

THE IMPACT OF OTHER COUNTRIES ON OKINAWA

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FOR: SHODAN PROMOTION

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## INTRODUCTION

The location of the Ryukyu Islands has played a dramatic role in the course of history for the Island of Okinawa and its people. Okinawa has both profited from and suffered because of its location. It was at one time the most respected locations for trade and, maybe because of this, became a sought after possession. The Ryukyu Islands share the fate of many frontier territories too small and too poor to attract attention in times of peace but doomed to rise to international prominence during crises among world powers. No prefecture contributed so little to the preparation for war and its prosecution through the years, but none suffered as much in widespread misery, in loss of human lives and property, and in ultimate subservience to military occupation. No other, in my opinion, stands out as a nation of people so steadfast and strong, yet content, enduring, gentle, and willing to serve.

In this thesis I have highlighted the three countries I feel have had the greatest impact on the lives of the Okinawans; China, Japan, and the United States.

## THE OKINAWANS THROUGH THE CENTURIES

It is possible that Okinawa was first settled by monks who traveled by sea to preach their beliefs. It is not believed that they set out to find the Ryukyus but were driven there by the frequently rough seas.

The history of Okinawa is essentially the story of a minor kingdom with few resources, and of unwarlike people, forever seeking balance between powerful neighboring states.

The basic structure of society and language indicates that in ages past they were closely akin to the early Japanese. For five hundred years they looked to China for cultural guidance and pridefully counted themselves as tributaries of the Chinese court. But for three hundred of these years, they were under heavy obligation to Japan, which they discharged faithfully. An interlude of fifty years, and they have now returned to this old pattern, called upon to divide allegiance. Japan has taken China's old place as the home of spiritual allegiance, while obligation to be discharged in day-to-day economic life and conduct of government are now owed to the United States.

During the thirteen century Okinawa was ruled by Shunten and other successive kings after him. Each island was headed by an Aji (Master) Chieftain. By the 14th century, Okinawa was divided into three (3) kingdoms; Chuzan, Hokuzan, and Nanzan.

There was a great poverty of material wealth in Okinawa. It is amazing that with such meager economic endowments; harsh, thin soil, no metals, and little forest wealth - the Okinawans were able to construct and preserve so long a complex society and government. It survived through the centuries at bare subsistence level, suffering a neverending cycle of storm,

drought, famine, and plague. Nature's way of maintaining balance between resources and population.

There was one era of colorful and creative activity in which the Okinawans found a rich expression of their own culture was in full control of its own far-ranging commerce overseas and could supplement, unchecked, the meager resources available to the governing elite. Some of the cargoes handled by the Okinawans at Malacca (according to Portuguese accounts) were gold and copper, arms of all kinds, fine gold-leaf and gold dust lacquerware, excellent fans, paper, colored silks, porcelains, musk, grains, onions and many other vegetables. Okinawan goods had a high reputation in that they were well made. Most of the Okinawan cargoes were of goods transshipped from Japan, Korea, and China. It is believed that the Okinawans traded with these countries in cloths, fishing-nets, and other merchandise.

Much of what is known about the people of the Ryukyus of the sixteenth century were written in the Annals of Thome Pires. This is what he writes about the Ryukyuans; "The Lequjos have only wheat in their country, and rice and wines, meat and fish in great abundance. They are great draftsmen and armorers. They make gilt coffers, very rich and well made fans, swords, many arms of all kinds. They are very truthful men. They do not buy slaves, nor would they sell one of their own men for the whole world, and they would die over this. They are white men, well dressed, better than the Chinese, more dignified. They are men who sell their merchandise freely for credit, and if they are lied to when they collect payment, they collect it sword in hand. They are truthful men, more so than the Chinese - and feared.

In preparing his commentaries upon his father's reports, Dalboquerque the Younger, writes this of the Ryukyuans, "... they are men of very reserved speech, and do not give anyone an

account of their native affairs. The men are fair; their dress is like a cloak without a hood; they carry long swords after the fashion of Turkish cimeters, but somewhat more narrow; they also carry daggers of two palms' lengths, they are daring men and feared in this land of Malacca. When they arrive at any port, they do not bring out their merchandise all at once, but little by little; they speak truthfully and will have the truth spoken of them. If any merchant in Malacca broke his word, they would immediately take him prisoner. They strive to dispatch their business and get away quickly, for they are not the men to like going away from their own land." It was also said of them, "They use weapons and wear very good short swords. They were in times past, subject to the Chinas, with whom they had much communication, and therefore are very like the Chinas."

After Satsuma laid hands on Okinawa trade in 1609, the creative genius of the Okinawans began to fade. Soon after Japan annexed the Kingdom and introduced a new technology, the population began to increase. The great Japanese sugar corporation moved in; land reforms were imposed which completely altered the traditional economic system. Thousands became landless laborers. Emigration to relieve pressure became necessary at the beginning of this century. By 1944, a total of 331,927 Okinawans and their descendents were living abroad. Of these, more than 180,000 were sent back to Okinawa after the war without lands and without employment. The area of land left for cultivation had diminished rapidly as the United States forces steadily expanded installations required for their needs.

On June 22, 1945, the long Okinawan Campaign ended in allied victory. But the island became an immense neglected military dump, strewn with the war's debris. Towns and villages were rubble heaps; tens of thousands lived in caves, tombs, and shacks, or took shelter in relief camps established by the

military forces. They were expected to live at subsistence level until a formal peace should restore them to Japanese administration and permit American withdrawal. Farmers became air-base laborers, fishermen became truck drivers. Cast-off G.I. clothing, American soft drinks, cigarettes, and canned goods supplied a new luxury trade for a totally impoverished people. In effect, Tokyo had "deposited" the Ryukyu Islands with the United States for an indefinite period. From time to time, Chinese spokesmen revived old claims to the Ryukyus, but no one paid attention to them.

From June, 1945, until April, 1952, Okinawa Prefecture was held as "enemy territory" governed by the rules of land warfare. Under these terms the occupying power had no obligation to meet damage claims against it or maintain the Okinawan economy above bare subsistence levels. With peace on April 28, 1952, Okinawa ceased to be "enemy territory". The Ryukyus became "friendly territory" under United States Civil Administration. The excitement in the Ryukyus died down for some time. Okinawa was not the center of attention anymore. It wasn't until June, 1950 that Okinawa's military importance was revived at the start of the Korean War.

## CHINA'S ROLE IN OKINAWA

Chinese rule in Okinawa can even be dated as far back as the Sui Dynasty (AD 581-618) when an expedition was made to subjugate the islanders, who were mainly farmers and fishermen.

Toward the end of the 14th Century, travellers from the Chinese Province of Fukien, began to settle in the area of Naha. Chinese culture began to affect both buildings and customs alike. The Chuzan state instigated the Chinese relationship. Naha became the main point of trade with China. Shuri was the seat of government. The Chuzan province became responsible for the complete control of Okinawa.

The Okinawans were faithful to the Emperors of China through the ages. The Ming Dynasty records indicate that the Okinawans showed an embarrassing eagerness to increase the frequency of tribute payments, agreed upon in 1372, and sought every reason to send official missions to the Chinese Capital. For five hundred years, the Okinawan kings were the most faithful of all the subject kings of the Chinese Court. Part was because Okinawans were deeply moved by a sense of moral obligation. China was also one of the most populous and powerful countries and all non-Chinese barbarians must tremble and obey lest they incur the wrath of the Emperor and provoke him to discipline. Neither love nor fear were at the heart of the matter; for the Okinawans a profitable and expanding trade with China was vital; China was the best customer for their commercial wares.

For the Chinese, however, the Okinawan's trade was unimportant. Peking was in no way dependent upon commerce with Ryukyus. The Ming Annals show clearly that the haughty bureaucrats at Peking felt the Okinawans were annoying with their endless requests for additional or larger missions, and that the Chinese Ministers of

State sought to "regulate" and reduce the number of official exchanges with this overeager tributary. The Chinese even made it difficult, at times, for these missions to be completed. The Okinawans endeavored to practice what the Chinese had preached in matters of ceremonial politeness and formal duty. They insisted that the birth of an heir to the Chinese throne or the wedding of a Crown Prince or death of an Emperor, required special recognition and a special mission. Such polite formalities covered additional opportunities for trade.

The Okinawans were zealous in the study of Chinese etiquette and ritual; the Chinese in turn recognized and admired the fidelity with which the island people met exacting demands made upon them by the stately court at Peking. This reached its highest attestation in 1554 when the Emperor granted upon the King at Shuri a large tablet bearing the inscription "Shurei no Kuni" (Country of Propriety). The King in turn recognized the honor which this implied by having a great gate erected on the approach to his castle, in which the tablet was placed for all to see.

Occasionally, the imperial court made special grants to the Confucian School at Tomari, where Okinawan youth applied themselves diligently to the Study of the Chinese classics. Also, for nearly five hundred years, there was a community of Okinawan students continuously in residence at Peking. The majority stayed two or three years. The Chinese government provided clothing, housing, food, and the equivalent of tuition. Youths selected for the foreign student training program were outstanding among their countrymen, both in intellectual accomplishments and in social status; they were assured of this prestige and of lifetime careers in high government offices at Shuri and Naha.

The Okinawans were faithful to the Emperors of China. They would have continued if not forced to stop by the Japanese. Hundreds of years later, China made claims to recover the Ryukyus when Japan's defeat seemed possible in 1942 during World War II.

## JAPAN'S ROLE IN OKINAWA

The Japanese became aware of the islands' existence around the year 600 and by the year 700, had brought certain Ryukyu clans within their allegiance.

In the 15th century, trade was very active between the Japanese states and the Ryukyus. Okinawan merchants traveled through Satsuma to Kyoto bearing gifts and goods. The Japanese recorded Shuri's gifts as "tributes" and in time began to look back on the year 1415 as the first in which the Okinawan Kingdom submitted "pro forma" to the shogunate.

Okinawan trade was of interest especially to the Japanese of Satsuma in the 16th century. As the decades passed, Satsuma became increasingly dependant upon Okinawa as a source of wares to be traded into Japan and Korea. This bred trouble for Shuri.

Japan was beginning to fall under its un-united states. States fought among themselves and with other lands for control and superiority. China and Japan were not communicating for like reasons, but some states of Japan tried to reunite friendship with China for purposes of trade. Ports of trade became the locations of disputes between states and countrymen. The Chinese government restricted ports of trade to certain states and countries. Okinawa's port of trade was Ch'uangchou. Ningpo was the base for trade with Japan. Shimazu, Lord of Satsuma, wanted a larger share in the Naha trade. Shuri was interested in developing its markets in nearby Kagoshima and needed Satsuma's protection in its trade with Korea. Shimazu, of course, was unwilling to allow any other covetous Japanese barons to intrude upon this highly profitable arrangement. Shimazu restricted Okinawa trade to only those ships carrying trading permits issued by Satsuma. Satsuma had gained a monopoly on the valuable luxury

trade. Shuri was powerless; the King couldn't evade the Shogun's orders issued through Satsuma.

The number of Japanese ships putting in at Naha increased. With them came priest missionaries who were ready to teach and preach while acting as agents in trade. Okinawa showed an increased interest in Japanese affairs, and a knowledge of the Japanese language became as important as the knowledge of Chinese was. In 1572, Okinawan students began to go to Kyoto to study in the Five Great Temples. Here began a division of Okinawan interest which was to continue in evidence for three hundred years. The student elite who returned from China, were naturally inclined to be pro-Chinese in outlook; the students home from Japan or those educated in Japanese at Shuri tended to support Japan's position in this conflict. Neither China nor Japan challenged the King's position as long as tribute was paid regularly.

Many events led up to the invasion of Okinawa by the Satsuma in 1609.

- a. The Japanese feared the influence of Europeans upon Okinawa. They began to come and trade firearms, had methods of warfare, and a new religion which required its converts to look to a foreign prince at Rome for guidance.
- b. There were many Chinese and Japanese pirate ships along trade ports. Trade between China and Japan was closed.
- c. Japan had gone from a state of governmental chaos to being united under the military leadership of Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi had dreams of conquering all of Asia.
- d. In 1571 Shuri wanted Amami Oshima (Island north of Okinawa), back.

- e. Hideyoshi had given the claims of territorial gains of Satsuma to the powerful Otomo of western Japan, this included Okinawa.
- f. A minor lord named Kamei Korenori was awarded the Ryukyu Islands for assisting Hideyoshi's gain of power. Hideyoshi inscribed on his fan, "Kamei, Ryukyu-no-Kami" (Kamei, Lord of Ryukyu). The Islands were not Hideyoshi's to give. In 1591, Kamei set out to take control of his "gift", but Shimazu blocked his way and forced him to turn back.
- g. As Hideyoshi strived for more power he began to send messages to Shuri ordering them to supply men and arms for the invasion of Korea. The Okinawans refused. Shimazu was not anxious to see an armed force raised in Okinawa. He advised Hideyoshi therefore that the Okinawans contribute material supplies. Shimazu notified Sho Nei, King of Shuri, in October, 1591, that the Okinawans must provide enough supplies to sustain seven thousand men through ten months. The King ignored the order. Through strong warnings, the supplies were gathered and forwarded, most reluctantly. Demands on Okinawa continued, but Okinawa argued that they were a poor country and had nothing to contribute. Hideyoshi's death in 1598 helped to lighten the pressures on Okinawa, temporarily.
- h. A new form of evangelical Buddhism was introduced about 1603 and became popular in Shuri and Naha.
- i. In 1606, the cultivation of the sweet potato was introduced from Fukien Province, followed soon after by the introduction of sugarcane. These were events of revolutionary importance to the entire Okinawan economy.

- j. Feudal lords and soldiers disputed over succession rights after Hideyoshi's death. Tokugawa Ieyasu was victorious. In 1603, he assumed the office of Shogun. Those who had supported him were given high offices in government. Barons who opposed him were considered outside lords and many were deprived of lands and honors. This isolated the Satsuma clan.
- k. Shimazu's son, Tadatsune, succeeded him in 1602, he showed Ieyasu respect and submission. As a mark of honor, he conferred one syllable of his own name upon Tadatsune, henceforth, to be known as Iehisa, and confirmed him in Shimazu's hereditary titles. These included the title Lord of the Twelve Southern Islands, which had been granted first to a Shimazu in A.D. 1206. Iehisa sent an envoy to Shuri to recommend the King's submission to the new order in Japan and to advise Sho Nei to pay his respects promptly to the new Shogun. He declined to do so. Shimazu was ready to return his samurai to their proper employment after three years of enforced tranquility. He was also aware of the wealth in trading goods and opportunities which would be his at Okinawa. Also, because of increasing fear of the Europeans moving from the south, this would give more protection to the south of Japan.

In February, 1609, Satsuma moved against Okinawa. A force of three thousand strong set sail on a fleet of more than one hundred war-junks. When the samurai landed at Unten Harbor on Motobu Peninsula, they met a brief but stiff resistance, with considerable losses on both sides. Shuri made a desperate effort to organize a defense, but the Okinawans were untrained and inexperienced. The last occasion for a general rally to arms and widespread fighting had been in the days of Sho Hasi, two

centuries earlier. The arms themselves had been called in and put away during Sho Shin's reign. The Okinawans were no match for the hardy Satsuma warriors. On April 5, 1609, the Japanese occupied Shuri Castle. The palace was looted and important treasures taken from the nearby temples and princely homes. The King was captured and held in Japan for three years. Only after signing an oath of subservency, was he released and returned to rule the Ryukyu Islands.

Sho Nei was embittered by memories of exile; subjugation had impoverished the Kingdom. He felt that he had failed to maintain the royal heritage. He decreed that his body should not lie in the royal tombs at Shuri, but in a hill-cave some miles away, near Urasoe, he took his life.

The Okinawans were ordered to conceal their true relationship with Japan. Chinese were forbidden to settle in Okinawa. The pressures and requirements of "dual subordination" affected the character and the standards of the Okinawan people. Basic elements of race, religious practices, and language formed natural ties with Japan, and the Okinawan lifestyle resembled that of the ordinary Japanese than that of Chinese.

The Satsuma clan governed the nation and Shimazu passed a law which banned the manufacture or possession of any kind of weapon. By the late nineteen century, the Ryukyu Islands eventually fell under total Japanese control. Though, come World War II, it would appear the Okinawans were left to fend for themselves in the Battle of Okinawa. When attacks were made on Okinawa in April of 1945, the Japanese had made no provisions to protect or segregate the civilians. Every Okinawan was on his own. The ancient castle at Shuri was in ruins after sixty days of heavy fire. The retreating Japanese fought hard but organization and discipline were gone. They had covered every inch of territory

from Naha and the cliffs which marked the southern shore. These men chose death rather than surrender, with total disregard for the fate of civilians trapped among them.

## THE UNITED STATES ROLE IN OKINAWA

America's position in the Ryukyus is unique, the islands have neither been a possession, a colony, nor a trust territory, yet they have had an effect on the culture of Okinawa.

In June, 1853, Matthew Calbraith Perry landed a token force from the U.S.S. Mississippi, marched into the castle at Shuri, and asked for Okinawan cooperation in exchange for American Friendship. He also demanded permission to establish a military base at Naha. To Washington he proposed, unsuccessfully, that the United States should take Okinawa "under surveillance" pending satisfactory settlement of American claims upon Japan. President Pierce thought conditions did not justify a prolonged occupation. "If, in future, resistance should be offered and threatened, it would also be rather mortifying to surrender the island, if once seized, and rather inconvenient and expensive to maintain a force there to retain the island". With only a fruitless "compact of friendship" in hand, Perry withdrew. President Pierce's words might have done well to have been repeated to Presidents less than one hundred years later. After the April 1, 1945 attack of Okinawa, with an estimated one hundred thousand non-combatant civilians killed and ninety percent of the buildings on Okinawa destroyed as were most of the crops, the United States was responsible for the Ryukyu rehabilitation. Military government was established in the Ryukyu Islands in June 1945, following the surrender of the Japanese forces to the Tenth United States Army. Military government operations ended in 1950 with the establishment of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands. Their objectives were to develop a Ryukyuan government, improve the welfare and well-being of the inhabitants, and to promote the economic and cultural advancement of the Ryukyans. These objectives were not being met.

In 1949, the Defense Department suddenly became aware of the neglect of civil affairs; the so-called Vickery Report to the Department of the Army caused anguish at the Supreme Commander's headquarters. Generals were reprimanded, colonels transferred, civilians dismissed, and new policies formulated which called for progressive rehabilitation of the civil economy. But when the Korean War started, a vast military base-expansion program started in 1950 overshadowed plans for civil rehabilitation.

Okinawan restlessness under an alien government, however benign, is inevitably translated into political terms affecting United States relations with Japan. As President Pierce foresaw, prolonged occupation is costly and embarrassing; some 800,000 Okinawans must be cared for in a wretchedly poor archipelago. More than fifty thousand families had become landless since 1945. Each new facility for American use in Okinawa reduced areas for cultivation; and fields once covered with concrete, stone, or gravel can never be restored to agricultural use. By 1955, more than 40,000 acres or 12.7 percent of the total land area of Okinawa had passed into military hands.

The Chinese invasion of Korea in 1950 with Russian aid, underscored the need for the United States to retain a foothold in the Ryukyus to support the interests of disarmed Japan, the U.N. forces in Korea, and the overall interests of the United States all along the Western Pacific rim. It was presumed that Washington weighed all the problems and dangers against the need for Okinawan bases. The fact remained that the United States government felt compelled to stay in the Ryukyu Islands.

Some Okinawans recognized that in truth the United States was in a better position than post-war Japan to underwrite economic

rehabilitation for the people, if the occupying authorities cared to undertake the task.

Washington could promote emigration (as Japan could not), which must take place to relieve overcrowded Okinawa. Many other Okinawans, however, continued to insist that it would be better to return the Civil Administration to the Japanese. The truce in Korea in 1953 eased the immediate threat and there was increased desire for reversion to Japan. The United States did announce that the northern islands of the Ryukyus (the Amami Oshima Group) would revert to Japanese control as of December 25, 1953. The Secretary of State at Washington, John Foster Dulles, formulated a doctrine of "residual sovereignty". The United States affirmed that Japan retained legal title to the Ryukyu Islands and that in good time and good faith Okinawa Prefecture would one day return to Japanese control. In August, 1956, Secretary Dulles, unexpectedly shifted American interest in Okinawa. He hinted that in its search for formal peace with Russia, that if Japan consented to permanent Russian occupation of certain islands in the Southern Kuriles, then the United States might have to reconsider the previous doctrine put forth in 1953. In other terms, the United States might yet decide to hold the Ryukyus permanently. The islands have been returned to the Japanese as of 1972 but the United States still maintains bases there.

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Okinawa - The History of an Island People  
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2. Martial Arts - A Complete Illustrated History  
By: Michael Finn
3. Okinawa - Keystone of the Pacific

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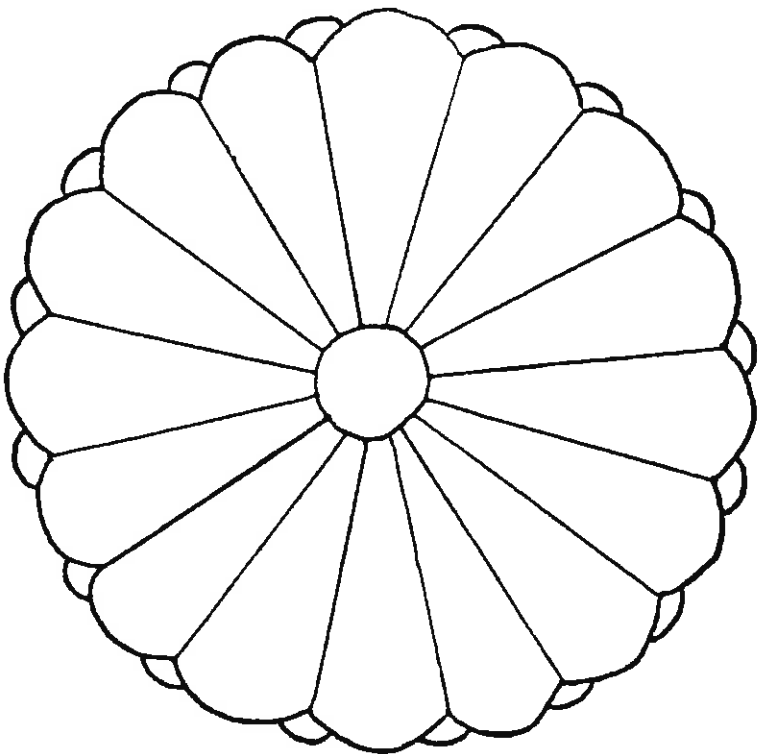
CRESTS IN OKINAWAN HISTORY



Sho family



Shimazu clan



Japanese imperial chrysanthemum



Shoulder patch worn by U.S.  
occupation forces in Okinawa