

OKINAWAN STUDIES

NO. 1

THE OKINAWAS
A JAPANESE MINORITY GROUP

Summary Statement
(Second Edition)

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This is a Summary of a long report,
in large part historical, on the
people of the Loo Choo Islands and
their descendants in the Hawaiian
Islands and in other parts of the
world.

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Surrounding the East China Sea, there are three centers of minority populations which have histories parallel in several respects: long associations, affiliations and allegiances with China, broken in very recent times by Japanese aggression and followed by Japanese sovereignty. These three areas are Korea, Taiwan or Formosa and the Okinawa or Loo Choo Islands. It is the last of these which is considered here, with a population forming a racial, linguistic and ethnic minority in its present Japanese setting.

Strategic Distribution of the Okinawas

The position of the Loo Choo Islands, stretching in a continuous chain from Kyushu southward, is of strategic importance with Korea and Japan proper on the north, China on the west, Formosa on the southwest, the Philippines on the south, and, far to the east, the Marianas, the westernmost of the Japanese Mandated Islands. The population of this archipelago is almost exclusively Okinawan with the Japanese making up the governing class and many of the teachers and traders also from the northern islands.

The second area within the present battle zone where there is a concentration of Loo Chooans is in the Japanese Mandates themselves where we learn that in June 1938, of the 57,000 Japanese there, 40,000 of this number or 70.1% were Okinawas, an immigration, seemingly involuntary in some cases, of these people from their own islands.

Davao on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines is the third area within the territory now held by Japan where there are Okinawas in considerable numbers. If the information is reliable, there is every reason to believe that of the approximately 29,000 Japanese in all the islands, of which 17,782 are in Davao, more than half are of Loo Chooan origin. One informant states that "seventy per cent of the Japanese tenants or farmers in the Abaca area in Davao belong to this group. Many Okinawas are also reported as forming part of the population in Formosa and in the Bonin Islands.

Cleavages

Thus in three and possibly four areas which will, sooner or later, have to be taken by the United Nations, there is a group between which

and the Japanese proper or Naichijin a long-standing enmity of greater or less intensity exists. This cleavage is a natural one and is founded on racial differences, together with those of language and of culture.

History

History has also played a large part in creating the antipathies existing between the two populations. Japan completed her conquest of the archipelago when she made the two southernmost groups of these islands one of her prefectures in 1879. Even then Okinawa continued to regard herself under the suzerainty of China and it was not until the Sino-Japanese war in 1894 that the question of Japanese ownership was definitely settled.

Their dynastic history, starting in 1187, had a continuous succession of thirty-six rulers. Thus, for 700 years, Okinawa had a loyalty to a long line of her own kings and knew little of the "descendant of the Sun Goddess" until 1879.

During all this time the fealty to China was a very real thing. The first tribute was paid her in 1373, only five years after the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. The Emperor of China made the investiture of each of the Okinawan rulers; students were continuously sent to mainland universities, and Chinese culture ruled in the Loo Choos to a far greater extent than in Japan proper. At the end of the first period of the Manchus (1786) we find a statement in an Okinawan manuscript, "The King builds all his palaces and his doors toward the west for China is to the west of Loochoo and in this way he shows his obedience and fidelity." Thus we see the long and close association between Okinawa and China in sharp contrast to the relatively short period of sovereignty forced upon the islanders by Japan.

Political and Economic Exploitation

The governmental machinery in the Okinawan Islands is almost exclusively in the hands of the Japanese overlords. It was not until 1920 that Okinawa was placed on an equality with the other Japanese prefectures with a prefectural assembly of its own. The Japanese governor has the power of veto over any acts of this body. Most of the important administrative positions are filled by Japanese. One of the most cultivated of the alien Okinawas in Honolulu, when asked regarding the attitude

of his type of people in his homeland toward the Japanese rule replied, "We feel it inside."

The economic exploitation of the country by the Japanese is practically complete. The practical state of vassalage of the inhabitants is shown by their willingness to migrate to other lands.

Mutual Antipathies

This discussion of Okinawan attitudes is based primarily upon a study of a considerable number of this group who are among the 20,000 now found in the Hawaiian Islands. Many of those interviewed were born in the Loo Choos and some had been there as late as 1940. The sample ran all the way from Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant clergy, through many of the professions to laborers on the sugar plantations. There is every reason to suppose that this study of the attitudes expressed in Hawaii by the Okinawas toward the Japanese and by the Japanese toward the Okinawas is an indication of what would be found in other regions where the two groups are found. This supposition has been borne out by all the data available in Okinawa itself and in South America where a large number of these people have migrated.

The intolerance of the Japanese and Okinawas toward each other is reciprocal. This cleavage, this desire for separateness, should be considered from all sides. The rift has closed to some extent in the cities, but on the plantations and in the country schools the antipathy persists and extends even into the University of Hawaii where the Japanese form fifty-four per cent of the student body.

Japanese laborers were first brought to the Hawaiian Islands in 1885. It was not until fourteen years later, after these earliest immigrants were fairly well established, that the first Okinawas arrived. They spoke a dialect of Japanese which was not understood by the Naichijin, they were poor and lowly in habits and, in appearance, usually quite different in several respects from the earlier arrivals. To this day, one authority writes, "The Japanese regard the Okinawas as dirty, impolite and uncultured and make no attempt to disguise this feeling." The Japanese insist that the Okinawas are not Japanese. Unlike the Naichijin, the Loo Choos are not usually articulate regarding their dislike of the Japanese. A Christian missionary writes of the Okinawas in Hawaii, "They

mistrust the Japanese with deep-seated hatred thinking that they are always insulting and sneering at them. They never get along with the Japanese."

Segregation

The attitude of Japanese "superiority" -- governmental, social and economic, combined with other factors -- generates the feeling of inferiority among the Okinawas. This finds expression in self-consciousness and a desire to escape attention. Almost without exception these people congregate as a minority group wherever they find themselves. This is the most obvious characteristic of their social life. The convergent attitude is, of course, a protective mechanism to meet the discrimination which they find expressed against them in so many ways by the Japanese proper. This segregation contributes to the social solidarity and to the harmony of the group but, at the same time, it has been a factor in retarding the acquisition of the standard Japanese language, to say nothing of English, and it has caused retention of some of the old Okinawan customs which in turn have accented and perpetuated the differences between them and the other Japanese.

Japanese clubs and other social organizations exclude those from the southern islands; the Okinawas are forced to have their own clubs. This segregation is also seen in occupations, in the professions, and in the religious groups. Okinawas buy from and employ Okinawas. A Loo Chooan priest expects to administer to other Loo Chooans. This schism is an everyday affair and is seldom forgotten by either group.

Expressions of Antipathy

The "social distance" between the two groups comes out most strongly in the severe ban on intermarriage. A Naichijin girl marrying an Okinawa is often cast off completely by her family. A typical expression of a Japanese mother runs, "Our ties are broken and I don't even speak to her now. She should have known better and not degrade herself and her family." On the Okinawan side the pride of a Loo Chooan heritage is often strong enough to prevent intermarriage on their part.

There are various ways in which the Japanese show outright contempt for the Loo Chooans. They are social outcasts in much the same way as the Etas who, unlike the Okinawas, do not have any physical, ethnic,

linguistic or historical unity. Ridicule and name-calling are always present. The most common epithet is "Pig-eater". "Hairy" is another, derived from the characteristic appearance of many of these people. Insult is expressed by rubbing the back of one hand with the fingers of the other in imitation of the lines of tattoo formerly decorating the hands of the women.

Okinawas Easily Identifiable

It is a fortunate circumstance that there are a number of criteria one or more of which are useful in distinguishing this minority population. The Okinawas have a different racial composition than that of the Japanese. They are generally shorter and darker and, in many cases, have much more body hair. By practice it is not difficult to pick out many of the Okinawas in a group of Japanese. In OKINAWAN STUDIES, NO. 2, will be found a fuller description of the physical characteristics together with some pictures of these natives.

The language is another distinguishing characteristic, and evidences of the Okinawan dialect remain after a native speaks perfectly good Japanese. "Motor habits", such as the way of walking, may sometimes be used as another means of separating the two groups. The best criterion, however, other than the physical, is the character of the name. Both Japanese family and the given names are usually typical either of Okinawa or of Japan.

In a list of over six hundred different names of persons who definitely trace their ancestry back to Okinawa Prefecture, certain types of names or combinations of characters are common. This list of names and their characters is published in OKINAWAN STUDIES, NO. 2. Many names of Japanese, such as those who volunteered for the American Army or were placed in Concentration Camps, have been broken down into Okinawa and Japanese by a study of the names alone. This means of distinguishing Okinawas from Naichijin may be of importance in any statistical studies where "the Japanese" have always hitherto been considered a unit.

Attitude since December 7, 1941

Since Pearl Harbor there often appears among the Hawaiian Okinawas a feeling of elation at their status today and stress is placed in the theory that they are not Japanese and never have been; hence, they should

have no blame placed upon them for what the Japanese are now doing. Several instances have been reported where the Okinawas openly assert the Japanese deserve a beating. Boys applying for positions openly boast they are Okinawas, a fact formerly covered up so far as possible.

Utilization of Cleavages

Could this rift between the Okinawas and the Naichijin be made use of in the present conflict? In the governmental and economic exploitation of the natives there seems to be present an inarticulate desire for a change. New lands have given freedom to thousands. All the evidence seems to show that there is present among many of these Loo Chooans, wherever they are found, a residue of disloyalty and dislike if not enmity toward their "superiors". A softening process directed toward increasing the idea of disunity might well bear fruit. The feeling that now is the time for the "under dog" to assert itself might be fertilized by encouragement and suggestion until it yielded perhaps no actual break but an acquiescence with the design of an enemy to enter their colony or their country. Both open and black propaganda would have many points to attack, not the least of which would be to stress a loyalty to the memory of their own rulers, their centuries of associations with struggling China, and their oppression by the Japanese, governmentally, socially and economically.

Operative Usefulness of the Okinawas

There is also the question of the recruitment of Okinawas as agents of various types. They are, in general, as shown in Hawaii, alert mentally and physically, and are considered excellent laborers. They are energetic and ambitious in their endeavors to get ahead financially and socially, and seem willing to devote themselves to new undertakings. They occupy a position of respect in any white community. Their loyalty to their adopted country is probably in general higher than that of the average Japanese.

In a military administration and in post-war stabilization the upper class Okinawas who seldom share the feeling of inferiority of the common laborer type could undoubtedly play an important part. It is among this higher group that pride in an Okinawan origin is often openly expressed.

Thus Psychological Warfare in its various aspects might well be

brought to bear upon the cleavage outlined here between the two Japanese groups, each with its own physical type, its own history, its own dynasties, its mores and attitudes. The Okinawa himself might well prove useful in this movement as an agent and in the civil and military administration at home, in his own islands, in the Mandates and in the Philippines.

Okinawas in Latin America

In another publication of OSS (Research and Analysis Branch #791), the possibility of an "Okinawan Movement" in Latin America is discussed. In Peru, for example, the Loo Chooans form sixty per cent or more of a large Japanese population and "with proper encouragement," we read, "the Okinawas could be persuaded to free themselves from Japanese control in Latin America."

If in South America, why not in their own archipelago, in the Mandates and in the Philippines where in each area they form the larger part of a Japanese population?

