

Peace-building: A Study Tour of Okinawa

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Introduction

Formerly the Ryukyu Kingdom, the Okinawan archipelago has had and continues to embrace a unique history, identity, and culture. In addition to this, since the end of the Pacific War and continuing till date, Okinawa houses an inequitable 70.3 percent of all U.S. bases in Japan. This history has for decades posed significant challenges to Okinawans. Shaped by these arduous experiences, Okinawans have been adamant supporters of peace, and carry with them a strong desire to promote it, build it and share the importance of it.

Field trips not only enhance learning by connecting classroom experiences with the outside world, but also provide valuable practical experience for both students and educators. In light of this, the JICUF funded Okinawa study tour aimed to introduce International Christian University (ICU) students from the course on Peace and Human Rights (PCS 201) to Okinawa, and enhance their awareness of peace-building, diversity, and inclusivity in Japan.

The study tour was organized and conducted by Vindu Mai Chotani (Assistant Professor by Special Appointment, Department of Politics and International Studies, International Christian University) and Yuki Moritani (Research Institute Assistant, Social Science Research Institute, International Christian University), and took place from the 15th to the 17th of March, 2023. Participants included Keitoku Ikegami (Major: “Peace Studies,” “Philosophy and Religion”), Hozumi Matsumoto (“Peace Studies,” “Media, Communications and Culture”), Kalea Grace Ema (“International Relations,” “Politics”), Amili Furukawa (“International Relations”), Mimi Redford (“Peace Studies,” “Philosophy and Religion”), Yohana Miyajima (“International Relations,” “Law”), and John Ueki (“International Relations,” “Law”).

On the agenda were visits to historical sites dedicated to the remembrance of Okinawa’s tragic past, such as the Himeyuri Peace Museum and the Okinawa Peace Memorial Park. Important cultural heritage sites such as Shuri Castle were also studied and toured, and the students also attended a Shisa pottery class in Shuri. Further, ICU students alongside students from the Okinawan Christian University (OCU) attended a lecture hosted at the Okinawa

Christian University. Finally, given the political instability due to the on-going Russian invasion of Ukraine, participants from both ICU and OCU had the opportunity to participate in an exchange meeting held at the ICLC Japanese language school in Oroku, Okinawa where four Ukrainian refugees are currently studying Japanese.

The following report shares and details the observations, experiences, key takeaways and questions raised by the participants during the study tour.



Picture: Participants at Haneda Airport, Tokyo, ready to depart for Naha, Okinawa (15 March 2023)

The Question of History

One key insight learned from this study tour was regarding the nature of history. History tends to be told objectively, but it often can be subjective. This can be said about the battle of Okinawa during the Second World War. A visit to the Himeyuri monument and museum further shed light on this. The Himeyuri Monument was constructed in memory of the young girls and teachers of the Okinawa Women's Normal School and the First Prefectural Girls High School, who were ordered by the Japanese Army to serve as nurses during the war. As a result many of them lost their lives during the Battle of Okinawa.



Picture: The Himeyuri Cenotaph next to the cave where many Himeyuri students died in a gas bomb attack of the U.S. Army during the Battle of Okinawa. (16 March 2023)

Prior to visiting the Himeyuri Memorial Museum, many of the participants, and people in general would have statistical knowledge on those who died during the war (i.e., these many lives were lost during the war). This is mainly because textbooks, albeit important, tend to focus and highlight the broader and overarching aspects of the war. However, the Himeyuri museum provides visitors with the ability to watch videos of the testimony of survivors, as well as read the panels of the stories of those who died during the war. This is not only an important way to remember the atrocities and horrors of war, but survivors' testimonies also enable a deeper understanding of the weight of each person's death – their personality, their family, and their dreams - all can be heard and seen.

War time testimonies such as “OO was a lovely girl with a smile. Everyone liked her because of her bright personality. She died of suicide grenade” will leave many speechless and with a feeling of sorrow and anguish, which cannot be understood and experienced in entirety by reading the statistics or textbooks one learns in school.

Furthermore, a common thought echoed by the survivors in their testimonies was, "I survived" and "I am sorry". These guilt ridden words highlight the guilt they carry for surviving while their classmates and teachers died in the war. It shows how much the war has continued to dominate the minds of survivors. Despite this, the courage of the survivors to speak up about their traumatic experience and share the reality of survivors' guilt, in order to pass down history to the next generation is truly inspiring and impactful for generations to come. Therefore, the visit to the Himeyuri Peace Museum taught us, participants, how the war continues to be a pain in the hearts of survivors even after the war is over. It also shows the importance of creating opportunities for those who have survived the war to heal their emotional scars left by the war.

The second insight is that history can sometimes be arbitrary. That is, many people, boys and girls who were mobilized to the front lines of the Battle of Okinawa - just like the Himeyuri students and the *Zainichi* Koreans that were made to fight by the Japanese army - do not exist in people's memories. This is because there are no archives or no people to share their stories. This results in two types of victims: those whose stories will be passed down in history for a long time and those who will be forgotten even though they are the same teenage children and people who were sacrificed in the Battle of Okinawa.

It can thus be said that history is often based on the selection of those who can share their stories, and also those who are given the opportunity to share them. Therefore, while it is important to learn from history, it is also important to consider what did not "become" history and why. Rather than believing or viewing recorded history as flawless, a part of learning from history means being able to ask how it was recorded and therefore, remembered.

Additionally, participants believe that it is important to view history with a more conciliatory and flexible mindset. Many on-going political disputes arise from different and rigid interpretations of history, and a more conciliatory and flexible approach to various difficult topics and subjects in history could provide the critical space to foster reconciliation.

Who Will Protect Okinawa?

Participants visited the Okinawa Christian University to attend a lecture on the history of Okinawa and its current state, delivered by Professor Shinako Oyakawa, a part-time lecturer at Okinawa University. Originally from Okinawa, Professor Oyakawa has also had first-hand experience growing up amongst the various changes that occurred in Okinawa over time.



Picture: ICU students at the Okinawa Christian University Campus, Nishihara, Okinawa (16 March 2023).

Looking back at their experiences and treatment in war and in the post-war era, to this day a considerable impact and shared sentiment amongst Okinawans is their distrust of and doubt towards the Japanese government and the U.S. military. Okinawans feel that they have no one on their side.

Testimonies from the survivors at the Himeyuri Peace Museum, alongside the lecture brought further clarity regarding the skepticism that Okinawans continue to harbor due to their experience with the Japanese military during the war. The children that were conscripted by the Japanese military had to witness atrocities and endure heinous conditions. These children were used to transport items, assist in medical procedures, and care for injured soldiers whilst being on the battlefield where they were at risk of being bombed or hit by bullets. In addition this, the information conveyed to them by the Japanese military was that the U.S. is the enemy, and if captured or if they are to surrender to the U.S., they would be tortured, raped or killed.

The survivors of the war expressed the guilt that they feel to this day knowing that if they had known then, that the U.S. military wouldn't torture and kill children and women, many of their friends would have not taken their own lives by suicide to avoid capture and may still be alive.

Regarding the U.S. military, on one hand the fact that 70.3 percent of all U.S. military bases in Japan are still located in Okinawa, exhibits the lack of priority and political will from the Japanese government to alleviate Okinawans from this heavy and unfair base burden. On the other hand, for decades, bearing this heavy base burden has meant that Okinawans have also experienced many negative social and environmental impacts caused by the U.S. bases. There have been 826 U.S. military aircraft-related accidents, 6,068 criminal offenses by U.S. military personnel, and evidence of contaminated water due to chemical pollution by the U.S. military. The rape of the 12 year old girl by three U.S. servicemen in 1995 is both shocking and shameful.

Compounding these issues is the lack of political will and responsibility by both the Japanese central government and the U.S. government Okinawans have for decades been advocating for a revision of the text of the Japan - U.S. Status of the Forces Agreement (SOFA), which is yet to be done. This revision could possibly give Japan greater jurisdiction over incidents such as those mentioned above and thus enable Okianwans to feel safer. This is a starkly different experience when one compares it to the SOFA that the U.S. has negotiated and signed with other countries hosting U.S. military bases in Europe.

What Should be Preserved?

Shuri Castle

Visiting Shuri Castle and exploring Shuri, one is struck immediately by the stark contrast of the lush greenery of the castle grounds, against the castle's red roof tiles and high walls. Shuri Castle is both a symbol of Okinawa and the ancient Ryukyu kingdom and a source of pride and identity for the people of Okinawa. It is a cultural treasure of Japan, and a UNESCO Heritage site. In October 2019 parts of the castle were burnt down, and as reconstruction of the castle is currently underway, it prompts Okinawans to think about their cultural heritage, what that means to them today, and why protecting it is important.

There are two perceived problems in the reconstruction project: First, the high financial cost (the main hall alone is expected to cost 12 billion yen to rebuild), and second, the troubled history of Shuri Castle, which was used by the Imperial Japanese forces as a base during the Battle of Okinawa. Some might argue that the money is better spent on policies with more tangible benefits, such as welfare or education spending. Some might also see the castle as a legacy of Imperial Japan and question the morality of preserving such a heritage.

However, on the guided tour, participants learned and understood the long history of Shuri Castle before it became a military base in the war. Above all, the castle represents Okinawa's rich history and past as the former Ryukyu Kingdom. This past contributes to a

uniquely Okinawan identity that many inhabitants continue to identify with today. To preserve the castle, then, is to preserve the identity of the people of Okinawa.

Economically speaking, Shuri Castle is not without its tangible benefits either. It significantly contributes to Okinawa's tourism industry, with about 2.81 million visitors in 2018. While it may not yield immediate returns, in the long term, the money spent on reconstruction will ensure that Okinawa's tourism industry continues to thrive.



Left: the building in which the North Hall is being reconstructed (15 March 2023)

Right: the panels explaining the history of the Shuri Castle (15 March 2023)



Picture: At the Bezaitendo, Kankanchi Pond, Shuri Castle (15 March 2023)

Languages

The OCU lecture delivered by Professor Oyakawa delved into the issue of language preservation. Participants learned that an important and interesting fact for all of us to keep in mind is that, about 90 percent of the world's languages are in danger of disappearing; Okinawa too is faced with this issue. Discussing the languages of Okinawa, Professor Oyakawa highlighted that while it is not technically feasible to preserve all disappearing languages, it is inevitable to prioritize which language in Okinawa to preserve. On this point, the question of what criteria and to what extent languages should be preserved was debated, and the answer is that it is not the same throughout the world, but depends on each situation.

In Okinawa, there are customs that place great importance on ethnic groups and clans, which are one of the major identities of the people. Different languages have been used by each group, mostly differing from island to island in the archipelago. Thus it can be said that the preservation of the language is directly linked to the preservation of the people. As this is something that defines not only the present, but is something that is carried over to future generations, preserving a language can be highly associated with people's identity. Therefore when choosing which language in Okinawa should be preserved, the perspective of which language is deeply related to current and future generations, is important to consider.



Picture: Both ICU and OCU students attending a lecture on Okinawa's history, culture and the issue of the U.S. bases at the Okinawa Christian University. (16 March 2023)

Who Will Remember?

The tour was not only a history lesson, but enabled a better understanding regarding some of the problems that Japan is facing today. Many of Okinawa's on-going struggles and issues are

a clear reflection of the Japanese government's stance, which often claims and perpetuates the notion that Japan is a single-ethnic nation, or that Japan is a homogenous society. The inability, till date, of the Japanese Government to recognize the inhabitants of Okinawa as indigenous, even after a 2019 Act legally recognized the Ainu as the indigenous people, demonstrates this continued lack of political will. Due to these rigid aforementioned assumptions from the Central Government, Okinawans are often discriminated against and feel “ruled out of existence”.

Related to this, the visit to the Peace Memorial Park, also enabled a deeper understanding of the experiences of the people from the Korean Peninsula or *Zainichi* Koreans who were drafted into the war as part of the Japanese military's effort to win the war. While the number of Koreans killed in the Battle of Okinawa is believed to be substantial, the exact number remains unknown. Further, in April 2016, the Japanese government announced plans to actively collect the remains of Japanese citizens who died during the Pacific War through enactment of the Act on Promotion of Collection of Remains of War Dead. However, its scope was limited specifically to the remains of Japanese citizens who died in the war. This leaves the Korean families of those *Zainichi* Koreans who were deceased during the war continually unable to identify them and collect their remains.

Thus, despite critical differences between the two groups, in recent years Okinawans have often identified with the plight of *Zainichi* Koreans and vice versa. The Peace Memorial Park also includes stone markers inscribed with the names --including Koreans--who died in the Battle of Okinawa. In the parks compound is also a

These are important wounds to heal and on-going issues that need to be addressed.



Picture: The monument is made of 117 walls that spread out in concentric arcs, and has names of those who lost their lives in the war. There is no nationality distinction in the names; Japanese, Taiwanese, Britons and Americans are listed together.



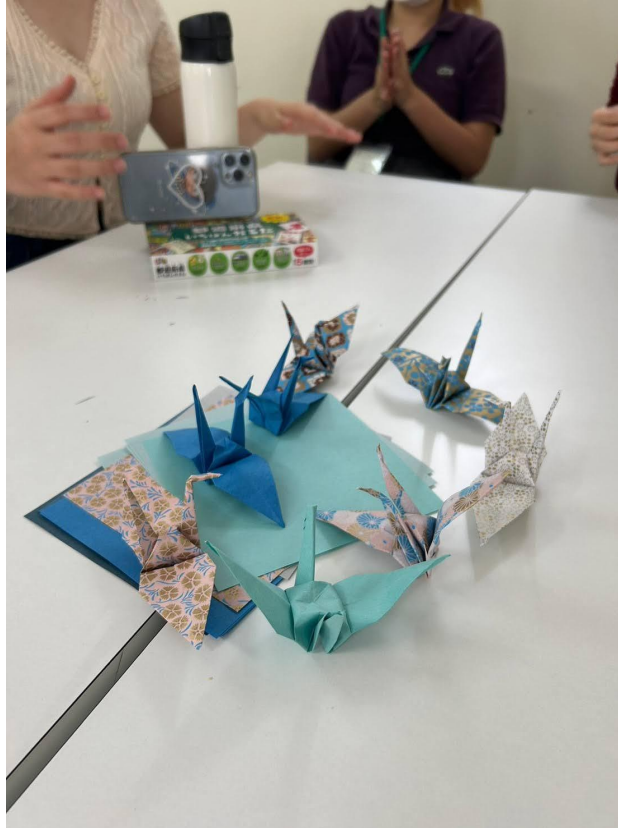
Picture: The National War Dead Peace Mausoleum, which was built to honor the souls of the victims of the war.

Exchange with Ukrainian Students at ICLC Japanese Language School

Both the ICU and the OCU students had the opportunity to visit the ICLC Japanese Language School in Oroku, Okinawa and interact with the Ukrainian refugees who are currently studying Japanese at the school. The initial ice-breaking session included doing origami together - the ICU and OCU students demonstrated how to make Japanese origami cranes - an important symbol for peace. They also played a Japanese language card game together - “*Karuta*”; a very lively game and session that had all the participants laughing, competing and enjoying their time together.

Given the current political climate in Ukraine, participants then moved onto a discussion session. The Ukrainian students shared their thoughts on their new life in Okinawa - they mentioned the warm welcoming nature of Okinawa. One student shared an experience where many of the neighbors would greet them and constantly ask if they had enough food to eat, as well as bringing home-cooked meals to their door. These acts of kindness and inviting people into their community are the heart of Okinawan people. There is an Okinawan proverb that best describes this - “*Ichariba Choode*”, which translates to mean, although we have met only once, we are family or friends forever.

The Ukrainian students also shared some of the difficult experiences adjusting to a new life. The difficulty in accessing a credit card was a reality they faced. Given the cash free based financial setting in Japan these days, having a credit card would be important for them as they make a brighter future.



Picture: Origami cranes made by the students (16 March 2023)



Picture: ICU, OCU, and the Ukrainian students with Origami peace cranes (16 March 2023)

Cultural Activity -

Shisa Pottery

On the final day, students attended a pottery class to make Shisa's - Okinawa's guardian lions. Local materials, such as red clay from the island of Okinawa were used in this process. Shisa's are usually found in pairs, one with an open mouth and one with a closed mouth (male and female). While folklore varies, the closed-mouth female is supposed to keep in the good spirits, and the open-mouthed male is supposed to scare evil spirits away. Once baked, the Shisa's made by the students were posted to Tokyo for the students to keep.



Picture: Shisa making Pottery class (17 March 2023)

Conclusion

Funakoshi Hisao is an Okinawan man who owns a local restaurant in a hidden and quaint corner of Shuri. Speaking with him during dinner, participants discovered that he had experiences in traveling around the world. Being able to communicate in English, Hisao-san

shared his experiences of how during his travels he would tell “The Story of the Little Island in the South”. He pointed out how minorities don’t have to conform to the majority. Often they get oppressed, when instead they should be valued and appreciated.

Okinawa is now seeing the fourth generation after the war, and as time and generations pass, the memory of the war, what had happened and their own identity as Okinawans is slowly starting to fade. This study tour enabled a deeper and better understanding of Okinawa, Okinawans and their continued importance. This report was written by the participants of the study tour who aimed to share their experiences and learnings. Though sources to study Okinawa’s history, culture and current issues are available through the world wide web, books, articles and the news, the trip to Okinawa was an opportunity to deepen one's understanding. Listening to personal stories and perspectives from the locals, feeling the emotions of Okinawan residents, as well as building connections with Okinawans were a special opportunity.

We hope you enjoyed reading about our experience!