Identity issue in Okinawa

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Methodology & Research Design

Personal semi-structure interview
- Peace activists
- High school teachers
- University professors
- City officers
- University students
Focus group discussion

Research Objective and Question

Research Objective
 Assess the impact of identity on the dynamics of social movements in Okinawa.

Research Question
 Why Okinawan identity is not a major issue in Japan?

Identity and the Dynamics of Social Movements in Okinawa

Okinawan Identity
- Political Identity
  - Until 1609, the nowadays Okinawa Prefecture including Amami island (which currently belong to Kagoshima Prefecture) used to be an independent nation: Ryukyu Kingdom.
  - 1609-1879, Ryukyu kingdom was a semi-independent country, simultaneously tributary to China and Japan.
  - 1879, Ryukyu Kingdom lost its independence and sovereignty as a result of invasion and annexation by Japan.
- Socio-Cultural Identity
  - Even though we can see some similarities with Japan, Okinawans socially and culturally very distinct to Japanese People.
  - Languages (Okinawan or Uchinaguchi, Miyako, Kunigami, Yaeyama, Yonaguni and Amami), all considered in danger of extinction by UNESCO.
  - Cuisine, Religion, Architecture, Music and other cultural manifestations.

Okinawan Identity and Social Movements
- Impact of Identity on Social Movements
  - Although some elements of Okinawan identity resisted the assimilation process implemented by Japan, it contributed insignificantly to the formation and dynamics of Social Movements.
  - Identity related Social Movements are almost inexistent in Okinawa. The few that still exist are generally weak, divided, and ineffective.
- Why
  - The severity of assimilation policy run by Japan since its annexation.
  - Prohibition and devaluation of local languages, imposition of Japanese history, culture, and mundus vivendi.
  - Experiences of Second World War and developments its aftermath.
  - Every single protest or demonstration episode in Okinawa is coded as anti-US base or pro-peace movement.

Education and identity in Okinawa

Some interesting quotes
- ‘Making identity stronger would unite people’
- ‘Focused study (in schools) about Okinawa would be a good idea, but the government wouldn’t consider that’
- ‘Assimilation policy is continuing’
- ‘Even if Okinawan dialect disappears, the culture will stay’

Findings:
- Conclusion: Education has a great impact on the Okinawan identity
  - Unilateral education fosters feeling of sameness among Okinawans and mainland
  - Most people do not think there is enough focus on Okinawa in the school curriculum and would like more to be included
  - However, that is thought to be unlikely to happen for several reasons
  - Most common source of heritage besides education comes from family relations
  - More education about heritage would result in stronger identity and sense of Okinawa-ness

Okinawan Language

Uchina Guchi
Okinawan Language status after annexation to Japan 1879

Okinawan Language
Muhammad A. Ahmad
Before my visiting Okinawa I was thinking there will be some young people who could speak Uchina Guchi. But I found out only senior citizens could speak. According to all interviews, the interviewees said that: “We can hear but cannot speak, they added that their grandparents speak to each other in Uchina Guchi.”

The cultural deprivation of language

Okinawan Language

The Ryukyu Islands were assimilated into the Japanese nation state in 1879, and Standard Japanese started to spread. Pressure for Standard Japanese language became particularly fervent during the national mobilization campaign, which started in 1939. (Patrick Heinrich 2004)

The new generations don’t know much about their originality and language in some extents.

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Japanese IS NOT the native language of Okinawa.

The Ryukyuan language, the Okinawan language itself is comprised of many different dialects and sub-dialects from village to village. The Shuri dialect was standardized under the Ryukyuan kingdom central administration established by King Sho Shin (1477-1526). It was the official language used in conversation by the aristocratic class of Shuri castle. Most Okinawan songs and poems were composed in the Shuri dialect.

In Turkey, the Kurds witnessed similar policy that Kurdish language had been banned from 1923 to 1990s.

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Hogen fuda before the WWII, “hogen-fuda” -- the “dialect tags” that kids who were caught speaking the native language were forced to wear. Treason, low educated or spy if you speak the native tongue.

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Five distinct language varieties exist in the Ryukyu Islands (from north to south: Amami-Oshima, Okinawa, Miyako, Kunigami, Yaeyama and Yonaguni).

Okinawan Language

Research question:

independent movements in the present time in Okinawa

Okinawa identity Vs Japanese identity

Local identity Vs National identity

Differences Vs Belonging

In-Dependence Vs in-Japan

Discrimination Vs Economical dependence

Aggression Vs Protection

Independence & Identity in Okinawa

Aim of Research:

to analyze the present support of the independent movements and the relations in the political environment

Independence & Identity in Okinawa