

Okinawa as a Method for Peacebuilding in Asia: A Case Study of U.S. Military Bases

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Abstract: In the fields of international politics and geopolitics, it is common for the Washington and Tokyo to emphasize research on Okinawa by highlighting its strategic military role. In contrast to the mainstream narrative, this study argues that Okinawa's strategic role as a hub for "diplomatic and economic exchanges with neighboring countries, and settlement of disputes through dialogue" should receive greater attention. This study aims to explore ways to build peace in Asia through research on Okinawa, with a focus on mitigating regional tensions and preventing conflict. From the perspective of academic history, this study analyzes the history, transition, mainstream views, and representative works of research on U.S. military bases in Okinawa within Japanese and Chinese academic circles. The study seeks to provide insights and recommendations for fostering peace in Asia. In other words, this paper positions Okinawa as a method for constructing peace in Asia, using U.S. military bases as a case study.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Asia, U.S. Military Bases, Okinawa, Japanese and Chinese Academia

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Introduction

Okinawa, historically known as Ryukyu, was considered an independent kingdom. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Ryukyu served as a strategic transportation hub in the East China Sea, benefiting from Chinese support. In 1879, Japan annexed Ryukyu and incorporated it as Okinawa Prefecture. During World War II, the Battle of Okinawa resulted in U.S. occupation. In 1972, the United States returned the “administrative rights” of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan, re-establishing Okinawa Prefecture.

In recent years, as strategic competition between China and the United States has intensified, Japan has strengthened its strategic and military cooperation with the United States to jointly address the so-called “China threat” (Japan Air Self Defense Forces 2021). Against this backdrop, the strategic significance of U.S. military bases in Okinawa (hereinafter referred to as “Okinawa bases”) has grown. More than 70% of the exclusive U.S. military facilities in Japan are deployed in Okinawa, which accounts for only 0.6% of Japan’s total land area, making it one of the most critical military bases for the United States in the Asia-Pacific region (Okinawa Prefectural Government 2021, 43).

Japanese politicians have repeatedly emphasized Okinawa’s military and strategic importance to the public. For example, in July 2021, then-Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso publicly stated that Okinawa is “geographically and geopolitically the most important cornerstone,” linking the Taiwan Strait issue to Japan’s existential crisis. He claimed that “the next [target] after unifying Taiwan is Okinawa.” He called for Japan to strengthen Okinawa’s strategic position to secure its maritime routes. This narrative set the stage for the Japanese government to further intervene in the Taiwanese issue (Okinawa Times 2021). Similarly, former Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, General Steven Rudder, confirmed that the United States and Japan were closely cooperating at the tactical level to enhance their joint use of the Okinawa bases and to optimize interoperability in military collaboration (Ministry of Defense 2021, 222,224,281).

Influenced by recent trend changes and coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the return of the administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan in 2022, a public opinion poll

conducted in Okinawa Prefecture. The findings revealed that 85% of Okinawans were concerned that Okinawa may be drawn into an armed conflict between China and the United States over the Taiwan issue (Okinawa Times 2015). In response to these concerns, Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki expressed his views on the issue in a speech delivered on February 14, 2023. He stated that “the more severe the security environment, the greater the need for diplomatic wisdom. Okinawa will leverage its soft power advantages to ease tensions and build trust through peaceful diplomacy and dialogue among countries in the Asia-Pacific region.” Specifically, the Okinawa Prefectural Government plans to establish a regional diplomacy office to facilitate its diplomatic initiatives and contribute to regional peacebuilding (Okinawa Times 2023, 6).

International political scholars representing Okinawa issued three statements under the title “Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of Okinawa’s Reversion to Japan - Voices from Okinawa.” The first statement expresses their “profound hope that Okinawa can transform from being a ‘border island’ likened to Japan’s breakwater into a ‘bridge island’ connecting countries in the Asia-Pacific region.” They advocate that “the Japanese government should revisit its plan to deploy the Self-Defense Forces to frontline islands and terminate this plan to avoid creating a ‘security dilemma,” emphasizing that the deployment of U.S. Marines in Okinawa, including the Futenma base relocation, has lost its strategic necessity. The second statement asserts that “to avoid conflict in the Taiwan Strait, China, the United States, and Japan should strive to find a peaceful solution to Taiwan’s future” and advocates for “an understanding of the ‘One-China policy’ to uphold Taiwan’s ‘status quo.’” They further urge “both China and the United States to shift from an arms race towards ‘status quo’ arms reduction.” The third statement suggests that “Japan should seek a new role for itself and actively contribute to regional peace and stability. Japan should pay attention to postwar developments in Northeast Asia, pursue ways to promote the next phase of development, and stabilize the regional order.” They advocate that “Japan should persuade countries in the region to make an early transition from the post-World War II Northeast Asian order, which relies on U.S. economic and military power, to initiate the construction of a new order.” In short, they argue that “for Japan’s security, there is an urgent need to reduce military deployments in Northeast Asia. Reducing

the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, particularly through the significant downsizing of U.S. Marines, is essential. Only then can Japan truly demonstrate its responsibility and status in terms of regional security” (Okinawa External Affairs Study Group 2023, 149-150).

The insights of the Okinawa Prefectural Government and the international political scholars representing Okinawa, as mentioned above, address the security of the Okinawa region and Japan and the broader security of the region, including Taiwan and mainland China. As the renowned Okinawan historian Masao Gabe¹ emphasized to the author, tensions between China and Japan continue to grow. At the same time, Okinawa remains deeply interconnected with disputes over the Diaoyu Islands and the Taiwan issue. Given these factors, Okinawa will become a focal topic between the two countries. Therefore, it is more important for China to strengthen its research on Okinawa-related issues than for Japan to do so.² Although this article introduces some of the connotations and essence of Okinawa-related issues, let us briefly define the so-called Okinawa issue here as problems arising from or related to the presence of U.S. military bases. In other words, it is more crucial for China to enhance its research on Okinawa’s U.S. military bases than for Japan to do so.

Building on this discussion, this study explores the strategic role of Okinawa bases and proposes methods for peacebuilding in Asia, with the ultimate goal of preventing the region from turning into a battlefield. The central research question addressed in this study is: How can peace be built in Asia? One approach, which leans towards peacebuilding in the region, explores whether Okinawa can serve as a “catalyst” for regional peace. The study draws on Okinawa’s unique historical and cultural experiences, which are both part of and distinct from Japan, and advocates for the concept of a transnational “living sphere.” (Arasaki 2014) Another approach focuses on methodology, the study “Methodologies in Okinawa Historiography: Indicators and Peripheries of Modern Japan,”(Gabe 1988) examines how historical material on Okinawa is sourced and interpreted. Combining these two studies, this paper advocates for studying Okinawa as a method for constructing peace in Asia.

Research Design

In the fields of international politics and geopolitics, Okinawa's strategic military role has increasingly garnered attention from both the United States and Japan, prompting the need for more focus on Okinawa's bases. However, this paper adopts an alternative narrative (Chen and Shimizu 2019), advocating that more emphasis should be placed on Okinawa's strategic role as "a platform for diplomatic and economic exchanges with neighboring countries and a means of resolving disputes through dialogue" (Okinawa External Affairs Study Group 2023, 142). Based on this position, this study examines Okinawa bases as a means of peacebuilding in Asia.

Initially, the study systematically introduces the current status and progress of research on Okinawa bases. The research objects (subjects) included publications and dissertations from both Japanese and Chinese academic circles over the past decade (2010–2022). Data were sourced from journal articles, periodic papers (periodicals), doctoral dissertations, and books available on the National Diet Library of Japan's website (<https://ndlonline.ndl.go.jp>). For Chinese academic sources, data were sourced from journal articles, period papers (periodicals), doctoral dissertations retrieved from CNKI (<https://www.cnki.net>), as well as books recorded in the National Library of China (<http://find.nlc.cn>). Specifically, the term "Okinawa U.S. Military Bases" was searched in these databases. Each piece of data was then reviewed and irrelevant or minimally relevant data were excluded. Finally, the data were categorized by topic.

Specifically, the authors searched and compiled the data analyzed in this study from public databases. After excluding irrelevant literature, five major topics related to Okinawa base research in both Japanese and Chinese academic circles over the past decade were identified: opposition movements, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (hereinafter referred to as "U.S.-Japan Security"), the strategic value of Okinawa bases, economic and social impacts, and the relocation of the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station (hereinafter referred to as "the Futenma Relocation Issue").

The specific methodology employed to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives is as follows. First, the relevant research topics and main arguments of the research objects (studied

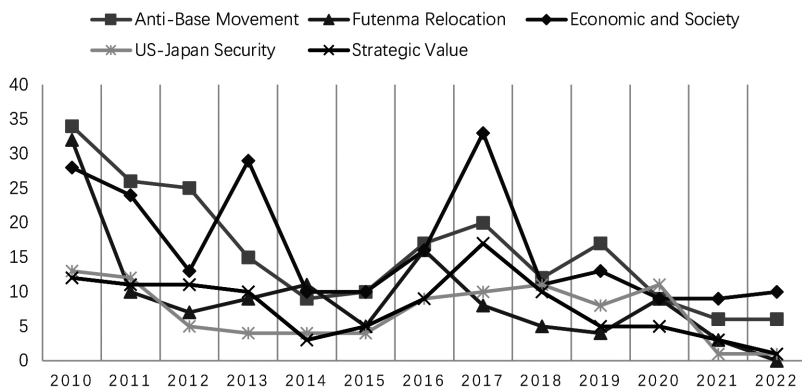
works) are introduced and reviewed. Second, a comparative analysis was conducted on the differences between Japanese and Chinese academic circles in terms of major topics and arguments related to Okinawa research. Finally, based on the limitations of the existing research, future research directions for peacebuilding in Asia are proposed. Although there may be some differences in the positions and viewpoints of Japanese and Chinese academic circles, a comparative study of the two is valuable. That is, from the perspective of academic history, meticulously reviewing history, evolution, mainstream viewpoints, and representative works of research on Okinawa bases in both Japanese and Chinese academic circles can not only provide inspiration and reference for research on this issue in both countries, but also, more importantly, offer insights for peacebuilding in the region.

Major Topics and Arguments on the Okinawa Bases Research in Japanese Academia

Research on Okinawa bases has been a popular topic in Japanese academia since World War II, while relevant research outputs in Chinese academia have gradually increased in the past decade. Among these, Japanese academia has published and released a total of 735 studies in the past decade, including 215 on the economy and society, 206 on opposition movements, 119 on the relocation of the Futenma base, 102 on strategic value, and 93 on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (refer to Figure 3). This demonstrates the keen interest of Japanese academics in Okinawa's base research. Similar to the research trend of the Okinawa bases in Chinese academia, the number of studies on the Okinawa bases in Japanese academia sharply declined from its peak in 2010, which is closely related to the resignation of Prime Minister Hatoyama, who vigorously promoted the Futenma relocation agenda. The number of specific topics has fluctuated to varying degrees in the past ten-plus years due to different factors (see Figure 1).

Economic Issues of the Base

The topics with the largest total number of documents were



Data source: The authors compiled the data from the National Diet Library of Japan.

Figure 1. Research trend of Okinawa bases in Japanese academia (2010-2022)

economics and social research. Research on this topic has rapidly declined from 28 items in 2010 to 11 items in 2012, which is related to the Hatoyama factor. Subsequently, it increased significantly to 29 in 2013. The reason for this trend change is a technical factor. That year, a special issue of a magazine introduced 11 topics related to the Okinawa base and social life by 11 different authors, so the total number in 2013 did not change much compared to the previous year. The total annual research peaked in 2017 (33 items), which is related to the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan. Japanese academia has published and released numerous studies that revisit Okinawa's economy and society. For example, the most representative research involves public opinion polls on the perceptions of the Okinawa bases and Okinawa's economy among Okinawa residents and people from other regions of Japan. Kei Kôno analyzed the poll results and pointed out that, regarding Okinawa's economy, although most people in other regions of Japan believe that the U.S. military base is an indispensable factor in Okinawa's economy, most Okinawa residents do not think so and instead believe that the base's presence is not conducive to Okinawa's economic development. In terms of Okinawan society, while most people in other regions of Japan recognize the U.S. military base in Okinawa, half of the

Okinawa residents approve, and half disapprove. Okinawa residents born after the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan in 1972 had fewer negative perceptions than those born before that time. However, more than half, like those born before the transfer, hope to reduce the number of U.S. military bases to the same level as on the Japanese mainland (Kono 2017, 18-28).

Anti-base movement

Japanese academia has paid significant attention to the topic of anti-base movements, with the number of studies on this topic continuously declining from 32 in 2010 to nine in 2014. Although it subsequently increased to 20 items in 2017, it declined again to 11 items in 2018 and then slightly rebounded the following year (17 items), maintaining a downward trend thereafter. The number of related documents peaked again in 2017, which is related to the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan and the increased discussion opposing the reinforcement of U.S. military bases and the integration of the Self-Defense Forces. The decline in such research in 2018 followed by an increase the next year is concentrated in the discussion among mainland Japanese citizens who propose that “the mainland should take over some of the Okinawa bases.” Meanwhile, discussions on anti-U.S. military base movements from the perspectives of human rights and feminism have increased in recent years.

Hirumori Maedomari, an Okinawan scholar, explores discussions on the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and Japan’s security policy from the perspective of the conflict between mainland Japan and Okinawa. The author points out that mainland Japan discusses “security in case of emergencies” when the United States will provide protection, while Okinawa focuses on “security in peacetime,” i.e., Okinawa residents suffer from exercises held in preparation for emergencies, noise pollution, and crimes committed by U.S. military personnel. The author criticizes other regions of Japan for having a superficial understanding of the “heavy burden of peacetime security” faced by Okinawa residents (Maedomari 2015, 25-28). Kozue Akibayashi, a Japanese scholar, discusses human-centered security issues from a feminist perspective and believes that

security centered on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) leads to the abuse of human rights and dignity of civilians in areas where U.S. troops are stationed. Under the guise of “security,” the right to live securely is instead denied, especially for women and children, who must be protected by the state in terms of military security. Therefore, as long as the current security system continues to exist, it will not be a fundamental solution, even if the SOFA is revised. The concept of security should also be diversified (Akibayashi 2015, 153-160).

The Futenma Relocation

The Futenma relocation issue is an important topic of concern in Japanese academia. Related research rapidly declined from 32 items in 2010 to 7 items in 2012 and then showed an increase and decrease in 2014 and 2015, respectively, before rising again to 16 items in 2016, followed by a general downward trend. The rapid decline in research output in 2010 was due to Hatoyama’s resignation, while the slight increase in 2016 may be related to two factors: the confrontation between Takeshi Onaga and the Abe administration and the increased discussion on the Futenma relocation issue during the 2016 Japanese general election.

Kei Kôno analyzed the results of a poll conducted on the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan in 2017 and pointed out that although most Okinawa residents understand the significance of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, especially its importance to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty regarding the transfer of the Futenma base to Henoko, most Okinawa residents cannot understand why Okinawa, which already hosts the largest number of U.S. military bases in Japan, needs to continue constructing a new relocation base in Okinawa. Okinawa residents perceive this situation as discrimination against Okinawa residents in other regions of Japan. Owing to the negative impacts of crimes, accidents, and other incidents caused by the U.S. military bases, Okinawa residents hope to reduce the number of bases to mitigate the adverse effects of the U.S. military. Most Okinawa residents believe that the best way to resolve the Futenma relocation issue is to immediately close this “most dangerous” U.S. military base in the world, and hope

that it can be transferred overseas to distribute the burden (Kono 2017, 20, 22, 23, 25).

Strategic Value of Okinawa Bases

The distribution trend of research related to the strategic value of Okinawa's bases is similar to that of research on anti-base movements, and the main factors influencing these two trends are the same. The number of studies peaked in 2017, related to the increased discussion among academics surrounding the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan, as well as opposition to the reinforcement of U.S. military bases and the integration of the Self-Defense Forces.

For example, Fumiaki Nozoe published a relatively representative book in which he discussed the reasons why U.S. military bases in Okinawa have not been significantly reduced, unlike those in mainland Japan. The author points out that when the Treaty of Peace with Japan went into effect in 1952, 90% of U.S. military bases in Japan were concentrated on the mainland, with Okinawa and the mainland sharing half of the bases by 1960. By the 1970s, Okinawa's U.S. military bases accounted for more than 70% of all military bases in Japan. The author believes that if Okinawa bases were significantly reduced, like those on the mainland, the difficult Okinawa base issue today would be less likely to exist. The author found that although there was an opportunity to significantly reduce Okinawa bases when the United States and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Agreement in 1973, this possibility was lost in interactions among the U.S. government, the Japanese government, and the Okinawa region. On the U.S. side, the U.S. military believed that reducing Okinawa bases would lead to the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Okinawa. On the Japanese side, the government created a narrative stating that Okinawa's U.S. military was a symbol of intervention in Asia to keep U.S. troops stationed in Okinawa. In the Okinawa region, some military landowners opposed the reduction of bases because after the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan in 1972, the Japanese government significantly increased compensation for military land to reduce opposition to the bases in Okinawa (Nozoe 2016, 9, chap3). In

summary, the Okinawa base issue can be said to be a result of strategic considerations between the U.S., Japan, and Okinawa.

U.S.-Japan Security Issues

Overall, research on U.S.-Japan security issues is relatively scarce. Due to the resignation of Prime Minister Hatoyama and the decline in interest in the Futenma relocation issue, research on U.S.-Japan security decreased sharply in 2010. However, with Japan's implementation of the "National Security Laws" starting in 2016, the number of documents related to U.S.-Japan security issues increased from 2016 to 2020.

Okinawa scholar Yoko Ikemiyagi has published a representative work exploring the origins of the Okinawa base issue, namely, the reasons behind the U.S. decision in the 1952 Treaty of San Francisco not to return the governance of Okinawa to Japan but to increase U.S. military bases there. The author concludes that in 1951, before the Treaty of San Francisco, the logic had already been established between the U.S. and Japan: in exchange for Japan taking responsibility for Okinawa's defense, the number of U.S. military bases in Okinawa could be reduced. However, because of the Japanese government's restrictive attitude towards strengthening defensive capabilities in the 1952-1953 period after the Treaty of San Francisco, it was difficult to realize Japan's defense concept for Okinawa. In short, the logic behind reducing U.S. military bases in Okinawa is that Japan must possess sufficient military strength to conclude a mutual defense treaty with the U.S., thereby reducing the U.S. burden of defending Okinawa, which could potentially lead to a reduction in U.S. military bases (Ikemiyagi 2018, 16, 146-147).

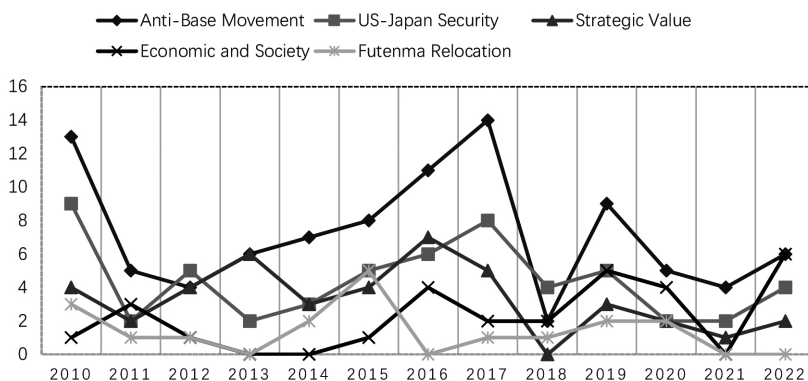
Based on the above discussion, it is evident that Japanese academia does not solely analyze research on Okinawa bases from the five major issues, but instead strives to explore the origins of the Okinawa U.S. military base issue from the differences and conflicts between mainland Japan and Okinawa, further delving into the essence and origins of Okinawa's issues. For example, Japanese academia does not discuss this issue solely from the perspective of opposition movements. Rather, recent research has launched opposition movements from the perspectives of human rights and feminism, exploring the essential conflicts between mainland Japan and Okinawa and discovering considerable differences in

human-centered perceptions of security issues.

Major Topics and Arguments in Chinese Academic Research on Okinawa Bases

In the past decade, Chinese academia has published 241 studies, including 94 on opposition movements, 57 on U.S.-Japan security, 43 on strategic value, 29 on economic and social impacts, and 18 on the Futenma relocation issue (see Figure 3 for details).

As shown in Figure 2, similar to the research trend of Okinawa bases in Japanese academia (see Figure 1), the five major topics related to Okinawa bases research in Chinese academia have declined sharply since 2010. This was closely related to Prime Minister Yukio strong promotion of Futenma relocation. After winning the House of Representatives election in August 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan formed a coalition government with the New Komeito Party and the Social Democratic Party. Hatoyama, the leader of the Democratic Party, became the 93rd prime minister starting in September of that year. Before taking office, Hatoyama proposed that “the Japanese central government should strive to achieve the goal of relocating the Futenma base outside Okinawa Prefecture,” and after taking office, he put forward slogans such



Data source: The authors compiled data from the CNKI and National Library of China.

Figure 2. Research trend of Okinawa bases in Chinese academia (2010-2022)

as “equal Japan-U.S. relations” and “revising the significance of the U.S. military reorganization and the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan,” attempting to reverse the Futenma base relocation bill reached between the Liberal Democratic Party government and the United States after more than 10 years of negotiations. Hatoyama’s actions attracted domestic attention to the Okinawa base issue, with most Okinawans supporting his proposal and looking forward to a smooth resolution of the Okinawa base problem (The Democratic Party of Japan 2011). However, the Hatoyama government’s requests to relocate military bases to local governments outside Okinawa Prefecture were repeatedly rejected, gradually causing dissatisfaction among the U.S. government, opposition parties, Japanese citizens, and Okinawa residents. In June 2010, Hatoyama was forced to resign because of his inability to advance the relocation agenda. At the end of Hatoyama’s term, the Futenma relocation agenda was shelved, and naturally, the attention of both Japanese and Chinese academics to Okinawa base research waned sharply.

Anti-base movement issues

The anti-base movement is the topic that has garnered the highest attention among Chinese academia. The number of studies on this topic soared from 13 in 2010 to a peak of 14 in 2017, with a sharp drop to just four in the following year and then hit a decade low of two in 2018. Okinawa’s regional politics may be a contributing factor in addition to the Hatoyama factor. For instance, Takeshi Onaga, the governor of Okinawa Prefecture who took office in 2014, disagreed with the Abe administration over the Futenma relocation issue. The conflict between the two sides continued to escalate until Onaga died suddenly in 2018. This period coincided with a continuous rise in the anti-base movement; following Onaga’s death, academic attention rapidly declined (Tang 2017; Tang 2019).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the primary outcomes influencing the research trend of the anti-based movement are related to the increase and decrease in publications in Okinawa’s literature and history, respectively. For example, in 2010, there were 11 publications in the fields of literature and history, which dropped to three in the following year and only one in 2018. Regarding Okinawa literature, Chinese

scholars have studied Japanese novelist Kenzaburo Oe and his work “Notes on Okinawa,” as well as Okinawan novelists Tatsuhiro Oshiro and Shun Medoruma. For instance, Li Wei cited the proposition from “Notes on Okinawa” that “Japan belongs to Okinawa”³ to describe the historical fact that “Okinawa implies too much of Japan’s past and present,” exploring the complex factors and essence of the Okinawa issue from a historical perspective (Li 2010, 23, 30-32). In terms of Okinawa’s history, Moriteru Arasaki’s “Modern History of Okinawa” is the most frequently studied work in Chinese academia. For example, Sun Ge interpreted the thread running through “Modern History of Okinawa” as “the struggle that has occurred in Okinawa’s political arena and society from Japan’s defeat in World War II to the present day,” pointing out that despite Okinawa’s special position in the international political landscape, the Okinawan people have consistently relied on their own strength to strive for the maximum degree of self-determination (Sun 2010, 73, 80). Zhang Jianwei believed that this work reflects “deep concern for the enormous cost Okinawa has borne as a result of being separated from the Japanese mainland and serving as a U.S. military base, as well as a strong anti-war sentiment” (2017, 92).

In the latest representative research on the anti-base movement, Tang Yongliang analyzed the tripartite game between Japan, the U.S., and Okinawa regarding the Okinawa base issue since 2014, dissecting the methods employed by the Japanese government to dismantle the Okinawan opposition movement, namely, establishing institutional and structural constraints. Under the framework of Japan’s Local Autonomy Law, Okinawa has no decision-making power over issues such as diplomacy or defense. Moreover, the Japanese government vigorously cultivates anti-Onaga forces through political party work domestically and “seeks support from stakeholders within Okinawa Prefecture through economic levers, thereby dividing and weakening the resistance posture of the Okinawan people from within” (Tang 2019, 67-70).

U.S.-Japan Security Issue

The second most focused issue is the U.S.-Japan security alliance, which demonstrates a distribution trend relatively consistent with that of the anti-base movement. Peak interest in this topic occurred in 2010 and

2017, influenced by the Hatoyama Factor and the Diaoyu Islands dispute. The Hatoyama factor has prompted the exploration of Okinawa-related issues and Okinawan history within the framework of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Li Wei is representative of Okinawa-related issues within this framework. Meanwhile, Sun Ge and Zhang Jianwei's analyses of the "Modern History of Okinawa" are relatively representative of Okinawan history. Notably, in an article published in a Chinese journal in 2017, Moriteru Arasaki put forward the argument of the "U.S.-Japan alliance based on structural differences," contending that under the trinity structure of the symbolic emperor system, Japan's status as a non-nuclear weapon state allied with the U.S., and Okinawa's separation from the Japanese mainland and military domination by the U.S., structural differences have formed between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland. That is, "the contradiction in the U.S.-Japan relationship of subordination to the U.S. stabilizes the U.S.-Japan alliance structure by transferring the burden onto Okinawa"⁴ (Arasaki 2017, 22-23).

The Diaoyu Islands dispute is closely linked to the U.S.-Japan security issue and has, to some extent, promoted research on the Ryukyu Islands during the Cold War. For instance, Cui Pi and Cui Xiuzhu argue that the focus of Ryukyu Islands research is on the post-war administrative rights of the Ryukyu Islands, while also pointing out many other important research topics, including "Japan's peace treaty strategies, the secret understanding between the U.S. and Japan on financial compensation, U.S. and Japan policies on the ownership of the Diaoyu Islands, various secret understandings between the U.S. and Japan concerning military bases in the Ryukyu Islands, the secret understanding between the U.S. and Japan on U.S. civil aviation rights in the Ryukyu Islands and the Taiwan authorities being forced to abandon their air route rights in the Ryukyu Islands, and the strategies of the U.S. and Japanese governments in responding to congressional deliberations on the agreement to return administrative rights to the Ryukyu Islands" (Cui and Cui 2017a, 17; Cui and Cui 2017b, 1).

Strategic Value of Okinawa Bases

The third most researched topic was the strategic value of Okinawa bases. Generally, Chinese academic circles maintained a high level of

research enthusiasm for this issue between 2012 and 2017, which is mainly related to adjustments in U.S.-Japan strategic security policies and the Diaoyu Islands dispute. Adjustments to U.S.-Japan strategic security policies mainly include the further promotion of Japan's "National Defense Program Guidelines" (2010 edition) to strengthen its strategic deployment for "southwest defense," the "Pivot to Asia" strategy proposed by Obama in 2011 and its deployment adjustments, as well as the new "Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation" issued by the U.S. and Japan in 2015. These policy changes have increased discussions among Chinese academics regarding the strategic value of Okinawa bases. Japan's so-called "nationalization" of the Diaoyu Islands in 2012 also spurred Chinese scholars to analyze and discuss the strategic value of Okinawa bases. For example, Qiu Jing pointed out that Japan uses the Diaoyu Islands dispute as the background or rationale for the presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa, the expansion of the Self-Defense Forces, and the highlighting of the Japan-U.S. alliance. China can consider the Diaoyu Islands issue within a larger strategic framework such as the Okinawa issue, while Japan claims that the Diaoyu Islands belong to Okinawa, but the status of Okinawa is also undetermined (Qiu 2013, 127, 138).

The latest research on adjustments to U.S.-Japan strategic security policies mainly focuses on the new role of Okinawa bases and changes in the division of labor between the U.S. and Japan. For example, by analyzing the historical evolution and strategic value of Okinawa bases, the role and changes of the Marine Corps stationed in Okinawa over the past two decades, as well as the strategic shift of the U.S. and Japan's response, Gui Yongtao believes that "from the U.S. perspective, stationing troops in Japan is mainly not to protect Japan, but to pursue the U.S.'s own interests in the Indo-Pacific region," while "from Japan's perspective, the primary task of Okinawa bases is no longer to cooperate with U.S. troops in response to potential regional conflicts, but to strengthen Japan's defense against China's possible 'island-seizure' actions." (Gui 2020, 90)

Economic, Social Issues, and the Futenma Relocation Problem

Chinese academic circles have paid less attention to Okinawa's

economic and social issues and the Futenma relocation problem. Specifically, Chinese scholars have paid relatively little attention to Okinawa's economic and social issues, but the specific topics they focus on are diverse, such as comparing Okinawa's international tourism and free trade special economic zone with the Hainan, Hong Kong, and Macao Special Administrative Regions and analyzing funding for the U.S. military presence in Japan. In 2019, 2020, and 2022, there was a noticeable increase in the total amount of research on economic and social issues among Chinese academics, mainly because of three factors.

Firstly, the 2019 fire that destroyed the Ryukyu "Forbidden City" (i.e., the world cultural heritage site of Shuri Castle). Tan Shanshan (2020, 15, 20) described the event as "Okinawa resurfacing historically in a tragic manner," and by approaching the post-war history of Okinawa from the perspective of Okinawan literature, it was found that "Okinawan literature is a dissimilar voice within 'Japanese literature.' It has never inherited any 'Japanese' literary traditions or shared themes or meanings with contemporary Japanese literature. Its gaze has always been fixed on Okinawa, and this perseverance certainly has historical and realistic considerations as well as being a manifestation of the writer's sense of responsibility." Second, it is related to U.S. President Trump's request in 2020 for Japan to bear more of the cost of hosting U.S. troops. Pang Zhongpeng (2020, 29) explored the inducements for discord between Japan and the U.S. in negotiations over the funding for the U.S. military presence, summarizing that "the boiling public resentment in Okinawa is a microcosm of Japan-U.S. relations over the years and a potential flashpoint for disputes and contradictions between Japan and the U.S. To save face in the Japan-U.S. alliance, the Japanese government has been willing to ignore the calls of Okinawans for years. However, if such calls and demands remain unanswered and the burden on the Japanese people from hosting U.S. troops continues to increase, the consequences for both Japan and the U.S. can be imagined." Thirdly, an introduction and analysis of public opinion surveys conducted in 2022 on the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's "reversion" to Japan. Each article mentioned Okinawa's sense of relative deprivation vis-à-vis Japan and the U.S., as well as resistance (Yao 2022).

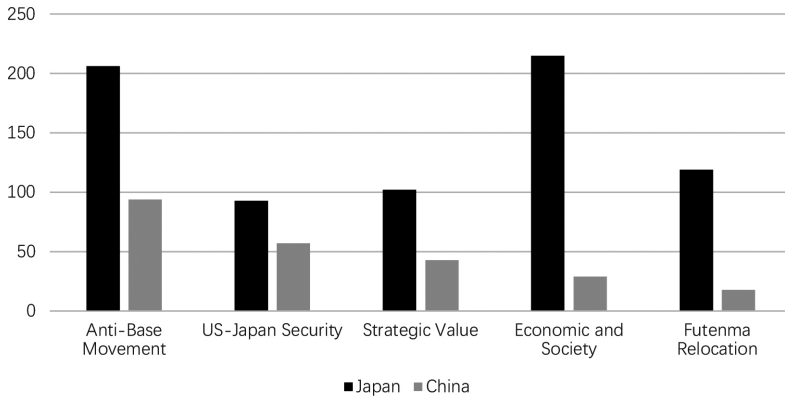
Research on the Futenma relocation problem was abundant between 2010 and 2015. The main reason for higher academic attention in 2010

was the Hatoyama factor. For example, Chen Jingjing and Zhang Yingjiao (2011) reviewed the origins of the Futenma base issue from a historical perspective, which led to sharp conflicts and disputes between the two countries and three parties (Japan, the U.S., and Okinawa), and concluded that the establishment of the U.S.-Japan security alliance also meant the emergence of the Okinawa issue. Li Wei (2010) believes that the essence of the Futenma base issue is also the essence of the Okinawa issue, namely the issue of Japan's national identity, which is "the scars left over from Japan's quest for regional hegemony in modern times and the issue of Japan's national identity based on its post-war position within the U.S.-Japan military alliance." Research on the Futenma relocation problem increased again in 2015, mainly because of disagreements between the Onaga and Abe administrations. The former was more concerned with the excessive burden of U.S. military bases in the Okinawa region and their distribution, as well as a more balanced burden sharing with other regions of Japan, whereas the latter focused more on Okinawa's strategic value. As Zhang Boyu (2015) pointed out, "the issue of U.S. military bases in Okinawa is not just a matter for Okinawa, but a major issue concerning the cornerstone of Japan's diplomacy—the Japan-U.S. alliance."

In summary, Chinese academic circles do not simply analyze research on Okinawa based on the five major topics themselves, but rather use these topics as perspectives to explore the essence of Okinawa issues. For example, Chinese scholars do not discuss the opposition movement purely from the perspective of the opposition movement but instead structurally analyze the essence of Okinawa's issues and the aspirations of the Okinawan people for the future. Another example is that Chinese scholars study the essence and structure of Okinawa issues from the perspective of the U.S.-Japan security alliance and even extend their research to broader studies of the Ryukyu Islands.

Comparison of Okinawa Base Research in Japanese and Chinese Academic Circles

The previous U.S. section's review of Okinawa based research in Japanese and Chinese academic circles provides a foundation for this study to compare the concerns and cognitive differences between



Data source: The authors compiled data from the National Diet Library of Japan (CNKI) and the National Library of China.

Figure 3. Research trend of Okinawa bases in Japanese and Chinese academia (2010-2022)

scholars from both countries from multiple perspectives. First, in terms of the quantity of research on Okinawa, the enthusiasm of Japanese academic circles for this topic is far greater than that of Chinese circles. To a large extent, this validates the viewpoint mentioned at the beginning of the article, namely that Japanese academic circles have long regarded Okinawa research as an important topic, whereas Chinese academic circles have paid significantly less attention to Okinawa research. Over the past decade, the total number of research publications and papers on Okinawa base issues by Japanese and Chinese academic circles has been 735 and 241, respectively.

Second, the different preferences of Japanese and Chinese academic circles for Okinawa base research can be seen in the number of studies and annual distribution of specific topics. Sorted by the number of topics, the topics of interest to Japanese academic circles, from most to least, are economy and society (215), opposition movements (206), Futenma relocation (119), strategic value (102), and U.S.-Japan security (93). For Chinese academic circles, the topics were opposition movements (94), U.S.-Japan security (57), strategic value (43), economy and society (29), and Futenma relocation (18) (see Figure 3 for details). It can be seen

that besides both sides paying close attention to the topic of opposition movements, Chinese academic circles tend to focus more on U.S.-Japan security and strategic value, while Japanese academic circles pay more attention to the economy, society, and the Futenma relocation issue.

Furthermore, there are differences in the factors influencing research trends and the main arguments related to Okinawa base issues in Japanese and Chinese academic circles. In terms of opposition movements, the distribution trends in Japanese and Chinese academic circles are relatively similar, but the reasons for these trends are different. The factors influencing Japanese academic circles' research on opposition movements mainly include the Hatoyama factor, the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan, Okinawa residents' opposition to the reinforcement of U.S. military bases and the integration of the Self-Defense Forces, the civic movement on Japan's mainland demanding the takeover of Okinawa bases, and human rights and feminist movements against U.S. military bases. In comparison, the factors influencing Chinese academic circles' research on opposition movements include the Hatoyama factor and opposition between the Onaga and Abe administrations. Chinese academic circles have primarily studied the phenomenon of opposition movements through Okinawa-related literature and historical works. In other words, Japanese academic circles adopt a more diversified perspective on this topic, whereas Chinese academic circles mainly study opposition movements from the perspectives of Okinawa's literature and historical works. It is worth noting that although the entry points of research in Japanese and Chinese academic circles are different, their problem awareness is quite similar, namely, structurally exploring the essence of Okinawa issues from the conflict between Japan's mainland and Okinawa.

In terms of the U.S.-Japan security issue, the factors influencing Japanese academic circles' attention to this topic, besides the resignation of Prime Minister Hatoyama and the subsequent decline in interest in the Futenma relocation issue, also include the introduction of the "Japan Peace and Security Legislation." The main factors influencing research trends in Chinese academic circles include the Hatoyama factor and the Diaoyu Islands dispute. Although the reasons influencing the distribution trends of the U.S.-Japan security issue in Japanese and Chinese academic

circles are not completely the same, their main arguments are relatively similar, focusing on the origins of Okinawa issues or exploring the essence and structure of Okinawa issues from the problem awareness of the conflict between Japan's mainland and Okinawa regarding U.S. bases.

Regarding the strategic value of Okinawa bases, the main factors influencing the distribution trends of Japanese academic circles include the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan, Okinawa residents' opposition to the reinforcement of U.S. military bases, and the integration of the Self-Defense Forces. The main factors influencing Chinese academic circles' attention are closely related to adjustments in U.S.-Japan strategic security policies and the prominence of the Diaoyu Islands territorial issues. In addition, Japanese academic circles mainly focus on the origins of Okinawa base issues, while Chinese academic circles tend to study Okinawa issues from the perspective of Diaoyu Islands' territorial issues.

Japanese academic circles conduct more research on the economy and society and the Futenma relocation issue, whereas Chinese academic circles pay less attention to these two topics. The main factors influencing Japanese academic circles include Hatoyama's resignation and the 45th anniversary of the transfer of administrative rights to the Ryukyu Islands from the United States to Japan. The main factors influencing Chinese academic circles' attention to the economy and society are related to the 2019 fire that destroyed Shuri Castle, a World Heritage Site, and the 2020 request by former U.S. President Trump for Japan to bear more costs for U.S. military bases in Japan. Although the factors influencing Japanese and Chinese academic circles are different, both discuss the contradiction between Japan and Okinawa regarding sharing the burden of U.S. military bases. Japanese scholars adopt a more diversified research perspective, whereas Chinese scholars discuss the Futenma relocation issue from a relatively single perspective. Furthermore, the factors influencing the attention of Japanese and Chinese academic circles on this topic are different. The Hatoyama factor was the main factor influencing the research orientations of both countries' academic circles; however, the opposition between the Onaga and Abe administrations and the 2016 Japanese general election were also important factors influencing Japanese academic circles.

It is worth noting that although the reasons influencing the distribution trends of specific topics in Okinawa base research by Japanese and Chinese academic circles are different, the attention trends of both academic circles towards certain topics have been roughly the same over the past decade. In addition, Japanese and Chinese academic circles share a relatively consistent problem awareness regarding the aforementioned main topics and tend to explore the essence of Okinawa's issues from a diversified perspective.

Future Research Directions for Peacebuilding in Asia

This study aims to provide a model for peacebuilding in Asia by examining the role of the Okinawa military bases in preventing Asia from becoming a battlefield. By reviewing and comparing research on these bases in Japanese and Chinese academic circles over the past decade, this paper summarizes the key factors influencing research distribution trends in both academic circles and discusses the differences in their research perspectives. The study finds that existing research in both circles has several gaps, which could become a foundation for future research on peacebuilding in the region.

First, to address tensions involving Japan and Okinawa, it is necessary to explore the essence of Okinawa's challenges from the perspective of "mutual growth". For example, Japanese scholar Shinji Kawana has conducted comparative studies on overseas U.S. military bases, including those on Japan's mainland, to assess the challenges posed by the Okinawa bases and review policy solutions (Kawana et al. 2021, Kawana and Takahashi 2020). This research proposes solutions that benefit both sides, namely, a "mutual growth" approach, by comparing the Okinawa bases with other international U.S. military bases, including those in other regions of Japan. The cooperative dynamics between the U.S. military and military bases in other countries in the region, along with their international comparisons, are not only promising future research directions but also critical issues in resolving Okinawa-related challenges and advancing peacebuilding in the region.

Second, given the close relationship between Japan and Okinawa-related issues, researchers should analyze Okinawa's base-related issues

by exploring their essence of Japanese issues in the future. Masao Gabe emphasizes that Okinawa's local research is central to Japanese research. Therefore, resolving Okinawa's challenges requires situating them within the context of Japan's modern history.

“How Japan’s modern history has evolved still needs to be a common understanding [between Japan and China]... This peripheral issue is closely related to the central issue. The relationship between the center and the periphery does not mean that there are local issues. Local issues are a reflection of how central issues are handled. [Local issues] are issues between the image reflected in the mirror and the real image. Therefore, local issues do not exist in the locality. They are located locally and are a mirror of the center. This is why Okinawa research is not research on Okinawa’s locality. This is research on Japan’s central part. [We need] to maintain this understanding when conducting [Okinawa research].”⁵

Notably, a few scholars have already explored this perspective. For instance, Li Wei and Moriteru Arasaki, previously mentioned, have argued that “the essence of Okinawa issues being Japan’s national positioning” and that “the Japan-U.S. alliance based on structural differences” from the context and background of Japan’s modern history. Analyzing Okinawa-related challenges inevitably involves Japanese and American factors. Researchers should therefore, further explore these issues, particularly by situating Okinawa within the context of Japan’s modern history. This is not only a valuable academic act but also potentially a practical approach to addressing Okinawa and even Japanese issues. In this way, this study provides insights and a reference for peacebuilding in Asia.

Finally, researchers should incorporate the perspective of American domestic politics when analyzing issues related to the Okinawa bases. Although existing research has addressed topics such as the Treaty of San Francisco, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and the United States’ global strategy, it lacks an analytical perspective on the involvement of the U.S. Congress in the U.S. A comprehensive research agenda should focus on the potential role played by the U.S. Congress in the issue of Okinawa bases, including its influence on the increase or decrease in budgets for overseas military bases, an analysis of the pros and cons of establishing overseas bases, and narratives employed to garner domestic support. The United States Congress plays an indispensable role in the process

of American foreign policy decision-making and may be an imaginative space that truly shapes the narrative about U.S. military bases in the Indo-Pacific region. Incorporating the role of the U.S. Congress in Okinawa research when analyzing U.S.-Japan relations may lead to unexpected research conclusions. From the perspective of congressional research, it also helps gain a deeper understanding of the origins of Okinawa-related and Japanese issues, laying a theoretical foundation for resolving related issues and contributing to the construction of peace in Asia.

Notes

1. Some of his writings are translated and presented in English (Matsumura and Loo 2024; Gabe and Matsumura 2024; Gabe and Loo 2024).
2. Author interviewed with Masao Gabe, Okinawa, September 2021.
3. “In today’s nuclear age, in terms of the total amount of sacrifices made and discrimination suffered, Okinawa does cover almost the entire Japan, and supports a huge burden beyond these... It can probably be seen through perspective that today the entity of Japan is shadowed in the shadow of the existence of Okinawa. And precisely because it is subordinate to Okinawa, it can show its ‘pseudo’ independence today” (Oe 2017, 35).
4. “Symbolic emperor system” refers to the new system that will abandon Okinawa and hand it over to the US military after the war in exchange for exempting the emperor from immunity. “From Japan’s unarmed country to the Allied Powers of the United States” refers to MacArthur’s desire to maintain Japan’s unarmed country status with the United States’ military rule over Okinawa. However, the Korean War that broke out soon prompted the United States to turn Japan, an unarmed nation, into a cooperating military ally. The above two factors contributed to the separation of Okinawa from the Japanese mainland and made the former subject to US military domination.
5. Author interviewed with Masao Gabe, Okinawa, September 2021.

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作为亚洲和平建设方法的冲绳: 以美国军事基地为案例的研究

摘要: 在国际政治和地缘政治领域, 华盛顿和东京通常通过强调冲绳的战略军事角色来重视对冲绳的研究。与主流叙事相对, 本研究认为, 冲绳作为“与周边国家进行外交和经济交流以及通过对话解决争端的枢纽”的战略角色应受到更多关注。本研究旨在通过研究冲绳探索在亚洲建设和平的方法, 重点关注缓解地区紧张局势和预防冲突。从学术史的角度来看, 本研究分析了日本和中国学界对冲绳美国军事基地研究的历史、转变、主流观点和代表作。本研究旨在为促进亚洲和平提供见解和建议。换句话说, 本文将冲绳定位为构建亚洲和平的方法, 以美国军事基地为案例进行研究。

关键词: 和平建设、亚洲、美国军事基地、冲绳、日本和中国学界

오кина와를 통한 아시아 평화 구축의 한 방법: 미군 기지를 중심으로

초록: 국제 정치와 지정학 분야에서 워싱턴과 도쿄는 오кина와의 전략적 군사적 역할을 강조하면서 오кина와에 대한 연구를 수행하고 있다. 이 연구는 주류 담론과는 달리, 오кина와의 “주변국과의 외교 및 경제적 교류의 중심지 역할과 대화를 통한 분쟁 해결”에 더 큰 주의를 기울여야 한다고 주장한다. 이 연구는 오кина와에 대한 연구를 통해 아시아에서 평화를 구축하는 방법을 탐색하는 것을 목표로 하며, 지역 긴장 완화와 분쟁 예방에 초점을 둔다. 학술사의 관점에서, 이 연구는 일본과 중국 학계에서 오кина와의 미군 기지에 대한 연구의 역사, 전환, 주류 관점 및 대표적인 저작을 분석한다. 이 연구는 아시아에서 평화를 촉진하기 위한 통찰력과 제안을 제공하고자 한다. 또한 이 논문은 미군 기지를 사례 연구로 사용하여 아시아 평화 구축을 위한 방법으로 오кина와를 설정한다.

핵심어: 평화 구축, 아시아, 미군 기지, 오кина와, 일본과 중국 학계

アジア平和構築の方法としての沖縄： 米軍基地研究を事例として

要旨: 国際政治や地政学の分野において、ワシントンや東京が沖縄の軍事戦略的役割を強調する傾向がみられる。本稿は、こうした主流の物語へのカウンターナラティブという立場から、「近隣諸国との外交、経済交流、そして対話による問題解決」の拠点としての沖縄の戦略的役割にこそ、より着目すべきであると主張する。本稿は、沖縄研究を通じて、地域的緊張緩和と紛争予防に焦点を当て、アジアにおける平和構築の在り方を探ることを目的としている。より具体的には、学術史の観点から、日本と中国の学術界における沖縄米軍基地研究の歴史、変遷、主流の見解、代表的研究を分析し、アジア平和構築のための提言を行う。つまり本稿は、米軍基地を事例として、沖縄をアジア平和構築の方法として位置づけるものである。

キーワード: 平和構築, アジア, 米軍基地, 沖縄, 日本と中国の学術界

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