

The Battle of Tropical Ryukyu Kingdom Tourist Okinawa

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If there were ever a concrete case of wartime loss transmuting into postwar gain, the pulverization of the Shurijō (Shuri Castle) during the Battle of Okinawa and its subsequent rebuilding as Okinawa prefecture's premier heritage tourism site would be it. After its opening in 1992, which featured the restored Seiden (Main Hall), Shurijo Castle Park¹ quickly became Okinawa's most visited tourist site, even before the restoration was completed. It drew over two million visitors in 2000, the year Shurijō, along with eight other historical sites, were registered as "Gusuku [Castle] Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu" in UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list.² What UNESCO did not recognize and what goes unnoticed by most tourists is the extent to which the Shurijō owes its present material form and symbolic function to the Battle of Okinawa.

Recognizing this connection is among my concerns in this essay. I also want to begin an analysis of the construction of "Ryukyu Kingdom" as Okinawan heritage from the 1960s to the present, a period during which Okinawa has become increasingly tropicalized for mainland Japanese tourists. Viewed in this way, the history of postwar Okinawa tourism presents a fascinating case of the "tourist gaze" confronting unexpected local realities and reacting by envisioning a place that was largely unimagined by the local population.³ This Japanese vision has since shaped the commodification of the islands for tourist consumption, raising questions of autonomy and authenticity in the production of "heritage" and physical environment in Okinawa today. By the time of Shurijo Castle Park's opening, twenty years after Okinawa's reversion (1972) to Japanese rule following U.S. occupation since 1945, a kind of "reversion to Ryukyu" had taken place, offering a sense of cultural and historical autonomy while at the same time catering to the gaze from the North by invoking an exotic, tropicalized South located conveniently within Japanese political and linguistic boundaries. In other words, local Okinawan cultural and historical identification with an independent premodern Ryukyu Kingdom—often with political overtones—co-exists with an Okinawa wishfully cast as "Japan's Hawaii" for local economic development that has increasingly been tied to tourism within the prefecture. And all of this has been taking place in the long historical shadow of the bloodiest conflict of the Pacific War. With these issues in mind, I would like to engage the postwar creation of "Tourist Okinawa" as an encounter among representations of the war, the Ryukyu Kingdom, and the tropics.

First of all, the idea that Okinawa had anything marketable for tourism took a long time to catch on among Okinawans after the war. The Battle of Okinawa had left the southern half of main island stripped of greenery, bereft of cultural assets (including twenty-four National Treasures, among which Shurijō edifices figured prominently) littered with bones

History and Folklore Studies in Japan (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2006).

and unexploded ordnance, and populated by a foreign military that occupied prime real estate and rebuilt the island's infrastructure according to its own strategic needs. The utter devastation of Shurijō was assured by the Japanese 32nd Army locating its headquarters in

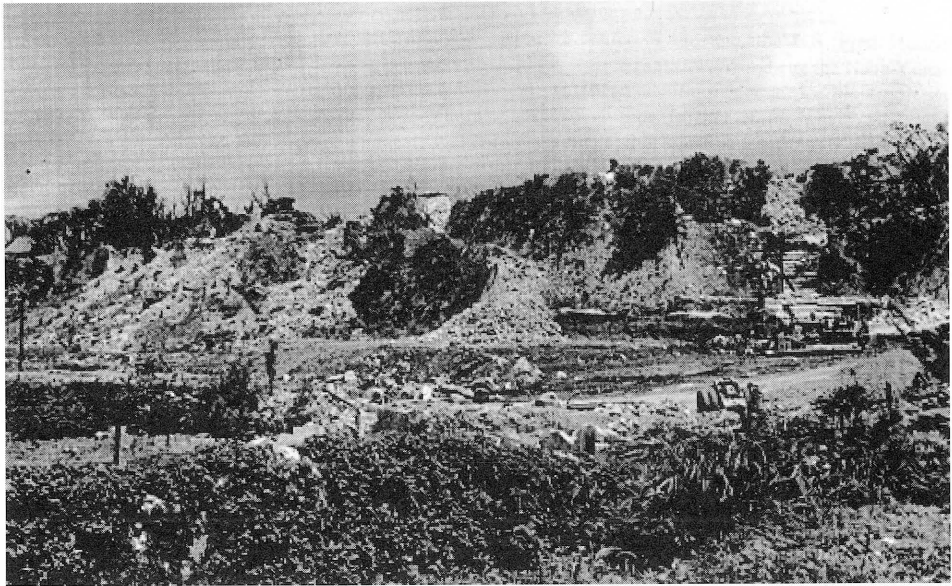


Fig. 1. The outer walls of Shurijō after its pulverization, May 1945.

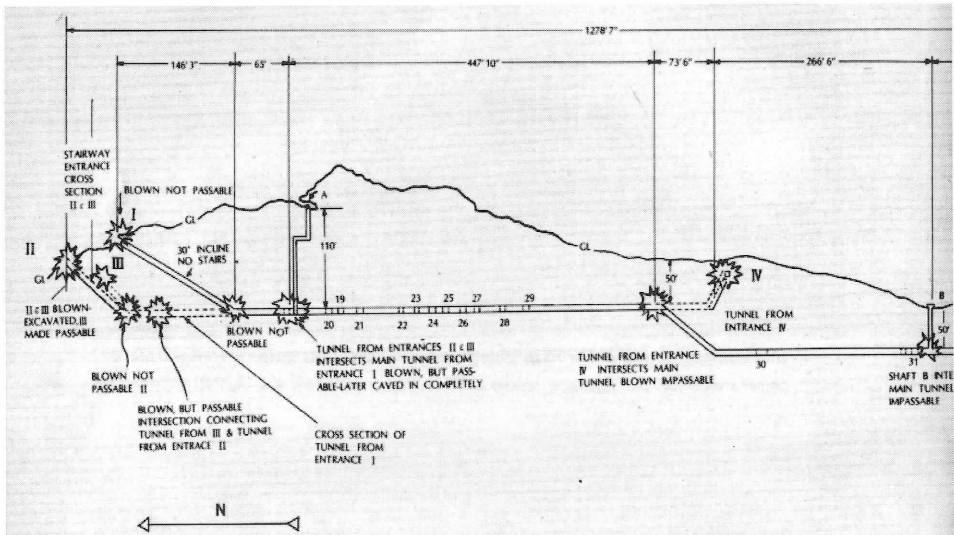


Fig. 2. Japanese 32nd Army Headquarters tunnel system under Shurijō grounds.

a system of tunnels under the castle grounds (figures 1 and 2). Assuming Shurijō was lost forever, the Okinawa Tourism Development Corporation sought in 1969 to capitalize on the remains of the underground headquarters. It surveyed the site and drew up ambitious plans

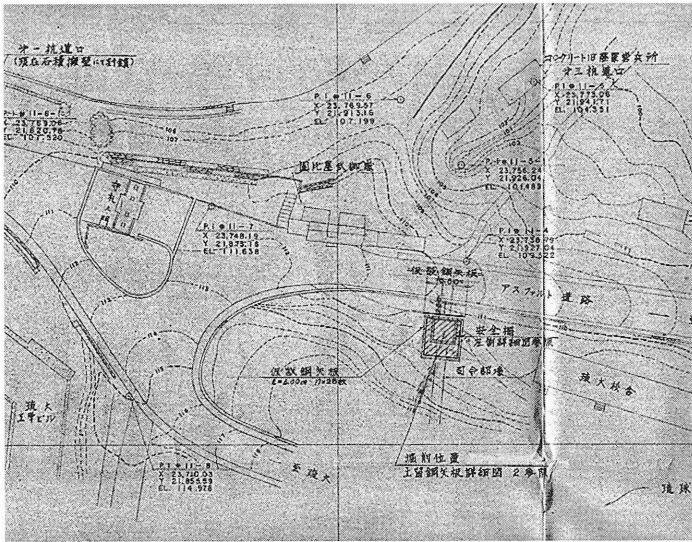


Fig. 3. Blueprint for plan to turn the Japanese Army HQ into a tourist site, 1969.

to turn it into a tourist attraction, but concluded that the damage to the entrances inflicted by the retreating Japanese army rendered such a plan impractical (figure 3).

Under these conditions of devastation it is not surprising that during the 1950s and 1960s visitors to Okinawa as well as members of the Okinawa Tourism Association (Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai, OTA, founded in 1954) complained frequently about the lack of “tourism consciousness” among the local population. This referred to two things: first, not recognizing the potential value of Okinawa as tourist destination; and second, once tourists arrived, not knowing how to meet their expectations. Visitor surveys and consultant reports typically identified an “utter lack of service consciousness” (*sābisu ishiki mo nai*), by which was meant the inability of Okinawan hosts to know what guests required without being asked for it. In other cases, poor service meant that what was asked for (hot bath water, a meal, a taxi, a bus) came late or was of poor quality, which reinforced stereotypes of backward and lazy Okinawans operating on “Okinawa time.” A 1962 survey of mainland student visitors, for example, listed “noticed the dull-wittedness [*noromasa*] of the Okinawan people” as one of the “things bad about Okinawa.” In contrast, “the exceeding kindness of all Okinawans” was noted among the best things about the place.⁴ Mainland visitors also routinely expressed revulsion at Okinawan food (calling it “*mazui*,” disgusting) while insisting that local cuisine should be featured, albeit in a form made more palatable to mainland tastes, perhaps by Okinawan chefs visiting Nagasaki to see how that “southern” place adapted its cuisine to Tokyo tongues.⁵ Fashioning a cuisine of “local flavor” palatable to Japanese tourist was a serious issue, still present today.

Having *sābisu ishiki* or not, with Shurei-no-mon (Gate of Courtesy) Okinawa had a ready-made sign for its nascent hospitality industry, one that purportedly had roots in the Ryukyu Kingdom (left center of figure 3; figure 4). The gate’s identification with Okinawa as “The Land of Courtesy” (“Shurei no kuni,” which is the inscription on the gate, originally given by the Chinese emperor to the Ryukyuan king in recognition of loyal tributary relations)

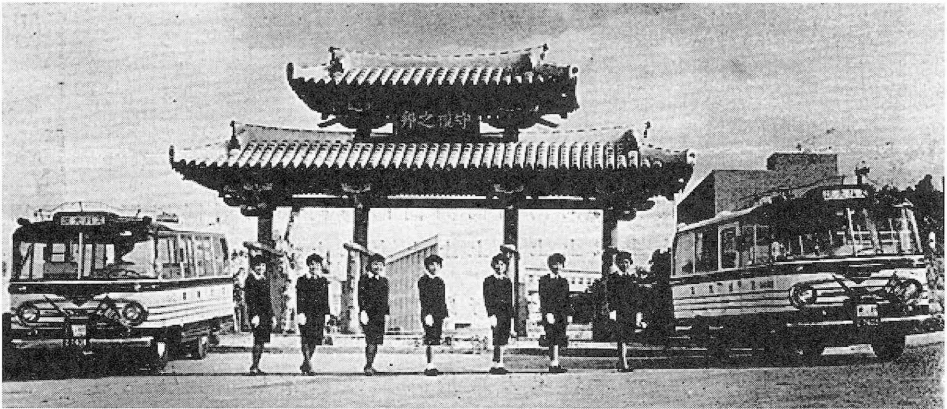


Fig. 4. Bus guides at Shurei-no-mon, from the cover of the January 1961 issue of *Kankô Okinawa* (Tourist Okinawa), a publication of the Okinawa Tourism Association..

stretches back to the sixteenth century when it welcomed foreign ambassadors, particularly official emissaries from China, on their way up to Shurijō, the central seat of government. Refurbished and designated a Japanese National Treasure in 1933, Shurei-no-mon was completely destroyed in the Battle of Okinawa twelve years later. In 1958 it became the first major icon of the old castle complex to be rebuilt and quickly reassumed its status as symbol of Okinawa and the hospitality of its people toward foreign visitors, namely increasing numbers of Japanese tourists. Ryukyu postal stamps, issued by the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI) during U.S. occupation on Okinawa, attest to Shurei-no-mon's place as Okinawa/Ryukyu icon (figure 5). Even the impressively rebuilt Seiden has not completely displaced Shurei-no-mon as Okinawa's cultural heritage icon; it was, after all, selected over the Seiden for the two-thousand yen notes printed to commemorate the July 2000 G-8 Summit held in Okinawa (figure 6).

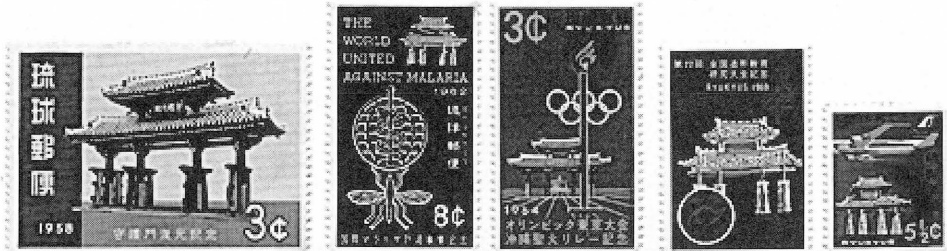


Fig. 5. Ryukyu Postal Service stamps featuring Shurei-no-mon, 1958-1969. From left: commemoration of the gate's restoration, anti-malaria campaign, Olympic torch relay through the Ryukyus, 22nd Annual National Modeling Education and Research Conference, airmail.

The recognition that a growing number of middle-class Japanese were interested in travel to Okinawa prompted the OTA in 1962 to commission Senge Tetsuma, the Executive Managing Director of the Japanese National Park Association, to examine Okinawa's current state and future prospects. His fifty-page report, "Okinawa kankō shindansho" (A Diagnosis of Okinawa Tourism, 1962) covered natural and built environments, cultural assets, battlefields

Fig. 6. Two-thousand yen note issued to commemorate Okinawa's hosting of the July 2000 G-8 Summit. Shurei-no-mon's reputation as symbol of Okinawa and as welcoming gate for foreign dignitaries made the gate a natural choice.



and memorials, and “customs” such as women dressed in traditional Ryukyuan elite attire (not enough of them except at ports of entry, in Senge’s opinion), Ryukyu dance (seen better at the Ryukyu Dance Preservation Clubs in Tokyo), village tug-of-wars, *Eisā*,⁶ the dragon-boat races of Itoman, karate, and bullfights. Among cultural assets Senge singled out Shurijō, the wartime destruction of which represented for him an irrecoverable loss, hardly replaceable by a facsimile of Shurei-no-mon:

One would naturally expect that Shurijō, as a historical site, would be an important sightseeing spot, but the entire edifice and the surrounding forests were destroyed in the flames of the recent Great War and in vain the only thing you see are stone hedges and withered broken trees. This is truly sad. Moreover, at the center of the ruins the University of the Ryukyus was built in the modern concrete block architecture prevalent throughout the main island, and all traces of the castle have vanished. Shurei-no-mon, which today adorns postcards and posters as a symbol of Okinawa, used to be in the area between middle gate and front gate of the castle approach, but it too was burned down. The present one is a restoration. The stone gate of Sonohyan Utaki [a site of worship for Ryukyu royalty] was also restored. These two things are uniquely Okinawan structures and because Shurei-no-mon is so completely different from the type of gate seen in the mainland it somehow draws our interest as something expressing Okinawanness.⁷

The January 1961 cover photo of *Kankō Okinawa* depicting bus guides in front of Shurei-no-mon shows the gate much like Senge viewed it in February 1962 (figure 4). Although he considered the University of the Ryukyus (seen in the distance under the gate in figure 4) an eyesore, Senge praised the bus guides that the OTA and the four major bus companies had recruited and trained since 1955. Full of plans for developing tourism, the OTA was perpetually strapped for cash and lacking in institutional support from the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI), the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyus (USCAR) and the Government of Japan (GOJ). Annual records of their meetings from the 1950s indicate that they busied themselves most with designing sightseeing courses, producing guides, putting up signs, conducting surveys of tourist sites and facilities, holding exhibitions of local goods, hosting important mainland visitors, trying to convince the GRI to establish a Tourism Bureau (which it finally did in 1961), and explaining to the local population what tourism was. Among these public relations efforts were the seven “bus guide competitions” that the OTA sponsored annually from 1956 to 1963 to raise tourism consciousness. For these contests the guides, single women in their late teens or early twenties, selected part



Fig. 7. Twenty-two year-old Toma Shizuko of Showa Bus, winner of the 1960 Okinawa Bus Guide Contest. She took the audience from airport to inn in her narration.

band playing folk tunes: “Without doubt, what was operating behind my feeling of embarrassment was a psychology that held in contempt an amateurish welcoming scene that smacked of provincialism.”⁸ Toguchi’s embarrassment was symptomatic of the gap between what locals experienced unremarkably as home and what outsiders envisioned desirously as an escape away from home, even if they were spending some of that escape time paying respects at war memorials. Closing this gap preoccupied Okinawa tourism promotion from the 1950s on. Okinawans from the tourist mecca of Hawaii who visited their homeland in April 1954 provided the first external critique of Okinawa’s tourism: at the battle sites, you should plant hibiscus like in Hawaii; and you should build restrooms.⁹ As mainland visitors to Okinawa gradually increased during the 1960s (14,829 in 1960; 133,453 in 1970), they added to these critiques and implicitly defined the Okinawa that they expected to experience along with the battle site tours.

An authoritative view of what Okinawa should be for tourists came in 1962 when experts from Japan, like Senge Tetsuma, assessed tourism in Okinawa, focusing specifically

of a sightseeing course to narrate on stage in front of a public audience and a panel of judges (figure 7). The winner went to the national competitions in Tokyo as Okinawa’s representative. Becoming minor celebrities in what was a new and glamorous job opportunity for Okinawan women, bus guides, noted for their poignant narrations of the war history that shaped the popular battle site tours, stand out as one of the few features of early Okinawa tourism that Japanese visitors uniformly praised. Indeed, because the origins of Okinawa tourism rested quite literally on war ruins visited by mainland Japanese (since the April 1954 arrival of members of the Hokkaido Bereaved Family Association), bus guides were in the spotlight (figure 8).

But attractive bus guides alone would not sustain tourism in Okinawa. In a 1979 address on tourism consciousness, Toguchi Masao recalled his embarrassment watching bus guides greeting visitors at the airport in the 1950s with shell leis and a brass

Fig. 8. Showa Bus ad for Southern Battle Site Tour, Kankō Okinawa, February 1956.

on the main island's "image problem." Although Senge also recognized the lost cultural assets of the Ryukyu Kingdom and insisted that a war memorial museum be built to explicate the Battle of Okinawa, the heart of his recommendation was simple: make Okinawa look and feel more tropical, or, in his words, cultivate and enhance its "southern island feel" (*nangokuteki na kibun*). This repeated phrase marks Senge's geographical and, perhaps, temporal viewpoint as it echoes a nostalgic longing for colonial Taiwan or even the South Pacific of the wartime empire. In fact, later afforestation and landscaping campaigns in Okinawa would rely significantly on Taiwan as a source of models, plant species, botanists, and businessmen to achieve Okinawa's tropical effect.

Senge details the kind of (mostly non-native) plants, such as palms and exotic flowers, that should be planted alongside the native tropicalesque *sotetsu* and *adan*, which for him conjure up that "southern island feeling" and "a brightness and warmth you can't taste on the mainland" when viewed against the backdrop of a vivid blue-green ocean.¹⁰ The cover of the first handmade tour guide pamphlet that the OTA published in 1954 approximates this sea and sotetsu scene (figure 9). *Sotetsu* (a cycad, sometimes mistaken for a type of palm) were probably the



Fig. 9. Cover of the Okinawa Tourism Association's first guide book, 1954.



Fig. 10. Sotetsu (cycad).

most familiar flora image of pre-tropicalized Okinawa (figure 10). Even the Ryukyu Postal Service recognized the plant's iconic status when it featured *sotetsu* among the first set of stamps issued when regular postage resumed in American-occupied Okinawa (figure 11).¹¹ Today it is practically unimaginable that *sotetsu* would be featured as representative of "Beautiful Okinawa." The 1998 postal issue of that name showcased pineapples and

Fig. 11. The first official postwar Ryukyu postage stamp, featuring native *sotetsu*, July 1948.





Fig. 12. “Beautiful Okinawa” series of stamps featuring tropical summer fruits, 1998. The deigo, Okinawa’s prefectural flower, is printed only in the margins.

mangoes, non-native tropical fruits cultivated as cash crops (figure 12). When selecting an official tree and flower in 1966 (which became the prefectural tree and the flower in 1972), the GRI passed over the sotetsu for the Ryukyu pine and *deigo* (Indian coral bean, seen in the margins of the “Beautiful Okinawa” issue). Subsequently, while the deigo is still the official prefectural flower, the more overtly “tropical” hibiscus, with all its Hawaiian associations, has become the ubiquitous unofficial symbol of Okinawa. Even the banner of the current Okinawa Prefectural Home Page is flanked by the Shurijō Seiden and a hibiscus, not the official prefectural flower (figure 13).

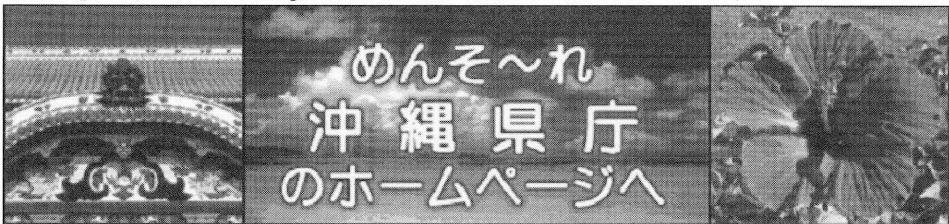


Fig. 13. The banner of the Okinawa Prefecture Home Page, December 2001.

Japanese tourism officials with whom OTA representatives met in May 1962 were blunt about encouraging this flora face lift: “the floral scenery is horrible; cultivate southern island-like plants and bring forth Japan’s Hawaii”; “Ginza willows are planted on Kokusai-dōri [Naha’s central shopping strip]; it would be better to plant flora peculiar to southern islands.”¹² The latter comment is a telling example of how Okinawa’s aspirations of parity with the mainland could clash with mainland desires for an exotic yet accessible tourist destination. Like Senge’s chagrin at seeing modern concrete buildings across the island, the desire of outsiders to keep Okinawa from developing like the mainland was at odds with Okinawans for whom the Reversion movement meant the chance for equal economic development as

well as equal rights and protection under the Japanese Constitution, both of which were lacking under U.S. occupation.

Senge also urged the development of swimming beaches and envisioned seaside resort zones complete with hotels, restaurants, shopping and entertainments: “To make Okinawa Japan’s Hawaii and attract droves of tourists, it seems best to think along these larger lines. . . . It’s a pity that the seaside scenery that Okinawa is blessed with is completely neglected and that hotels and inns are concentrated within Naha city limits.” And perhaps even tours of U.S. bases might be arranged, he opined, so that after beachcombing tourists might take in the interesting nightlife of the base town Koza, “as long as it can be made safe.”¹³ These were items that had scarcely entered the “tourism consciousness” of the locals.

In short, these outside observers were dismayed upon seeing a place that didn’t match their image of an exotic southern island and insisted that the reality be “fixed.” In Senge’s summation, mainlanders imagined Okinawa as: 1) islands south of Kyūshū having beautiful southern island scenery; 2) having tropical and subtropical weather with warm winters; 3) green islands of abundant tropical and subtropical vegetation; 4) having a unique, distinctive culture; 5) a place where Battle of Okinawa sites can be seen; and 6) the location of U.S. strategic bases.¹⁴ His recommendation to the OTA was to groom Okinawa to deliver on these images related to nature, culture, and war history. The product would be some kind of amalgam of southern tropics, Ryukyu Kingdom heritage, and Battle of Okinawa memorial, hosted ideally by young women in native costume. Japan’s Okinawa also had to remain sufficiently exotic, but familiar and inexpensive enough, to have any appeal to Japanese tourists. “Taste foreign travel while speaking Japanese!” is the way a GRI Tourism Bureau official put it in his caption to a scene described in the 1962 scenario of the GRI’s first promotional film which depicted Japanese shopping (with U.S. dollars) beside Americans in a department store.¹⁵ The number of Japanese desiring to go to Okinawa in the 1960s, one commentator surmised, was dropping relative to those wanting to go to Hawaii and Hong Kong precisely because Okinawa had no “*ekizochizumu no mūdo*” (exotic mood). And, the beer there was too expensive as well, even though Okinawa was gaining a reputation for “shopping tourism” because of significantly lower tariffs on foreign goods while under U.S. occupation and on a dollar economy since 1958.¹⁶ Okinawan tourism officials took this advice to heart—the first prize in the OTA’s 1963 “catch phrase” contest was “For a Southern Island Mood—Okinawa” (*Nangoku mūdo wa, Okinawa*).¹⁷

In the wake of the 1975 Marine Expo, which squarely put Okinawa on the mainland Japanese tourist map with over 1.5 million visitors to Okinawa, earlier advice in image-building and consciousness-raising became the commonplace foundations of the prefectural government’s tourism development policy. As the 1979 *Okinawa Prefectural Plan for Tourism Landscaping and Afforestation* announced: “We should emphasize that the great appeal of tourism, symbolized by ‘Tropical Okinawa,’ is the natural scenery of our nation’s only subtropical zone, but the state of our prefecture’s flora does not sufficiently merit it the moniker ‘Southern Islands Wrapped in Flowers and Greenery.’ In response to this condition, the present plan aims to enhance the image [*imēji appu*] of ‘Tropical Okinawa’ through planned landscaping and afforestation. . . .” And just to make sure that “tropical” in this

context is sufficiently exotic-sounding and isn't confused with the technical term "*nettai*," the Japanese English "*toropikaru*" (glossed as "*nettai teki*"; that is, "tropical-like") is used in katakana, the script commonly used for foreign words.¹⁸ The plan specifically targeted the port and the airport areas, Kokusai-dōri, the main arteries of Route 58 and 332 in Naha, the beaches and tourist areas in Onna Village, and other tourist-exposed areas for "tropical-type" plants.¹⁹ The beach resort boom that began in the 1980s, with its emphasis on island leisure and marine sports, reinforced this push to cast Okinawa in a more tropical light (figure 14).



Fig. 14. Cover of 1984 Okinawa tour guide booklet published by the Okinawa Tourism Federation: "Okinawa: The south is resort paradise." (Note the federation's logo in the lower left: Shurei-no-mon floating on waves).

At the same time that Okinawa's tropical transformation was in full swing, plans were being laid for the rebuilding of Shurijō that Senge Tetsuma assumed impossible twenty years earlier. Popular interest in this project fueled growing expressions of Ryukyu identity in cultural and political spheres during the 1980s so that by the early 1990s "Tropical Okinawa" was being fully grafted onto overt markers of "Ryukyu Okinawa," both of which still existed alongside reminders of war. Perhaps no better image of this grafting is the look of present-day Shurei-nomon, which stands a stone's throw away from the ruins of unmarked bunkers that protected one of the entrances to the Japanese Army underground headquarters. The only thing it needed to fit within the prefecture's "Tropical Okinawa" beautification plans was a stand of palm trees that had no roots in the Ryukyus (figure 15).

The physical transformation of the Shurijō site from 1945 to the present is remarkable (figures 1 and 19). But, the castle's rebuilding and its present look were by no means inevitable. Despite widespread desire to overcome the war by restoring this icon of Ryukyu Kingdom identity—"Okinawa's postwar will not end until Shurijō is restored" was a popular slogan during the restoration campaign—the project faced numerous obstacles.²⁰ First, the American-built University of the Ryukyus occupied the site since 1950, as the stamp issued to commemorate its founding made clear (figure 16).



Fig. 15. Tropicalized Shurei-no-mon, July 2001.

It had to be relocated, which it was in 1982. Second, the Finance Ministry argued that because all tangible assets of Shurijō had been destroyed in the war the project could not be properly called a restoration (*fukugen*) to be funded under the tangible cultural assets provisions. The Finance Ministry had a point. This was not going to be the restoration of damaged edifices as they had existed before the war (figure 17). Rather, it would be bigger and better and based on what Shurijō looked like just after its last complete rebuilding in 1715.²¹ Ironically, if not for its pulverization in the Battle of Okinawa, such a grandiose rebuilding would not have likely happened. In addition, the rebuilding was planned since 1972 to commemorate Reversion, thus tying it to U.S. postwar occupation.



Fig. 16. Stamp commemorating the building of the University of the Ryukyus on the former site of Shurijō. Despite the association suggested here, the University's Main Hall was no modern architectural equivalent to Shurijō's Main Hall.

Local historians objected to the plans on the grounds that the money necessary to build what would amount to an “imitation” or “replica” would be better spent on actual historical edifices and cultural assets in dire need of repair and preservation.²² Shuri area residents feared the ill-effects of increased traffic in the area. While these obstacles still persisted, the Seiden *was* restored—in ice, at the 1984 Sapporo Snow Festival (figure 18). After heavy lobbying and a very public promotional campaign, the Shurijō Restoration Realization Association (Shurijō

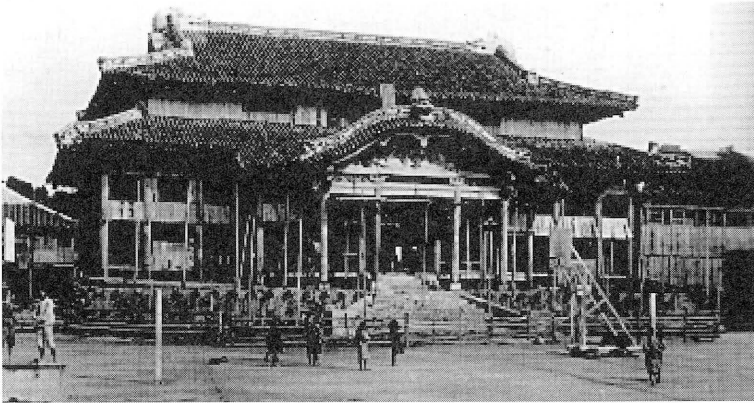


Fig. 17. The Seiden undergoing repairs in 1931 after its designation as a National Treasure in 1925.



Fig. 18. The Seiden “restored” in ice at the 1984 Sapporo Yuki Matsuri. Shurei-no-mon had been similarly built in ice at the 1978 Snow Festival.

Fukugen Kisei Kai), with help from the Prime Minister’s Office, ultimately shepherded the reconstruction of the central buildings and gates, most notably the Seiden (figures 19 and 20). Complementing Shurijo Castle Park’s opening in 1992 was the studio stage park in Yomitan Village for the filming of the NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) television saga “Ryūkyū no Kaze” [Winds of Ryukyu], which aired for six months in 1993. The studio park featured a reconstruction of Naha Port, the Chinese emissary quarters, and the townscape around Shurijō around the time of the Satsuma Invasion of 1609. The Seiden’s completion



Fig. 19. The restored Seiden, where the Ryukyu kings presided.

segued with intense beach resort-building, widespread tropical landscaping in tourist zones, rising mainland interest in Uchinā (Okinawa) pop music and all things Ryukyuan, and NHK’s “Ryūkyū no Kaze.” All Nippon Airlines’ Okinawa tourism campaign at the time seized upon all of this in one compact image and two words: “Ryukyu blossoming” (*Ryukyu kaika*, figure 21). Appearing on the inside front cover of an NHK-published guide to the Okinawan history and culture behind “Ryūkyū no Kaze,” ANA’s ad was tied directly with the newly opened Shurijo Castle Park and NHK’s historical drama without directly showing either.²³ Instead, sand, sea, and sky—the *real* reasons to go to Okinawa—form the backdrop for Rinken Band, the colorful icons of Uchinā pop whose members, posing seriously in flamboyant Ryukyuesque/Eisā costumes, are clearly not suited up to swim and sunbathe. Shurijō and “Ryūkyū no Kaze” are implicit in the dragon logos used in NHK’s promotions and in the ad copy that appeared below the image, which offered this invitation to (re)discover the Ryukyu Kingdom within Tropical Okinawa:

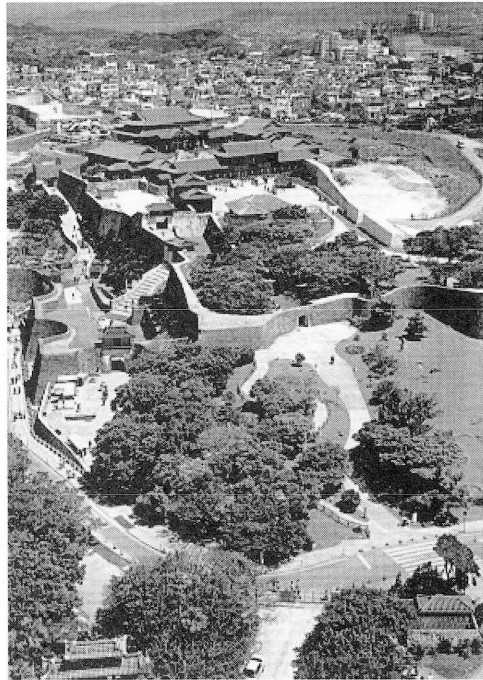


Fig. 20. The rebuilt Shurijō. The roof of Shurei-no-mon is visible in the lower left.



Fig. 21. “ANA’s Okinawa” as Ryukyu Kingdom Beach Party.

A Ryukyu Dynasty that boasted prosperity from the 14th to 16th century.

A unique culture nurtured by relations with various Asian countries.

The most Okinawan heart of Okinawa—Ryukyu.

This winter’s theme is about rediscovering the splendor of the Ryukyu Spirit that has continuously flowed and is deeply rooted throughout Okinawa even today.

It’s the Ryukyu Spirit itself that allows you to sense a new Okinawa because it reveals to you the Okinawa you didn’t know until now.

Predictably, the ANA ad on the inside back cover of the same publication highlights seven ANA resort hotels in Okinawa under a huge hibiscus (figure 22). As a catch phrase, “Ryukyu blossoming” was brilliant for marketing Okinawa tourism at this time. It not only suggested Okinawa’s now-famous faux-tropical flowers; it tapped into the Ryukyu Kingdom boom that peaked with the opening of Shurijo Castle Park and is—along with “Tropical Kingdom Okinawa”—still going strong today (figure 23). “Kaika” (blossoming) is also homonymic with the “kaika” in the Meiji-period slogan “bunmei kaika” (civilization and enlightenment), suggesting a certain coming-of-age for this “new Okinawa.” At least, it is hoped, the food and service will be improved by now.

原色の楽園に、くつろぎのバックステージ。

ANAホテルズからあなたへ、鮮やかな旅のワンシーンを贈ります。

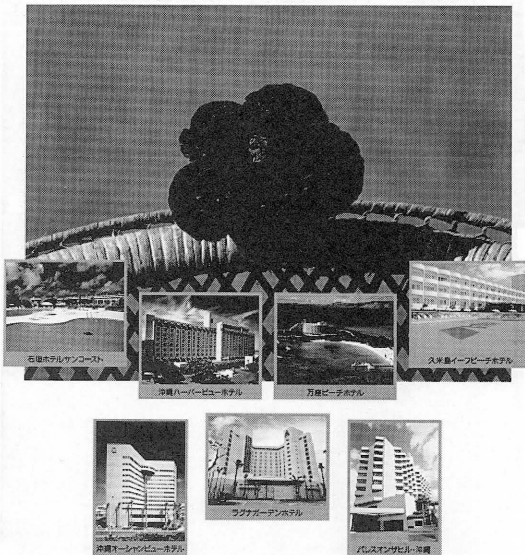


Fig. 22. “In a paradise of primary colors, the backstage of relaxation.”

Conclusion: The Other Image Problem

Alongside its sun, sea and Ryukyuan landmarks, Okinawa’s war memorials and U.S. military facilities complete the outsider image of Okinawa. They are arguably part of its “heritage” and definitely part of its tourist interest. Yet, despite its historical significance and deep, abiding impact for over a half century now, the Battle of Okinawa and its consequences are not promoted as heritage tourism; they figure even less in pure beach resort tourism. Somehow, it would seem obscene to include *this* modern history and *this* form of foreign relations in a



Fig. 23. One of many examples of “Tropical Kingdom Okinawa,” complete with buttressed palms to prevent damage during typhoon (nature’s reminder that palms don’t belong in Okinawa).

sources of touristic interest since the 1960s and figure significantly in bus guide tours of central Okinawa.²⁵ Not only do bus guides narrate facts about the bases; certain base-related spots—notably the ironically dubbed “Anpo no oka” (Security Treaty Hill)—are now regular stops for student excursions, general tourists, peace guides, and aviation fans (figures 24 and 25).

“Real” heritage tourism in Okinawa derives from its Ryukyu past, and in effect exists to offset unpleasant aspects of recent history in the same way war memorials are designated peace memorials. The “peaceful nature” of Okinawans is itself advertised in tourist literature as deriving from the peaceful relations the Ryukyu Kingdom had with foreigners as players in Asian trade networks. Nonetheless, this war and postwar history has provided the enabling conditions for a positive sense of Okinawan/Ryukyu heritage. With the slate wiped clean, Shurijō could be rebuilt better than it had existed in prewar and be filled with greater significance as a symbol of recovery and as a recovery of symbols (of past prosperity, of relative autonomy). And with prewar vegetation cleared, the island could also be replanted as tropical paradise to meet tourist desires and expectations. Even base perimeters have acquired tropical camouflage thanks to the Defense Agency planting palms and bushes, particularly the hardy *kyōchikutō* that the locals refer to as “kichi no hana” (base flowers, figure 26).

Wartime destruction in Japan in general has led to rebuilding things bigger and better than before, fueling a narrative of postwar prosperity being founded on wartime sacrifice. This formulation makes the past more palatable and the present more livable by making an otherwise meaningless loss meaningful, but it invites criticism when overdetermining meaning for the present oversimplifies events of the past. In the case of Shurijō, there is more overdetermination of meaning than meets the tourist’s eye. By building over and leaving unmarked that

display of heritage centered on the premodern history of the Ryukyu Kingdom and its foreign relations. The war and its reminders are not ignored in Okinawa tourism; they are just not part of “heritage.” As we have seen, bus guide tours of battle sites and memorials are the oldest form of organized tourism on Okinawa Island and they are still routine for mainland Japanese interested in the history of island and for school groups involved in peace study programs.²⁴ Likewise, U.S. bases have rarely been openly promoted by Okinawa tourism officials—let alone be considered a part of heritage tourism—but they have been

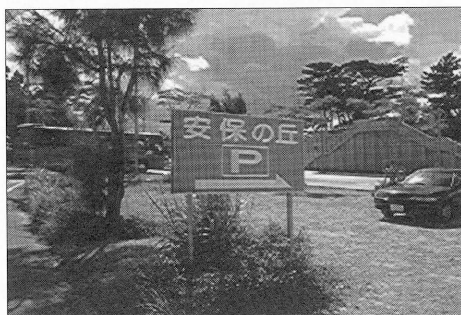


Fig. 24. “Security Treaty Hill,” on the north edge of Kadena Air Base.



Fig. 25. Ryukyu Bus tour group on “Security Treaty Hill,” June 2001.

removal of the American-built University of the Ryukyus. Finally, its rebuilding went beyond redemption of war loss; restoring the site to its early eighteenth-century form overcomes the history of its modern dilapidation from the time when the last Ryukyu king, Shō Tai, was abducted from Shuri in 1879 and the kingdom dissolved. Given this history and local efforts to develop some autonomy, I find it difficult to criticize Shurijō-centered heritage tourism on the grounds that it is only a replica or that it (literally) buries the wartime past while resuscitating the glory of the Ryukyu Kingdom. It is perhaps more appropriate to question Shurijō as heritage icon of the entire prefecture when in the historical view of the outlying islands it represents at worst an oppressive centralizing authority and at best nothing to get too excited about.²⁶

would-be tourist site, the Japanese Army Underground Headquarters, the Ryukyu Dynasty trumps the Japanese Army. The rallying cry “Okinawa’s postwar will not end until Shurijō is restored” also means more than simply recovering what war had taken away and thus putting an end to a highly-charged physical absence; it also suggests overcoming the American Occupation because the restoration necessitated the



Fig. 26. “Base flowers” outside the gate of Camp Foster, July 2001.



Fig. 27. Your caption here.

This staging of a reversion to the Ryukyu Kingdom in Okinawa heritage tourism—albeit a tropicalized one that suspends otherwise painstaking efforts to evoke historical authenticity—raises not only the issue of viewpoint and power of representation in packaging the tourism product; it prompts a consideration of the stage itself. To what extent has tourism transformed the place and the routines of place so that the props—those castle gates, those

costumed women, those palm trees—no longer seem staged to guests and hosts alike? In practical terms, how narrow is the gap between “Tourist Okinawa” and “Okinawa,” especially given that Okinawa has aspired since Reversion to be Japan’s “Tourism Prefecture”? How should this souvenir photo (figure 27), destined for the “My Trip to Okinawa” scrapbook, be captioned?

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NOTES

¹ Despite the redundancy of “Shurijo Castle Park” (Shuri Castle Castle Park) and the lack of macron on “jo” (*jō* 城) that is the park’s official English designation, which I will recognize when referring to the park. Likewise, “Ryūkyū” is rarely written in English with macrons in the contexts I will be examining so I too will dispense with them.

² “Okinawa Gains World Heritage Sites,” *Okinawa Times Weekly Times* (online English edition), 2 December 2000, <http://www.okinawatimes.co.jp/eng/20001202.html>. It must be noted here that Okinawa tourism dropped precipitously in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. The concentrated presence of U.S. military bases on the main island of Okinawa—amounting to about 20% of the land and upwards to 40,000 military personnel and their dependents—brought fears from would-be mainland Japanese tourists that these bases would be targets of terrorism as well as sources of nuisance given the heightened security alerts and exercises in and around the bases. School field trips from the mainland to Okinawa—a growing mainstay counted on by many middle-sized hotels and bus companies—also experienced a severe drop post-9/11. This economic downturn in Japan’s poorest prefecture prompted the prefectural government, tourist industry officials, and local businesses to unite in a high-profile campaign aimed to assure travelers that Okinawa is a safe tourist destination. By August 2002, there has been a gradual recovery in visitor figures.

³ To my knowledge, the only original treatment of early postwar tourism in Okinawa is the first chapter of Ishikawa 1979, pp. 6-49. It relies heavily on an in-house history of the early Okinawa Tourist Association not for sale to the general public, Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai 1964. I too draw considerably on this document as a primary and secondary source.

⁴ Ryūkyū Seifu Keizai-kyoku Kankō-ka, “Hondo gakusei no Okinawa ryokō jikken chōsahyō,” Okinawa Prefectural Archives (OPA), R00070382B.

⁵ Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai 1964, p. 76.

⁶ *Eisā* is the Okinawan form of *Bon odori* (dance for the spirits of the dead) which takes place between the 13th and 15th of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. Developed into a performing art, the lively performances of local *Eisā* groups are a source of cultural identity as well as considerable tourist interest in recent years. *Eisā* is now frequently conducted year-round out of the traditional context at Ryukyū heritage theme parks. *Eisā* rhythms and motifs also inform a good deal of Uchinā (Okinawa) pop music that consciously invokes identification of Okinawa with a cultural heritage distinct from that of Japan.

⁷ Senge 1962, p. 16.

⁸ Toguchi 1979, p. 37.

⁹ Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai 1964, p. 20. The type of hibiscus display mentioned here is actually associated with Buddhist notions of the ephemeral nature of physical existence and is thus often seen at grave

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sites. That this association of hibiscus is transformed over the years from funerary symbol into “tropical paradise” is yet another instance of redeeming the war dead within the context of tourism in Okinawa.

¹⁰ Senge 162, p. 4.

¹¹ There was some controversy over this issue of stamp given that the sotetsu held for many of the older generation of Okinawans negative connotations of desperate poverty in the 1920s and 1930s following the sugar market crash of 1920-21. During that time, many starving Okinawans turned to boiling out the poison of the fruit of the ubiquitous sotetsu to render it edible. See Christy 1993, pp. 611-612.

¹² Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai 1964, p. 75.

¹³ Senge 1962, pp. 46-47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Ryūkyū Seifu Keizai-kyoku Kankō-ka, “Kankō eiga no shinario ni tsuite” (29 August 1962), OPA, R00070386B, p. 7.

¹⁶ Okinawa Kankō Kyōkai 1964, p. 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Okinawa-ken 1979, vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 27.

²⁰ Shurijō Kenkyū Gurūpu 1997, p. 155.

²¹ Shuri Castle is thought to have been first built by 1427 and to have been burnt down three times prior to the Battle of Okinawa: in 1453 during civil war; in 1660 by accident; and again in 1709 as the result of an accident.

²² Shurijō Fukugen Kisei Kai 1998, pp. 44-45.

²³ NHK 1993.

²⁴ See Figal 2001 for details about peace guide tours in Okinawa.

²⁵ Linda Angst has, however, examined how Koza, which developed adjacent to Kadena Air Base in pre-Reversion days as a base town of bars, brothels, clubs, has since, under its new name Okinawa City, co-opted the U.S. military presence as part of a reimagined “international city” that is well-known in Okinawa guide books for mainland Japanese. Her concern is mainly with the hybridized base town—not the base itself—as a tourist draw founded on the stereotype of Koza’s nightlife, especially of Koza women servicing U.S. military personnel. See Angst 2001, pp. 276-288. The recent history of Okinawa City as tourist destination that Angst details—especially as place where a foreign country could be experienced in the comfort of one’s own language—actually has pre-Reversion roots.

²⁶ Hara Tomoaki has conducted an interesting analysis of the “message” and differing reactions within Okinawa prefecture to NHK’s 1993 saga “Ryukyu no Kaze” in the context of the “Ryukyu Kingdom boom” of the early 1990s in his *Minzoku bunka no genzai* (Hara 2000), pp. 149-213.