(RE)-DISCOVERING OKINAWAN INDIGENEITY:
ARTICULATION AND ACTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

Okinawa broadly refers to a geographical island chain between Kyūshū (mainland Japan) and Taiwan, which is the southernmost and most recently added administrative region of Japan. Since 1996, people from Okinawa have started articulating their indigenous rights to self-determination under international law. In a small island in the Pacific, pressured by both Japanese and American foreign policies, homegrown Okinawan cultural, economic, and political development efforts have long been trivialized and even ignored outright. The recent wave of globalization helped galvanize a modern Okinawan self-identity in line with the global indigenous movement at large.

I argue that the adoption of an indigenous framework to examine Okinawan political articulations and movements would both expand understanding of the place and people and mobilize Okinawans to secure a decolonized future. Using a peoplehood definition of “indigenous” that underpins the balanced and linked foundations of indigenous way of being, this thesis illustrates how Okinawans have politically and culturally demonstrated their indigeneity and how global indigenous movements could possibly help to rethink and discuss “domestic issues” that Okinawans have been struggling to solve.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIPR  Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryūkyūs

CRDV  Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques

DNO  Dugong Network Okinawa

DOD  Department of Defense (United States of America)

HOA  Hawai‘i Okinawa Alliance

ICERD  International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

MOFA  Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)

NHPA  the United States National Historic Preservation Act

OEN  Okinawa Environmental Network

OWAAMV  Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence

SOFA  the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement

UN  United Nations

UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization

UNGASS  United Nations General Assembly Special Session

UNWGIP  United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Population

USCAR  United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyūs

WGS  Women for Genuine Security
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Would you give prior warning when you are about to rape someone?” (Hayashi 2011) On November 28, 2011, Satoshi Tanaka,\(^1\) former chief of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, asked this provocative, rhetorical question at a media event hosted by the Bureau. It was his response to the Japanese government’s ongoing delays in scheduling Okinawa Prefecture to present the environmental impact assessment report on the relocation of the United States military from Futenma Air Station to Henoko. Although Okinawa Prefecture has long demanded to reduce its burden of hosting the U.S. military bases and for the removal of the Futenma Air Station from the center of the city, the relocation to Henoko has been strongly opposed in Okinawa due to its negative impacts on the local community and environment.

In directly referring to acts of sexual assault against women, Tanaka used the word *okasu*, which means “commit” (as in a crime), and so avoided pointing to a direct answer to the question (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 2011b). His ostensibly off-the-record remarks, which a local newspaper published, offended and angered many Okinawans, especially women. Outraged, they gathered to protest against Tanaka and the Japanese government’s continued imposition of the U.S. military bases upon Okinawa.

It is nothing new to Okinawa and its people to be on receiving end of insults. For example, when three U.S. Navy personnel kidnapped and raped a 12 year-old Okinawan girl in 1995, U.S. Admiral Richard C. Macke, former Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, exclaimed, “For the price they paid to rent the car [used in the crime], they could have had a girl [prostitute]” (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 2011b).

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\(^1\) Tanaka resigned from the position after making this comment.
In both the Japanese and the U.S. governments’ tolerance of such disregard, Okinawan bodies and soil have long been, and continue to be, construed merely as the object of physical and psychological violence. As Okinawan identity is “always already politicized” (Hook and Siddle 2003, 136), the struggles of Okinawan people are deeply entrenched within the Japanese and U.S. colonial and imperial order.

Okinawa Prefecture, the southernmost and most recently added administrative region of Japan, comprises the 169 islands of the Ryūkyū Archipelago, an island chain between Kyūshū (the Japanese mainland) and Taiwan. Whereas the name Okinawa mostly indicates a geographical area, it also embodies myriad historical, political, and cultural meanings. In the last two centuries, it has undergone significant changes in political regimes that make clear how this place and its people must be understood as distinctive from those in other parts of Japan. In this paper, I use “Okinawa” to indicate islands that now consist of Okinawa Prefecture, rather than the whole archipelago.

On this “raped” island, many Okinawans\(^2\) have been seeking a way to liberate themselves from political oppression. Since the early 1980s, for example, Okinawan women’s groups started to engage internationally-accepted legal frameworks in asserting their rights. Starting in 1996, with the first direct Ryūkyūan\(^3\) individual participation in the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Population (UNWGIP), Okinawans have declared their rights for self-determination as an indigenous people (Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ryūkyūs 2004). “Self-determination” quickly became a significant keyword in the lexicon of Okinawan social activism. What does it mean to be

\(^2\) There are diverse identifications within Okinawa that distinguish people from neighbor islands such as Yaeyama Island and Miyako Island and people of Okinawa Island. In this paper, I use Okinawan to indicate ethnic Okinawans from whole islands of Okinawa Prefecture. For more details on identification terms of Okinawans, see Chapter 2, page 32.

\(^3\) I use Ryūkyūan and Okinawan interchangeably in this paper.
indigenous, and how did Okinawans’ assertion as such emerge and evolve? What possibilities for political and cultural self-determination does an Indigeneity-centered framework offer to Okinawans?

Seeking to answer the aforementioned questions, this study examines the emerging articulation of Okinawans as an indigenous people, especially in the international arena and with regard to issues of representation and militarism in contemporary Okinawan society. Indigenous identification, although a new component within the political ideology for Okinawans, draws upon a historical understanding of their communities’ connections to lands, cultures, and spiritualities.

First, I shall briefly review the history of Okinawa vis-à-vis the historical resistance by its people against colonialism. I argue that the prior existing framework of Okinawans, as an “ethnic minority group,” has limited their range of autonomy to within their small prefecture of Japan. I argue that the adoption of an indigenous framework to examine Okinawan political articulations and movements would both expand understanding of the place and people and mobilize Okinawans to secure a decolonized future.

This study will then re-center Okinawan narratives about decolonization from Japanese and the U.S. imperialism to self-determination. Okinawan narratives are intricately woven among cultural actions, and are often undervalued in political discussions by the Japanese government. Their indigenous way of being can be described in a “peoplehood matrix” of sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language and sense of place, which would inspire the people of Okinawa to regenerate possibilities for their political mobilization (Alfred 2005; Corntassel 2003; Wilson and Bird 2005). Hints
of Okinawans’ latent interests in political liberation via self-determination are present in their cultural philosophies and collaborative works with other indigenous peoples. Exploring their narratives, as applied and implicated within their political and cultural actions, the goal of this study is to challenge the inherent colonial structure of Okinawa-Japan-U.S. relationships, and to highlight the articulation of resurgent indigenous identity toward creating their self-sustainable future.

Theoretical Framework: Peoplehood Model

This chapter traces the history of the native people of Okinawa, including a brief history of their political movements, along its evolutionary path toward articulating an Okinawan “indigenous” identity. I refer to the “peoplehood” model suggested by indigenous scholar Jeff Corntassel, which he developed from the work by Holm, Pearson and Chavis (Corntassel 2003), in seeking dynamic, holistic and flexible approaches toward deeper understandings of indigeneity.

Studying Native American knowledge, Tom Holm, Diane Pearson and Ben Chavis introduced this as a basic lens through which to understand Native American ways of sovereignty. It consists of four essential, intertwined factors: sacred history, ceremonial cycle, language and place/territory inherent in identity and behavior (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003). As illustrated by Native American textiles, they are interwoven inextricably, to create a unique pattern for their lives. Within this peoplehood matrix, “no single factor is more important than the others;” the relationship among all four represents a balanced way of being (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003).

Using this peoplehood model, Jeff Corntassel offers this working definition of indigenous peoples that include these four factors.
1. Peoples who believe they are ancestrally related and identify themselves, based on oral and/or written histories, as descendants of the original inhabitants of their ancestral homelands;

2. Peoples who may, but [do] not necessarily, have their own informal and/or formal political, economic and social institutions, which tend to be community-based and reflect their distinct ceremonial cycles, kinship networks, and continuously evolving cultural traditions;

3. Peoples who speak (or once spoke) an indigenous language, often different from the dominant society’s language – even where the indigenous language is not ‘spoken’, distinct dialects and/or uniquely indigenous expressions may persist as a form of indigenous identity;

4. Peoples who distinguish themselves from the dominant society and/or other cultural groups while maintaining a close relationship with their ancestral homelands/sacred sites, which may be threatened by ongoing military, economic or political encroachment or may be places where indigenous peoples have been previously expelled, while seeking to enhance their cultural, political and economic autonomy (Corntassel 2003, 91–92).

Okinawans’ political claims to indigeneity are supported by their distinct historical and contemporary experiences, therefore correlating with Corntassel’s definition. In ongoing debates on definitions of “indigenous,” international organizations, host states and academic researchers take different approaches to define who is indigenous. While international organizations such as the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have accepted rights to self-identification for indigenous peoples, Corntassel’s working definition through the peoplehood model takes a holistic, interdisciplinary and self-identification approach to indigenous identity.

One of big concerns in establishing definitions of indigenous peoples is that setting criteria excludes some indigenous populations and ignores diversity among indigenous peoples (Corntassel 2003). Definitions of indigenous peoples in the ILO
Convention No.169 and UN Declaration emphasize the “colonized” condition of indigenous peoples or numerically minority status in a host state. Such definitions make it difficult for indigenous peoples like Okinawans, who are numerically dominant in their “colonized” land, to claim political autonomy. Meanwhile, Corntassel’s peoplehood model emphasizes the linkage of indigenous identity and cultural perspectives and places importance on interrelatedness and balance of key factors (Corntassel 2003). Therefore, the peoplehood model is more applicable and useful for this research in examining political movements and cultural actions of indigenous Okinawans.

**Okinawan Indigeneity**

The earliest human habitation on Okinawa, as supported by archeological evidence, dates to 18,000 years ago (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 14). Since the late 12th century, these people, under the leadership of a chiefly system, started forming agricultural communities. In 1429, groups across Okinawa Island were unified by the most powerful chief and were collectively named the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Known as marimers, the kingdom’s people engaged in overseas trade with other Asian regional entities like Ming Dynasty China, Siam, Annam, etc. for over 150 years. Then, following the Satsuma invasion in 1609, the Ryūkyū Kingdom became politically subjugated to the sovereign system of Japan.

In 1868, Japan’s Meiji Restoration greatly transformed its political structure and achieved the rebirth of Japan as a modern nation. Shortly after, in 1879, the Ryūkyū kingdom was overthrown and became annexed to Japan, transformed into Okinawa Prefecture.

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4 Satsuma was one of the powerful feudal domains in Japan before the 1868 Meiji Restoration.
Since the Great Japanese Empire began expanding its colonial territories in East Asia and the Pacific in the late 19th century, economic and political modernization, concurrent with deliberate Japanization, proceeded to engulf its colonies. The people of Okinawa were deprived of their self-governance, denied their culture, and forced to assimilate into Japanese practices. The first governor of Okinawa Prefecture, Naoyoshi Nabeshima appointed from the Japanese central government, urged Okinawan people to practice the language and customs of Japan by implementing assimilation policies (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 173). The old Ryūkyūan customs of women’s tattooing and men’s topknot hairstyle were banned and completely wiped out. Additionally, the Lifestyle Reform Movement imposed by the government prohibited Okinawans from having social gatherings and seeing yuta (a spiritual counselor), and simplified their ceremonial practices (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 184).

While Japan’s assimilation policies forced Okinawans to become “Japanese,” the Empire continued to position Okinawans as “primitive natives;” as opposed to the ostensibly-civilized Japanese. In 1903, the Anthropological Society of Tokyo hosted a pavilion, Jinrui kan, at the 5th Osaka Industrial Exposition. Representatives of the various ethnic backgrounds, such as Ainu, Ryūkyūan, Taiwanese, Koreans, Chinese, Indians, and Africans were displayed in their traditional costumes. The exhibit was to emphasize the power of the Japanese empire while proclaiming the inferiority and backwardness of these specific ethnic groups (Weiner 1997, 11). Accordingly, the indigeneity of Okinawans was believed to signify their “primitiveness” and status as an “inferior race.”
During World War II, the Empire of Japan sacrificed Okinawa as, in effect, a “fortress” to protect its mainland. One fourth of the prefecture’s residents were killed at the Battle of Okinawa (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 254). Later, when Japan lost the war, it relinquished Okinawa to a newly created foreign entity, the United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyū Islands (USCAR). Lands were forcibly taken from the indigenous Okinawan people and fundamental human rights for local Okinawans were often violated.

Since the 1960s, when the U.S. military had begun launching troops from Okinawa to Vietnam for its military intervention thereof, Okinawans have debated the potential impact of a full reversion to Japan. In hopes that their human rights would be best protected under the Japanese Constitution, the movement worked toward this, also hoping to secure a total withdrawal of the U.S. military from Okinawa. After 27 years of struggle, Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972. However, its people’s demands remain neglected, and the military bases still occupy Okinawa, occupying 20% of Okinawa Island (Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division 2010). The economy of Okinawa Prefecture was deliberately, and still remains, structured in a way to maintain dependence on the U.S. military, tourism and Japanese state funds.

As we can see from the brief outline of Okinawa history, the peoplehood model of “indigenous” identity can apply to experiences of its people. Since the Satsuma invasion the Japanese nation-state has prevented Okinawan (or Ryūkyūan) sovereignty, deprived Okinawans of the unimpeded ability of practicing their culture and languages, and instilled a lasting sense of inferiority.
WWII and post-war American militarization played a significant part in the physical oppression of the island and the Okinawan people as well. After the war, the United States forcibly expropriated lands from grieving communities and built its military facilities in areas that did not allow many Okinawan survivors to return to their homes. Surrounded by a military supreme power that continues to threaten everyday security and prosperity of local residents, there is no end to the number of military-related crimes such as thefts, rapes, and accidents that often violate human rights and safety standards. Despite its everyday engagement with local communities, the United States military recuses itself from debate regarding Okinawa’s territorially bearing of its bases as “Japan’s domestic issue.” Meanwhile, Japan continues to impose them on Okinawa without considering the local voices. Under a “double empire,” accordingly, any political extension of Okinawans has ultimately been slight and relatively powerless.

**Okinawa under Japanese Nationalism**

Since the annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, Okinawa’s political course has been rocked by Japanese political opportunism. The Great Empire, before WWII, placed an emphasis on developing a territorially-unified national identity positioning the Imperial Family as a symbol of the Japanese nation. It developed a national polity theory that centered the Emperor as its sovereign, with the imperial subject as a member of the “family state” (*kazoku kokka*). This ideology deliberately interplayed with a politicized reconceptualization of ancient Japanese history and mythologies, as well as the implementation of compulsory imperial education, industrialization and militarization policies that all forged a strong Japanese nationalism (Oguma 2002).
As Japan developed itself as a modern state, with the Emperor as its leader, racial and cultural criteria began to play an increasingly important role toward determining legal membership within the family state (Weiner 1997). In *Japan’s Minorities*, analyzing pre-war Japanese nationalism, Michael Weiner explains that “the naturalization of culture...re-cast the meaning of ‘Japaneseness’ in powerful images of the enduring purity and homogeneity of the nation, the family and Japanese way of life. The nation was projected as an extended family” (2).

While Japan focused on fostering its nation-state, the formation of its national self-identity excluded and marginalized minority populations as “Others.” For indigenous Ainu and Okinawans, who were pre-existing within the national imaginary, a simultaneous promotion of naturalization and the building of national borders vis-à-vis other states led to limitations imposed upon their social activities and exchanges on the frontier, politically positioning them to be “inside Others” (Graburn, Ertl, and Tierney 2010, 4). These indigenous populations were reductively imagined as “invisible” and/or “vanishing” people of Japan’s geographic peripheries (Graburn, Ertl, and Tierney 2010). Because of their alleged cultural “inferiorities,” they were excluded, pushed to the edge, forced to assimilate into the “modern,” Japanified political and economic system. Simultaneously, however, they were still denied the opportunity for total assimilation, remaining otherized within the state.

As “inside Others,” Okinawans under Japanese nationalism struggled between a Japanese and non-Japanese identity. While Japanization proceeded to engulf the country, it was more strictly imposed upon “culturally inferior and barbarous” Okinawans. In order to pull themselves out of the discriminatory status inherent to their indigenous
identity, Okinawan intellectuals strived to develop a theory of consanguinity between Japanese and Ryūkyūans (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Oguma 1998).

After its defeat in WWII and the loss of its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, post-war Japan successfully rebounded as a nation by pro-actively fostering ethnic solidarity. According to Eiji Oguma, the theory of the homogenous Japanese nation was indeed widely accepted and articulated by politicians and intellectuals after WWII “for protection, when Japan was weak” (2002, 322). Ignoring the distinctive identities of indigenous and other ethnic minorities, Japanese anthropologists and historians developed and promoted the myth of Japanese ethnic homogeneity. This self-image of homogenous Japan was encouraged in post-war international politics to applaud “Japanese diligence, unity, [and] naturalness” (Oguma 2002, 319). Within a few years after the war, ethnic minorities in Japan like Zainichi Koreans were legally re-defined as foreigners, while Indigenous Ainu were to be considered as already-assimilated Japanese.

Richard Siddle’s study on Japanese citizenship explains that:

The commonsense notion of a neat and unproblematic overlap between nationality and Japanese ethnicity, itself an inherently essential and ‘racialized’ concept that encompasses widely held beliefs in ‘Japanese blood’, is one of the central tenets of a cluster of beliefs in the uniqueness of Japanese people and culture that are collectively known as Nihonjinron (discourse of Japaneseness) (2003, 448).

Until recently, despite Japan’s diversity of ethnic groups, “homogenous nation” statements by politicians still continue to be heard.

After the war, Japan relinquished Okinawa to the United States administration and started its post-war reconstruction. For 27 years thereafter, it was left on the borderline

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5 Zainichi Koreans are ethnic Korean residents in Japan who trace their ancestral roots to people who moved to Japan during the Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.
between Japanese and non-Japanese dominance. While the nationality of Okinawans legally pertained to Japan, Japan’s Postwar Constitution was deemed non-applicable to Okinawans under the U.S. military administration. The U.S., meanwhile, had no intention to formally annex Okinawa to its States or to guarantee Okinawans’ human rights as per those of U.S. citizens (Oguma 1998, 472). Debates over Okinawa’s political ascription vacillated among three possibilities: reversion to Japan, U.S. trusteeship or independence.

Although there were not many supporters for the reversion right after the war, the oppressive U.S. military rule and the prior entrenchment of “Japanese” identity eventually did influence Okinawans to demand the reversion to Japan. Oguma states that their claims were largely influenced by the arduous effort they had already made to be Japanese (1998, 497). Rather than demanding the reversion because of “Janeseness” however, Okinawans demanded it primarily because they keenly remembered the previous experiences of discrimination and exclusion. They did not want their efforts of the past century, toward remaking themselves into Japanese, to be wasted (1998, 497). For Okinawans, the reversion movement was ultimately a means to secure their civil rights as Japanese citizens while also affirming the path they had already walked.

Nevertheless, in spite of their wishes, the Okinawan reality following reversion was not what they expected. In becoming Japan’s most recently added administrative division, it was expected to carry the extraordinary burden of the U.S. military bases on its territory. Because of its status as “Okinawa Prefecture” since 1972, Okinawan self-determination has been subsumed into the category of ethnic minority, rather than as an inherently sovereign people. The Japanese government has camouflaged the historically
discriminatory relationship and reduced Okinawan functional autonomy to that of merely one locality among another 46 prefectures. The establishment of an “equal civil society” among Japanese citizens has instead helped maintain the Japanese government’s discriminatory control over Okinawa and Okinawans.

After being given prefectural autonomy in 1972 on deciding a course of Okinawa, under the centralized Japanese government, people’s dissatisfaction and distrust of the government are growing. Seeing limitations in envisioning Okinawa’s future in the current political structure, Okinawans began to seek the right of self-determination to determine their own future.

**Okinawa Today**

According to the 2007 survey on Okinawan identity conducted by Lim Chuan-Tiong, a professor of the University of the Ryūkyūs, 43.8% of Okinawa resident respondents asserted that the Japanese government’s attitude towards Okinawa is “not friendly,” and 56.6% expressed dissatisfaction towards Japan’s Okinawa policies (2008). Moreover, despite the continuous predominance of assimilationist ideologies, Okinawans continue to express their distinctive collective identity; their peoplehood. 41.6% of the survey respondents indentified themselves as Okinawan, 29.7% as Okinawan and Japanese, and 25.5% as Japanese (2008).

In addition, in answer to the question of when Okinawans would most support independence of Okinawa, 31.0% answered “when the U.S. military issues get worse,” 30.1% answered “when there is a conflict in the understanding of history with the Japanese government,” and 24.4% answered “when an economical gap with mainland Japan further widens” (Lim 2008). From this survey, it is notable that Okinawans have a
distinct historical sense of understanding, which continues to separate the majority from self-identifying as Japanese. The contemporary Okinawan political and economic dependency on the Japanese government does not satisfy Okinawan ideas of autonomy, either.

**Beyond “Minority” Status**

Under international law, minorities and indigenous peoples are recognized as distinct subjects. While “minority rights” are promised in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities of 1992, “indigenous rights” were adopted in 2007, per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, defines minority here as:

> A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population, and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language (United Nations Human Rights).

Moreover, Article 1 of the United Nations Minority Declaration provides that “States should protect their [minority] existence” (UN Human Rights). Within such an ethnic minority framework however, Okinawans would lack one of the important factors of the peoplehood matrix; that is, self-determination over place. Growing active participation of indigenous peoples in international organizing presents a collective challenge against the existing political ideologies and governing system of nation-state (Barker 2005).
light of this, self-determination is the theme most emphasized in Okinawan political activism today.

In *Sovereignty Matters*, indigenous scholar Joanne Barker explains that an indigenous movement is “a refutation of the assimilationist ideologies that constructed indigenous peoples as ethnic minorities, under the governing authority of the nation-state and a claim of attributes of sovereignty customarily associated with nations” (2005, 19). Legal and academic discourses, which have frame Okinawan identity and politics through an ethnic minority, do not reach to a core of indigenous articulations. In the peoplehood matrix, where “no single factor is more important than others” (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003, 12), peoples’ claim for self-determination are not limited to protecting their distinctive culture or to preserving their languages. What Okinawans are trying to regain is the physically, economically, culturally, and spiritually balanced well-being of their people and the place that is an essential source of indigenous development (Engle 2010).

**Acting Internationally**

As Lim’s survey on Okinawan identity shows, there is a strong connection between this and related social movements. Whenever there is a conflict with the Japanese government, an “always already politicized” Okinawan identity gets consolidated (Hook and Siddle 2003, 136). While social movements and political resistance in Okinawan society have a long history, anti-colonial and anti-military movements operating within an international legal framework are fairly recent phenomena. Since the early 1980s, Okinawan activists, who saw the limitations of their political claims within the state, began appealing to international audiences.
In 1982, the Okinawa Women’s Association first participated in the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. In 1995, women activists from a non-government organization, International Society for Mangrove Ecosystem, attended the World Conference on Women in Beijing to report about frequent sexual assaults upon Okinawan women by U.S. military personnel. Overall, international political protests by Okinawans have aimed to acquire and protect human rights; especially of women.

In 1996, Yasukatsu Matsushima became the first Ryūkyūan participant at the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Having worked previously in Guam, Matsushima describes the relationship between Chamorro and Okinawans as “like brothers and sisters,” and continues to raise Indigenous voices collaboratively with activists from Guam (Asahi Shimbun 2011). Since Matsushima’s first participation, Okinawans’ political assertions and movements as “indigenous people” have continued to grow (AIPR 2004).

The Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryūkyūs (AIPR) was formed around young Okinawan activists. In 1999, AIPR sent Okinawan delegates to develop their own platform regarding indigenous rights for self-determination, at the UNWGIP. The title page of the first publication by AIPR says, “If we cannot solve them [Okinawan issues] domestically, let’s bring them to the UN!” (2004). Reflecting on the U.S. Military Special Measures Law, which enables the U.S. to expropriate land in Japan, and imposition of the military to Okinawa by the Japanese government, AIPR states that Japanese domestic laws do not redress regional and ethnic inequality (2004, 3). The position papers written by these activists have addressed various important issues including the U.S. military occupation, the illegal annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom,
discrimination against Okinawans, and cultural genocide due to Japanese assimilation policies. Determining the best approach toward using international law for their benefit was definitely an important first step toward Okinawan self-determination. However, since the Japanese government considers “Ryūkyūan” an ambiguous term, it does not recognize Okinawans as indigenous (Ryukyu Shimpo 2008).

**Legal Approach to Self-determination**

Indigenous peoples’ social movements and advocacies for the rights to self-determination were initially derived from and developed in the Western settler colonies such as Australia, Canada and the United States. Since the 1970s, indigenous peoples throughout the world, whose life conditions had been drastically impacted by colonization, began to organize movements internationally (Engle 2010).

In 1982, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) was formed by the United Nations Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Indigenous peoples from all over the world, along with state representatives in the UNWGIP, worked to prepare the draft for the Declaration. Regarding the process thereof, a study by Jose R. Martinez Cobo, the UN Special Rapporteur, was often referred to in order to define who comprises indigenous peoples. The Cobo Report provided fundamental research on Indigenous issues and definitions of Indigeneity.

The term “Indigenous” in the Cobo Report indicates:

[C]ommunities, peoples and nations…which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form, at present, non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (1987).
His definition of indigenous requires indigenous-ness to the land, historical continuity and a non-dominance in their region that reflects the traditional understanding of Western colonialism. Since the late 1980s, peoples in Africa and Asia have also begun to incorporate the concept of “indigeneity” in claiming their autonomy. However, questioning the applicability of the term “indigenous“ to their specific contexts, African and Asian states have asserted that “indigenous people” are “the outcome of Western imperialism and white settler colonialism” (Engle 2010). Some Asian state governments, for example, Bangladesh, have stated that all peoples of Bangladesh who achieved liberation from British colonialism are indigenous (Kingsbury 1998). Clearly, the more recent indigenous articulations being made by peoples in Africa and Asia often disagree with state governments’ interpretation of “indigenous.”

Japanese scholar and activist Hideaki Uemura’s approach to the indigenous Okinawan movement focuses on a historical recognition of the nation-state building process. Uemura examines how this understanding of the national history has formed, manipulated, and led to the “production” of indigenous peoples in Asia. Analyzing the pre-modern understanding of “ruling” in Asia, Uemura’s approach aims to expose the “unrecognized colonialism” of the modern Japanese state (Uemura 2009; Nomura 2005). Emphasizing the illegal annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, he proclaims Okinawans as holders of the right of self-determination as an indigenous people (Uemura 2009).

Claiming similar politically, economically and culturally oppressed experiences and also their distinctive natures from a dominant group(s) within the country, Okinawans have advocated their “indigenous” identity toward securing their right to self-
determination against both Japanese and U.S. colonialism and imperialism. Although self-identifying as “indigenous” opened a way to peoples in Asia and Africa to assert themselves as holders of indigenous rights, debates over who is indigenous have not been settled (Corntassel 2003).

Moreover, a major concern of the states in recognizing Indigenous Rights is in the issue of sovereignty. The final version of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in 2007 by the UN General Assembly with a majority of affirmative votes of 144 states, notes in Article 46 that:

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues).

The response of the Japanese government to the adoption of the declaration expresses the State’s hesitation to recognize indigenous “sovereignty.” The Japanese representative stated:

[H]is delegation had voted in favour of the Declaration. The revised version of article 46 correctly clarified that the right of self-determination did not give indigenous peoples the right to be separate and independent from their countries of residence, and that that right should not be invoked for the purpose of impairing the sovereignty of a State, its national and political unity, or territorial integrity. The Japanese Government shared the understanding on the right and welcomed the revision.

Japan believed that the rights contained in the Declaration should not harm the human rights of others. It was also aware that, regarding property rights, the contents of the rights of ownership or others relating to land and territory were firmly stipulated in the civil law and other laws of each State. Therefore, Japan thought that the rights relating to land and territory in the Declaration, as well as the way those rights were exercised, were limited by due reason, in light of harmonization with the protection of the third party interests and other public interests (UN Genral Assembly Department of Public Information 2007).
The Japanese government’s strong concern for “national and political unity, or territorial integrity” reveals that the international legal approach to indigenous rights is limited by a dominant state’s understanding of sovereignty. In *Sovereignty Matters*, indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred explains that the concept of sovereignty takes its roots in the western legal understanding of governance, economy, and land properties and resources, while indigenous conceptions entail sustainable relationships with nature, the well-being of peoples and cultural values of the community (in Barker 2005). Alfred states, “True indigenous formulations are nonintrusive and build frameworks of respectful coexistence by acknowledging the integrity and autonomy of the various constituent elements of the relationship” (in Barker 2005, 46). For indigenous peoples, the challenge is to extend legal discourses of indigenous politics, decolonize their political philosophies, and transform them with more suitable approaches based on cultural values of the communities (Barker 2005).

**Adding Responsibility Discourse**

Reviewing indigenous advocacies for rights to self-determination and their consequences, Jeff Corntassel clearly points out the limitations of the rights-based discourse in securing Indigenous self-determination (2008). He states that the rights-based discourse not only keeps the autonomy of indigenous peoples and their distinctive identities within the existing frameworks of host state(s), it devalues cultural components and the sense of responsibility for life of indigenous peoples (Corntassel 2008). Instead of relying only on a rights-based path toward self-determination, he argues for reframing self-determination toward a responsibility-based discourse. This mode of self-
determination aims to “de-center the state from discussions of indigenous political, social, and economic, and cultural mobilization” and to regenerate cultural and ecological systems (Corntassel 2008, 123).

As other indigenous intellectuals have demonstrated transformative approaches to studies of indigenous peoples and politics, this study is a process of adding a responsibility-based discourse in Okinawan decolonization and resurgence. Although decolonization is an unwieldy concept to define, it is broadly interpreted as “critical understandings and engagements with colonialism and imperialism” (Smith 1999). In their innovative workbook, *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, Wilson and Yellow Bird define decolonization as “the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation” (2005, 2). This concept is common to many indigenous peoples in challenging colonial ideologies and also as an active, strategic manifestation of indigenous narratives and practices.

In bringing up the word “resurgence,” Alfred elaborates on the possible dialogues of decolonization and reaches to the core concept. Indigenous survival in the face of imperialism requires political and cultural resurgence on collective and personal levels (Alfred 2005). He advocates forms of resurgence that are grounded in indigenous peoples’ philosophies, in order to respect and reconnect to their ways of being. Alfred encourages community resurgence through individual reconnection to our soul. He states that “the end goal of our Wasáse - our warrior’s dance - must be formulated as a spiritual revolution, a culturally rooted social movement that transforms the whole of society and
a political action that seeks to remake the entire landscape of power and relationship to reflect truly a liberated post-imperial vision” (2005, 27).

Indigenous resurgence is an important concept in this project because it ties the indigeneity of the Okinawan people, or “a culturally rooted social movement” to an international legal “political action” as indigenous people. Examining the articulation of indigenous Okinawan identity through indigenous frameworks provides new perspectives to Okinawans for their resurgence and decolonizing future.

**Methods and Methodologies**

This study combines indigenous historiographical methods and discourse analysis. Providing an instructive conceptual map for understanding representation, Stuart Hall explains the semiotic approach and discursive approach in discourse analysis. The discursive approach, which I use, examines “not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied” (Hall 1997, 6). Colonial power and practices are linked to knowledge in a way to rule the colonial subjects in certain circumstances (Hall 2001; Smith 1999). For indigenous researchers, who have struggled to decolonize the mechanism of knowledge production, it is crucial to critically analyze the produced knowledge. In this project, examining language and representations, I analyze discourses as ways that construct particular knowledge(s) with regard to specific historical situations.

The data needed for the intended analyses were gathered from both primary sources and multidisciplinary secondary sources. Primary data includes legal documents,
testimonies and institutional reports regarding indigenous movements. The information was mostly gathered online from governmental institution websites. Japanese newspaper articles, including those published in Okinawa Prefecture, were also selected sources. I also made full use of websites and weblogs created by non-governmental, private organizations and indigenous activists. Moreover, songs and oral histories make up a large part of my data for analysis.

My secondary sources were drawn from multidisciplinary literature written by both Okinawans and non-Okinawans. Although I encountered only a handful of published works on “indigenous” Okinawans, there is otherwise a vast amount of literature on Okinawa and Okinawan people. I used these data to support my argument and/or to re-analyze them through indigenous theoretical frameworks. Much of the Okinawa-related data were written in Japanese. I translated these into English, analyzed them critically, and added to this the perspectives of indigenous Okinawans.

As far as research ethics are considered, I hereby note a personal sensitivity about how I position myself as an Okinawan scholar, as per the underlying power relationship between the researcher and the researched. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, claims that research is a way to ideologically create and legitimize imperialism and colonialism (1999). As an Indigenous Okinawan researcher, I use these qualitative research methodologies while I situate myself in between, as both “insider” and “outsider” to the research object community. For me as a researcher, this project reflects my responsibility as an Okinawan person, towards the decolonization of methodologies for conducting research. Also, I am inspired by Ty Tengan’s approach. Reflecting his own identity, situating and representing himself as an Indigenous
anthropologist, Tengan shares his sense of the Kanaka Maoli concept of *kuleana*, which he explains as requiring “the responsibility and willingness to unsettle ourselves by our ethnographic partners in all contexts of teaching, researching, sharing, and writing” (2005, 253).

Being situated within Western academia, the most important *kuleana* for me is: How I can utilize Western knowledge and practices in the conducting of research as beneficially as possible for the community? For indigenous researchers, decolonizing research means “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith 1999, 39). By critiquing and re-analyzing colonial narratives of Okinawa and Okinawans, my research attempts to open up a path toward liberation of the previously undermined worldviews, values, and voices of Okinawans.

**Objectives and Significance**

My approach in this study aims to activate construction of positive identity for Okinawans. By supporting an Indigenous theoretical framework, which resonates with Okinawan indigeneity, this study hopes to empower Okinawans for their political and cultural resurgence.

This study seeks to fill in the gap that often emerges when researchers study indigenous populations from within the field of political science. Because of indigenous peoples’ movements engaging with international organizations and as per the political category of “indigenous“ itself, studies on indigenous peoples tend to be examined through a rights-based discourse of self-determination. As Corntassel claims, the rights-based discourse leaves states and institutions in positions of patriarchal power to interpret
and recognize the “indigenous.” It limits such self-determination to within political and legal frameworks (2008). To the political rights movement of indigenous Okinawans, my thesis adds understandings of indigenous cultural values and ways of being which come along with and are inseparable from political self-determination.

To the field of Indigenous Studies, my work contributes to expanding the theoretical concepts of indigenousness, colonialism, and imperialism. Indigenous Studies, like the predominant definitions of “indigenous,” are still heavily situated within Eurocentric understandings. Indigenous peoples from the Western settler colonies dominate Indigenous Studies that contest European imperialism. My study expands the application of the concepts of indigeneity and imperialism by extending these to Okinawa’s case of challenging U.S. and Japanese empires. Acknowledging different understandings of imperialism, but similar experiences among the oppressed will offer more holistic, inclusive, and transnational approaches in Indigenous Studies.

My research will contribute to the field of Okinawan Studies by providing a new analytical perspective on the Okinawan experience, while endorsing indigenous Okinawan epistemologies grounded, centered, and developed by the people. Therefore, my overarching objective in this study is to critically examine existing narratives about Okinawa and to emphasize Okinawan perspectives. By doing so, I aim to re-center and “indigenize” the research object: Okinawa and Okinawans. The importance of this project is in connecting indigenous cultural narratives to political movements and in supporting the shift to an indigenous framework for future scholarship and political action.
Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of three additional chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 traces historical colonialism in Okinawa and its socio-political relationship with Japan and the United States. In contextualizing its history in the world’s social phenomena, Chapter 2 maps an overview of major historical processes of Japanese and U.S. colonialism that greatly influenced the contemporary politics of Okinawa.

Criticizing Japanese peoples’ “unconscious colonialism,” Okinawan sociologist Köya Nomura states, “the Japanese majority refused to take responsibility for its country’s colonial despotism, and, with this refusal, Japan forgot its colonial past. The loss of its colonies and its memory lapse, however, do not necessarily mean that Japanese colonialism is dead” (Nakasone 2002, 112). As Nomura proclaims, colonization has not ended in Okinawa. The evolving articulation of indigenous-ness is Okinawans’ challenge and resistance to Japan’s intentional forgetting of the past and ignoring the present. The collective memory of historical colonialism is important in examining indigenous politics in contemporary Okinawan society. Reviewing literatures surrounding the history of Okinawa, Chapter 2 explores how the Japanese and the U.S. empires have engaged in the dismantling of Okinawan autonomy and justifying the powers of empire. As the first step of resistance in understanding the history and people, Chapter 2 outlines the interlocked colonial structure over Okinawa/ns.

The following chapters establish the framework through which this paper analyzes the Okinawan articulation of indigeneity. Chapter 3’s focus, for example, covers the U.S. military occupation; an ongoing, major political issue. Since Japan’s defeat in WWII, Okinawa—only 0.6 % of Japanese national territory—has been
burdened with 75% of the U.S. military forces stationed in Japan (Okinawa Prefecture Military Base Affairs Division 2010). While the demilitarization movement of Okinawa has been active over several decades, the restoration of the land does not proceed as verbally promised by the Japanese government. This chapter focuses on this movement and its connection to global communities of anti-militarization activists. I examine how Okinawans have utilized other U.S. militarized community and Indigenous agency in their struggle to demilitarize the land. I also present how an Okinawan indigenous peoplehood matrix and worldview work in the resistance against militarism.

In Chapter 4, through examining oral traditions of Okinawan society and contemporary folk songs, I presented evidence for the resurgence of Okinawan indigeneity. Oral tradition in Okinawan society has its roots in the ancient Ryūkyū era and has played an important role in the dissemination and survival of Okinawan narratives. Our ancestors wove their knowledge and lessons into chants, poetry, songs and stories, and passed them down orally from generation to generation. This chapter provides a critical discourse analysis of Okinawan songs. Looking closely at these in historical and political contexts, I explored how songs and storytelling have served to express people’s thoughts, values and emotions, and also how oral tradition situated in the Okinawan community serves as a medium for collective political action. My emphasis and recognition of oral tradition in this chapter aim to re-center Okinawan narratives and methodologies within Okinawa’s political movements.

Finally, I conclude my thesis with a brief overview of my research on emerging political articulations and activism of Okinawans as “indigenous.” This research links
together the history, political actions and cultural expressions of Okinawa that form and underpin the Okinawan people’s struggle for self-determination and decolonization.
“The people who live in Okinawa Prefecture and natives of Okinawa are all Japanese nationals,” responded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to a periodic report by the Committee on International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (MOFA 2010). In 2010, the ICERD committee listed the Okinawan community as an eligible subject of international law, regarding the concentration of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa. The Japanese government presented their view that “there exist no special measures in place to recognize the rights of people who live in Okinawa and natives of Okinawa with respect to land” (MOFA 2010), disregarding the definition of what constitutes an “indigenous people” as outlined in the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2000, MOFA commented:

Those who live in Okinawa Prefecture or natives of Okinawa are of the Japanese race, and they are not generally considered to be a group of people who share different biological or cultural characteristics from the Japanese race (2000).

In 10 years, the only change in the Japanese government’s stance toward Okinawans has been in re-categorizing them from being of “the Japanese race” to now being “Japanese nationals.” This ignoring of the history of Okinawa and Okinawans’ advocacies and resistances as indigenous people makes one wonder if the Japanese government suffers from “a willful amnesia” (Krishna 2001).

In this chapter, I described the historical processes of colonialism by the Japanese and the U.S., as well as the contemporary political stance of the Japanese government toward the issue of indigenous people. What is Okinawa? Who are Okinawans? How
and why did Okinawans suddenly become racialized as “Japanese”? Is the Japanese government trying to separate the issue of foreign-imposed militarization from their own discrimination against Okinawans? Can we really, separately, discuss the two?

As we can see from the peoplehood model that I referred to the previous chapter, sacred history, ceremonial cycles, language and place are intricately linked and equally important in the formation of an indigenous Okinawan identity. Because the land has been encroached upon militarily and strategically for so long and so broadly, the people of Okinawa have been subject to discrimination that prevents their inheritance and enhancement of cultural, political, and economic practices. In addition to this devastating loss of land, Okinawans have been subjected to forcible assimilation.

For Okinawans incorporated into Japan’s nation-state building, their nationality and their citizenry in the state developed differently; so they should be separately understood. Since the 1972 reversion of Okinawa, the Japanese Constitution has stipulated that the rights of Okinawans should be understood to be equal with those of “Japanese nationals,” and this allows the Japanese government’s willful forgetting and ignoring of its continuous colonialism over Okinawa and Okinawan people. Meanwhile, the historical continuity of colonialism in the indigenous Okinawan memories continued to distinguish the people’s existence as distinct from peoples comprising the dominant society. It is a driving force, therefore, in articulating their indigenous identity and claim to self-determination. In order to understand contemporary indigenous politics of Okinawa, it is necessary to unpack the historically interlocked colonial structures of Okinawa, Japan, and the United States.

One of the most influential theorists of colonialism, Frantz Fanon, says:
Thus, the history which he [the settler] writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves.

The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization – the history of pillage – and to bring into existence the history of the nation – the history of decolonization (1963, 51).

Taking a cue from Fanon, the supposed immobility of Okinawans needs to be called into question and challenged by the colonized. To understand ongoing colonialism on Okinawa requires re-articulating the history and politics from an indigenous perspective. The story needs to be re-examined beyond the framework of Japanese history, with Okinawa as an agent of its own history.

**What is Okinawa?**

Okinawa, which comprises an island chain between mainland Japan and Taiwan, is the southernmost and last-added administrative region of Japan. However, a map of East Asia with Okinawa at its center reveals that the distance from Okinawa’s capital, Naha, to Tokyo is actually equal to its distance to Manila, Hong Kong or Pyongyang (Figure 1). During the 16th and 17th century, Naha’s geographical location helped the island to prosper as the Ryūkyū Kingdom. What is now called Okinawa Prefecture consists of 169 islands of the Ryūkyū Archipelago. Whereas the name Okinawa mostly references the geographical area of the prefecture, it also connotes a lot of historical, political, and cultural meanings from the Ryūkyū era. In this thesis, however, I use “Okinawa” to indicate the islands of Okinawa Prefecture, with the terms Okinawa and Ryūkyū used interchangeably.
Figure 1. Map of Okinawa (Okinawa Prefecture 2008).
Likewise, “Okinawan” does not refer only to the people from the Prefecture. Beyond one’s residency, being Okinawan has specific political and cultural implications. Although it has been translated into one word in English, Okinawan, there are several other names by which Okinawan people are called. The most common term used by Okinawan people to identify themselves is *Uchinānchu*, as opposed to *Yamatonchu* or *Naichā* (mainland Japanese). *Uchinānchu* is also used for ethnic Okinawan in diasporic communities. Other examples of names include: Okinawa *jin* (Okinawan people), Okinawa *kenmin* (Okinawan prefectural people), *Shimanchu* (Islander), Ryūkyū *jin* (Ryūkyū people), Ryūkyū *minzoku* (Ryūkyū nation).

In Okinawa Prefecture, the majority of the population identify as *Uchinānchu*, and in the Okinawan diaspora, approximately 390,000 descendants who self-identify themselves *Uchinānchu* and distinguish themselves from ethnic Japanese (Okinawa Prefecture Exchange Promotion Division 2010). With the term Ryūkyū, there is a connoted history of independent sovereignty and ancestral genealogy that trace back to the Ryūkyū Kingdom era. Ryūkyū often includes the area and people of Amami Islands, which is now part of Kagoshima Prefecture. Thus, a categorical boundary of what is Okinawa and who are Okinawans changes based on political and historical context.

Although studies about “Okinawa” often focus on its history after the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, Okinawa needs to be further understood by historicizing and contextualizing it as an independent actor in the development of modern nations. It is important to note that colonization of the island started even earlier, during the global era of colonization. There are four important periods in this colonial history: The Age of “Discovery” and the Satsuma Invasion (1609~1879), Absorption into
Japanese Nation-state Building (1879~1945), Military Colony (1945~1972), and Neo-Internal Colony (1972~).

**Age of “Discovery” and the Satsuma Invasion (1609~1879)**

In Okinawa, the time when people started settling the land based on agricultural economy is known as the *Gusuku* period (12th~15th century). Local chiefs led each community to actively engage in trade, and they built *gusuku* as forts to represent their territories. Today, several major *gusuku* ruins have been designated as United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites and remain as places deemed worthy of protection. After Okinawa’s most powerful chief, Shō Hashi unified the island populations within a Ryūkyū Kingdom in 1429, Ryūkyū strengthened its diplomatic presence in East Asia.

The foreign entity with which Ryūkyū had the most contact was Ming China, and the name “Ryūkyū” itself was first cited, in print, in a Chinese document. Under the Imperial Chinese tributary order in East Asia at that time, and its Sino-centric view of peoples along their periphery as “barbarian,” it was diplomatically essential to be recognized as an independent sovereign nation by China (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 29). While the Ryūkyū, as a tributary state, sent gifts to Imperial China, they maintained autonomy over their own political affairs until Satsuma, a feudal domain of Japan, militarily invaded the Ryūkyū Kingdom in 1609.

The Ryūkyūan economist Matsushima prompts us to look at the Satsuma invasion in the context of world colonization history (Matsushima 2012) with the rise of European empires in the 16th and 17th centuries, cataclysmic to many Indigenous peoples. In 1492, Christopher Columbus reached the Americas; Vasco da Gama arrived in India in
1498; and Ferdinand Magellan became the first European to cross the Pacific to “discover” Guam and the Philippines in 1521.

In 1549, Francis Xavier and also other Portuguese missionaries and crews sailed into Japan. Before the Portuguese arrived, with the primary objective to negotiate trade, they had sailed to Ryūkyū. Already knowing about the Portuguese’ conquest of Malacca, the Ryūkyū refused to trade with them (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 63). Japan, on the other hand, welcomed the Portuguese ships and started trading their own silver and lacquerware for guns. Colonial expansion of European empires in East Asia had carried on within the realms of trade, missionary work, and military invasion (Matsushima 2012, 11). It was around this time that Satsuma Japan started planning the invasion of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

The Ryūkyū Kingdom, which maintained its tributary relationship with China, was desired by Japan as a source of profit. In 1609, Satsuma warships and troops with their imported guns landed on the island and forced the Kingdom to surrendered under its control. After establishing a surveillance base in the Kingdom, the Satsuma controlled Ryūkyū’s trade until 1871. Satsuma also imposed heavy taxation on the Ryūkyūan people to benefit the economy of Satsuma. Under this taxation, many overwhelmed farmers died of starvation, and there seemed no end to human trafficking among the commoners in the Ryūkyūs.

Another imposed policy by Satsuma on the Ryūkyūan people at that time was the prohibition of adopting Japanese appearances such as clothes and hairstyles and family names. By educing the exoticism of the Ryūkyūan culture, especially when the

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6 After trading with Portugal, Japan took a seclusion policy from 1639 to 1854.
Ryūkyūans made courtesy visits to Japan, Japan further codified its authority over the Ryūkyūan nation (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 93). For more than 200 years from 1609 to 1879, the Ryūkyū Kingdom existed in name only. The island was under the exploitative colonialism of the Japanese Satsuma domain.

In addition to its political administration, Satsuma took control of the economic market of the Ryūkyūan Islands. During the 17th to 18th centuries, as plantation economies had arisen in colonies of the United States, South America and the Caribbean, indigenous peoples in many parts of the world were forced into labor. Satsuma brought sugar plantation economies into the islands and their people became exploited plantation workers (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Matsushima 2012).

In 1854, ending 200 years of self-imposed seclusion, Japan signed a treaty that granted extraterritoriality and free trade with the United States, and also opened its doors to trade with the western countries. The U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew Perry and his crew entered Ryūkyū before the negotiation for the treaty with Japan, however. In case the negotiations failed, the United States intended to occupy Ryūkyū and “liberate” the impoverished people from Satsuma control (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 152). Pressured by the Western empires, Japan accelerated the opening of the country and endeavored to build its modern state government. This process included the annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

Absorption in Nation-state Building: the Annexation of the Kingdom (1879~1945)

After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan effected enormous changes in its political and social structure as a modern nation. In 1871, Japan abolished its traditional feudal han system and established its central government authority with the prefecture ken

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Planning for its demise, the Japanese government soon began direct political intervention in the Ryūkyū Kingdom and unilaterally renamed it Ryūkyū Han. For diplomatically strategical reasons, the Japanese government was desperate to show the world that Ryūkyū was part of the Japanese sovereign territory (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 165).

While the Ryūkyū government pledged to keep its tributary relationship with China, the Japanese government issued policies that mandated Ryūkyū’s disassociation with China, its political reformation, and military installations. In 1879, the Japanese government installed its own military, definitively overthrew the kingdom, and annexed the islands as Okinawa Prefecture. Arashiro explains that “the Ryūkyū Disposal” preceded not from internal revolution but as a result of external pressure and the imposition of Japanese national unification (1995, 172).

Okinawa Prefecture, after the annexation, was remade into internal colony of Japan that placed Okinawans in a “second-class citizen” status under the centralized government administration. This government appointed Japanese officials to lead public administration of Okinawa Prefecture. The first enacted policy in Okinawa Prefecture was to keep old policies from the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Although some policies like criminal codes were adopted from the Japanese government, others including taxation, land ownership, and government system remained, in order to more reasonably govern Okinawa.

As mainland Japan advanced a capitalist system for its industrial development, the government began to steer Okinawa’s economic activities by encouraging the

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7 A series of historical events from the annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom to the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture is called the Ryūkyū Disposal.
development of a local sugar plantation industry. Industries from mainland Japan soon monopolized the economy of the prefecture, hiring local farmers as plantation workers. While the plantation economy supported the economic growth of mainland Japan, it did not help to improve impoverished Okinawan lives. Rather, with the heavy taxation, it pushed people to the edge of *sotetsu jigoku* (the cycad hell), an expression used to describe the “great depression” period when farmers were forced to eat a deadly poisonous plant, known as cycad, to avoid starvation. Struggling to make a living, some engaged in human trafficking including slave labors and sex workers, and many others left Okinawa as migrant workers (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 211).

While the government retained some old policies, Japanization of Okinawans was strongly encouraged through the implementation of an imperialist education, supported by new policies. The enforcement thereof, as well as the missions of modernization, and Japanization by the government, were discriminatory and constituted cultural and psychological aggression toward Okinawans. Students were strictly prohibited from speaking their native local languages at school; the Japanese language was, and still is, positioned as “the national language.” In addition, by promulgating the theory that Ryūkyūans descend from a common ancestor with the Japanese, the imperialist education sought to change the historical perception of Okinawans (Oguma 1998, 44). In daily life, Okinawan costumes, customs, and ceremonies were disparaged as “barbaric and uncivilized” and became subjects of abolishment or reformation. Education was used as a means to carry out the Empire’s mission to wash out the “primitiveness” of Okinawans; to “civilize” them as like the modernized Japanese (Oguma 1998, 44).
Beyond imperialist education, assimilation policies of Imperial Japan extended to sacrificing people’s lives for the sake of national pride. Adopting the policy of “Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Army,” the Great Japanese Empire encouraged the drafting of Okinawan men as a process toward Japanization. One key reason behind the conscription was to force their pledging loyalty to the Emperor. During the process of imperial expansion to East Asia, sacrificing one’s life for the Emperor was represented as the supreme ethic. Loyalty to the Japanese emperor was taken as an absolute.

Becoming the Emperor’s subjects entitled the people to be Japanese citizens (Oguma 1998, 200–201). Yet, Okinawan soldiers who entered the Imperial military were often the subjects of discrimination as the “uncivilized Ryūkyūans.” Japanization not only pressured the colonized people to live as Japanese but also to die as Japanese. As a result, many young soldiers lost their lives at war and were enshrined as the nation’s war dead. In Okinawa, where political reformation had not yet been completed, enforcement of this military obligation as “Japanese nationals” preceded the establishment of their rights as such (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995).

As Imperial Japan continued winning its battles with China and Russia, the Empire strengthened its national pride. In December 1941, the Imperial Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor and started the Pacific War. On the same day, Japan also attacked the U.S. battleships in Malaya and the Philippines. The Pacific War between empires began and ended with the sacrifices of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islands. At the Battle of Midway, which changed the course of the war, the United States defeated Japan.
With its power thus weakened, the Japanese military used Okinawa as a bulwark to delay a United States attack on mainland Japan. Imperial Japan started sending its military to the islands of Okinawa since in the summer of 1943. The military expropriated residential areas and cultivated land for the construction of airfields, and the local people were drafted as construction laborers.

The 90 days of the Battle of Okinawa killed more than 150,000 people of the total population. Murders of civilian Okinawans, conducted by Japanese military orders, occurred in many places. Explicit, direct orders were given to stop crying babies by murdering them and other cases involved the executions of Okinawans under the suspicion of being spies. There were also indirect orders to force civilians to commit suicide. In the book *Okinawa kenshi (The History of Okinawa Prefecture)*, Okinawan history around this time is described as undergoing the process of an extreme cultural and philosophical manifestation of *kōminka* (subjugation to the Emperor system). At the same time, the battle underscored officially-sanctioned prejudice and discrimination directed toward native Okinawans (Okinawa Prefecture 1977; Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Ginoza 2010).

**Military Colony: The U.S. Military Administration of Okinawa (1945~1972)**

After Japan’s surrender in WWII, the colonial rule of Okinawa transferred from Japan to the United States. While some Okinawan leaders had established the Okinawa Civilian Administration for their self-governance in 1946, in reality, the U.S. military assumed full control of the governance. The American Navy Admiral compared the U.S. military to a cat and Okinawa to a mouse, with Okinawan autonomy very restricted to within the limits allowed (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 262).
In 1949, the United States enacted a plan to separate Okinawa from mainland Japan in order to utilize the area for its military reinforcement in the Far East. No referendum was held in Okinawa for its own people to decide their political future, however. Then, in 1951, Japan and the United States signed the Treaty of San Francisco and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty without regard to the Okinawan voice.

In Article 3 of the Treaty of San Francisco, Japan agreed to the following provision:

Japan will concur in any proposal of the United States to the United Nations to place under its trusteeship system, with the United States as the sole administering authority, Nansei Shoto south of 29° north latitude (including the Ryūkyū Islands and the Daito Islands), Nanpo Shoto south of Sofu Ėn (including the Bonin Islands, Rosario Island and the Volcano Islands) and Parece Vela and Marcus Island. Pending the making of such a proposal and affirmative action thereon, the United States will have the right to exercise all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of these islands, including their territorial waters (UN Treaty Series 1952, 50).

The United States, it should be noted, did not propose a trusteeship system of Okinawa that would encourage self-governance or independence; instead, it maintained its own provisional governance by establishing the United States Civilian Administration of the Ryūkyūs (USCAR). While it was indeed named “Civilian Administration,” it was led by a Governor who served as a military Commander-in-Chief, with the U.S. military controlling all administrative, legislative and juridical powers in Okinawa (Oguma 1998, 470).

Under the jurisdiction of USCAR, military affairs took top priority over any administrative and legislative acts of Okinawa, depriving Okinawan people of their land and their dignity as human beings as a result. When the people were placed in a prison camp during and after the war, the U.S. seized their land and built the military bases.
1953, the USCAR issued the Land Expropriation Act,\(^8\) during the implementation of which its military, with bayonets and bulldozers, forced farmers and landowners to relinquish their lands.

Trying to protect the land from any permanent purchase and use by the U.S. military, Okinawans carried out an island-wide demilitarization protest and sent representatives to speak directly to the United States government in 1955. However, the U.S. would not consider their protests. The 1956 Report by the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Melvin Price of the U.S. House of Representatives, described Okinawa (following his visit there) as a “military colony” of the United States:

We are in Okinawa because it constitutes an essential part of our worldwide defenses. In Japan and the Philippines, as in other parts of the world, our base tenure is dependent upon the continued existence of friendly governments. In the Ryūkyū Islands the circumstances of our political control and the absence of a belligerent nationalistic movement [emphasis added] allow us to plan for long-term use of a forward military base in the offshore island chain of the Far East-Pacific area, subject, of course to our own national policy. Here there are no restrictions imposed by a foreign government on our rights to store or to employ atomic weapons. In addition to the foregoing considerations, assigned missions of the Army, Navy, and Marines add to the importance of this island (U.S. House. 1956).

On the colonized island, human rights of Okinawans were not protected, as either as American or Japanese. While, for example, accidents and crimes related to the military frequently occurred, there was no way for Okinawans to legally protect themselves from such. With Americans’ extraterritorial rights in Okinawa, whenever military tribunals would try American perpetrators of crime against Okinawan people, the

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\(^8\) This act entitled the U.S. to take and use the land of Okinawa. In an emergency, the U.S. could order a notice of eviction to residents and owners of the land.
result would often be unfair and unjust toward the victims (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Arasaki 2000).

In the report Melvin Price also wrote “[a] responsibility arises also because Okinawa has become, in its most precise sense, a ‘showcase of democracy’” (U.S. House. 1956). However, frequent military related crimes, accidents, and American national favoritism for their soldiers proved that the U.S. administration on Okinawa at that time was very far from any kind of “democracy” for Okinawans (Oguma 1998, 471).

For 27 years, from 1945 to 1972, the political identity of Okinawa largely depended on the then-interlocked U.S. and Japanese empires. Even though Japan continued to claim Okinawa to be a part of its territory, and Okinawan people as Japanese nationals, the Japanese Constitution did not apply to Okinawans, who were not thus enfranchised (Arasaki 2000; Toshiaki Arashiro 1995). When they traveled to Japan, for example, a passport was issued to them as “Residents of Ryūkyū Islands” by USCAR. Despite Japan’s retaining “residual sovereignty,” the United States held the more substantial political control over Okinawa.

Without the ability to exercise enough real democracy or to receive real protection from either the U.S. or Japan, Okinawans continued island-wide protests against America’s military. This soon developed into what would become the reversion movement. In the late 1960s, as anti-war and civil rights movements reached their peak in the United States, Okinawa was in the middle of the struggle to remove itself from status as a military colony in order to secure their fundamental human rights. While Okinawa’s “reversion to the motherland” has been often attributed to the post-war protest
movement, the primary reasons behind it were Okinawans’ desire for sovereignty and the protection of their dignity as people.

The slogan *Okinawa wo kaese!* (Return Okinawa!) was popularized in a theme song during the movement. The song continues:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Kataki tsubi wo yaburite} & \quad \text{Breaking the hard soil} \\
\text{Minzoku no} & \quad \text{The island is burning} \\
\text{ikari ni moyuru shima} & \quad \text{with the people’s anger} \\
\text{Okinawa yo} & \quad \text{Dear Okinawa} \\
\text{Warera to warera no sosen ga} & \quad \text{We and our ancestors} \\
\text{Chi to ase wo mote} & \quad \text{with blood and sweat} \\
\text{mamori sodateta} & \quad \text{have taken care of} \\
\text{Okinawa yo} & \quad \text{Dear Okinawa} \\
\text{Warera wa sakebu} & \quad \text{We cry} \\
\text{Okinawa yo} & \quad \text{Dear Okinawa} \\
\text{Warera no monoda} & \quad \text{It’s ours} \\
\text{Okinawa wa} & \quad \text{Okinawa} \\
\text{Okinawa wo kaese} & \quad \text{Return Okinawa!} \\
\text{Okinawa wo kaese} & \quad \text{Return Okinawa!}
\end{align*}
\]

– Zen Shihou Fukuoka Kōsai Shibu, *Okinawa wo Kaese!* 

The nationalistic slogan and song reflect the colonial experience of Okinawans, who had their sovereignty taken away while they still resided on the island. Disenchanted with the United States, the local people demanded a total removal of the U.S. military from Okinawa.

When Okinawa had called for demilitarization through the reversion movement, some Pacific Islands such as Micronesian Islands and Marshall Islands, which had been through similar colonial subjugation and were under U.S. trusteeship began heading toward independence and achieving sovereign statehood. While the people of Okinawa

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9 (Okinawa no utagoe undou henshū iinkai 2004). English translation by Megumi Chibana.
showed their close attachment and commitment to the land, and their economic recovery, human rights became another important factor in turning public opinion towards reversion. Taking a different path from those Pacific Islands, Okinawa again became a prefecture of Japan, placed under the rule of the centralized Japanese government.

Oguma concludes that Okinawans’ motivation for seeking and accepting reversion over independence, despite their strong will to reconnect with the land, must have derived from a desire to continue their efforts in the century-long Japanization which had started prior to the war (1998, 497). It seems to me, however, that the desire for reversion came not from any Okinawan loyalty to Japan; rather, it was to take part in the global peace movements and to choose what they believed to be the most beneficial option for achieving their own peaceful existence under the Japanese Constitution. Nevertheless, in spite of Okinawans’ hope for change, the manner of reversion that Japan and the U.S. prepared would go on to keep Okinawa as “The Keystone of the Pacific.”

Though administrative power of the island was transferred to Japan, the U.S. military remained in Okinawa.

**Neo-Internal Colony: Post-reversion Okinawa (1972~)**

On May 15, 1972, Okinawa was officially returned to the Japanese administrative region as Okinawa Prefecture, and the Japanese government reformed the legal system of Okinawa under its Constitution. In addition, to reduce disparities with other prefectures, the government implemented Okinawa development policies. For the 20 years from 1972 to 1991, more than three trillion yen were invested for infrastructure building and development of the prefecture (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 293). In celebration of the

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10 A nickname for Okinawa that indicates geographical and strategic importance of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa for the maintenance of security in Far East.
reversion, major national events such as the Tree-Planting Festival, National Athletic Meeting, and the Ocean Exposition were held in Okinawa.

Ultimately, such initiatives displeased Okinawans, especially smaller local manufacturing and service business owners who were directly affected by the development plans. Led by Japanese companies, these events marked the start of a growing tourism industry and further exploitation of Okinawa. To implement the public projects and events, Japanese industries started buying up the land and investing in the coastal reclamation of red-soil, which caused coral erosion and destruction (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 295). To add insult to injury, the majority of the projects’ profits were absorbed not into Okinawa but into Japanese companies, causing many local businesses into bankruptcy with resulting job losses for Okinawans (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Matsushima 2012). The enticement of Japanese companies, their marketing of Okinawa, and reflux of money to mainland Japan formed the base of a neo-colonial tourism economy in post-reversion Okinawa.

Post-reversion conditions eroded not only their political and economic autonomy, but also their distinct identification as Okinawans. Hosting national events such as the National Athletic Meet triggered active resistance following the singing of *Kimigayo* as the national anthem and the hoisting of *Hinomaru* as the national flag, both of which symbolize Japanese nationalism and imperialism. This was not pleasant for many Okinawans (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 294).

In 1987 when another National Athletic Meet was held, Shōichi Chibana showed his resistance against Japanese nationalism by pulling down and burning a *Hinomaru* flag at the event. He became a bashing target of a Japanese right-wing group and received
much attention from Japanese media, while “most of the local people accept[ed] what he
did on an emotional level” (Field 1993, 51). Under the Japanese nationalist rhetoric
imposed through public events, the muted voices and emotional struggles continued for
Okinawans.

Development and Japanization continue to be promoted today, with the heavy
burden being borne by Okinawans not yet resolved. While Okinawa Island comprises
only 0.3% of Japan’s total land mass, it bears the burden of 70% of the U.S. military in
Japan. These forces occupy 20% of the island (Figure 2). Okinawans’ demands for the
total removal of the U.S. military and the full return of the land have not yet been
fulfilled, even after 40 years since the reversion. The people in Okinawa still suffer from
noise pollution, environmental destruction, accidents and crimes caused by the U.S.
military presence.
In addition to the unsettled past still remains, deeply buried in Okinawan soil. Throughout the islands of Okinawa, where an intense land battle took place and more than 200,000 people lost their lives, remains of these dead are still being found. Likewise, about 3,000 tons of unexploded ordnance remain in the soil, 50 tons of which are disposed of every year (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 298). In addition to the physical damages, reports and analyses of a resulting trans-generational,

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11 Approximately 150,000 of 200,000 war dead were people from Okinawa.
traumatic aftermath and psychological effects of the war experience on individuals, families, and communities, have recently begun to attract public and professional attention after 67 years. For Okinawans, the war has not yet ended.

**40 Years Since the Reversion**

2012 marks 40 years since Okinawa returned to Japanese administration. For 40 years, the development of the prefecture proceeded while the Japanese government invested in economic development while, at the same time, maintaining the U.S. military facilities in Okinawa. Under the combination of the carrot (the development fund) and the stick (the military base), Okinawa has remained dependent on, as well as politically and economically subjugated to, the Japanese government (Matsushima 2012, 31). Fostering Okinawa’s economic dependency on the government subsides and the imposition of the U.S. bases upon Okinawa, the government has manipulated the autonomy of Okinawa in a peremptory way. As a result, it has remained the poorest prefecture, with the highest unemployment rate, all the while surrounded by the U.S. military bases.

The Japanese government continues to throw the carrot and stick to Okinawa, but Okinawan resistance and advocacy for autonomy have been growing. Okinawan activists asserted, at the United Nations, that the ongoing imposition of the U.S. military is a form of discrimination against the Okinawan people. However, the Japanese government denies all discrimination charges by emphasizing Okinawans’ equal rights “as Japanese nationals” and the implementation of Okinawa promotion and development policies (Ryukyu Shimpo 2012a)
Criticizing the government development plans, Yasukatsu Matsushima claimed that assimilation policy functions not only in the field of education but also in economic activities and development of the community (2012, 24). Advocacy for rights to self-determination as indigenous people is seen as a way to break Okinawa’s dependency on the carrot and the stick.

**Japan’s Stance Toward Its Indigenous Peoples**

Okinawan indigenous advocates seek a form of self-determination that would overcome structural discrimination from Japan and enable them to protect the place they live, the source of their culture, and the foundation of who they are. It is an ongoing struggle for Okinawans, like all indigenous peoples, to reconnect their people to the land. While Okinawans have not yet been officially recognized as Indigenous by Japan, the Indigenous Ainu, on the other hand, have slightly changed their relationship with the government.

In 1997, the Ainu people attempted to legally protect their culturally significant sacred land from the construction of a dam that had long been opposed by Ainu activists. In a case known as *The Nibutani Dam Decision*, Ainu people filed a lawsuit against the operating body, the Japanese state. The Ainu accused the Hokkaido Development Bureau of forcible exploitation of the land for the dam construction. Despite a long resistance by the Ainu people, the sacred land was permanently flooded. After the dam was completed, the Sapporo District Court ruled that the acquisition of land for the dam construction was illegal, and failed to protect the land that was culturally significant for the indigenous Ainu people. In this case, for the very first time, the Japanese court referred to the Ainu as indigenous people. Although the Ainu resistance did not reach to
successfully protection of the land, it was the first symbolic case where Japan officially demonstrated their recognition of the Ainu as indigenous people of Hokkaido, the Northern part of Japan (Levin 1999, 394).

The government has not yet recognized native Okinawans similarly, as a distinctive group of people who therefore also hold Indigenous rights; rather, the government has been reducing these rights to the land and to the culture by keeping them under its control. After recognizing the Ainu as an indigenous people, the Japanese government finally abolished the assimilationist policy on Ainu, *the Hokkaido Former Natives Protection Act*, which entitled the government to seize the land from the Ainu and prohibited them from practicing the main economic activities of gathering and hunting as well as other cultural activities. Instead, the first “multicultural” law, *the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act*, was enacted in 1997. Although the new legislation provides legal protection to the Ainu culture, it is not satisfactory for them and does not allow them to exercise their political and economic self-determination (Siddle 2003, 447).

As described in Chapter 1, the Japanese government has strong concerns about indigenous rights relating to land and secessions of indigenous peoples from the nation-state. It seems as though the Japanese government does not want to recognize Okinawans as indigenous, even in the limited ways they have with the Ainu, in part because of concerns over land use. Any Okinawan claim over land based on indigenous rights of self-determination could potentially cause the Japanese government to have to negotiate moving the U.S. bases to other prefectures or places and to reconsider the security of the state. This is especially problematic in that other prefectures are unlikely to accept any U.S. military bases. In addition, the Japanese government values its
relationship with the U.S. over any consideration of fairness to the Okinawan people. The government seems to be more invested in the U.S. Military Special Measures Law, which entitles the U.S. to use land for the military, than redressing past and present discrimination and dispossession of Okinawans.

Although the Japanese government has engaged in promoting the political and economic development of Okinawa Prefecture by stressing geographical, historical, and cultural characteristics that are uniquely Okinawan, this recognition is still framed within Japanese nationalism and sustains the Japanese state. At other times, these characteristics are the subject of national discord; the government denying its historically, politically and culturally interlinked discriminatory acts towards Okinawans (Ginoza 2010). The historical, cultural and ethnic distinctions of Indigenous Okinawans and their self-identification and commitment to these differences cannot be compared with residents of another prefecture, and thus were often disregarded. Reviewing the history of colonialism on Okinawa, it is clear that the current prefectural status has locked it within a centralized nation-state which discourages Okinawan self-determination.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the historical processes of Japanese and U.S. colonialism in Okinawa. Although this history is often told in the Japanese narrative as if it is a glorious page of the nation-state, it is a history of colonialism that has deprived Okinawa of agency in taking its own course. The history of the islands has often been caught up in a whirlwind of global colonial politics. Militarily, economically, and culturally conquered by colonial powers, the autonomy of Okinawans has been reduced to that of a prefectural group within the larger state. Indigenous-framed resistance by the people is
not merely an act of “catching up” with other Japanese prefectures. Rather, it is a continuous effort to overcome the adverse legacy of colonial rule. Okinawans have used the international stage to call attention to their historical situation; a refusal to remain buried in the history as written by Japan.

In the following chapter, by examining the demilitarization movement, I illuminate how Okinawan resistance has connected with global resistance against colonial militarism.
On April 25, 2010, over 90,000 people gathered in Yomitan Square to call for the removal of the U.S. military bases from Okinawa. It was one of the largest post-war rallies against the occupation, and it was mainly targeting a plan by the U.S. Marine Corps to relocate Futenma Air Station to the Henoko coastal area. In September 2009, then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama proclaimed that the station would be removed in order to reduce the burden on the prefecture. Okinawans rallied in support of the long-awaited change; to say “NO!” to the imposition of the U.S. military bases on the island. Borrowing the idea of “a yellow penalty card” from soccer, people wearing yellow T-shirts, caps and scarves, with umbrellas, filled the Square and gave a warning to the government to reconsider its conduct. There were many who, while personally supportive of this rally could not physically join it for various reasons. Some were caught up in a 10-kilometer traffic jam leading up to the Square. Other chose to express their support by wearing the color yellow at work (Ryukyu Shimpo 2010). Men and women, young and old, stood up together to demand the demilitarization of Okinawa.

At the same time, outside of Okinawa, activist groups supported the protest in different ways, in a show of solidarity. For example, in Shinjuku, Tokyo, approximately 1,250 people gathered in a park in a public appeal declaring: “NO BASE OKINAWA [sic],” spelled out by making “human letters” with the participants holding candles in their hands. In Chiyoda, Tokyo, meanwhile, 1,000 people representing the Tokyo Okinawan Association and the Association of Okinawan Antiwar Military Landowners, Kantō Chapter marched in demonstration. In San Francisco, too, a non-governmental
organization, Women for Genuine Security, assembled protesters and members from eight other NGOs, and held a meeting to call for the reduction of the U.S. military bases.

In front of the Japanese embassy in Washington D.C., people showed their opposition by holding up banners saying “Close Base [sic],” and “Save the Dugong.” Organized by a U.S.-based environmental group, Network for Okinawa, the protest was held on the same day of the convention in the prefecture. Honolulu showed their opposition as well, in the evening of April 25, the Hawai‘i Okinawa Alliance held the Sunset Candlelight Peace Vigil for Okinawa. Led by third- and fourth-generation descendants of Okinawan immigrants in Hawai‘i, and also included local residents of Native Hawaiian, Filipino, and Korean ancestry, along with Chamorro from Guam, who showed their solidarity in opposing militarization on small islands. With the rapid development of this increasingly global network, the Okinawa diaspora’s strong desire for a demilitarized homeland has spanned generations and crossed oceans. The Okinawan demilitarization movement stepped onto another stage.

This chapter demonstrates how Okinawan struggles against the U.S. military occupation have moved to take part in the global Indigenous movement. The chapter begins with a brief summary of major military-related issues affecting Okinawa, including human rights violations and environmental effects, and it examines the range of Okinawan voices and actions directed against these issues. What are the core values directing their claims and forms of resistance? How does each act relate to Okinawan identity and their distinct way of being? I discuss how indigeneity has influenced Okinawan anti-military activism. Then, looking at different activist organizations and their networks, I explore how the Okinawan social movement against militarization has
evolved from a local resistance to part of the global indigenous movement. This examination aims to show intersections of Okinawan indigeneity, historical social movements, and the global indigenous movement.

Researching demilitarization movements, I gathered data needed to analyze Okinawan discourses, practices of political resistance, and the articulation of indigenous identity from texts including legal documents, testimonies, and institutional reports. Most of these primary sources were obtained online from major Japanese and Okinawan institutions’ websites. In addition, I examined and analyzed data from websites, weblogs and other social networking sites, created and managed by NGOs, activist groups, and individual activists.

**Military Colony Okinawa**

Okinawan struggles against militarization began with the Battle of Okinawa during WWII. In the summer of 1943, planning to make the prefecture a bulwark, the Japanese military started seizing land and constructing its military stations across the islands. The Japanese military used them as a “fortress” during the war, seeking to delay the American invasion of mainland Japan. Beginning with the U.S. military invasion on the islands in March 1945, the battle on the ground lasted for three months and claimed approximately 150,000 Okinawan victims; one fourth of the Okinawan population at the time. The U.S. intended, with its invasion, to separate Okinawa from Japan and to occupy the land as part of their military expansion and enforcement in the Pacific (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995, 260). Japan abandoned Okinawa to the United States following its unconditional surrender, as a spoil of war. Playing an important strategic role for the U.S. military, Okinawa was called “the Keystone of the Pacific.”
During and after the battle, Okinawa residents were detained at a prisoner-of-war camp. While there, the U.S. military occupied the air stations originally constructed by their Japanese counterparts to use prior to entering a battle, and they seized land to build additional military facilities. The military forcibly usurped the land with bulldozers and threw out local landowners who resisted surrendering (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Arasaki 2000). Those who were deprived of their residential plots and farmlands had no choice but to relocate to other places. Losing the lands once relied upon for their livelihood, some Okinawans had to find jobs with the military or emigrate to find work in another country (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Arasaki 2000).

In 1953, under the U.S. Civil Administration (USCAR), the U.S. unilaterally announced a policy to rent the land themselves with use the land with very cheap leases for an indefinite period. The U.S. government’s forceful expropriation of land and purchasing plan triggered an island-wide protest among Okinawans. Known as the “all-island struggle,” the protest was a big social movement by Okinawans for the protection of the land and in opposition against the U.S. military occupation (Toshiaki Arashiro 1995; Arasaki 2000).

Suffering from the impact of this undemocratic land seizure, as well as frequent accidents and crimes committed by the military personnel, Okinawans started to strongly push for its reversion in negotiations with the Japanese administration. The former governor of Okinawa Prefecture, Masahide Ota, in his book published a year before the 1972 reversion, explained “Okinawa’s heart,” which laid at the root of the reversion movement. Three important principles of the reversion movement were 1) protect peace

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12 Land Expropriation Act.
without war, 2) ensure human rights, and 3) gain autonomy (Ota 1971, 3). The main goal that Okinawans sought through the change of political administration was the self-determination to protect their people’s peaceful life style.

In contrast to Okinawans’ wishes and philosophies, the reversion proceeded as both the Japanese and U.S. government had planned. They kept imposing the U.S. military bases on Okinawa, as “the Keystone of the Pacific,” under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. According to Article VI of the Treaty, both countries agreed upon the following:

For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan (MOFA 1960).

After the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japanese administration, the U.S. military bases were partially consolidated and reduced. Yet, 20% of the Okinawa Island, a total of 11% of the Okinawa Prefecture, is still occupied by U.S. military facilities. Ota criticized the unfair burden of hosting the military. If the purpose of the military bases in Okinawa, according to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, is for the protection of all of Japan, then they should be evenly divided all over the country (Kōbunken 2005, 163). There is no valid reason for 75% of the U.S. military forces in Japan to be found within Okinawa.

Even after the end of the Cold War, America’s military occupation in Okinawa continued, based on the Japan-U.S. Declaration on Security in 1996, which emphasizes the importance of the U.S. military in Japan for the “security environment of the Asia-Pacific region” (MOFA 1996). The Ministry claims:
[O]n the basis of this review, the Prime Minister and the President reaffirmed their commitment to the profound common values that guide our national policies: the maintenance of freedom, the pursuit of democracy, and respect for human rights (1996).

Okinawans ask: “Whose human rights are respected?” The “profound common values” that the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed upon in the Treaty were not necessarily shared by local residents, who were negatively affected by the presence of the U.S. military. Okinawan historian Moriteru Arasaki states that their enormous presence in the prefecture is a result of “America’s global strategy and the Japanese government’s policy of confining bases to certain areas” (2000, 115). The United States, in order to expand and maintain its status as a military superpower in the Asia Pacific region, stayed in the best military host state in Japan. Japan, meanwhile, succeeded in its economic and social development after WWII, under the protection of the U.S. military and also through the sacrifice of Okinawans.

Emphasizing the prefecture’s strategic importance and also the necessity of the Security Treaty to insure the security of Japan, the central government has been reluctant to move the military out of Okinawa to other prefectures. The former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Taro Asou, commented on the relocation plan of Futenma Air Station by saying that it is necessary to continue the U.S. military presence in order to insure Japan’s safety, especially because of Okinawa’s geographically efficient position (Kōbunken 2005).

However, Tomohiro Yara a journalist from Okinawa Times, upon interviewing a U.S. Marine officer, revealed the presumed “geographical importance” of Okinawa to be a fiction (2009, 24).
“[Our base] does not need to be in Okinawa. The U.S. Marine Corps have the abilities to perform their duties even if they are stationed in Kyūshū or Guam” (Yara 2009, 230). The Japanese government’s long promoted argument for “the geographical importance” of Okinawa’s hosting the U.S. military is falling apart, and its discrimination towards Okinawa is beginning to come to light.

Calling Okinawa a “military colony” of both the U.S. and Japan, Okinawan journalist Kensei Yoshida criticizes U.S. military imperialism as well as Japan’s national backing of it (2007, 6). The occupation on Okinawa has been supported by the political discrimination against the island, rather than by its “geographical importance.” Yoshida further questions whether Japan itself might be a military colony of the United States (2007).

It is very clear that there’s a big difference in views between the decision-makers in the central government and Okinawans, in their interests and understandings about the land, the sea, and the people of Okinawa. Many of the inappropriate comments, reasoning, excuses and gaffes by the Japanese and U.S. government officials reveal their failure to truly recognize and respect that there are people living in Okinawa (Kōbunken 2005, 71).

Still annoyed and swayed by decisions that the centralized Japanese government makes, Okinawans have started to question the purported benefits gained through the reversion, which was expected to empower their autonomy and secure their human rights, without the military. In a small island in the Pacific that has a long history of social movements, how do the demilitarization and the people’s indigenous-centered

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13 English translation by Megumi Chibana.
movements for self-determination intersect? Among many debatable issues regarding the U.S. military occupation and different approaches to the demilitarization of Okinawa, this chapter looks at human rights and ecological impacts of militarization.

**Violation of Women’s Rights**

One of the big negative outcomes that the U.S. military presence has created includes the frequent accidents and crimes committed by military personnel. According to statistics attached to a confidential report, titled “Civil Affairs Related Basic Issues and Okinawa’s Reversion,” which was released by the Foreign Ministry, in the five years from 1964 to 1968 under the U.S. Military Administration, a total of 5,367 crimes were committed in the prefecture by military personnel (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 2011c). This includes 504 violent crimes, such as murders, robberies and rapes. Only 33.6% of all the crimes committed, however, actually resulted in prosecution. The number of recorded crimes committed there by U.S. military personnel in 2010 was 71, which means that approximately 14 times more crimes were committed in 1970 (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 2011c).

Under the military administration, Okinawa lacked both the jurisdiction and the right to arrest a U.S. soldier accused of committing a crime (Arasaki 2000, 120). Because of the extraterritoriality of U.S. personnel, many often escaped heavy punishment while their Okinawan victims ended up crying themselves to sleep, in silence. Without proper legal protection for Okinawan civilian lives, their reversion to Japanese administration embodied a hope to demilitarize the land and gain civil rights under Japan’s post-WWII “Peace” Constitution, which promised renunciation of armed forces with war potential.
Although Okinawans did gain jurisdiction over crimes by off duty soldiers following the 1972 reversion, the U.S. still possesses jurisdiction when incidents happen while the soldier is on duty. Should a U.S. commander issue proof to affirm that an accused soldier was on duty at any given time, there is nothing Japan can do. As long as a suspect stays within the U.S. military area, Japan is not allowed to investigate or arrest the suspect (Arasaki 2000, 125). While numbers of reported crimes by military personnel decreased since the reversion due to the shift of jurisdiction from the U.S. military to the Japanese government, the structural violence caused by the military existence in Okinawa has not changed.

In 1995, three Marine servicemen kidnapped and gang-raped a 12-year-old Okinawan girl. After the crime occurred, Okinawa Prefectural Police gathered various evidentiary facts to prove the accused servicemen’s involvement in the case, and requested to issue an arrest warrant. However, as per the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), Okinawa police could not issue it while the accused military personnel were in the custody of the U.S. Accordingly, it delayed any further investigation and arrest of the accused (Yoshida 2007, 107–108). Such disadvantages and unfairness outraged the Okinawans and led to another large demonstration against U.S. militarization. Okinawan demands converged over two major claims: one, to realign, reduce, and eliminate the U.S. military bases in Okinawa; the other, to re-examine the SOFA, which privileges the U.S. military personnel to remain exempt from Japanese law.
Okinawan Women’s Demilitarization Activism

While activism is strong and there are many social movements against the military occupation in Okinawa, it is only since the 1995 rape case that women’s activism started attracting public attention. Considering the high number of military-related crimes against women, Okinawan women’s groups have pointed out a gendered and sexualized power relationship that the presence of U.S. military creates in Okinawan society.

Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence (OWAAMV) is a non-governmental group consisting of women who protest against the violation of women’s rights by the military (Takazato 2005). Suzuyo Takazato, who worked as a counselor for women for the group, learned that a large number of women in Okinawa were physically and mentally affected by targeted violence related to the military (Takazato 1996, 4). From her counseling experiences, Takazato states that negative physical and psychological effects on women by the war and the military were not yet understood well enough to provide proper protections and provisions for them. She also points out that the majority of rape cases happening in Okinawa trace back to U.S. military personnel (Takazato 1996).

Looking at militarism from a feminist perspective, Takazato and members of OWAAMV argue that militarization on Okinawa has created a “gendered space” of violence. Takazato proclaims, “Okinawa is the prostituted daughter of Japan. Japan used her daughter as a breakwater to keep battlefields from spreading over the mainland until the end of World War II. And after the war, she enjoyed economic prosperity by selling the daughter to the United States” (Gerson 1996).
While both governments, Japan and U.S., have justified the imposition of the military on Okinawa in the name of “security,” women’s groups critically challenge the fundamental meaning and implications of this concept. Seeing evidence of a high involvement of military personnel in violence and crime overall, women activists claim that human rights of Okinawans, especially pertaining to women and children are not protected. Rather, they are being violated by the military. Takazato strongly criticizes their presence as functioning to maintain a paternalistic society and global hegemony by way of armed force. Such a paternalistic society imposes incitement to sexual abuse on women as due to being “women’s fault” or “temptation,” without recognizing the violence-governance structure that the military has created in Okinawan society (Takazato 1996, 15).

In her book, revealing voices of Okinawan women who survived the post-war period, Takazato describes how the military has taken a patriarchal role to create a gendered and sexualized Okinawan society (1996). Under the severe living conditions after the war and without men in their household, women have become the primary breadwinners in many families. Some have been pressed into the sex industry to make a living; orphans have been sold into labor.

When the Vietnam War brought economic prosperity to Japan by supporting the U.S., it also increased the business generated for and by the commercial sex industry. For Okinawan women, this would, unfortunately increase the threat of sexual crimes against them, and their potential enslavement by the sex industry. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military bases in Okinawa were used as hubs from which troops flew and made sorties between Okinawa and Vietnam. The mental conditions of many returning
soldiers, among whom a number had endured near-death experiences in Vietnam, were unbalanced and not normal (Takazato 1996). As if to shake off feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and fear, soldiers lavished their money toward buying the sexual services of women. Soldiers lined up in front of prostitute hotels, carrying wads of dollars and condoms (Takazato 1996, 27). As might be expected, following the War, the number of biracial newborn babies jumped sharply.

Takazato’s observation and interaction with female Okinawan victims critically examines the situations and structured violence that the presence of U.S. troops has brought to post-war Okinawan society. Sending young bachelor soldiers to the battlefield, the U.S. secured its own country by displaying its military power. Takazato points out that the economically poor societies were hard-pressed to provide an outlet for the soldiers’ frustrations (1996, 29). Hosting both the military and a commercial sex entertainment industry catering to American soldiers, even the everyday life of the local community became militarized. Violations of women’s and children’s security became chronic. Takazato emphasizes that the military presence brings up not only issues about geo-political security and its functionality, but also its impacts on an especially unwilling host society (1996, 30).

The main aim of the Okinawa Women Act against Military Violence group has been to dismantle structural violence against women by calling for demilitarization. Through Okinawan women’s perspectives and experiences, OWAAMV’s protest activities and workshops repeatedly use three statements to emphasize negative impacts of the military on a community:

1) the military is a form of structural violence,
2) the military threatens a peaceful society,
3) peace and the military cannot coexist (Takazato 2005).

OWAAMV’s activities include holding workshops, sending out and exchanging information among other cooperative NGOs, observing court proceedings on U.S. soldiers’ rape cases, and building up networks with people outside of Okinawa. After the 1995 rape incident, Takazato also established and served as a representative for Rape Emergency Intervention Counseling Center Okinawa to give counseling support to victims of sexual abuse (Takazato 1996, 35).

Demilitarization movements by women’s groups like OWAAMV criticize the very nature of military presence and actions that violate the human rights of women. Although the women’s groups have actively organized and participated in protests to bring attention to the oppressive situation and militarized everyday life faced by Okinawan women, activists have sensed a gap in the understanding of crisis between people in Okinawa and Japan. The majority of people in Japan do not share the negative impacts that Okinawan women have incurred through the military presence. While the daily lives of Okinawans are already militarized, the presence of the military is extraordinary for people in Japan. Okinawa continues to be viewed as simply a small island far away, where the Japanese government can impose noise, crimes, violence, and pollution in order to protect its security. People in Japan choose not to see the military issue as their own problem; rather, they distance themselves from the U.S. military by regarding it as just Okinawa’s prefectural issue (Takazato 1996, 20).

Adopting a feminist approach, these women’s groups advocate abolishing violence against women and dismantling the structure of violence. As Okinawan women’s groups sought to appeal to the rest of Japan, they also began to report the
violation of human rights of women and children by the military in international arenas. In the summer of 1995, a group from Okinawa consisting of 71 women participated in the World Conference on Women in Beijing (Makishi et al. 2000, 209), joining more than 40,000 women from all over the world who gathered to discuss rights of women. They began to break the wall of silence and raise their voices (Takazato 1996, 5).

A group there from Okinawa spoke out about the frequent (reported and unreported) crimes against women by the U.S. military individuals and discrimination regarding women’s and children’s rights. In the case of those women who have children with U.S. military personnel, financial support for either mother and/or child is not guaranteed, even should a father abandon a family. Participating in the international conference, Okinawan women shared further experiences, and finally felt they were “fitting in a right place” (Makishi et al. 2000, 224). Their voices were heard and respected by women from other military colonies such as South Korea and Puerto Rico. Building up the global network of women from other U.S. military hosting communities, these Okinawan women opened a way to build a society with no military or violence.

Since the 1995 rape case and formation of OWAAMV, international advocacies and demonstrations by Okinawan women have become especially active. In 1996, Takazato led Okinawan women on a two-week Peace Caravan across the U.S. The group visited San Francisco, Washington, New York and Honolulu, and held more than 15 forums within two weeks (Takazato 1996, 190). Meeting with representatives of UN member states, a senator, and a congressman in the U.S., they appealed for assistance to remedy Okinawa’s struggle. Moreover, by also visiting non-governmental organizations
and local citizens’ groups working for peace and human rights, the caravan broadened their networks at the grassroots level (Takazato 1996, 194).

Okinawan women galvanized other NGOs in different regions to work together against their own military occupation. In 1997, hosted by OWAAMV, the international “Women, Militarism, and Human Rights,” forum was held, including participants from Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and the United States (Makishi et al. 2000, 210). The U.S.-based organization Women for Genuine Security (WGS) was then founded to strengthen such international women’s networks fighting militarism by providing translation services, sharing frameworks to understand the localized structures of race, gender, class, and nation, and also hosting international workshops.

Influenced by Okinawan women’s activism, the WGS connects individuals and organizations from other U.S. military host communities such as Hawai‘i, Guam, South Korea and Puerto Rico. On their website, WGS states: “we began in 1996 when women from Okinawa (Japan) appealed to us, as women living in the United States, to take responsibility and speak up about the impact our military forces have on other countries” (Women for Genuine Security).

In 2000, the International Women’s Summit was held in Okinawa, with members of WGS present from the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Korea, Japan, U.S., and mainland Japan. At the meeting, participants discussed militarism and security from feminist perspectives. Questioning “security” as maintained through the military, women in the summit redefined it to represent four principles:

- the environment in which we live must be able to sustain human and natural life;
- people’s basic survival needs for food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education must be met;
• people’s fundamental human dignity and respect for cultural identities must be honored;
• people and the natural environment must be protected from avoidable harm (WGS).

Okinawan women’s international activism has taken small but sure steps to work together with women in other regions. Takazato says, “When we talk about ‘relocation’ of bases, we think of the people of a host community. We don’t want others to have the same suffering as the Okinawans have experienced. We call for demilitarization, not relocation” (Makishi et al. 2000, 229). Beyond their own national boundaries, local anti-military movements by feminist groups link to a global demilitarization movement.

It is also through a women’s organization that Okinawans first started to participate at the United Nations, and formally lay claim to their human rights under international law. Policies regarding the U.S. military use and exploration of land have continued to regard Okinawans unequally with Japanese, and Japanese domestic laws offer no redress against discrimination towards Okinawans. Following this engagement, other Okinawan activists started to take international approaches to asserting what are understood as Indigenous rights.

When military and security issues are discussed, members of OWAAMV, including Takazato, have resolutely validated women’s perspectives on the U.S. military occupation. In line with Takazato’s description of Okinawa as “Japan’s prostituted daughter,” feminist movements had primarily focused on achieving women’s equality within the existing patriarchal society. The indigenous movement, however, promoted a fundamental questioning of the relationship between this daughter and her erstwhile father. Okinawan advocates for self-determination want to be free from any existing
colonial mechanism that has previously established a patriarchal society to oppress women.

Cynthia Enloe describes diverse experiences of militarism by women, Okinawan women’s experiences of militarization are different from those of non-Okinawan Japanese women who may live next to Yokohama Air Base, or to white American women who actively advocate for women’s security in the United States (2007). The U.S. militarization and demilitarization in Okinawa intersect with gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and indigeneity complexities. Extending the Okinawan feminists’ resistance to the violent space that the military creates, their indigenous demilitarization approach calls for the return of the aforementioned “prostituted daughter” to mother earth, and for the protection and well-being of all such daughters.

**Environmental Destruction and Global Networking**

Another major issue is the bases’ negative impact on the islands’ natural environment. Since the Battle of Okinawa, the presence of the military facilities continues to damage and contaminate the Okinawan islands. Its negative impacts on people’s daily lives are beyond any doubt.

For example, although it has been 67 years since the Battle, more than 2,000 tons of unexploded ordnances remain buried in the soil. As to the environmental issue, in 1995 and 1996, over 1,500 bullets containing depleted uranium were used for firing practice at Tori Shima shooting range (Arasaki 2000, 118). This fact was revealed a year after the firing practice, through a report from the U.S. ambassador to the Foreign Ministry of Japan. Three weeks after that, the news finally reached Okinawa Prefecture from the Japanese government (Makishi et al. 2000, 47). It has since become known that
radioactivity from the employment of depleted uranium may have caused serious diseases like Gulf War Syndrome and children’s cancer in Iraq (Arasaki 2000, 118). While many local Okinawans already suspected that depleted uranium would cause harm, the U.S. military long denied any negative effects upon the human body and surrounding environment could result from its firing practice, despite their use being restricted to only a few specific firing ranges on the mainland U.S (Matsumoto et al. 2003, 45).

In addition to the firing exercise fields, environmental pollution was confirmed to have occurred in the military’s communication facilities. In 1996, approximately 120 tons of polluted sludge, highly contaminated with PCBs and mercury, was found at the former site of the Onna Communication and Training Center (Arasaki 2000, 118). The discovery was made five months after this land was released from the U.S. military use. It was revealed when the Department of Sanitary Facilities of Okinawa Prefecture conducted an investigation in response to a request by local Okinawan farmers to use the soil for fertilizer. Because the site had already been returned, the U.S. military refused to remove the sludge it created (Matsumoto et al. 2003, 41). The occupation and abuse of the land have not only threatened the natural environment, but also continue to undermine the maintaining of healthy living conditions for local residents and future generations as well.

Other communities have suffered from environmental pollution caused by military activities, much like Okinawa. Grassroots groups that have worked through environment conservation mechanisms, much like with feminist frameworks, have joined an international network in the global ecological movement and expanded their fields of protests to reach international communities.
Okinawans saw a connection with the people of Vieques, for one comparison. Vieques, a similar “military colony” which belongs to the United States’ Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is an island in the Caribbean Sea. Two-thirds of its land, surrounding airspaces and coastal areas had been occupied by the U.S. Marine Corps (Makishi et al. 2000, 107). Its occupancy of the Vieques brought negative impacts upon the natural environment and worsened frictions between residents and military personnel. On the east side of the island, firing practices had been carried out since 1947. Like those on Tori Shima in 1995, depleted uranium bullets were similarly used in Vieques in 1999. At the west side of the island, contamination of the returned land was reported (Makishi et al. 2000, 129). Exasperated by the military’s abuse, local residents organized the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) in 1993. They put forth four main objectives: the demilitarization of Vieques, land restitution, environmental clean-up, and development, and then carried out campaigns of civil disobedience against the U.S. military (Makishi et al. 2000, 123).

The first encounter between representatives of Okinawa and Vieques occurred at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in New York, in 1997. Kaori Sunagawa from the Okinawa Environmental Network (OEN) participated in NGO session of the UNGASS and sought to build up a global network with other environmentally-concerned people that included the representatives of Vieques. Three years later, organized by OEN, the International Environment NGO Forum was held in Okinawa. Members of CRDV flew to the island from Vieques to participate in the forum and reported on the abuse of their own island by the U.S. Marine Corps. Grassroots activists from Okinawa, in turn, visited Vieques in 2001 for the purpose of supporting the
local opposition to the U.S. military training at a referendum (Matsumoto et al. 2003, 135). Sharing similar experiences, Okinawa and Vieques forged a tight bond in supporting each other’s communities toward their mutual demilitarization and environmental protection goals.

In 2003, the Vieques people’s wish finally came true and the U.S. Marine Corps left Vieques. When U.S. Marine Corps General James L. Jones expressed his concern about the international effects of local protest movements against the U.S. military, referring to the referendum on Vieques (Makishi et al. 2000, 135), Okinawans’ solidarity with its people must have been one of his concerns. By building up global networks, local peoples of both islands learned from each other’s activities and continue to seek strategies to resolve the military issues. Although the political backgrounds of Okinawa and Vieques are different, the peoples of both have shared the same goals for demilitarization and regaining their peaceful and clean lands.

**New Construction of the U.S. Base in Henoko and Indigenous Alliance**

In December 1996, following the large civilian protests against the U.S. military occupation in Okinawa, the closure of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma was agreed upon by the United States and Japan in the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO). However, following a long discussion about the dangerousness presented by the Futenma Station and realignment of the U.S. military, the U.S. and Japanese governments have shifted the focus of the initial agreement from the return to the relocation of the Air Station. Instead of its total return, the governments planned to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps by building a replacement facility at Henoko Bay area in the northern part of Okinawa.
Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu Nakaima repeatedly criticized the plan as it completely disregarded the people’s opposition. Moreover, for the Okinawan people, the process of agreement between the two states has been questionable and unreliable. The governments of Japan and the U.S. both lack accountability to the public, which has increased Okinawan distrust toward them (Ryukyu Shimpo 2011a).

On April 27, 2012, The U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee released a joint statement of the revision to the Realignment of the U.S. Forces. In the statement, the Japanese government announced they are delinking the issues of the relocation of the Marine Forces from Okinawa to Guam and land returns from the issue of the moving of Futenma Air Station to Henoko. Encountering strong opposition from Okinawa, the Japanese government has attempted to reduce the U.S. military burden there; however, the governments have continued to assert that the relocation to Henoko “remains the only viable solution that has been identified to date” (MOFA 2012). Although the Japanese government ostensibly showed sympathy to Okinawans, the statement revealed that both governments fail to respect the will of the people for the unconditional return of the land.

Any planned relocation can expect negative impacts on the environment. The Henoko marine area is located in a central region of the habitat of dugong, an endangered mammal noted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and recognized as a Japan’s national natural treasure (Makishi et al. 2000, 102). It is a matter of great concern that the construction of a new base at Henoko would destroy this habitat of not only the dugongs but other marine creatures as well.

Dugong Network Okinawa (DNO) has actively worked to protect the environment from damage by the military. Through a fund-raising campaign for the dugong, the
group aims to protest against construction of new military bases and develop publicity and educational activities for dugong protection (Makishi et al. 2000, 184). The group has organized international dugong symposiums and invited guest lecturers, who work for the protection of dugongs, from other areas of the world such as Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand (Ryukyu Shimpo 2009). Moreover, the group has participated in conferences of International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and reported the crisis of dugongs and the possible negative impacts on their habitat by U.S. military base construction (Makishi et al. 2000, 184).

Figure 3. Image of a dugong by Dugong Network Okinawa (DNO 2010).

To protest the relocation plan proposed by the governments, local Henoko residents started carrying out sit-in protests to show their opposition to the plan. Community elders participated in sit-ins held on the shore, while young opponents sat in on boats on the sea to watch the construction closely.
In 2008, Yoshikazu Mashiki from DNO filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) with international support and led to a win for the “Okinawa Dugong” case in San Francisco. As a member of UNESCO World Heritage treaty, the United States has an obligation to protect cultural heritage. The U.S. District Court ruled that the Marine base construction plan on Henoko Bay by the DOD, per its potential effect on endangered dugongs. Since dugongs are protected under Japan’s Cultural Assets Preservation Act, which is equivalent to the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the district court judged the base construction on Henoko Bay would violate the NHPA and requested the DOD to submit an environmental impact assessment (DNO 2010; Okinawa Dugong et al., v. Robert Gates et al. 2008).

As activists have worked for demilitarization internationally, there is an interesting factor among Okinawan demilitarization protests that expresses their Indigeneity. Their appeal is not only for environmental protection, but also to protect their cultural and spiritual connection with the place. The planned relocation, if enacted, is likely to disturb Okinawans’ ontological relationship with nature and their guardians. Henoko is a beautiful natural coastal area with healthy coral reefs designated a one of “500 Important Wetlands in Japan” by the Environment Ministry (Makishi et al. 2000, 102). The ocean has been an important life source for the residents of Henoko and they make their living off of it. The dugongs and other marine life are part of their ecological way of being and the cultural lifestyle.

Along with their marine biological significance, dugongs play a very important role as Okinawa’s cultural treasure. They appear in Okinawan mythology and creation stories, and tales of dugongs have been transmitted as part of community genealogies.
from generation to generation. In Northern Okinawa, dugongs are considered to be the ancestors of human beings, and they are worshiped as messengers of the gods at traditional ceremonies. Dugongs have also often been sung about in ritual songs and enshrined at ritual sites (DNO 2010). For example in Ogimi Village of Northern Okinawa, Ungami, a ritual ceremony is held in July on the lunar calendar to welcome gods from mountain and ocean (Okinawa Times 2011). Noro, who conducts ritual ceremonies, worship gods by singing chants about dugongs. This song says:

\[
\begin{align*}
Yei yei & \\
Wan du nire gami yu & \\
I am the god from Niraikanai, far sea.
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Yei yei & \\
Jan nu kuchi tuyai & \\
Riding on a dugong, taking its mouth,
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Yei yei & \\
Itu magui & \\
Let’s go home to the land of god.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{align*}
\]

At the sit-in site of Henoko, elders give prayers toward the ocean as if they ask for help and strength from their ancestral spirits (Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting 2006).

In the current military protests at Henoko and within the peace movements across Okinawa, the dugong has symbolized the people’s political resistance. Since 2006, the community initiative with young local musicians held “Peace Music Festa!” several times in Henoko. The project committee subtitled a 2010 event “We Can See the World From the Henoko Bay,” and called on the public to demonstrate against the military issue through the power of art and music. Performances were open to any genre of music, from rock to traditional folk music, and dances from the community (Peace Music Festa! Henoko 2010 Executive Committee). The event links the core elements of the land, sea,

\textsuperscript{14} I extracted the chant from a documentary TV program (Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting 2006). English translation by Megumi Chibana.
living creatures, and the spiritual world, beyond genres. Although it was officially just a musical event, through the performances, per that theme, its political import demonstrated how these can connect to each other.

Due to its huge impact on the endangered dugong’s habitat, the demilitarization movements in Henoko are often focused on an environmental approach; however, using an indigenous approach, it is important to carefully look at the relationship of people, animals, nature, place, culture, and spirituality. Considering the roles that dugongs and the ocean play in indigenous Okinawans’ peoplehood matrix, the cultural significance of the place for Okinawans should also be respected as an important political claim.

Through the relocation issue in Henoko, local people started to think more critically and internationally about the ways in which military bases have impacted the natural environment and people’s lives. Okinawans started to gather together, motivated not only to protect their human rights, but also in their perseverance toward securing a harmonious community coexistent with its natural environment. The Henoko movement triggered awareness of the importance of interrelatedness and indigeneity to Okinawans.

To protect the symbolic “messengers of god” and also protest against the construction of the new base, elderly people in Henoko have carried out a daily sit-in since April 19, 2004 (Ryukyu Shimpo 2009). The women of Henoko formed a protest group named Jannu no Kai; Jan meaning dugong in Okinawan, and also Jan from Jeanne d’Arc.

As they fought to protect dugongs and the Henoko Bay area, a member of Jannu no Kai, Tomi Mashiki, found another global connection through their demilitarization activities. She and other members were invited to talk about the military issues of
Henoko by Hawai‘i Okinawa Alliance (HOA). Through her visit and interaction with 
HOA members, Mashiki found many similarities between Hawai‘i and Okinawa in terms 
of histories, current political issues, and Indigenous philosophies in relation to nature 
(Makishi et al. 2000, 190–191). She sympathizes with the indigenous people of Hawai‘i 
about similar experiences which resulted in the deprivation of their lands by the U.S. 
military as well.

An Indigenous Hawaiian woman who is a member of HOA emphasized the need 
for cooperation by saying that although there are some differences, Hawaiians and 
Okinawans share many similarities as Indigenous peoples of the Pacific who have been 
burdened by others’ military bases. “If Hawai‘i and Okinawa can connect together and 
reject militarization, we can build a peaceful world”15(Makishi et al. 2000, 197).

Learning from and feeling stimulated by HOA’s activities in Hawai‘i, where there is a 
diversity of ethnic groups, Jannu no Kai’s interactions with this counterpart raised their 
consciousness with regard to Indigenous issues and inspired them to forge networks 
among other islanders in an Asia Pacific from Guam and the Philippines.

The Obama Administration’s proclamation regarding the relocation of U.S. 
Marine Forces from Okinawa to Guam, while presented as a solution to many Okinawan 
concerns, failed to respect the rights of Guam’s own Indigenous peoples, meanwhile. It 
has, however, helped to strengthen solidarity between the Okinawan and Chamorro 
peoples in their shared struggle for demilitarization. As part of the realignment of its 
forces, the United States government had announced the relocation of approximately

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15 English translation by Megumi Chibana.
4,500 Marine personnel to Guam, with another 4,000 to be rotated among Australia, Hawai’i and the Philippines.

By keeping their focus on demilitarization, rather than realignment, the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands have reaffirmed their solidarity and commitment to protect their peoples and land. In 2011, Matsushima joined members of Guam’s delegation to UN Special Committee on Decolonization. Describing the relationship of Guam and Okinawa as like that of sisters and brothers, he petitioned for their demilitarization, in accordance with the United Nations decolonization principles (UN Special Committee on Decolonization 2011).

These “sisters and brothers” have held “family meetings” to solidify their resolve to pursue an Asia Pacific without militarism. In 2011, with peace movement activists from Japan, Korea, Hawai’i, Guam, Palau, the Marshall Islands and the Philippines, the annual Japan Peace Conference was held in Okinawa. These activists produced a joint statement to demanding that the U.S. put an end to its militarization in the Asia-Pacific Region. Chamorro representatives from Guam explained the problematic non-self-governing status of the U.S. territories in the region, and petitioned for support of their rights to self-determination while also urging transnational solidarity among peoples (Japan Peace Committee 2011).

For Chamorros and Okinawans, both struggling against the myth of “U.S. deterrence” in the Asia-Pacific region, the common concerns comprise infringements on their autonomy, justice, peace, safety, human rights and natural environment, as brought on by the U.S. military. A big obstacle, they agree, is their ascribed “minority group” status within host states. Their challenges include needing to speak out about the local
concerns and issues across the borders of nation-states. Connecting all their concerns, seeking indigenous community alliances has strengthened relationship between Okinawans and Chamorros, in their shared commitment to decolonize both places and peoples and to empower each to work toward securing a sustainable living environment.

While the indigeneity of people has often been questioned and presumed to be primarily focused on entitlement rights of self-determination in relationship with a state, the positionality of Indigenous peoples is especially emphasized in their mutual relationships.

**Conclusion**

As Okinawans connect to other communities, globally, that host military bases, one factor that makes them successful in linking with this network seems to lie in the shared values of those peoples, including also common experiences and goals. Most of these groups have been marginalized as minority and/or indigenous peoples, in their country. Because of their peripheral status, their claims have not been heard much when the nation-state’s they inhabit make political decisions, especially regarding the military and international security issues. Common experiences of being subjugated by political authorities and, in response, participating in global social movements, move them forward in their quest to gain justice through the decolonization of their homes. Manfred Steger describes locally-based, globally-focused justice movement groups as “ordinary people [who] struggle together to overcome steep concentrations of undemocratic power” (Steger 2008, 122).

In their resistance against militarism, Okinawan people have protested in a variety of non-violent ways. Some have pointed out how the colonial structure of the military
that supports a patriarchal society and permits or even encourages violence against women; others have worked for demilitarization through emphasizing their indigenous ontology and relationship with nature, as well as connecting the local and global. Although these groups have approached demilitarization of Okinawa from different frameworks at the local level, they have all participated in the global discourse. Each group may have its own goals to achieve, but one big aim shared by local and global activists is to self-determine how people(s) relate to each other and how they care for their places.

At the Sunset Candlelight Peace Vigil for Okinawa on April 25, 2010, Kyle Kajihiro, a representative of the American Friends Service Committee, Hawai'i Area Office, also stated, “We are the islanders of the Pacific. Our ocean should not separate us; it should connect us. We work together in solidarity for peace without military”\(^{16}\) (Yonamine and Nago 2010).

Global expansion of the U.S. military to their lands brought global anti-military sentiments to many small communities. Today, a shared status of “military colony” connects and units peoples together across the ocean to challenge militarism. Continued networking with global communities and organizations will help Okinawans to further understand the historic and potential impacts of militarism, and to rethink how their approach, as an Indigenous people, might serve their goals of self-determination and justice. The increasing of such networks among local communities with their global counterparts has obscured the borders of the local and global.

\(^{16}\) English translation by Megumi Chibana.
CHAPTER 4
SINGING INDIGENEITY: RESISTANCE AND RESURGENCE

Nakanaide hitobito yo
Anata no tame ashita no tame
Subete no kuni yo
Uwabe dake no tsukai yamete
Wasureruna Ryūkyū no kokoro
Buryoku tsukawazu shizen wo aisuru
Jibun wo sutete
Anata no tame nanika ga dekīru

People, stop crying
For yourself, for tomorrow
All countries,
Stop having superficial relationships
Don’t forget the heart of the Ryūkyūs
No forces, love nature
Putting your own things aside
What can you do for others?

– MONGOL 800
“Ryūkyū aika” from Message

Mongol 800 is a rock band that consists of three members from Urasoe City, Okinawa. The band was formed in 1998 when they were all attending the same high school there. They had performed independently and locally without contract with an entertainment company, in Okinawa, until their second album, Message became the greatest hit throughout Japan in 2001. Selling more than 2,800,000 CDs, the band gained national popularity. Their main audience consists of the current generation of teens and twenty-somethings. According to a research survey among Okinawans conducted by sociologist Osamu Tada, Mongol 800’s songs are in high demand among the youth of Okinawa because of their honest, easy to relate to, and straightforward expressions (2008, 214).

The band is especially valued for their original way of expressing “Okinawan-ness” and their use of Ryūkyūan musical scale in rock music (Tada 2008, 215). The lyrics above are excerpts from a song titled “Ryūkyū aika,” or Love Song for the Ryūkyūs, from their blockbuster Message album. In this song, “the heart of the Ryūkyūs” is expressed as a key theme by the singer asking us not to forget.

17 English translation by Megumi Chibana (Mongol 800 2001).
What is “the heart” or “the spirit” of the Ryūkyūs? Why did Mongol 800 use the name Ryūkyūs instead of Okinawa? All members of the band were born in the 1980s; ten years after Okinawa was reincorporated into Japan. What do they know about the Ryūkyūs? What is the “message” behind this song? Why do they choose to sing at all about Okinawa or the Ryūkyūs?

This chapter explores the historical roots of oral tradition and the contemporary role of songs in Okinawan society. Using theoretical concepts of resistance and resurgence, I present how Okinawans use their oral tradition everyday, as a form of expressing how they see themselves, how they relate with others, and how they reflect upon personal and collective experiences.

In his book *Reasoning Together*, which examines Native American literatures, Christopher B. Teuton compares these indigenous oral and written traditions as ways of transmitting native knowledge. He states, “The oral communicative context is communal, while writing ‘isolates’ the reader; the oral communicative event is, at very least, dialectic, but the reader’s text never responds; the oral event exists in the present, writing exists as record of past thought” (Womack, Justice, and Teuton 2008, 195).

In this section, for the purpose of structural organization, I focused on contemporary folk songs to conduct my critical discourse analysis. They are defined as “anonymous songs which have been sung by people from generation to generation,” and include ritual songs, love songs, work songs, gossip songs, popular songs, lullabies, and nursery rhymes (Arasaki 2000, 181). For Okinawans, they have traditionally played an important role in their life experience, serving as marketing these songs as a form of personal and collective remembrance, a conveyance of knowledge, beliefs and values,
and a medium of spiritual communication (Arasaki 2000). Today, although most of folksongs and folklores were recorded and documented, and many songs have been marketed, through the act of consumption, songs continue to serve as a key form of collective action (Ginoza 2010) and helped Okinawan folksongs to be shared transnegenerationally.

I chose to analyze oral communication sources because I have long believed this expression of culture to be one of the more important ways to represent Okinawan narratives. My mother was an ethnographer who interviewed elders and worked to compile the stories of her community. Stories recorded from the elders are very important surviving accountings of the historical record for shima, or the community, in particular because much of their records were destroyed in the Battle of Okinawa. Following my mother’s work, I grew up listening to a lot of folklore and life stories of our elders with great interest. These stories which, in many cases, were narrated in their shima kutuba (native community tongue), were rich and highly expressive. Oral traditions of chanting and singing present our stories in an emotionally compelling style, in a way that is communally experienced and accessible to masses.

The continued embracing of these in Okinawan society holds a lot of possibilities toward further re-visioning our stories and illuminating our ways of being and knowing, through indigenous-centered theoretical interpretations. The objective of this chapter is to give prominence to indigenous Okinawan forms of resistance and resurgence, through an analysis of cultural and pedagogical implications in the folk songs of the Okinawan community.
Resistance and Resurgence

Resistance is defined as an act of challenging social, political, and cultural dominant power. Researching peasant and slave societies, James Scott, in his insightful book *Weapons of the Weak*, analyzes forms of this among lower Socio-economic class peoples. Rather than looking at mass social movements and other organized collective actions, he pays specific attention to informal, anonymous, and disguised forms of resistance. Scott states:

The argument to be developed here is that much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of “everyday forms of resistance,” that these activities should most definitely be considered political, that they do constitute a form of collective action, and that any account which ignores them is often ignoring the most vital means by which lower classes manifest their political interests (Scott 1985, 33).

Moreover, Scott provides extended understandings for the resistance of subordinate groups and their uses of anonymity and ambiguity in rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, and ritual gestures (Scott 1990, 137). He also claims that oral traditions “offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity that make them ideal vehicles for culture resistance” (Scott 1990, 160).

My analyses of songs in this chapter frame these cultural practices of Okinawans as everyday collective forms of resistance. Their songs and other expressions of oral traditions are both cultural and political actions, through which the people resist hegemonic discourses that continue to oppress Okinawans. Contemporary songs, like the one introduced at the beginning of this chapter, convey collective experiences and memories of Okinawan history, trauma, and teachings.
In addition to James Scott’s analysis of oral traditions and forms of resistance, I applied another theoretical concept of indigenous resurgence in contemporary folk songs of Okinawans. In *Wasáse*, Taiaiake Alfred defines resurgence as “courageous action against injustice” (Alfred 2005, 151). He states that “resurgence is acting beyond resistance. It is what resistance always hopes to become: from a rooted position of strength, resistance defeats that temptation to stand down, to take what is offered by the state in exchange of being pacified” (Alfred 2005, 151). Moreover, he asserts that views of resurgence need to be grounded in indigenous peoples’ own philosophies, in order to respect and reconnect to their ways of being (Alfred 2005, 36). I include this concept because of my understanding that Okinawan folksongs are indeed grounded in this way, and to acknowledge songs as useful tools for re-centering Okinawan philosophies, rather than their serving as passive reactions made by themselves as a subordinated group.

First, I briefly describe how beliefs and experiences have been disseminated and transmitted orally through chant, poetry, and songs in Okinawan society. The historical role of chant, poetry, and songs comprise our everyday forms of expressing social, political, spiritual, and emotional reflections. Then, I examine contemporary poetical songs. Comparing different genres of songs, I demonstrate how poetical songs and cultural practices of singing have served not only as forms of resistance but also evidence of the resurgence of Okinawan indigeneity.

**Oral Tradition**

Oral traditions of modern Okinawan society can be traced back to the ancient Ryūkyūan period. Classical oral tradition and literature in the Ryūkyū Archipelago can be divided into two groups, *kami-kuchi* (chants for gods) and *kami-uta* (songs for gods)
(Arasaki 2000, 186). *Kami-kuchi* includes meanings of *kuchi* (mouth), *kui* (voice), and *kutu* (word). *Kami-kuchi* are considered to be “sacred words;” a medium of communicating with gods and spirits. People in the ancient Ryūkyūan period chanted as part of their rituals, to ask the gods for a good harvest (Hokama 1986).

On the other hand, *kami-uta* is known as a genre of epic and lyric. Classical Ryūkyūan poetry and poetical songs were derived from *kami-uta*. Practiced in rural communities, *kami-uta* was sung to reflect people’s happiness, wishes and sorrows (Hokama 1986, 119). Some songs are used in a pedagogical manner to teach the process of rice cropping, for example (Hokama 1986). *Kami-uta* have long been a part of the agricultural society and passed down orally. Folk songs, which I introduce in this chapter, are developed from and categorized into these.

One of the oldest written compilations of poems from the Ryūkyūan era, *Omoro Sōshi* is also in the genre of *kami-uta* and consists of 1,554 *omoro* collected since 1531 (Hokama 1986, 127). *Omoro* means “to think” in Ryūkyūan language. Noteworthy Okinawan literature scholar Shuzen Hokama states that *omoro* are the words that gods give to humans and the words to deliver the community’s mind to the gods (Hokama 1986, 128). Although *kami-kuchi* and *kami-uta* are separated into different groups, both served as important communication vehicles in interrelationships between people, gods, and nature in the ancient Okinawan society. While their styles change with the times, *kami-kuchi* as a communication medium for *yuta* (or a messenger of spirits,) and *kami-uta* (as Ryūkyūan poems and folk songs) still remain, and they are passed down in contemporary Okinawan society.
Singing with Spirits

For the first genre of folksongs, I looked at those meant for children. I extracted a few examples from a collection of children’s songs, called *Okinawa no warabeuta* by Hiroshi Gima. Ethnomusicologist Etsuko Higa states that the unique characteristics of traditional children’s songs are “spontaneous products of [their] daily life and play” (Gima 1999, 33). All the songs in Gima’s book are sung in *shima kutuba*, or, the language of the community. Although it is unknown since when and for whom these originally were sung, it is certain that most Okinawan children had heard these songs in their everyday lives, at least until the early 20th century (Gima 1999, 33). The establishment of Japanese compulsory education and the imposition of standard Japanese language eventually detached them from daily use of their *shima kutuba*, however. Moreover, popularization of other, non-Okinawan, music through mass media alienated children’s interests from these songs (Gima 1999, 33).

These songs reflect how Okinawans, during the drastic changes of political regimes of their community, nevertheless maintained their relationship with spiritual realm. They recognize intrinsic indigenous views that Okinawans look to, in understanding how they, as a people, relate to nature and convey their beliefs.

These two songs reflect Okinawan ontological relationships with nature and spirits.

*Tōtōmē sari, tōtōmē*
*Ufu muchi, yatu muchi,*
*Utabimishori*
*Umaguru hiroti, ushagi yabira.*

Moon up in the sky, oh, moon up in the sky!
Give me some *mochi*,
Some enormous *mochi!*
I’ll go and gather seashells to give you
(Gima 1999, 1).
At first glance, the lyrics of this song appear to be regarding children’s appetites. However, beyond the children’s imaginative singing, there seems to be a fundamental action of prayer to supernatural forces, inherent therein. Moreover, the lyrics also describe a sense of reciprocity between the moon and the children, by the offering of shells. This expresses an Okinawan view of a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature.

Researching Okinawan mythology and rituals, Mikiharu Ito emphasizes the inseparability of nature and society in the Okinawan community. He affirms that Okinawan people recognize that society does not exist in opposition to nature; rather, nature and society work as partial systems within the cosmos and maintain a reciprocal relationship with one another (Nihon Minzoku Gakkai 1973, 252).

This song expresses more clearly than the first one the children’s communication with spirits and their relationship with nature. Higa explains that Akanā is an imaginary “spirit living beyond the red twilight of the western sky” (Gima 1999, 37). An interesting point is that the song takes a conversational tone. In it, the spiritual being, Akanā, is like a friend who thinks of giving a gift for a loved one.

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18 Akanā is a “mythological monkey-like being covered with red fur” (Gima 1999, 18).
The two aforementioned children’s songs clearly show how Okinawans’ indigenous worldviews emphasize a mutual relationship between the human, physical world and the natural, spiritual world, as a vehicle to communicate with the nature of the universe. The next song is also a children’s song; a form which was sung at seasonal festivals.

*Akata Shundunci*  
*Kugani doru sagiti*  
*Uri ga akagariba*  
*Miruku yugafu*  
*Shīyāpū, Shīyāpū*

In the Shundunci mansion at Akata  
A golden lantern has been hung  
When its light shines,  
It’s like the light of heaven  
*Shīyāpū, Shīyāpū*  

(1999, 30)

As mentioned earlier, folk songs are developed from *kami-uta*, which connect human beings to the spiritual world. Folk tales and songs originate from a people’s belief and wishes; this song denotes the Okinawan people’s wish for a rich harvest (Hoshi, Ibaraki, and Oshiro 1976, 246). *Miruku* (or *Miroku*) in this song is a god of rich harvest. The song tells of Okinawans’ belief in *Miruku* and *Niraikanai*, or “heaven,” which the people believe to exist in a realm beyond the ocean. They believed that peace, happiness, rich harvest and wealth come from *Niraikanai* (Arasaki 2000, 172). Although the belief in *Miruku* is derived from the Buddhist concept of “savior,” it was combined with a regional, indigenous belief in *Niraikanai*, to produce worship of *Miruku* as a god from *Niraikanai* who brings rich harvests and peace to the community.

“Spiritual things do not derive from physical things, but physical things derive from spiritual,” Nuu-chah-nulth philosopher Umeek, explains (2005, 18). Indigenous Okinawan cultural richness and sense of peace are also rooted in spirituality. Moreover, folk songs have strong connections to places. Folk songs were born and developed from

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19 *Shīyāpū* is a nonsense musical refrain (Gima 1999).
local environment and local people’s daily lives. They are unique to places, and wishes within folk songs and are different from place to place (Arashiro 1969). Along with offering the description of a spiritual being, this song also expresses the spatial relationship between people and their metaphysical worldviews.

Maori scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira notes that “a central principle of indigenous peoples’ relational ontologies and cosmologies is the inseparable nature of the relationship between the world of matter and the world of spirit” (2005, 37). The three children’s songs show Okinawan indigeneity and interdependent ontology of how they, as a people, relate to natural and spiritual beings.

The next two songs, meanwhile, bring forth Okinawans’ realization and understandings of ethnicity and cultural differences. Continuous changes of political regimes in Okinawan society, and their effects on Okinawan culture, seem to be reflected in them. Based on Shermerhorn’s definition of ethnic identity as “self-conscious,” Stephen Cornell describes it as a phenomenon that is socially constructed vis-à-vis relationships with others. “To claim an ethnic identity is to distinguish ourselves from others; it is to draw a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ on the basis of the claim we make that ‘we’ share something that ‘they’ do not” (Cornell 2007, 20–21).

Tō ya firagun
Yamatu wa kanpū
Saraba
Uchinā ya katakashira

Chinese tie their hair in plaits
Japanese tie their hair in buns,
But
Okinawans tie their hair in topknots
(Gima 1999, 30).

This song describes different hairstyles preferred by Chinese, Japanese and Okinawans. By observing culturally distinctive styles, children made a distinction between “us” and “them.” Although this song only describes cultural differences here, it
is noteworthy that Okinawans expressed cultural distinctiveness from other ethnic groups when culturally homogenizing pressure and policies were imposed upon them. Establishing difference from Japanese is essential to understanding Okinawans as indigenous.

Ye, garasā,  
Yamatunchu nu,  
Teppo katamiti,  
Yā iriga, chun dō.  
Adan nu mi nji,  
Sutichi nu mi nji,  
Hakkui, bēbē,  
Hakkui, bēbē.

Hey, crow!  
There’s a Japanese fellow  
Carrying a rifle  
And he’s out to shoot you!  
Hide quickly in the adan thicket  
Hide quickly in the sotetsu thicket  
Hurry, hurry  
Hide hide

(Gima 1999, 23).

This song again shows Okinawans’ attempt to differentiate themselves from Japanese. By describing the Japanese attack on crows, the song not only expresses children’s fear of military force but it also depicts an antipathy toward Japanese, portraying them as offensive. This is an example of a song used as an everyday form of resistance of the oppressed. This song should be understood as an indication of the Okinawans’ resistance against the Japanese’s use of arms. In this song, depiction of the Japanese offender as “them” in opposition to the crow being harbored by “us” expresses and underpins the development of a distinctive ethnic identity as Okinawan.

Tinsagu nu hana ya  
Chimisachi ni sumiti  
Uya nu yushigutu ya  
Chimu ni sumiri  
Yuru harshu funi ya  
Ninufa bushi miati  
Wan nacheru uya ya  
Wan du miati

Dye on your fingernails  
With the flowers of the touch-me-not  
Dye in your heart  
The words of your parents  
Ships traveling through the night  
Rely on the North Star  
The parents who gave me birth  
Place their trust in me

(Gima 1999, 24, 48).
This is one of the most well-known Okinawan songs, even among diasporic communities. Often sung as a lullaby, it is shared and transmitted by parents to their children. The object of focus in the lyrics, *Tinsagu nu hana*, is a flower of balsam. Although this flower is not native to Okinawa, it was traditionally used as a talisman or a medicinal herb (Radio Okinawa 1994, 16). The first verse says to remember lessons from one’s parents. In old days in Okinawa, children played by using this flower to paint their fingernails (Higa and Nakamoto 1984, 76). The second verse expresses parents’ deep devotion and love to their children. *Ninufa bushi* is the North Star, which was often used by islanders as a guide star for voyages. For Okinawans as maritime people, stars have served as very important signs; a source of knowledge used to navigate and locate canoes during night voyages. The polar star is an especially important one because it does not appear to move at all (Higa and Nakamoto 1984, 100). This song relates that, just as the North Star is important to voyagers, children are the reasons for living for parents.

This song continues with two more verses and teaches lessons of life that remind one to always appreciate one’s parents’ teachings and love, to live faithfully and mercifully, and to have a positive mind to improve oneself. The use of cultural metaphors in this song resonates with Okinawan hearts in their experiences and memories. Although people no longer paint their nails with *Tinsagu nu hana*, the song still keeps alive, as a pedagogical tool, the tradition of teaching Okinawans’ cultural values, philosophies, and knowledge.
Singing as Resistance

In addition to children’s songs, this chapter also analyzes another style of folk songs, which are usually accompanied by an Okinawan instrument called *sanshin*. The *uta-sanshin*[^20] tradition started from classical court music enjoyed by the Okinawan aristocracy in the early 16th century. Later, *uta-sanshin* was diffused to commoners and became incorporated into Okinawan folk songs. In this section, I focus on the latter type of folk songs that originated and developed from the everyday life experiences and reflections of peasants. Although many of their composers were anonymous, they have been enjoyed by many Okinawans of all ages, even until today.

For the research, I extracted songs from the book *Okinawan Music Best 100*. It is a compilation of folk songs preferred by more than 40,000 voters in a poll conducted by the Okinawa Postal Service (Radio Okinawa 1994). The following songs express the people’s political claims of the time.

In the old days, class relations seemed to have played a huge role in the development of a collective identity in Okinawa society; one that left a gap between peasant Okinawans with the political leaders and intellectuals who forced assimilation, taxation, and modernization. Under the feudal caste system, peasants could not hold power, nor were they granted the franchise to give opinions on political decisions at the time (Arashiro 1995). Without official ways of voicing their political claims, peasants and other subordinate-class people sought different ways to do so.

In *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott explains that “most forms of everyday resistance are, after all, deployed precisely to thwart some appropriation by superior

[^20]: Singing and playing *sanshin*. While *uta-sanshin* is now known as a main style of Okinawan folk music, as I described earlier, chanting and singing without instrument were done as ways to convey stories and praying to the gods (Chinen 2007, 294).
The forms are “invariably quiet, disguised, anonymous, often undeclared forms of resisting claims imposed by claimants who have superior access to force and to public power” (Scott 1985, 36–37). As a means of resistance, the Okinawan working class expressed their complaints and sentiment in oral stories and songs. The fact that we still hold onto them seems to prove that the implied messages have been successfully diffused, and that many people relate to them. These stories remain as the voice of the masses and the collective memories of peasant Okinawans.

Metaphorically expressed in a love song, the lyrics below describe the aggravation, sadness, and toughness felt by peasants about their oppressed situation, due to land expropriation and their forced exodus at the hands of politicians.

*Nusuku Māpē nu kanu shama*  
*Māpē in Nosoko*

*Hai nu fusuma yu*  
*For someone on Kuro Island*

*Umui kugarite ishi nu kata*  
*I have been longing and*

*Banga umuin*  
*My heart is as hard as stone*

*Jinto tsindara yo*  
*Jinto tsindara yo*[21]  
*(Radio Okinawa 1994, 74)*

This is a song about a couple from Nosoko, on Ishigaki Island, and is derived from the oral stories of Nosoko Māpē.

Since the 1730s, for the purpose of land development, the Ryūkyū government enforced a policy to divide the population of Kuro Island, with its displaced residents sent to Ishigaki Island (Hoshi, Ibaraki, and Oshiro 1976, 109). It separated a young couple of Kuro Island, named Māpē and Kanamui, and the song expresses their grief at the separation. Although it was based on one particular couple, in fact there were many

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couples and families who were forced to be separated because of this imposed policy (Arashiro 1969, 147).

The song tells how Māpē climbed up a mountain to look at the other island, yet she could not see it. When people went to the mountain to look for Māpē, they found that she had disappeared, and there was a rock there instead, which they had never seen before. Filled with a great sorrow, they believed that Māpē had become fossilized on the mountain (Hoshi, Ibaraki, and Oshiro 1976, 109).

As explained in Chapter 2, after the Satsuma invasion on Okinawa in 1609, the Ryūkyū Kingdom became integrated into the feudal system of Japan. This greatly transformed the political system of the Ryūkyūs, depriving them of autonomy and positioning the formerly independent kingdom of Ryūkyū as “an internal colony” of Japan. Satsuma imposed heavy taxes on the Ryūkyū government, which then shifted its duty to the neighboring small islands. It imposed heavier taxes on the people of those islands, in turn, and treated them like slaves (Arasaki 2000, 225). In addition to that, local people were forced to displace themselves from their homes as had happened on Kuro Island.

Considering the historical background of this story, the lyrics of these songs were intended to express compassion to the couples, while also articulating the people’s complaints overall, about their sufferings from political oppression. Implied in Māpē’s love for her sweetheart is an inner strength, present in her devotion to the place which is so strong it would transform Māpē into a rock.

This song not only reveals the subordinate position of peasants within the previous feudal class system of the Ryūkyū dynasty, it also supports different voices of
the society that had not been counted in political decision makings during that time. In many of the archival documents, the history of the Ryūkyūs was written so as to honor the past glory of the kingdom. Also, there are no complaints or criticism about Satsuma to be found in these official historical records (Nakaima 1974, 325). Oral stories, however, disclose another side of history. The voices of peasants in these, and also in songs, do articulate their political complaints. They are not aimed exclusively at one particular ethnic group of people, rather, they are a form of resistance against the overall political system that afflicted the people. As such, the fundamental articulation behind their stories is the struggle for the self-determination of their own lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kantoku yadekashi sayo tatchōte</th>
<th>Our boss can make money by just standing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temadoyui washita ninpu nu cha</td>
<td>We are treated like cows and horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sā ushi uma nu achike</td>
<td>So there, work cows and horses!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayo ushi uma nu achike</td>
<td>Come on, work cows and horses!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ikana kantoku nu sayo hamari yoi shichin</th>
<th>No matter if the boss tells you to work hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamaruna yo shinka</td>
<td>Don’t work too hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sā jikan gurashi</td>
<td>We are hourly-paid anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayo jikan gurashi</td>
<td>Here we are hourly-paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Radio Okinawa 1994, 58).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a part of a folk song sung around 1909, when the construction of prefectural roads began (Radio Okinawa 1994, 58). This is a labor song shared by working class people, and it describes the kind of hard labor they do in construction, as well as the workers’ resistance towards their supervisor. The sarcastic lyrics sung from the perspective of the workers makes fun of their own low-paid, working class status, and yet seems to nevertheless describe their overall optimistic attitudes and about getting through the severe situation by encouraging each other. There is a true sense of

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22 “Kendō bushi,” English translation by Megumi Chibana.
collaboration shared by the workers. In addition, the song clearly expresses their resentment toward their supervisor’s orders.

Researching labor songs in Japan and the U.S., Ken Kitazawa defines a “labor song” as one that is used in a labor movement to call for workers’ rights. In Okinawa around that time, many working class people organized protest marches and launched strikes (Kitazawa 2008). The labor song is, accordingly, a form of political resistance by these workers, having realized the possibilities in using collective actions to obtain workers’ rights. Like the previous song of Māpē, this one demonstrates an understanding Okinawan history from the working class experiences.

**Singing as Resurgence**

With the development of new media technologies and the introduction of different styles of music, Okinawan musicians also began to incorporate these new genres to express themselves. Besides their own folk music, the people started playing guitar in addition to sanshin, and imported forms of music like jazz and rock became very popular among Okinawans. Especially post-WWII, during the U.S. military occupation, music that inspires courage in the listeners became preferred and gained great popularity (Arasaki 2000, 182).

Music became more of a commodity and the people eagerly consumed this new music, but it still succeeded in its function as a collective voice. Despite the increasing popularity of newly introduced genres, folk songs in the Okinawan society never vanished; rather, people incorporated different sounds into them, transforming “traditional” folk music to “new” styles (Arasaki 2000, 183). Researching media influence and folk songs, Howell and Baxter state that “although the rural locales and
economies of the traditional folk may be disappearing, one can still find an element of genuine folk culture sedimented within the urban” (Howell and Baxter 2006, 85).

Below is a song written by Yutaka Sadoyama. He was born in Koza City (presently Okinawa City) in 1950. He spent his childhood under the governance of the U.S. military administration and experienced the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese administration when he was 22. He accompanied the song in *Uchinā Yamatoguchi*23 with a guitar. Although hard rock was more popular and preferred at that time, this appealed to many of the younger generation and reminded them of the high value of folk within popular music.

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Tō nu yu kara Yamatu nu yu
Yamatu nu yu kara America yu
America yu kara mata Yamatu nu yu
Hirumasa kawayru kunu Uchinā
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From the Tang (China) to Yamato (Japan)  
From Yamato to America  
From America to again Yamato  
Surprisingly, always changing, this Okinawa

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Uchināguchi ya ippē jōtō rō
Uhigwa eigon kai nichoushiga
Mānu kunin kai nēran kutuba
Nnashi daijini nukuchou kaya
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Okinawan language is very beautiful  
It sounds a little like English  
No country has this language  
I want to treasure and preserve it

– Yutaka Sadoyama

*Dūchūi munī*  
(Radio Okinawa 1994, 124).

He titled the song “Soliloquy”, and its support and promotion by Okinawan youth lead the song to have its national debut across Japan. Its lyrics describe the dilemmas of young Okinawans in their identity formation, having lived the formative years of their lives under constant changes in political regimes. In the song, we can see how Sadoyama has connected his Okinawan identity with his Okinawan language, and how the loss of the language has since affected his self-identification.

23 Pidgin Japanese with Okinawan language.
In *Wasáse*, Alfred explains the important relationship between the existence of indigenous people and their languages:

[C]olonialism sought to destroy us by erasing our languages and in so doing deculture our people and destroy the worldviews and value systems that were the foundations of our distinct ways of life; thus, language is the *prima facie* evidence of indigeneity (2005, 245).

Although Sadoyama sings the remainder of his song in Japanese, it begins with a self-introduction in Okinawan and continues to assert the importance of (re-)vitalizing the Okinawan language. The song served as a way to express his strong concern of losing the language, and it also seems to note how the Okinawan people’s collective identity has wandered from its roots. It functions as a localized form of resistance toward both Japanese and U.S. imperialism, and can also be understood as the vanguard of indigenous Okinawan resurgence. Claiming language as a source of knowledge, Alfred emphasizes indigenous resurgence and that “survival as peoples is dependent upon the survival and revitalization of Indigenous languages” (2005, 246–247). The use of indigenous language in the song by the singer, underpinning his call for the language revitalization is a call for resurgence as Indigenous Okinawans.

This next song was composed by a group of Okinawan musicians from Ishigaki Island in 2002, for the 30th anniversary of the reversion of Okinawa to Japan. This song soon became a big seller throughout the whole country, and acted as an accelerant to the “Okinawa boom” in Japan. With the title “Islanders’ Treasure,” the song reminds Okinawans what values are important to them.

*Bokuga umareta*  
*kono shima no uta wo*  
*Boku wa dore kurai shitterun darou*  
*Tubārāma mo Densābushi mo*  
*Kotoba no imi sae wakaranai*

Songs of this island  
where I was born  
How much do I know them?  
*Tubārāma, Densābushi*  
I don’t even know the meaning of the words
But more than anybody else,
I know more
On ceremonial nights
and festival mornings,
These songs drift over to me
from somewhere

Until someday
When I leave this island
I want to know the important things
And understand them more deeply
That’s the treasure of the islanders.

This song expresses “Okinawan-ness” in stereotypical ways. It is no wonder that it stimulated the Okinawa tourism boom, especially given its imagery of islands, ocean, sky, island folk songs, and a sense of community, all of which are associated with externally framed images of Okinawa. They link the island to a sense of nostalgia and healing, and appeal to many people who seek a sense of home or to get closer to their roots. While the song depicts Okinawans’ internalization of images of utopian “Okinawan-ness,” it also asserts cultural claims against the dominant Japanese values, by which they try to differentiate themselves by preserving Okinawan values. From this song, we see the dual identities and the dilemmas of contemporary Okinawans who desire to preserve cultural values, even as they have realized their colonized and assimilated selves.

Conducting a survey on Okinawan identity in 2007, Chuan-Tiong Lim concluded that the basic identity structure of contemporary Okinawan kenmin consists of a complex
fusion of Okinawan and Japanese identity, and that this duality is static (Lim 2008). Lim believes that this sense of dual belongingness would not change unless the political situation of Okinawa significantly changes. While the duality may, for now, be static, he mentions that a dynamic aspect of Okinawans’ identification is the fluctuation of their own ethnic claim as Okinawan (Lim 2008). This articulation of identity is fluid and largely influenced by Okinawa’s relationship with Japan.

Unlike Sadoyama’s song, this one seems to support the notion of a more passive Okinawan attitude about their assimilation. It sings that we will still keep our treasure, even though we cannot stave off the mainstream. The song seems to show that Japanese identity accounts for a greater part in Okinawan people’s self-identification today than it did before.

There is another contemporary song in which shows a new trend of claiming Okinawans’ Indigenous identity, meanwhile. It is a different song by Mongol 800, the band which I mentioned in the very beginning of this chapter. While their previous song expresses Okinawans’ assimilation and highlights local culture, this song emphasizes more fundamental differences.

\[
\begin{align*}
Utsukushii sora no ao & \quad \text{Beautiful blue in the sky,} \\
umi no ao & \quad \text{blue in the ocean} \\
Kono shima sudeni & \quad \text{Sadly this island is} \\
kanashiki Nihon iro & \quad \text{already Japanese-colored} \\
Kokoro kara minnade utaeru & \quad \text{It may be happier if we can sing} \\
Kuni no uta nara tanoshii kamo ne & \quad \text{The national song from our heart} \\
Heiwa negai sakebu maen & \quad \text{Before you wish for peace} \\
Kore iyou shizen wo kowasanaide & \quad \text{Don’t destroy this nature anymore} \\
Mujun no ue ni saku hana wa & \quad \text{The flowers that bloom upon paradox} \\
Nekko no oku kata nuki masyou & \quad \text{Let’s pull them out by the root} \\
Onaji ayamachi kurikaesanu you & \quad \text{Not to make same mistake again}
\end{align*}
\]
In addition to the song in the very beginning of this chapter, this one goes on to call out to the heart of the Ryūkyūs. Using “Ryūkyū” instead of “Okinawa” emphasizes its fundamental differences from Japan and its charismatic uniqueness (Tada 2008, 218). This song can be seen as a new form of articulating indigeneity; one that is strongly critical of how the Japanese have “colored” Okinawa. The song also emphasizes the contradiction between what Okinawans think of Okinawa and what, in their hearts, they hope for Okinawa. The composers of this song examine the idea of reconnecting with nature through engaging their indigenous knowledge of the land. Their way of claiming Okinawan identity seems to be similar to other Indigenous peoples’ strategies to apply traditional values to alternative models.

**Conclusion**

Besides songs’ function within musical performance, their analysis reveals their role in collective political articulation. Oral tradition and interaction through songs expresses the collective values and worldviews shared by a group of people. Bauman describes them as: “a form of cultural expression, song is associated with marked events, transformations, and the resolution of conflict. It serves to create special kinds of temporal-spatial continua as well as to signal the support of the social system” (Bauman 1992, 166).

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25 English translation by Megumi Chibana (Mongol 800 2001).
Analyses of folk songs in this paper examine what Okinawan people have experienced in the past, and how they have reacted to a number of relevant experiences and situations. Our children’s songs, as informally shared oral tradition, disclose how the Okinawan people traditionally relate and communicate to nature and the spirits. Ontology and epistemology of Okinawans show their sense of belonging and indigeneity to the land. In addition to that, folk songs also have served as an everyday form of resistance for peasants and working class peoples within Okinawan society itself. Acts of singing in various historical settings have functioned as the mechanism through which subordinated people voice the political claims for their self-determination.

Styles of performance have changed over time, and more and more Okinawans have internalized the imposed identity of “Okinawan as Japanese.” While this shift proves that their identity is neither static nor singular, Okinawans in contemporary society continue to articulate and re-articulate it in their expressions of resistance and the resurgence of their own indigeneity. Singing continues, as a tool of oral communication, to provide a significant source of empowerment for Okinawans as they continue to contemplate and also narrate their way of being.
What does it mean to be an indigenous people? This study has been a process of re-discovering Okinawan indigeneity. I conclude this thesis with my findings that Okinawans are the indigenous inhabitants of the region currently identified as Okinawa Prefecture. As all of the elements of the peoplehood matrix are found in the Okinawan society, for Okinawans, the concept of indigeneity is deeply ingrained in their memories, voices, and visions.

Throughout much of its history, Okinawan political attribution was stifled under Japanese and American imperial hegemony, and the sovereignty of the people of Okinawa was ignored. Okinawan claims of indigenous rights to self-determination take root in the ongoing resistance to the historical process of colonialism. “Okinawa,” alternatively represented as “backward,” “exotic,” and “key-positioned,” has been used to justify political, economic, and cultural control by both Japanese and American empires.

Although Okinawan international proclamations regarding indigenous rights began only recently, they have advocated self-determination in opposition to the apparently overwhelming double colonialism of the Japanese government and militarization of the country by the United States. The people of Okinawa have long demanded and struggled to achieve self-determination to autonomously decide their cultural, political, and economic future.

To achieve a decolonized future, the challenge to colonialism takes place at both personal and collective levels. Alfred says, “[Decolonization] is thinking through what we think we know to what is actually true but is obscured by knowledge derived from our experiences as colonized peoples” (2005, 280). For Okinawans, it starts from “knowing”
what it means to be indigenous. For a long time and even now, the stigma of being
“barbarous natives” and an “inferior race” has prevented Okinawans from fully accepting
and clearly representing and articulating their own “indigenous” identity. However,
through transnational activism, Okinawans have gained an opportunity to align with
peoples sharing same goals of liberation from such a stigma and from existing political
boundaries, and they have surely rediscovered and regenerated themselves. Participating
in the UN Working Group in 2000, Kazuto Oyama made these remarks:

[...]

Oyama’s remark describes dilemmas of political and cultural representation that have
been shared by many Indigenous peoples. While facing such dilemmas, Okinawans have
stepped forward to understand their own people’s survival and to self-determine who they
are and how they represent themselves.

Decolonization of Okinawa needs to occur in all people’s ideologies and actions,
no matter what their race, class, gender, and national background. For Okinawans, it is
regeneration of our own philosophies, visions, narratives, and actions. Self-determination
is a process of reconnecting the people to the place and balancing out the matrix
components. So, how can we envision a decolonized Okinawa and Okinawans through
this Indigenous framework?

In order for Okinawans to be able to determine the future of their own culture,
there needs to be an understanding of the concept of champuru. Champuru is an
Okinawan cultural concept that emphasizes mixture and hybridity that is also represented
in a popular Okinawan stir-fry dish. It reminds us that Okinawa is not a set single entity; it is always changing, mixing, and diversifying itself. A colonial approach to Okinawa and Okinawans ignores the fluidity and multiplicity of our own understandings and experiences of the people and the culture and, rather, sets us in a fixed understanding of them.

Many of the culturally distinct landscapes, historical architectural works, and other symbols that together help define “Okinawa” have been preserved and are recognized for their cultural heritage importance. However, these cultural preservations sustain Japanese nationalistic and assimilationist discourses that keep Ryūkyūans in a static category of indigenous people, who lived in the past, as well as Okinawans as an ethnic minority among “Japanese nationals.”

While Okinawans embrace the memory of a sovereign nation, being indigenous does not necessarily require that we live our lives in the way that they did during the kingdom era of the past. Instead, we try to keep the stories alive in pedagogical means to know who we are while living our contemporary lives. A renaissance of Okinawan or Ryūkyūan culture is a confirming process of our own existence and culture is one of few tools that Okinawans have that can be an agent of action and change.

Recently in Okinawan society, modern *kumiodori*, a performance that combines Ryūkyūan and contemporary musical theater, has gained popularity. It mixes modern music and dance with the classical Ryūkyūan performing arts, and its narratives are based on regional histories from the Ryūkyū Kingdom era. Junior high and high school students from each community participate in practicing and performing in their

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26 *Kumiodori* is a traditional Ryūkyūan musical theatre that recounts local historical events and legends.
community, occasionally using the designated world heritage sites as their stages. Through these activities in the community, Okinawan youth learn stories of places and discover their connections to the community (Ryukyu Tryout 2010).

Although preservation and revitalization of traditional culture is important for finding the genealogical roots of Okinawans, cultural resurgence by Okinawans should be understood beyond imaginary Okinawan or Ryūkyūan nationalism. As modern kumiodori has incorporated modernity into classic Ryūkyūan theater, understanding champuru and fluidity in one’s own identity and positionality in relation to the place helps to overcome potential nostalgic indigenous nationalism for the Ryūkyū Kingdom era, and it opens up possibilities to connect peoples from different backgrounds through actions of knowing and connecting to place.

In between the “Japanese national” and indigenous Okinawan, Okinawan comedian Masamitsu Kohatsu expresses the dilemma of being Okinawan in stand-up comedy. He says, “While Okinawans are recently depicted in Japanese popular media as cheerful, hospitable and laid back and many Japanese people have good images of Okinawans, Okinawans I know say with venom that they don’t trust Tokyo people.”27 (Ryukyu Shimpo 2012b). He created a project, Owarai Beigun Kichi or “The U.S. Military Bases Comedy,” and has provoked laughter about a serious political issue. Kohatsu says, “The U.S. military issue is too serious, you cannot make jokes out of it. But I want people to laugh at it” (Ryukyu Shimpo 2012b). Bringing out politics in comedy scenes, Kohatsu takes a step toward decolonizing Okinawa by raising critical

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27 English translation by Megumi Chibana.
awareness about the militarized Okinawans and the militarized landscape of the Okinawan society.

While changes may emerge relatively quickly in cultural actions, political and economic transformation takes long-term commitment and patient efforts that may positively or negatively affect one’s everyday life. The first step toward a politically and economically decolonized Okinawa is a full return of the land and sea from U.S. military use. This requires for all Okinawans to be debrainwashed from the myth of development through government subsidies and the attraction of Japanese and foreign enterprises and to have determined minds to reject the carrot (the development fund). It is important to break the dependence on the development fund from the Japanese government to decide our own economic future.

For islanders, the land and the sea are important sources to sustain production and reproduction of the essentials of life such as clean air, water, and food. The economically and politically sustainable future of the islands should be built and supported with the spontaneous development by the residents’ autonomous activities, rather than relying on development plans created by the centralized government (Nishikawa, Matsushima, and Motohama 2010).

My hometown of Yomitan Village can be a good example of envisioning a larger community planning of a demilitarized Okinawa. Yomitan Village consists of approximately 40,000 residents and has promoted spontaneous development with local autonomy. After WWII, 95% of the village area was occupied by the U.S. military, and even after the 1972 reversion, the military occupied 73% of the land (Nishikawa, Matsushima, and Motohama 2010; Yomitan Village 2000). After suffering eviction from
their homes, the return of the confiscated lands and securing places for them to live were
the most important issue for the people. Yomitan Village set a basic concept for their
community building based on the people’s values and expressed it in the rhyme of a
Ryūkyūan poem. It says,

\[
\begin{align*}
Yutasa aru funshi, & \quad \text{The rich nature} \\
Masaru chimugukukuru, & \quad \text{Good hearted people,} \\
Sakifukuru hanaya, & \quad \text{The culture, shining [with] all of its glory,} \\
Mura nu miatei & \quad \text{is the guideline of our village.}^{28}
\end{align*}
\]

After the return of approximately 190 hectares of the former military land, the
community planned and promoted the development of an agricultural and autonomous
community without depending on the U.S. military-related income or external capital.
With the cooperation of landowners, the former military air station became agricultural
land leased to local farmers. In 2011, a farmer’s market was built adjacent to the
farmlands, and it strengthens the connection of local production and local consumption
(Nishikawa, Matsushima, and Motohama 2010; Yomitan Village 2000).

As we can see from Yomitan’s case, decolonized community building consists of
a shared value and goal that are rooted in the community, and depends upon the people’s
participation. While the concept embraces the cultural and moral climate of Yomitan, it
highlights the ontological relationship with nature and the people’s responsibility to take
care of the place and each other.

A sustainable development that takes root in soil is important and suitable for a
community like Okinawa. I believe that this is how a community or shima should be able
to sustain the political, economic, and cultural existence of the people or shimanchu. In a

\footnote{28 I extracted this from an official website of Yomitan Village (Yomitan Village 2000).}
larger envisioning of Okinawa’s future, a cluster of these shima coexist while maintaining a shared philosophy of connecting to the place and the Okinawan value of mutual help, or yuimāru.

Diplomatic exchanges and activities for these communities should also be based on the objectives of taking care of the place, the people, nature, and the culture, rather than exploiting them for one’s benefits. The successful networking and strengthening of ties among Okinawan and other Indigenous communities beyond the national borders are not just because of their “colonized” experiences. But they, as Indigenous peoples, stand upon and branch out from the similar value roots of shima and yuimāru.

The most common word used by Okinawans to articulate a distinctive ethnic identity of Okinawan people, Uchinānchu, has now slightly been changing to shimanchu, the people or islanders. Rather than standardizing native tongues to the Okinawan language or Uchināguchi, the language revitalization movement in the Okinawan society has promoted and encouraged preserving diversities of shima kutuba, the languages of the communities. What Okinawans have autonomously decided about their decolonized future is not merely to overturn the representation of political stigma of Okinawan-ness, but it is a regeneration of a politicized indigeneity as the people. Transforming barbarians to people, formerly misused and confiscated lands and cultures to become the life sources of the people, and dilemma to laughter, Okinawan self-determined articulation and activism continue to decolonize Okinawa.
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