

6 Satsuma's invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1609 and Okinawa tourism

Kyungjae Jang

Cultural anthropologist Sasaki Toshikazu speaks of the Japanese archipelago (Nihon rettō) as 'one archipelago, two countries, and three cultures' (Sasaki 2011: 70), namely one geographical collection of islands, a country with an emperor (Japan) and a country with a king (the Ryukyu Kingdom, until 1879), and the three cultures of Ainu, ethnic Japanese, and Ryukyuan. Through this expression, Sasaki argues for the need to recognize the coexistence of multiple cultures within the contemporary Japanese state and criticises the prevalent discourse of Japan as a mono-ethnic nation-state.

As Sasaki argues, the Ryukyu Kingdom – currently Okinawa prefecture and part of Kagoshima prefecture – was a country with a monarchy and its own territory, language, culture, and diplomatic relations. However, the Ryukyu Kingdom as an 'other' country in Japan ended after the annexation of the Ryukyus in 1879, when Okinawa was completely incorporated into the Japanese state (Takara 1988: 27). From that period to the present day, the history of Okinawa has been distorted in Japan, especially in school education, which is an important basis for Japanese people's historical perceptions. For example, Shibutani and Iwamoto (2014) state that the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom is not emphasized in the Japanese curriculum. Any mention of the Ryukyu Kingdom in textbooks appears only in sections regarding Satsuma's invasion of Ryukyu (1609) and the Ryukyu Disposition (1879), while the kingdom's relationship with Japan before or between these events is treated with ambiguity. They cite results of questionnaire surveys revealing that many Japanese students thought that Okinawa was part of Japan all along, and some students even thought that the Ryukyu Kingdom had done something bad because of the word *shobun* ('disposition' in the context of the 'Ryukyu Disposition', but *shobun* can also mean 'punishment') (Shibutani and Iwamoto 2014: 47). By contrast, the Battle of Okinawa (1945) at the end of the Second World War is strongly

emphasized in Japanese textbooks. As Takara notes, it is important to convey Second World War history, but it is just one part of the history of Ryukyu/Okinawa (Takara 1993: 8–10).

The major Japanese work of popular culture depicting the Satsuma domain's invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1609 from a Ryukyuan perspective is *Ryukyu no Kaze: Dragon Spirit* (1993).¹ The drama is based on a novel of the same title (written specifically to be the basis of the drama) by Chinese–Japanese author Chin Shunshin (Haraguchi 2018: 53). The drama is set in the Ryukyu Kingdom in the first half of the seventeenth century. It tells how the protagonists try to gain independence for their kingdom as a trading country between Japan and China despite the Satsuma invasion. While many Taiga dramas have real historical figures as the main characters, in *Ryukyu no Kaze* the main character Keitai is fictional. Keitai was born on a ship going from Ryukyu to Ming China and spent his childhood in China before being separated from his parents when pirates attacked his home. He and his brother moved to Ryukyu. After many twists and turns, it is revealed that his father was working as a doctor for the Shimazu family, the lords of Satsuma and instigators of the Ryukyu invasion. Through the life story of a fictional character, the situation in Ryukyu at that time is dramatically portrayed. The drama was especially popular in Okinawa, although the use of Japanese actors to play Ryukyuan, the lack of local dialect, and the ‘mediated “Yamatoization (Yamatoka, i.e., Japanization)” of Okinawa-as-Ryukyu designed for mainland Japanese consumption’ generated considerable criticism, too (Figal 2012: 163–164). However, this Yamatoization might have been out of ignorance rather than design. As mentioned previously by Takara, there is often a lack of basic understanding regarding Okinawa in Japan. Furthermore, the original author, Chin, was not recognized as a well-versed authority on Ryukyu history and culture (Haraguchi 2018: 53). Partly in response to such concerns, in 1994 (the year after the initial broadcast) a version dubbed in the Ryukyuan language was aired again in Okinawa.

Ryukyu no Kaze contributed to the revitalization of tourism in Okinawa. In 1992, a year before the drama aired and the 20th year after Okinawa's return to Japan from the United States, Shuri Castle, which had been destroyed in the Pacific War in 1945, was restored (Benesch and Zwigenberg 2019). The restored Shuri Castle (Figure 6.1) was widely used in the drama, including a scene depicting the visit of an emissary from the Ming Dynasty in 1606. The filming set for the drama was made in Yomitan village, Okinawa prefecture, and opened to tourists as the Studio Park Nankai Kingdom Ryukyu no Kaze after the shooting. At the end of each episode, the drama introduced places related to the story



Figure 6.1 Shuri Castle. This picture was taken before it burnt down in 2019. Photo: Yamamura Takayoshi.

(this is a feature of Taiga dramas, and partly explains their power as tourism drivers). In *Ryūkyū no Kaze*, the title of the corner was *Churaumi kikō*, which means beautiful sea travel (Figal 2012: 159).

The drama conveyed the exotic topography, scenery, and culture of Ryūkyū. Okinawa received a boost as a tourist destination, not only because of the various sites connected with the filming but also because the collapse of the bubble economy caused many Japanese people to favour domestic over international tourism. Products to stimulate tourism consumption were also developed. The release of awamori (traditional Okinawan liquor) called 'Churaumi travel' (Ishigaki 1995), named after the section at the end of the drama, and 'Keitai', named after the main character, contributed to increasing tourism revenue and promoting the Okinawa brand throughout the country.

The revitalization of tourism through the drama combined the existing exotic image of Okinawa with the image of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, resulting in what Gerald Figal refers to as 'Tropical Kingdom Okinawa' (Figal 2012: 165). Associated tourism campaigns had little incentive to focus on the historical facts of Satsuma's invasion of Ryūkyū.

For example, a tourism campaign conducted by Japanese airline ANA focused on tropical images of the Ryukyu Kingdom, while the description of the Ryukyus evoked the Okinawa and Ryukyu spirit (Figal 2012: 166). Also, this overlap was not highlighted after *Ryukyu no Kaze*. There has not been a terrestrial TV drama of similar stature dealing with the relationship between the Ryukyu Kingdom and Japan since *Ryukyu no Kaze*. NHK's dramas centred on Okinawa typically emphasize Okinawa's image as an island paradise in the modern world.

However, as with every other instance of Taiga drama tourism, there was a decline in the number of tourists from the year after the drama aired. Visitors to the studio park, who numbered about 520,000 in the year the drama aired, declined sharply from 1994. By the end of the 1990s, the facility was operating at a loss and attracting only 100,000 people a year (Asahi Shinbun 1999). The studio park went bankrupt and closed in March 1999. It was transferred to Yomitan village and since 2000 it has been operated under the name Experience Kingdom Murasaki Mura by a new company established by members of the municipal Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The financial difficulties of this site were a salient lesson for tourism operators across Japan about the risks of developing large sites of contents tourism on the back of the Taiga drama. These days, any sets and attractions linked to the drama tend to be open only in the year the drama is aired.

In summary, *Ryukyu no Kaze* is conspicuous for being one of only a few dramas about the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom from a Ryukyuan perspective. While there were clear, temporary tourism effects because of the drama around the time of the broadcast, and while the drama was partly successful in remaking the image of the Ryukyu Kingdom, it has not generated a decisive shift in terms of historical consciousness. The history of the invasion and colonization of the Ryukyu Kingdom remains side-lined and relatively unknown in Japan. War and tourism in Okinawa remain connected more strongly to memories of the Second World War, after Okinawa was incorporated into Japan, rather than by the seventeenth-century invasion that paved the way for Okinawa to become part of Japan in the first place.

Note

- 1 Another drama is *Tempest* (2011), which aired on the NHK satellite channel.

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