

## Confronting Home-Grown Contradictions: Reflections on Okinawa's 'Forty Years Since Reversion' みずからつくり出した矛盾に向き合う——40年目の感慨

Arakawa Akira

Translated by Scott W. Aalgaard<sup>1</sup>

**Arakawa Akira.** Born in Okinawa in 1931. Dropped out of the Japanese National Literature Department of the School of Literature and Science at the University of the Ryūkyūs in 1955, and took up a position with the *Okinawa Times* newspaper. After serving as chief of the publication's Yaeyama branch, Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Shin Okinawa Bungaku*, and Executive Director for Publication for the *Okinawa Daihyakka Jiten* (Okinawa Encyclopedia), Arakawa would go on to serve as the paper's Director and Editor in Chief, President, and Chairman (retiring in 1999). His publications include *Hankokka no Kyōku* (Okinawa: Antithesis to the Evil Japanese Nation State<sup>2</sup>), *Ryūkyū Shobun Ikō* (After the Disposition of the Ryūkyūs), *Shin Nantō Fūdo-ki* (A New Record of the Culture of the Southern Islands), as well as a co-authored collection of poems and artwork titled *Nihon ga Mieru* (I Can See Japan).



Arakawa Akira

Conspicuous of late, in light of this historical moment that marks forty years since the 'restitution' of the rights to administrative control over Okinawa from the United States to Japan, have been media special reports which, be they designed for publication in print or for broadcast over the airwaves, have featured in their titles the phrase '*Fukki 40 Nen* [40 Years Since Reversion]'. There are, however, no few individuals in Okinawa who harbor a certain hostility to the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, this word 'reversion' is deployed without being bracketed in quotation marks, as if it represented a simple matter of fact.

Since the original meaning of the word *fukki* [reversion] is, according to the *Kōjien*,<sup>3</sup> "to

restore to an originary place, location, or condition, ‘ ~ to one’s native country’”, the transfer of administrative control over what was originally an independent Ryūkyū Kingdom – a region annexed in the shadow of threatened military force in 1879 (the Disposition of the Ryūkyūs) and under Japanese control for only a few decades before Japan’s defeat in 1945 – was nothing but an arbitrary act carried out to suit the purposes of the United States and Japan in 1972; thus, it cannot properly be called a ‘reversion’ in the correct sense of the term. It is therefore not difficult to appreciate why so many harbor senses of hostility and discomfort toward this term.

In the context of postwar Okinawan history, however, the word ‘*fukki*’ itself was adopted and popularized by none other than Okinawans – the very Okinawans who, for example, founded the Okinawan Reversion Council, and who, via the ‘reversionist movement’, sought to bring about their own absorption into Japan. Thus, another reality of these past forty years has been that Okinawans have had to come face to face with a contradiction of our own making.

This is why, whenever I use this word, I encase it in brackets or quotation marks in an attempt to indicate that the term (‘*fukki*’, reversion) carries with it special, specific implications. It is also why I have been continually on guard against a normalization of the face-value meaning of the term and its seeping into the consciousness of people, all of which result in the violent *manipulation* of that consciousness, and a rendering-invisible of the historical reality of re-annexation.

Why? Because the historical perception that conceives of ‘reversion’ as ‘re-annexation’ constitutes the fundamental, basic viewpoint required for considering the whole ‘Okinawa problem.’ Only when we adopt this viewpoint can the root of the colonialism that continues to engender all of the structural discrimination

wrought by Japan upon Okinawa be rendered clearly apparent.

For example, in terms of the problem of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa, epitomized in the issue of the proposed relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Henoko, the fact of the matter is that Japan has thrust the burden of hosting 75% of the U.S. military facilities in the country onto Okinawa, and that the Japanese people as a whole have no will to share in Okinawa’s pain; the Japanese state defines the U.S. military bases in Okinawa as “a force of deterrence to protect the Japanese nation and its citizens”, and it continues to cultivate its own economic prosperity in the shadow of it all.

This structure is nothing but the structure of colonial rule. Its genesis can be found in the ‘Disposition of the Ryūkyūs’: the ‘annexation by force’ perpetrated by the Empire of Japan and the Meiji Government. The ‘re-annexation’ of 1972 has served to maintain this structure to the present day. It is, we can say, precisely because Okinawans can sense this colonial structure viscerally, almost as a crawling of the skin, that political actors both conservative and progressive, up to and including the current Prefectural Governor himself, have come to declare unequivocally, as the will of the whole Okinawan people, their opposition to the idea of moving the Futenma base elsewhere within the Prefecture, despite the insistence on the part of the Japanese government to carry out the relocation of the facility to Henoko.

\*

At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that a set of circumstances has been emerging within Okinawa that should be cause for considerable concern.

Particularly problematic has been the issue that emerged this year with the deletion of explanatory content from the ‘32<sup>nd</sup> Army Trenches Historical Marker’ by the Prefectural

authorities. When the Prefecture erected a historical marker at the site of the remains of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army Headquarters Trenches, which served as the command post from which the Battle of Okinawa was coordinated and waged,<sup>4</sup> it committed the audacity of unilaterally eradicating any mention of ‘comfort women’ and ‘the massacre of local civilians’ from the explanatory text that the Prefecture had entrusted the ‘Historical Marker Planning Committee’ to write, executing this change without so much as a word to the committee itself. When this came to light, the two local newspapers reported on the story for many days on end, and the details of the Committee’s deliberations on the proposed explanatory text were also subsequently made public; the Prefectural authorities in charge, however, show no indication of any willingness to reconsider their actions.

to learn afresh the history of that period, as evidenced in the participation of more than 110,000 individuals in the ‘Prefectural Citizens’ Rally Demanding the Retraction of the Assessment Pertaining to Textbook Authorization’,<sup>5</sup> held on September 29, 2007 in protest of the decision to delete from secondary-level Japanese history textbooks an entry stating that the so-called ‘mass suicides’ of Okinawan civilians that occurred during the Battle of Okinawa were actually the result of coercion by Japanese forces. Through meticulous investigation, scholars of the Battle of Okinawa have proven the presence of ‘comfort women’ within the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army Headquarters Trenches, as well as the reality of the massacre of Okinawan civilians in the vicinity of the trenches. And yet, the Prefectural authorities unilaterally deleted all mention of these historical facts from the historical marker’s explanatory text, an act that was due solely to the intervention of external interests who objected to their inclusion, claiming that no official documents referring to these facts had been found. The Prefectural government was itself involved in the Prefectural Citizens’ Rally of September 2007. Given its recent handling of the historical marker issue, however, one cannot but feel uneasy over how the issue of the relocation of the U.S. forces to Henoko will pan out.



**An entrance to 32<sup>nd</sup> Army HQs at Shuri Castle**

This all happened despite the existence of a widely-shared and eager determination to re-examine memories of the Battle of Okinawa and



**The September 2007 rally**

\*

Additionally, on top of ongoing pressure tactics exerted by external interests that aim to coerce residents into accepting the notion of an augmented, reinforced Self-Defense Force via such means as the fanning of a sense of impending crisis through loud proclamations that North Korean rocket launches are in fact ‘missile launches’ and the concomitant deployment of PAC 3 (surface-to-air missile) interceptors on the islands of Okinawa, Miyako, and Ishigaki, other recent external developments, including Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō’s headstrong bluster about his plan to purchase the Senkaku Islands and Japanese Prime Minister Noda’s announcement that he would consider the chain’s nationalization, have also combined to send troubling and turbulent rumblings resounding through Okinawa.<sup>6</sup>

This maneuvering has led Satō Masaru to comment that “the Senkaku Islands are not Japanese territory; they are Okinawan territory.[...] [These people] are going over the Okinawans’ heads, and are trying to determine Okinawa’s fate for them” (*Okinawa Times*, April 18, 2012). He is entirely correct: once, when interviewed by a television station in Hong Kong on the Senkaku issue, I also responded that “both Japan and China are misguided in discussing the sovereignty of the Senkakus over Ryūkyūan and Okinawan heads.”

In any event, the fundamental premise that must undergird any thoughtful consideration of issues pertaining to the future of Okinawa, including the Senkaku Islands issue and the problems surrounding the military bases, is the securing of our own right to self-determination as Okinawans. A splendid and inimitable work dealing with precisely this issue has been published recently: Matsushima Yasukatsu’s *The Road to Ryūkyū Independence: A Ryūkyūan Nationalism That Defies Colonialism* (‘Ryūkyū dokuritsu e no michi – shokuminchi-shugi ni

kou Ryūkyū nashonarizumu’, published by Hōritsu-Bunkasha in 2012); indeed, while there have been in the past many essays and writings dealing with matters of autonomy and independence, including the “Unofficial Constitution of the Republic of the Ryūkyūs” (Ryūkyū Kyōwakoku Kempō shian<sup>7</sup>), I cannot but feel a renewed sense of anguish at the fact that it has taken forty long years since the reversion=re-annexation of Okinawa for such a masterful text, one so rich in content, to appear.

This article appeared in *SEKAI* (World), June, 2012.

### About the Translator

Scott W. Aalgaard is a PhD student at the University of Chicago, where his research focuses upon the manner(s) in which geographically- and historically-specific individuals conceive of ‘Japan’ and formulate desires for ‘sovereignty’, approaching these questions through the lens of individual interpretations and deployments of certain popular musics. His Masters thesis, titled “[Gimme Shelter: Enka, Self and Society in Contemporary Japan](#)”, was completed at the University of Victoria in 2011.

*Recommended citation: Arakawa Akira, "Confronting Home-Grown Contradictions: Reflections on Okinawa's 'Forty Years Since Reversion'," The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 11, Issue 25, No. 1. June 24, 2013."*

### Related articles

- Christopher T. Nelson, [Dances of Memory, Dances of Oblivion: The Politics of Performance in Contemporary Okinawa](#)
- Gavan McCormack and Satoko Norimatsu, [Ryukyu/Okinawa, From Disposal to Resistance](#)
- Annmaria Shimabukuro, [Who Should Bear the Burden of US Bases? Governor Nakaima’s Plea](#)

for a “Relocation Site Outside of Okinawa Prefecture, but within Japan”

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Translator’s Note: I am indebted to Michael K. Bourdaghs, Michiko Hase, Satoko Norimatsu, and Mark Selden for their expertise, invaluable feedback, and suggestions for improvement to earlier drafts of this translation. Any mistakes or insufficiencies that remain herein are mine alone.

<sup>2</sup> Translator’s Note: This translation of the book’s original Japanese title is provided by David John Obermiller in his *The United States Military Occupation of Okinawa: Politicizing and Contesting Okinawan Identity, 1945~1955* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Translator’s Note: The *Kōjien* is widely regarded as the standard, go-to dictionary for the Japanese language, and has a status similar to that of Webster’s or OED among English speakers.

<sup>4</sup> Translator’s Note: Japan’s 32<sup>nd</sup> Army was in fact headquartered in Okinawa’s Shuri Castle, which has been described by Laura Hein and Mark Selden as “[t]he most important physical symbol of an autonomous Okinawan past.” See Laura Hein and Mark Selden, Eds., *Islands of*

*Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Translator’s Note: This bipartisan rally, held in protest of government attempts to eliminate references to compulsory suicides during the Battle of Okinawa during the Pacific War described by Arakawa herein, drew a total of 117,000 people from across Okinawa, making it the largest such gathering to occur in the Prefecture since reversion to Japanese control in 1972. For more on the rally, see Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu. *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), esp. pp. 33~34.

<sup>6</sup> Translator’s Note: In September, 2012, subsequent to the publication of this essay, Noda Yoshihiko’s administration did in fact nationalize the Senkaku Islands - known in Chinese as the Diaoyu - sparking a renewed and still intense (as of June, 2013) round of China-Japan tensions.

<sup>7</sup> Translator’s Note: This provisional constitution for the Ryūkyūs, submitted by an author who identified her- or himself only by the single initial ‘F’, appeared in the June, 1981 edition of the journal *Shin Okinawa Bungaku* (pp. 174~183).