

## The Significance of the Seminar on the Commemoration of the Reversion of Okinawa

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The Battle of Okinawa, fought over an 80-day period in April-June 1945, was one of the major historical events symbolically marking the closing days of the Pacific War (1936-1945). Many of the fierce battles fought during that war have earned special recognition in the annals of military history, and each and every one of them has been deeply engraved into the Japanese consciousness. The Battle of Okinawa, however, having been fought within the frontiers of Japan itself and having ensnared many ordinary citizens in its maelstrom, has an extraordinary and unequalled significance for the Japanese. Furthermore, the fact that Okinawa remained under the control of the U.S. military so long after the war has given the name 'Okinawa' an even greater symbolic place in Japanese memories of the Pacific War: A considerable amount of time passed before Japan's post-war history was able to move beyond the page headed 'the Battle of Okinawa'. In the summer of 1965, Sato Eisaku, the first Japanese Prime Minister ever to visit Okinawa, proclaimed that "without the reversion of Okinawa [to Japanese control] there can be no end to 'the post-war period'", and he certainly spoke for a great number of Japanese citizens of similar conviction.

Japan was officially released from occupation by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and on 28 April 1952 it rejoined the international community. Twenty years later, on 15 May 1972, Okinawa was returned to Japan. With the passage of yet another two decades, we scheduled an academic seminar for May 1992 to provide both American and Japanese scholars an

opportunity to reconsider from a variety of angles the significance of the reversion of Okinawa. Today, forty years after the conclusion of the peace treaty marking the end of the Pacific War, Japan occupies a very important place both globally and within Asia. As the international community undertakes the fashioning of a new world order, we believe it important to examine post-war Japanese diplomacy, U.S.-Japan relations, and the history of international relations in Asia as a whole in looking back upon how the road was paved for Okinawa's reversion and what impact that episode has had on U.S.-Japan relations and international relations in the Asia-Pacific region. From an academic standpoint, this 20th anniversary was a one-time opportunity to conduct interviews with persons directly involved in the reversion and to organize essential documentation an opportunity that we could not afford to let pass.

Naturally, numerous approaches can be taken in assessing the historical significance of Okinawa's reversion. The question of the place of the Okinawa problem in the context of Japan's post-war history has already been mentioned. Quite frankly, Okinawa was one of the post-war issues that should have been resolved in the peace treaty with Japan but was not. Unlike other problems of the post-war period, this issue was one tied very closely to U.S.-Japan relations after the peace treaty. Though the call of the residents of Okinawa for a 'return to the motherland' went unheeded during ratification of the peace treaty, the treaty's recognition of Japan's 'potential sovereignty' left the door

partially open. Final settlement of the issue of Okinawa's status, however, was left to the future of U.S.-Japan relations. In other words, the leaders of both Japan and the U.S. linked the fate of Okinawa to future developments in relations between the two countries. For that reason alone, the story of Okinawa is itself the story of post-war U.S.-Japan relations.

How should one interpret, from such a standpoint, the reversion of Okinawa two decades after the peace treaty? For the residents of Okinawa these years undoubtedly meant extremely long perseverance. If one accepts that it is the duty of the state to treat its people without discrimination, then the fact that this duty went unfulfilled for a period of 20 years clearly leaves only Japan to blame. The special efforts expended by the Japanese government since reversion to bring *hondo-nami* (mainland standards) to Okinawa—as a first step in its Okinawa Promotion and Development Plan—stem from the past inability to support Okinawa.

Was there really no way of dealing with this issue after the peace treaty other than thrusting Okinawa into the context of U.S.-Japan relations and leaving it under the continued control of the U.S.? From the very start, there were people in both the U.S. and Japan who advocated the return of Okinawa to Japanese administrative authority, asserting that American possession of military bases on Okinawa in compliance with the terms of the U.S.-Japan Security Agreement, as with its bases in 'mainland' Japan, would sufficiently protect American military interests. Unrestricted use of the Okinawa bases, free from any political considerations due an autonomous Japan, however, was seen by the U.S. as incomparably valuable to its Cold War aims. In addition, the perceptions of American political leaders regarding Japan's reservations about the U.S.' military role, even within the basic framework of the U.S.-Japan Friendship Treaty, made the U.S. increasingly reluctant to give up unrestricted use of its Okinawa bases. Consequently, the keystone of the U.S.' Okinawa policy was that Okinawa could not be turned over to Japan until the dark clouds of danger over the free world dispersed and a clear sky appeared on the Far East horizon. This was

the political atmosphere in Washington when in 1965 Prime Minister Sato, during his visit to Naha, gave voice to the Japanese people's hopes for Okinawa's reversion.

The Sato-Johnson Joint Communique of 1967 promised to decide the timing of a reversion of Okinawa "within a few years"; after two or three years"; after two years had passed, a basic consensus was reached in the 1969 Sato-Nixon meetings on a 'non-nuclear/hondo nami' reversion. These were indeed remarkable developments. The conclusive factor behind the American decision was a recognition that any immediate benefits to be gained by insisting on the unrestricted use of Okinawa would be far outweighed by the problems this would likely cause the maintenance of sound U.S.-Japan relations. For the rationalists, who believed that this was the proper course for U.S.-Japan relations, the resolution of the Okinawa issue in this fashion was perhaps no more than what should have been done?. Nevertheless, it is not an easy thing to abandon benefits already in hand in the hopes of gaining vague and uncertain long-term benefits, even more so when the interests of such an enormous organization as the U.S. military are involved.

From the vantage of hindsight, one notices that just about the time that American political decision makers commenced secret preparations to make the reversion of Okinawa the next item on the U.S.-Japan agenda, U.S. relations with China began to see improvement. It would not be in the least unusual to imagine that some connection existed between these two occurrences. However, as far as we have been able to confirm with American government officials at that time, including Secretary of State Kissinger, there is no evidence for the existence of any such 'rational model' of political decision making; the Okinawa issue was always confined within the limits of U.S.-Japan relations. This means, therefore, that improved Sino-U.S. relations and the subsequent appearance of blue skies on the Far East horizon were not directly responsible for making the reversion of Okinawa possible. Indeed, from the standpoint of U.S. military authorities still bogged down in the

Vietnam war, any policy change that would endanger the military value of Okinawa was certainly out of the question.

The withdrawal of nuclear weapons (Mace B) deployed in Okinawa was a similar issue. We know today that the utility of this type of nuclear weapon had already dropped considerably by this time and that this fact was common knowledge among specialists in the field and even known to some degree outside the field. In other words, the military technological obstacles to the reversion of a non-nuclear Okinawa had already been lowered. While this was certainly so, again things did not proceed along a straight line plotted by some 'rational model' of political decision-making.

Pointing out the objective factors (related to the international atmosphere and military technology) that accelerated progress towards a reversion of Okinawa, even if we suppose that political decision makers were aware of these factors but did not act on them, in and of itself has meaning. More important, though, is the ability of political leaders to take advantage of the opportunities born of the changes in these objective factors (such opportunities normally seem insignificant at first), to set a definite course, and to bring the issue to a clear outcome. In the shadows of the accomplishments of these political leaders, though, stand the uncelebrated devotion and talent of the countless people who assisted them. Walking back along the road to Okinawa's reversion, one is deeply impressed by the presence of these people and the major and minor dramas in which they acted. The processes leading up to the diplomatic negotiations on Okinawa's reversion required extremely delicate handling, bringing to mind a number of surgeons at work. Just as in surgery, where it is practically impossible to create a completely germ-free environment, success in diplomatic relations often relies a great deal on luck.

Continuing with this analogy, how should the results of the reversion negotiations be evaluated? In the sense that the surgeons were able to remove a potentially cancerous growth from the U.S.-Japan relationship before it was too late, the operation was a success. In light of

the various frictions that have arisen since, what would have happened to U.S.-Japan relations had the Okinawa problem been left unresolved? (One can well imagine the effects on U.S.-Japan relations if, given such a situation, the U.S. military commander at Okinawa were to announce that a continued American military presence in post-Cold War Asia was needed to prevent the military resurgence of Japan) The series of accords and agreements resulting from the Okinawa negotiations was, like most diplomatic negotiations, the product of difficult compromises, and if one looks hard enough it would not be difficult to find some imperfect sutures. The Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam clauses and the vague wording on the redeployment of nuclear weapons were all subjects of debate at the time. These external factors were certainly capable of inflaming the sutures, but with time these stitches healed over to become relatively unnoticed scars. In the end, the results of diplomatic negotiations, as those of surgery, are determined by the recuperative state of the patient, and success or failure must be evaluated from a long-term perspective.

How, then, did U.S.-Japan relations fare after this major surgery? As mentioned earlier, the Okinawa reversion lies at the midpoint of the 40-year history of post-treaty U.S.-Japan relations. Comparing U.S.-Japan relations before and after Okinawa's reversion, one can quickly conclude that Japan's political role in the Asia-Pacific region has seen remarkable expansion; U.S. expectations of a more active role for Japan in the Asia-Pacific region entered greatly into the decision to return Okinawa. In a manner of speaking, the Okinawa reversion signified the U.S.' choice of a trusting relationship with Japan as the basis of its future Asian policy. Such a U.S.-Japan partnership was in itself an expression of the expectations that U.S. leaders had of Japan, using the Okinawa reversion as collateral. Naturally the specific nature of the partnership was not clearly determined at the outset, and was indeed something that would have to be gradually defined through later developments in U.S.-Japan relations. This is an ongoing process, and no final judgment can yet be handed down on the

consequences. However, it is evident that Japan has accepted more political responsibility in Asia since the reversion and that the U.S.-Japan partnership has taken on even greater importance for international relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Social and economic changes in Okinawa in the 20 years since reversion have on the whole been for the better, though Okinawa does continue to host an enormous American military base. Most importantly, Okinawa has been restored to its status as a prefecture of Japan,

giving its people a feeling of contentment as well as of pride. In this sense, too, the operation can be deemed a success. Today, as Japan attempts to fulfill an important role in the Asia-Pacific region, hopes are high that its southernmost prefecture, Okinawa, will lend the vigor of its own historical and cultural heritage to this task.

I have attempted in this very limited space to comment on the final report and accompanying documentation from the U.S.-Japan Academic Seminar; I sincerely hope that readers will find it useful.