) is not a 'dialect' of Japanese but is recognized by UNESCO as a distinctive language, sharing a smaller proportion of cognates with the national language than modern German with modern English.

2) The so-called 'reversion' was, however, very partial, with the most important sites – of village, town, and farmland - appropriated to the US military.

3) During the brief interlude between LDP governments from 1993-1994 a report on Japan's security and defense problems was prepared at Hosokawa's request by Higuchi Kotaro of Asahi Beer. Higuchi noted the slow decline of US hegemonic power and recommended Japan adopt a more autonomous, multilateral, and UN-centred diplomacy.

4) Yoshimoto Masanori, a native of Yonaguni and Deputy Governor of Okinawa between 1993 and 1997, became a key figure in the deliberations.

5) In a 70 per cent poll, the vote was 327 in favour of merger and 605 against.

6) The Yonaguni statement is reminiscent of the 'Itsukaichi Constitution' drawn up as a draft national constitution in 1881 by local intellectuals and farmers on the fringes of Tokyo at the height of the 'Liberty and People's Rights' movement (see Irokawa 1985: 108-113; Irokawa 1988: 69-86).

7) Scrutineers subsequently ordered deletion of some of these, reducing the final number to 544.

8) Interviewed by this author (15 November 2011).

9) For a sobering discussion of the military options, see Chikazumi (2016).

10) Tasato, Chiyoki, personal communication, 26 March 2020.

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