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Generational Divides in Okinawa: Perspectives on U.S. Military Presence

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Contents

Abstract..... 4

Introduction..... 4

 Background: Okinawa and U.S. Military..... 4

 Okinawa: Distinct Island in the Most Southwestern Part of Japan 4

 Context of U.S. Military Base Presence in Okinawa..... 5

 Base Relocation to Henoko..... 7

 Shifting Public Sentiments Amid Global Tensions..... 8

Problem Statement & Purpose of Research.....9

Research Questions.....10

Motivations & Positionality for Research..... 10

Relevance and Importance of Research..... 11

Theoretical Framework: Generational Theory.....12

 Key Concepts.....12

 Relevance to Research Questions.....13

 Assumptions of Theory.....13

 Limitations of Theory.....13

 Summary.....14

Literature Review.....16

 History of Okinawa’s Struggles.....17

 From the Origin of the Ryūkyū Kingdom to Its Demise.....17

 Japan’s Annexation and Beyond.....17

 The Battle of Okinawa: WW2.....19

Impacts of U.S. Military Presence: From U.S. Rule to Present Day.....19

 First Wave of Okinawan Struggle.....20

 Second Wave of Okinawan Struggle.....21

 Third Wave of Okinawan Struggle.....23

Protest Culture: Diversity and Complexity..... 23

Key Events from Post-WW2 to Present..... 25

Gaps in Literature..... 27

 Generational Perspectives and Attitudes..... 27

 The Impact of Collective Memories on Generational Attitudes.....27

 Nuanced Understanding of Socio-Economic Factors.....28

 Limited Exploration of Youth Perspectives.....28

 Summary.....28

Methodology..... 29

 Data Collection Methods..... 29

 Quantitative Data..... 29

 Qualitative Data..... 31

 Methods for Data Analysis & Discussion..... 34

 Methodological Limitations..... 35

 Reliance on Secondary Data..... 35

 Sampling Bias..... 35

 Survey and Interview Limitations..... 36

 Language and Cultural Nuances..... 37

 Generalisability..... 37

 Ethical Considerations..... 37

Data Analysis & Discussion.....38

 Perspectives of “National Security” 38

 Perspectives of “Economy” 43

 Summary of Findings..... 47

 Discussion.....47

 “Unarmed Equals Peace”: the Impact of Collective Memories and Experiences..... 48

 Prevailing Misconceptions on the Economic Dependence on U.S. Military Bases..... 50

Base Fatigue: Young Okinawans Being Sick of Base Issues..... 54

Conclusion.....56

Recommendations for Further Research..... 57

Attitudinal Gaps among Younger Okinawans..... 57

Longitudinal Analysis of Okinawan Sentiments 58

Impact of Local Media on Public Opinion..... 58

Implications for Policy and Practice..... 59

Creating Opportunities for Interactions..... 59

Boosting the Economy and Dispelling Misconceptions..... 59

References..... 61

Abstract

In the southernmost part of Japan, only 750 kilometres away from Taiwan, Okinawa Island holds approximately 70% of the U.S. military installations in Japan. Okinawans' antipathy towards the U.S. military bases that have continued to exist from the end of WW2 to the present day, as well as base-related incidents and accidents, continue to be serious problems in the region, even more than 50 years after Okinawa reverted to Japan. Amidst tense international situations like the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Taiwan crisis, the anti-U.S. military movement spurred by a protest against an ongoing base relocation plan is now attracting more attention than before. This research investigates the generational divides in attitudes towards base issues among the younger and older generations in Okinawa, specifically focusing on their perceptions of the U.S. military presence in relation to “national security” and “economy”.

Keywords: generational perspectives, Okinawa, U.S. military presence, military-community relations, socio-political dynamics, secondary data analysis

Introduction

Background: Okinawa and U.S. Military

Okinawa: Distinct Island in the Most Southwestern Part of Japan

Japan consists of four main islands—Honshū, Hokkaido, Kyushū, and Shikoku—and Okinawa is part of the Kyushū region, located further south of the Kyushū island. With the historical background of an independent “Ryūkyū Kingdom”, Okinawa developed its unique culture and language, which are still prominent today. Its subtropical climate and natural beauty make it a popular tourist destination.

Okinawa is home to a diverse population of over 1.4 million people, including the indigenous Ryūkyuan people, who have their own distinct cultural practices and language. The Ryūkyuan culture, a blend of various influences from China, Southeast Asia, and Japan, contributes to the rich cultural tapestry of the island.

The island's strategic location near Taiwan, China, and Southeast Asia adds to its importance in regional dynamics. Okinawa's distinct characteristics—its history, culture, population, and geographical position—make it a unique and significant area of study in the context of East Asian relations.

Figure 1*Location of Okinawa*

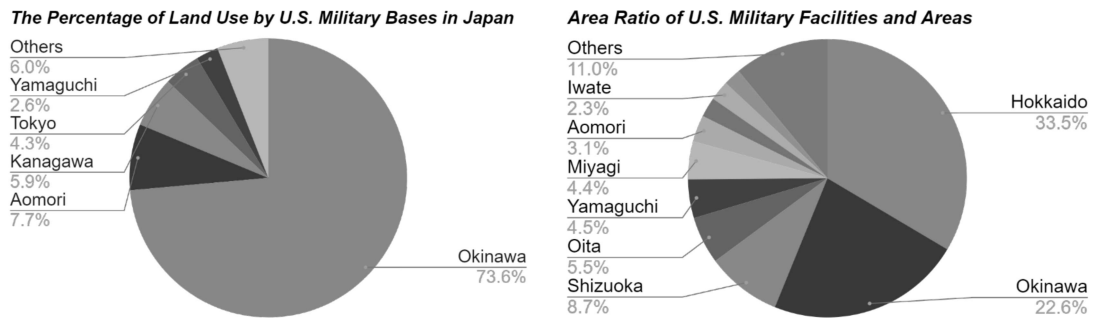
Note. Adapted from “Thousands in Japan Rally Against US Base on Okinawa”, by NDTV, 2016.

Context of U.S. Military Base Presence in Okinawa

The U.S. military bases in Okinawa have been a point of contention since the end of WW2. The significance of these bases has been multifaceted, with implications for security, politics, and the daily lives of Okinawans. The history of the U.S. bases there is not just post-war; it is interwoven with the island’s identity and the nation’s strategic interests during the Cold War and beyond. The bases have been perceived as a symbol of protection and an unfair burden with approximately 70% of the country’s U.S. military installations, playing a complex role in Okinawans’ daily lives in both good and bad ways, including the economic development and cultural transformation of the island.

Figure 2

Land Utilisation by U.S. Military Bases in Japan and Area Ratio of U.S. Military Facilities



Note. These pie charts depict the disproportionate land use by U.S. military bases in Japan, with a significant concentration in Okinawa, which, despite only comprising 0.6% of Japan’s total land area, hosts 70.6% of the land exclusive to U.S. military facilities. Adapted from “U.S. Military Base Issues in Okinawa”, by Okinawa Prefectural Government Washington D.C. Office, 2016, retrieved from <https://dc-office.org/basedata>.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the U.S. military presence was a clear sign of occupation. It established a significant military presence in Okinawa, which has continued for decades even after the reversion to Japan in 1972, largely due to its strategic geographic location. The strategic location of these bases has made them central to U.S. military operations in Asia, especially during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and more recently, in balancing China’s growing regional influence. The Okinawans, with their history of independent rule and subsequent integration into Japan, have often felt caught between their historical identity and the geopolitical realities of the present (Inoue, 2007; Meyer, 2020; Roberts, 2020). The military bases, thus, are not just seen as a remnant of occupation but also as a reminder of a long history of external domination.

Locally, the bases have had a profound impact on the Okinawans’ ways of life. While they have brought economic benefits and opportunities for local employment, they have also caused social disruption, environmental damage, and a sense of lost sovereignty among the residents. Incidents involving U.S. service members have frequently made headlines, reinforcing a narrative of external imposition and leading to numerous protests and demonstrations; the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old girl by three U.S. servicemen caused the most heated protests of all (Angst, 2001).

Base Relocation to Henoko

Due to the unbalanced burden for this small island and base-related incidents and crimes that have continued to happen even after the reversion, Okinawa has been demanding the downsizing of the U.S. military bases. However, there has been no substantial reduction in the size of these bases for over 50 years since the reversion.

In the post-war time, there were three times of mass protest movements against the U.S. military. The first was against their forceful land seizure for military base construction in the mid-1950s, which is notably known as “bulldozers and bayonets”. The second was the all-island campaign for reversion to Japan. The third was ignited by the 1995 rape case, leading to demands for revisions to the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the elimination of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma). This base, located in close proximity to densely populated residential areas, was identified as one of the primary causes of numerous problems, including the rape case (Lummis, 2018). In response to this third wave of the anti-U.S. military movement, the Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa (SACO) was established under the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee in the same year, and its final report speculated on the complete return of MCAS Futenma (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1996). However, the relocation of the base outside of the island is not going to happen. Instead, the proposed relocation site is Henoko, situated only about 50 kilometres north of MCAS Futenma.

On December 27, 1999, the Mayor of Nago City, where Henoko is located, conditionally accepted the proposal for the replacement airfield facility. Subsequently, the Japanese government approved the “Government Policy on the Relocation of MCAS Futenma” at a Cabinet meeting (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 1999). Still, disagreements arose between the Japanese government and Okinawa regarding various aspects such as facilities to be installed and the construction process. As a result, the Cabinet decision of 1999 was repealed, leading to legal disputes between the government and Okinawa Prefecture regarding the relocation of the base (National Diet Library, 2023).

While the Japanese Government insists that the decision-making complies with the law, there has been strong opposition from Okinawa. According to the Okinawa Prefectural Government (2024), the main reasons for the opposition are as follows:

1. 既に異常としか言いようのない過重な基地負担を抱えていること。
[Okinawa already has an excessive base burden that can only be described as abnormal (Author's translation).]
2. 辺野古移設に反対する民意があること。
[There is public opposition to the Henoko relocation (Author's translation).]
3. 辺野古・大浦湾の豊かな自然環境が破壊されてしまうこと。
[The rich natural environment of Henoko and Oura Bay will be destroyed (Author's translation).]
*The relocation involves landfill work in the bay.
4. 辺野古移設では普天間飛行場の一日も早い危険性の除去にはつながらないこと。
[The Henoko relocation will not eliminate the MCAS Futenma threat (Author's translation).]

The opposition is not limited to the Okinawa Prefectural Government; some Okinawan populace continue to express strong resistance to the central government's ongoing construction work. Sit-ins by them are still taking place in front of the gates of the U.S. military's Camp Schwab in the Henoko coastal area (The Asahi Shimbun, 2024).

Shifting Public Sentiments Amid Global Tensions

The debates on the matter have been heightened by international tensions. The spectre of the Taiwan crisis reverberated throughout the country, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine spurred on prompting a reassessment of the importance of national security including the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Amid speculation that armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait could occur, there is a noticeable shift in the attitudes of many Japanese citizens, traditionally viewed as "peace-oriented"; a U.S. congressman expects that "[c]onflict could break out in the Taiwan Strait 'much sooner' than 2027" (Nikkei Asia, 2023).

Until now, the media, including TV news related to base problems in Okinawa, have predominantly showcased voices of opposition to the bases; although this does not necessarily mean that opposition voices constitute the majority. In recent years, however, pro-base perspectives have gained traction because of international tensions, bringing diverse attention to the issues. This shift marks a crucial point for a comprehensive reassessment of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. It offers a prime opportunity for stakeholders to

engage in a more balanced and inclusive dialogue that considers the multiple impacts on local communities, regional stability, and geopolitical dynamics.

Problem Statement & Purpose of the Research

In an ideal scenario for an independent nation, minimising the military footprint of foreign powers for self-protection is a unanimous aspiration among Japanese citizens of all ages and regional backgrounds. However, current global tensions suggest that a drastic reduction of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa may not be prudent in the short term. This is because both the majority and the Japanese government consider their presence essential for national security; while there are also voices arguing that the U.S. military presence could escalate threat perceptions among neighbouring nations, potentially increasing the risk of armed conflicts. Nevertheless, the enduring grievances of Okinawans cannot be overlooked. Balancing national security needs with the human security and rights of Okinawans requires the government to make optimal decisions that serve the future well-being of both Okinawans and Japan as a whole.

The anti-U.S. military movements on the island have been long-lasting. After Okinawa reverted to Japan, Okinawans have been advocating for the reduction of their presence. However, despite more than half a century having passed, Okinawa's burden of military bases remains exceptionally heavy. This could be attributed mainly to political factors, such as maintaining a balance of power with the U.S., but another contributing factor may be that previous statements of intent and protests across Okinawa have not been sufficiently effective in mobilising societal and political change. The Japanese government's policy of advancing without adequate consent from Okinawa Prefecture and its citizens is undoubtedly questionable. However, what is even more concerning, in my view, is the inefficacy of the movements seeking change, such as the sit-in, which appears to result from a lack of unity and cohesion among Okinawans.

In countries like Japan, where organisational and social harmony is highly valued, protests and demonstrations are often perceived as disruptive. Nonetheless, I argue that these movements can also play a crucial role in promoting appropriate social change within a democratic framework if they are conducted effectively. While I am not advocating an escalation of the anti-U.S. military movements in Okinawa, I do believe that peaceful and effective protests can hold authorities accountable and serve as a catalyst for positive change. To increase the effectiveness of such movements, citizens must unite on the basis of mutual understanding. This solidarity allows for effective communication with the government, fostering a more informed and collaborative approach to solving the complex issues at hand.

This Okinawa case highlights pronounced generational divides in perceptions of the U.S. military presence. The older generation, often bearing traumatic experiences associated with the bases, is more actively opposed to their presence. In contrast, the younger demographic, which tends to be more liberal and individualistic, is less aware of the issues. This study aims to delve into the generational divides among Okinawans as a foundational step towards promoting mutual understanding within the community, with a special emphasis on “national security” and the “economy”—two significant concerns closely related to the military bases. By examining how different age groups perceive the U.S. military presence and how these perceptions influence their engagement in the movements, the research aims to explore the generational dynamics within the anti-U.S. military movements in Okinawa and their implications for fostering greater unity and effectiveness in achieving the goal of base reduction. Ultimately, the goal is to identify strategies for enhancing consolidation and promoting meaningful dialogue between Okinawans and the Japanese government, contributing to the development of more effective advocacy and policymaking efforts.

Research Questions

1. How do perceptions of the U.S. military presence among Okinawans differ in terms of “national security” and “economy” between the younger (born after Okinawa’s reversion [OA]) generations and older (born before the reversion [OB])?
2. What are the possible causes of the differences?

Motivations & Positionality for Research

The impetus for this research is rooted in my military background. Prior to joining the MPCT programme in Tromsø, I was serving in the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, an entity comparable to the Air Force in other nations. My service included visits to a Japanese base in Okinawa, where the sheer scale of the U.S. military infrastructure was evident. Although I was aware of its existence, the sight of fighter jets crisscrossing the skies, sprawling military installations and American-style housing developments stretching along the national roads was profoundly striking. A helicopter tour of the island, giving a comprehensive view of the numerous bases crammed into such a small area, left a lasting impression.

The year 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of Okinawa’s reversion to Japan, a significant milestone that received extensive coverage in various media outlets. This coverage through news and documentaries highlighted ongoing challenges faced by Okinawans due to the presence of U.S. military bases. Such media attention underscored the realisation that the struggles and voices of the Okinawan people have not been adequately addressed or even recognised. The Henoko sit-in in front of Camp Schwab’s gate, particularly striking when

broadcast on television, symbolised the enduring will and frustration of the Okinawan people. However, it was notably only the older generation who were visible in these protests, casting a poignant image that evoked mixed feelings.

With a background in the military, I appreciate the strategic significance of Okinawa and the role of the U.S. military presence there, and believe that a large-scale withdrawal of U.S. military bases in the future may be conceivable, but is probably unrealistic under the current geopolitical climate and existing power dynamics between the United States and Japan. From the point of view of a democratic nation, however, it is indefensible to disregard even minor opposition and to pursue national policy without due consideration. While certain demands voiced by a segment of Okinawans may appear exaggerated, it is evident that many grievances merit attention and support from the state. To address these concerns effectively, it is imperative to bolster the legitimacy and coherence of Okinawa's stance. Moreover, fostering unity among the majority of Okinawans, not limited to the older generation, is crucial for facilitating meaningful dialogue with the Japanese government and ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the policymaking process.

Although numerous studies have examined the dynamics between Okinawa and the U.S. military bases, there has been little focus on the generational divides within Okinawa. This research is particularly relevant at a time when international tensions are escalating and the issue of bases in Okinawa is attracting more attention. This context makes it all the more important to understand the nuanced perspectives of different generations in Okinawa. It is also meaningful in terms of impartiality for someone like me, who is not from Okinawa, to discuss this issue. Hence, the focus of this study.

Relevance and Importance of Research

The ongoing presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa is situated at the nexus of local sentiments, national security interests, and the broader geopolitical landscape, making it a critical subject for study. This study ventures into the relatively unexplored territory of the generational divides concerning perceptions in Okinawa, offering a unique lens through which to examine the interplay of historical, socio-political, and economic factors. As the global stage is characterised by heightened tensions and shifting power dynamics, understanding these internal divisions becomes crucial for making policies that are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the Okinawan people while also addressing national/regional security and economic concerns.

This study's exploration into how different generations in Okinawa perceive the U.S. military presence, particularly through the lenses of "national security" and "economy",

provides valuable insights for peace and conflict transformation efforts. It highlights the complex ways in which historical experiences, alongside evolving socio-political attitudes, shape local discourses and potentially influence broader policy directions. Such nuanced understanding is essential for policymakers, scholars, and activists seeking to address the challenges posed by the military bases. By identifying commonalities and differences across generational lines, the research lays the groundwork for more inclusive dialogues aimed at reconciling these divergent views.

Moreover, the findings hold significant policy implications, not just for Japan and the U.S. but also for other nations grappling with similar issues of foreign military bases and local opposition. The generational perspectives unearthed in this study could guide Japanese and U.S. policymakers towards policies that better balance security imperatives with respect for local communities' rights, cultures, and environmental concerns. Furthermore, the global relevance of this research extends beyond Okinawa, offering lessons on the impacts of military decisions on local populations in different parts of the world.

By weaving together the threads of historical context, socio-political dynamics, and economic impacts, this research contributes a vital piece to the puzzle of how military bases are perceived and how these perceptions influence the broader discourse on peace, security, and regional stability. In doing so, it underscores the importance of fostering mutual understanding and dialogue as foundational steps toward addressing the complex issues at the heart of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa.

Theoretical Framework: Generational Theory

This thesis employs Generational Theory to explore the generational divides in perceptions of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. The theoretical lenses help to dissect the complex interactions between historical experiences and societal dynamics that shape attitudes across different age groups in Okinawa.

Key Concepts

Generational Theory suggests that a group of individuals, born and living through the same period, collectively develop unique characteristics distinct from other generations. These characteristics are shaped by the socio-economic, political, and cultural events that members of a generation experience during their formative years, usually defined as adolescence through early adulthood (Mannheim & Kecskemeti, 1952). This theory helps to

understand how shared historical experiences influence values, behaviours, and societal roles across different age cohorts.

Relevance to Research Questions

In the context of Okinawa, Generational Theory is instrumental in examining how different age groups perceive the U.S. military presence. For instance, older generations who experienced WW2 and the subsequent U.S. occupation of Okinawa may have markedly different views from younger generations who grew up under the influence of rapidly changing globalised cultural trends (Pilcher, 1994). This theory will guide the analysis of the survey data and interviews to uncover how generational identities influence attitudes towards military bases and associated political and social issues.

Assumptions of Theory

Generational Theory proposes that the distinct perceptions of the U.S. military presence among Okinawan generational cohorts are shaped by their unique historical experiences and socialisation processes. It posits that significant events, such as the Battle of Okinawa and the subsequent reversion of Okinawa to Japan, have indelibly marked the collective memories and attitudes of the island's residents. These historical milestones are experienced differently by each generation, fostering unique generational narratives that influence contemporary viewpoints.

The theory asserts that an examination of these varying perspectives across generations can shed light on broader societal attitudes towards matters like national security and economic development in the context of the U.S. military presence. By applying a generational lens, the analysis of this study can gain a deeper understanding of how historical experiences mould social dynamics in Okinawa today. This approach not only highlights the diverse impacts of past events on present-day perceptions but also illustrates the complex interplay between history and identity within the community.

Limitations of Theory

While Generational Theory provides a valuable framework for analysing societal changes and attitudes, it comes with several limitations that must be acknowledged. One significant limitation is the potential for oversimplification of the diversity within generational cohorts. Individuals within the same age group may hold varied views due to a range of personal experiences, socio-economic status, educational levels, and other personal factors that the theory might not fully account for.

Additionally, an overemphasis on generational differences might obscure other critical factors that influence perceptions of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Elements such as

political ideology, gender, and occupation can play equally or more significant roles in shaping both individual and collective attitudes. This oversight might skew understanding and interpretations of the social landscape regarding the military presence.

Furthermore, the unique historical and cultural context of Okinawa means that findings based on Generational Theory may not necessarily apply to other settings where U.S. military bases are located. This limitation affects the generalisability of research conclusions, suggesting that each context might require a tailored approach that considers its specific socio-political and historical dynamics. These factors collectively suggest the need for a nuanced application of Generational Theory, ensuring that it complements rather than oversimplifies the complex realities of Okinawan society.

Summary

Generational Theory posits that individuals within a specific age group share common beliefs, attitudes, and values, significantly shaped by their shared life experiences and the historical events that occur during their formative years. This theory is beneficial for understanding the nuanced perspectives that different generations in Okinawa hold regarding the U.S. military presence, particularly in relation to “national security” and “economy”. These two elements are critical in understanding the complex relationship between Okinawa’s residents and the military bases because the two have for a long time been seen as the key significance of the presence of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa. The theory suggests that these perspectives are not always static and rational but are deeply influenced by the socio-political and historical contexts in which each generation has been socialised.

For the older generations in Okinawa, their views are likely informed by direct experiences or the collective memories of significant historical events, including WW2, the Battle of Okinawa, the American occupation, and the reversion of Okinawa to Japan. These events may colour their perceptions with a blend of historical grievances and socio-economic considerations brought about by the military presence.

Conversely, the younger generations, raised in a period of relative peace but amidst ongoing debates regarding the military bases, may see the issue through the lens of contemporary geopolitical concerns, the global economy, and international relations. Their attitudes are also likely shaped by modern nationwide or global discourse, reflecting a generational shift in priorities and concerns.

Table 1

Assumptions and Limitations of Generational Theory

<p>Assumptions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generational cohorts in Okinawa have distinct perceptions of the U.S. military presence, influenced by their unique historical experiences and socialisation. 2. The major historical events that have transpired in Okinawa, such as the Battle of Okinawa and the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, have a lasting impact on the collective memory and attitudes of the island’s inhabitants. 3. The perspectives of different generations can provide valuable insights into the broader societal attitudes towards issues of national security and economic development in the context of the U.S. military bases.
<p>Limitations</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The theory may oversimplify the diversity within the generational cohorts, as individuals within the same age group can still hold varied views due to personal experiences, socioeconomic status, education, and other factors. 2. The focus on generational differences might underemphasise other important factors that influence perceptions of the U.S. military presence, such as political ideology, gender, and occupation. 3. The historical and cultural specificity of Okinawa means that the findings of this study may not be directly applicable to other contexts or locations where U.S. military bases are present.

Note: The table outlines key assumptions and limitations of applying Generational Theory to the study. This summary underscores the careful balance required in utilising Generational Theory to analyse generational attitudes within Okinawa’s unique context.

Literature Review

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature pertaining to the historical and ongoing issues associated with the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. It aims to contextualise the complex interplay of historical events, cultural dynamics, and political decisions that have shaped the current socio-political landscape of Okinawa. Through a detailed exploration of Okinawa's past and present, from the era of the Ryūkyū Kingdom through its annexation by Japan and subsequent military engagements during and post-WW2, this review illuminates the deep-rooted tensions and the enduring struggles of Okinawans.

The chapter is structured to first delve into the historical trajectory of Okinawa, examining how its geopolitical significance has been a double-edged sword, bringing both prosperity and strife. It then transitions into discussing the pivotal moments and repercussions of military confrontations, notably the Battle of Okinawa during WW2, which have left indelible marks on the island's collective psyche and identity. The review further extends to the post-war era, highlighting the persistent challenges and resistance movements that have emerged in response to the continued military presence and the complex relationship they had with mainland Japan and the United States.

Additionally, this literature review addresses the gaps in existing research, particularly the underexplored generational perspectives on the military presence, which this thesis seeks to illuminate. By examining the nuanced differences in perceptions across age groups, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the contemporary issues faced by Okinawans and provides a backdrop against which the empirical findings of this study will be discussed. This review not only synthesises historical and contemporary viewpoints but also accentuates the significance of viewing Okinawa's challenges through a multifaceted lens of history, culture, and geopolitics.

In synthesising these varied sources, the literature review aims to provide a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of how historical legacies and current realities coalesce to shape the attitudes of Okinawans towards the U.S. military bases, framing the discourse within a broader historical and cultural context. This approach ensures a balanced understanding of the longstanding and emerging dynamics at play, paving the way for insightful discussions and analyses in the following chapters.

History of Okinawa's Struggles

From the Origin of the Ryūkyū Kingdom to Its Demise

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Okinawa was an independent country —The Ryūkyū Kingdom—, which existed from 1429 to 1879 until being annexed to Japan. Throughout its historical tenure, the kingdom adeptly navigated the influences exerted by its geopolitical neighbours, sustaining its distinctive identity and survival mechanisms under complex regional dynamics.

The origin of the kingdom dates back to the 14th century. There are small domains scattered on Okinawa Island, but later they were united into three domains: Hokuzan [Northern Mountain], Chūzan [Central Mountain], and Nanzan [Southern Mountain]. The three were subsequently united after some battles into the Ryūkyū Kingdom by the king of Chūzan, Shō Hashi. He reigned it as a united king recognised by the Ming Dynasty (China). The name “Ryūkyū” was derived from the term used by China to refer to the island at that time. Shō Hashi deliberately adopted this name to underscore the kingdom’s tributary allegiance to China (Akamine, 2017). The kingdom was successful with the strong support from China in maritime trade by taking advantage of its geographical location and its loyalty to China. This strategic affiliation with China, particularly in leveraging maritime trade routes due to its advantageous geographical positioning and demonstrating unwavering loyalty, propelled the kingdom into a zenith of prosperity, especially pronounced during the reign of King Shō Shin (1477–1526), thereby elevating its status as a favoured vassal state to China.

The year 1609 marked a pivotal juncture when Japan initiated an invasion of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, swiftly establishing dominion. In order to avoid a potential military confrontation with China, Japan chose to maintain an outward appearance of sovereignty over the Ryūkyūs and secrecy about the Japanese occupation. On the surface, the Ryūkyū appeared to be an independent kingdom; however, historical documents reveal that Japan exerted covert control over them. This indirect rule led to the imposition of heavy taxes on the Ryūkyuans, which contributed to a sustained period of decline (Sakihara, 1972).

The Ryūkyū Kingdom, strategically located and historically influenced by regional powers, has parallels with contemporary Okinawa. Since the end of WW2, Okinawa has found itself at the crossroads of Japanese and U.S. government policies, reflecting a continuity of geopolitical importance and external influence reminiscent of its past.

Japan's Annexation and Beyond

The 1870s was a significant period of transformation in Japan. The opening of Japan to the international community and the formation of a new government under Emperor Meiji

ushered in an era of rapid modernisation and centralisation. In this transformative time, Japan unilaterally altered the status of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, designating it as the Ryūkyuan Domain in 1872, and subsequently formally annexing it and renaming it Okinawa Prefecture in 1879 (Jansen, 2000).

The annexation did not go unchallenged. China, which had historical ties to the kingdom and considered it a tributary state, objected. In response, the Ryūkyū sought China's support, hoping to counter Japan's aggressive incorporation. However, following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the geopolitical tides turned decisively against the Ryūkyū (Makito, 2011). In the aftermath of the conflict, China, faced with its own defeat and the harsh realities of regional power dynamics, finally recognised Japan's annexation of the islands. This recognition marked the end of the Ryūkyū's autonomy and its integration into the burgeoning Japanese empire, signalling a major realignment in East Asian affairs.

With the formal incorporation into the Japanese state, Okinawa underwent significant cultural and social transformations. The Japanese government embarked on a systematic campaign to assimilate the Okinawan people, which included the introduction of the Japanese language in schools, the replacement of Ryūkyuan cultural practices with Japanese ones, and the imposition of the Japanese legal and political systems. (Kerr, 2011)

The education reform was particularly impactful, serving as a critical tool used by the Japanese government to disseminate its culture and erode Ryūkyuan linguistic and cultural heritage. In schools, the use of local language was heavily discouraged, and in some cases, students were punished for speaking it. A stark example of this suppression was the implementation of "Hogen-Fuda [dialect cards]" that were hung around the necks of children who spoke their native Ryūkyuan language (Nakamine, 2015).

However, the annexation of Okinawa was not solely a harbinger of challenges. Within the context of Okinawa Prefecture, one of the nation's least affluent regions, the emergent Japanese government embarked on an ambitious agenda aimed at propelling infrastructure enhancement, modernisation, and industrial growth. The establishment of contemporary education and healthcare frameworks marked a significant milestone, fostering improved literacy and elevating public health standards across Okinawa. Despite the negative sides of the annexation, it remains undeniable that post-annexation, Okinawa witnessed a notable surge in economic prosperity, a development that yielded tangible benefits for many of its residents.

The Battle of Okinawa: WW2

The Battle of Okinawa in 1945 stands as one of the most devastating military confrontations of WW2, marked by its extreme brutality and high casualty rates, including significant civilian losses. This battle not only represented a critical point in military strategy but also set the stage for the long-term U.S. military presence on the island, fundamentally altering the socio-political landscape of Okinawa.

The human cost of the battle was unprecedented with approximately 150,000 lives lost, which included a significant number of Okinawan civilians (Inoue, 2007). This loss accounted for a quarter to one-third of the local population at the time. Particularly, the battle is remembered for the tragic mass suicides of civilians, the grim reality recounted in numerous testimonies (NHK Archives, n.d.). Surrender was deemed dishonourable, reflecting deeply ingrained Japanese cultural values that prioritised honour and loyalty to the nation. To instil fear, the Japanese military spread rumours of American barbarity and cruelty, warning of rape and death upon capture. Faced with the prospect of disgrace, many civilians chose death over surrender. In some instances, Japanese soldiers forced civilians to take their own lives rather than submit to the advancing U.S. forces (Simpo, 2014). The pervasive atmosphere of fear and coercion deepened the tragedy of the Battle of Okinawa.

The aftermath of the battle led directly to the prolonged U.S. military governance of the island, which lasted until 1972, far beyond Japan's sovereignty restoration in 1952. Inoue (2007) discusses how this extended American presence not only in Okinawa's political landscape but also in its identity and social structure, embedding a complex legacy of foreign military presence that continues to affect Okinawa to this day. This legacy, combined with the subsequent U.S. administration, has been instrumental in shaping modern Okinawan attitudes towards both the Japanese government and the U. S. military. The presence of U.S. military bases has been a contentious issue, contributing to strong local resistance movements that reflect deeper historical wounds and a struggle for autonomy and respect. The Battle of Okinawa was more than a military operation; it was a transformative event that reshaped Okinawa's destiny. The scars left by the battle are deep, influencing the political, social, and economic trajectories of the island. The continued U.S. military presence has been a reminder of these scars, making the Battle of Okinawa a pivotal chapter in the island's history and its ongoing narrative of struggle and resilience.

The Impacts of U.S. Military Presence: From U.S. Rule to Present Day

After WW2, Okinawa was occupied by the U.S., retaining its status as a crucial military base throughout the Cold War and beyond, with numerous bases still present in

Okinawa today. Frequent disputes arose between the U.S. military and the Okinawan populace over issues such as forced land seizures and a succession of crimes, environmental destruction, and noise disturbances. Criminal acts by U.S. military personnel are a particularly serious problem. According to the Okinawa Prefectural Police, between the year of the reversion 1972 and 2021, there were 584 cases of violent crimes, such as robberies and sexual offences, involving 757 people (Ryūkyū Shimpō, 2022). Dissatisfaction stemming from the Battle of Okinawa and subsequent unfair treatment, compounded by an unchanged status quo, has fueled growing resentment towards the central government. This has reinforced the perception among Okinawans that they have been abandoned or discriminated against by Japan. These deep-seated emotions endure among the older generation in Okinawa even today (Yamaguchi, 2022).

During the prolonged struggle of the Okinawan people, there were three distinct post-WW2 periods when their resentments and anti-U.S. military movements particularly intensified. An Okinawan activist historian, Arasaki Moriteru (2000, as cited in Tanji, 2006), referred to them as the “three waves of Okinawan Struggle”. In the following sections, the contexts and backgrounds of these three periods are explored in detail.

First Wave of Okinawan Struggle

“The first wave refers to the series of Okinawans’ protest activities against draconian US land policy in the 1950s” (Tanji, 2006, p. 5). During the Battle of Okinawa, the U.S. military seized vast tracts of land, relocating residents to internment camps and subsequently constructing bases on these lands (Okinawa City Office, Entente and Gender Equality Section, 2012). Following the implementation of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, there were demands for compensation for the lands seized by the U.S. military. In response, the United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyū Islands (USCAR) issued “Authority to Contract/[契約権について]” in November 1952 (United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyū Islands, 1952), establishing lease contracts with the landowners whose properties had been taken. However, the lease terms were unacceptable in that the annual rent was approximately 2 cents per tsubo[坪] (about 3.3 square meters), equivalent to the cost of a bottle of Coca-Cola for roughly 9 tsubo (Okinawa City Office, Entente and Gender Equality Section, 2012). As many refused to sign contracts, and the following year, in April 1953, the USCAR initiated the compulsory expropriation of land for military installations by promulgating “Land Acquisition Procedure/[土地収用令]” (United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyū Islands, 1953). Okinawan individuals who resisted eviction were forcibly expelled at bayonet point, and without the opportunity to remove their

possessions, their homes were demolished with bulldozers. The process was later dubbed “bulldozers and bayonets”, emblematic of the hardships faced by the Okinawan people under the U.S. military rule (Okinawa Prefecture Cultural Promotion Association Document Management Department Editorial Office, 1998).

Moreover, The U.S. President at the time, Eisenhower declared the indefinite retention of the Okinawa base in January 1954, and the USCAR announced a “lump sum” payment of military land fees, which the residents vehemently resisted. The Ryūkyū Government articulated its opposition with four principles to protect the land: 1. opposition to lump sum payments, 2. adequate compensation, 3. compensation for damages, and 4. opposition to new confiscation (Sinjo, 2014, author’s translation). In response to Okinawa’s demand, the United States House of Representatives, chaired by M. Price, sent a survey team to Okinawa and subsequently submitted a report called “The Price Report” to the U.S. Congress. Once the report was revealed to the Okinawan public through the USCAR, the anger of Okinawans boiled over because of the content of the report, which still contained “lump sum” payments of military land fees (Ryukyu-Okinawa History and Culture Website, 2019). Consequently, protests were held in 56 of the 64 Okinawan municipalities, including the “Yon-gensoku-kantetsu-kenmin-taikai [Four-Principles-Through Prefectural Assembly]” held on the ground of Naha High School that approximately 150,000 people gathered (Shinjo, 2014, p.347). Due in part to the vigorous opposition from the residents, the cancellation of the “lump-sum” payments was announced in 1958. Subsequently, there was a significant increase in land-use fees. However, despite all the protests, new land seizures were tacitly approved, and the issue of compensation for damages remained unresolved (Nakano & Arasaki, 1976, p. 108).

Second Wave of Okinawan Struggle

“The second wave of protest occurred at the end of 1960s, with a series of mass protests against the US military administration, mainly demanding reversion to Japanese administration.” (Tanji, 2006, p. 5). Even before the first wave, movements advocating for the reversion were actually in place. However, these movements faced significant



March for the Return to Japan, 27 April 1965. (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, n.d.-b)

challenges due to repression from the USCAR, which ultimately forced their activities to be suspended (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, n.d.-a). However, the first wave of the island-wide protests also rekindled the interest in the reversion movement. In 1960, “Okinawa-ken-sokoku-fukki-kyōgikai [the Okinawa Prefecture Reversion Council]” (Reversion Council) was formed as the central body for the reversion to the mainland joined by a wide range of organisations, including political parties, trade unions, PTAs and bereaved families’ associations. Since then the voice demanding the reversion was raised and protests such as “Sokoku-fukki-dai-kōshin-dan [March for the Return to Japan]” started being held more actively (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, n.d.-a).

Amid these tensions, the Koza riots of 1970 in what is now Okinawa City marked a significant escalation in the reversion movement. The immediate catalyst was a traffic accident involving an American serviceman who ran over an Okinawan, but the underlying causes were deeper—stemming from longstanding dissatisfaction with oppression and human rights violations under the U.S. administration. At that time, the area around Koza was teeming with American soldiers who were on furlough or agency leave from the Vietnam War. This influx created an environment where crimes by U.S. personnel were rampant. While the local economy of Koza was heavily dependent on the spending of U.S. military personnel, even in cases of serious crimes like murder, robbery, and rape, American perpetrators were frequently acquitted or received light sentences due to lack of evidence. Often, when serious crimes occurred, the accused were transferred back to the U.S., leaving outcomes and details obscure, and compensation for victims was rare (Inoue, 2007, pp.50). The number of crimes committed by U.S. service members, which had been under 500 per year, nearly doubled by 1970, the year of the riots (National Diet Library, 1970). This dramatic increase exacerbated Okinawan discontent, culminating in the violent incident where locals burned down U.S. military vehicles and installations; although there were no fatalities, about 500 police officers, 300 MPs and Okinawan guards (security guards) and 400 U.S. armed soldiers were eventually mobilised (Okinawa City Office, 2019).

For more than 25 years following the war, numerous Okinawans were left to endure persistent hardship due to continuous violations of their human rights. This profound suffering fueled the efforts of the Reversion Council, which campaigned vigorously for the “immediate, unconditional, and total return” of the islands to Japan (Inoue, 2007, p. 52). This campaign was not just about political reintegration; it also sought the removal of U.S. bases and aimed to secure the protection afforded by the Japanese Constitution, advocating for a restoration of civil rights and legal protections that had been withheld under U.S.

administration. The Koza riots thus became a potent symbol of deep-seated frustration and pushed for greater urgency in the reversion movement.

Third Wave of Okinawan Struggle

“Then, after an interval of 25 years, came the period of mass protests following the rape case of September 1995. This was ‘the third wave of the Okinawa Struggle’” (Arasaki, 2000; cited as in Tanji, 2006).

Following the incident’s exposure, public indignation surged, particularly the fact that the three perpetrators were not handed over to the Japanese side became a major issue due to the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which stipulates that:

“The custody of an accused member of the United States armed forces or the civilian component over whom Japan is to exercise jurisdiction shall, if he is in the hands of the United States, remain with the United States until he is charged by Japan.”

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024)

The privileged treatment of U.S. soldiers, which often hindered proper investigations into incidents, led to the boiling over of long-simmering anti-base sentiments among Okinawans once again. In response to these frustrations, a series of protest resolutions were adopted by several local governmental bodies, including the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly, Okinawa City Council, and Ginowan City Council (World and Japan Database, 1995). Additionally, a significant rally took place in Ginowan City, attracting around 85,000 attendees, according to the organisers’ report. This marked the largest protest rally since Okinawa reverted to Japanese sovereignty (Takada, 2020). These developments led to an increasing demand for a review of the SOFA, which subsequently saw partial operational modifications. In addition, there were intensified calls for the consolidation and reduction of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa, ultimately prompting the decision to relocate MCAS Futenma—a plan that remains controversial as construction continues.

Protest Culture: Diversity and Complexity

When discussing base issues in Okinawa, the conversation is always framed around three primary stakeholders: the U.S., Japan, and Okinawa(ns). Consequently, Okinawans are often viewed as a collective cohort, perceived as “a unified collective subject responding continuously and uniformly to externally imposed oppression” (Tanji, 2006, p.5). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is diversity within this seemingly homogeneous collective, indicating varied perspectives and responses among the Okinawan population to the presence of U.S. military bases. One factor is, of course, generational difference, which is the focus of this study, but diversity is also reflected in the number of protest groups active in

Okinawa. Each group may represent different segments of the community, highlighting the varied concerns and approaches within the broader movements against the U.S. military presence; “[t]he protest actors today include anti-base labour unions, local socialist and communist parties who compose a local anti-base coalition, anti-war landowners who refuse to contract with the US military, women’s organizations, and locally based groups against the relocation of the MCAS Futenma to the eastern region in Nago.” (Tanji, 2006, p.4)

Allen Nelson, a former U.S. Marine and now a peace activist, stressed that the diversity problem must be tackled first, for the further study of the “Okinawan base issue”, and made the following comments on the chaotic complexion of organisations engaged in protest in Okinawa:

“When I come to Okinawa, I have an extremely busy schedule, because I give talks for so many different groups. I am asked to give a talk by this group and that organisation and I don’t want to say no. The Okinawan peace groups are so splintered. Why can’t they all be together? Personally I don’t think they will have a substantial voice strong enough to move the US military unless all those small different groups are able to come together in one united front.” (Tanji, 2006, p.4)

The three waves mentioned above were the periods “when the population put aside its differences and collectively expressed widely shared demands.” (p.6) While the changes brought about by these three movements did not fully satisfy Okinawans’ expectations, these nonetheless represent small yet significant achievements or rights regained by the residents of the small island. These accomplishments were achieved through unity, despite the residents being caught between two major powers: the U.S. and Japan.

As Allen argues (2002, p.4), the unities that have driven change are both legitimate and strategically relevant. This suggests that for changes they demand, effective unity across the whole of Okinawa is essential, including bridging the division between the younger and older generations.

Key Events from Post-WW2 to Present

Post-WW2 - before Okinawa was returned to Japan (1945 - 1972)

1953	<p>U.S. National Government “Land Expropriation Order”</p> <p>This order was promulgated by the USCAR to seize new land for military use. The term “bulldozers and bayonets” emerged to describe the forceful methods used by the U.S. military to expropriate land during this period. (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, n.d.-b)</p>
1955	<p>Yumiko-chan incident</p> <p>The rape and murder of a five-year-old girl whose name was Yumiko ignited anti-American outrage in Okinawa and contributed to the first major Okinawan protests against the U.S. occupation and military presence. (Kawato, 2015, pp. 45-56)</p>
1956	<p>島ぐるみ闘争 (Shima-gurumi-tōsō) [Island-wide Struggle]</p> <p>The struggle between Okinawan citizens and the U.S. National Government over a large military site in Okinawa under U.S. administration. About 150,000 people rallied at one of these events (see p.21).</p>
1959	<p>Miyamori Elementary School Crash</p> <p>A U.S. military jet (F-100) crashed into Miyamori Elementary School in Ishikawa City (now Uruma City), killing 17 people and injuring another 210 (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, n.d.-c).</p>
1960s	<p>With the escalation of the Vietnam War, Okinawa’s role in the conflict expanded, leading to a surge in anti-war and anti-base sentiments among the local population. Particularly, the frequent bombings launched from Okinawa to Vietnam heightened Okinawan awareness and opposition to the war. (Kawato, 2015, pp. 45-56)</p>
1970	<p>Koza Riot</p>

	In December, followed by a hit-and-run by a U.S. serviceman that killed a woman from Itoman City, clashes between U.S. soldiers and local residents in Okinawa City (Koza) led to a riot. The riot lasted seven or eight hours, beginning in the early morning hours and continuing past dawn. In the end, many were injured, including 60 Americans and 27 Okinawans, and 82 people were arrested (Inoue, 2007).
1971	The Signing of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement
	The Japanese and U.S. governments reached the agreement for Okinawa’s reversion to Japan, effective from the 15th of May, 1972. However, the continuation of the U.S. military bases on the island, as stipulated in the agreement, sparked controversy.

Post Reversion (1972 - Present)

1972	Reversion of Okinawa (May 15)
1980s	Despite its reversion to Japan, Okinawa Prefecture continued to hold a vast amount of U.S. military bases, continuing the longstanding issues associated with their presence. Noise pollution, environmental degradation, and accidents associated with the bases persisted, fueling strong anti-base movements within the local community.
1995	1995 Okinawa Rape Incident
	The case represented an outburst of anger against violent crimes committed by U.S. military personnel. The incident triggered the “third wave,” during which the location of the Futenma base in a densely populated area and the operational procedures of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) regarding extradition and trial procedures for U.S. military-related suspects emerged as major issues. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.). It also led to the very first prefectural referendum, in which 89% voted in favour of base reduction and a review of the SOFA (Okinawa Prefectural Archives, 1996).
2004	U.S. Military Helicopter Crash into University

	A helicopter (CH-53D) from the MCAS Futenma crashed into Okinawa International University, intensifying concerns regarding the safety of the base’s operations (Fukui, 2022; Sanechika, 2004).
2014	Election of Mayor with Mandate to Stop the Construction of New Base
	In December 2014, the political landscape in Okinawa underwent a significant shift with the election of a mayor who was opposed to the construction of the Henoko base, succeeding a pro-construction incumbent. This change heightened the pre-existing tensions and led to the revocation of previously granted permissions for landfill work, sparking a prolonged legal battle (Miyagi, 2014).
2019	Prefectural Referendum on Land Reclamation for the Henoko Base Construction
	In February 2019, an overwhelming majority (72.15%) of Okinawan residents voted against the landfill work for the construction of the new Henoko base in a prefectural referendum. Despite a petition submitted reflecting the referendum’s outcome, the construction work proceeded (BBC News, 2019).

Gaps in Literature

The issue of U.S. military bases in Okinawa has been extensively studied from multiple angles. However, specific areas in the literature reveal notable gaps that this thesis aims to address.

Generational Perspectives and Attitudes

Previous studies often focus on the overarching opposition to U.S. military bases among Okinawans, without delving deeply into the internal diversity of perspectives within communities. This generalisation has led to a lack of understanding of the generational divides that significantly shape local attitudes. Kokaji (2021) and Morrison & Chinen (2019) highlight the disparity in awareness and attitudes between the younger and older generations in Okinawa Prefecture, particularly regarding military base issues. However, further exploration is needed to clarify the underlying reasons for these differences and their implications for anti-base movements.

The Impact of Collective Memories on Generational Attitudes

The historical contexts and collective memories associated with events like the Battle of Okinawa, the American occupation, and its reversion to Japan have profoundly influenced

Okinawan society. Inoue (2007) discusses how traumatic experiences and memories from these historical events shape the older generations' strong anti-base sentiments. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines how these collective memories influence the attitudes of the younger generation and contribute to the generational divides.

Nuanced Understanding of Socio-Economic Factors

Existing research tends to focus on the security and political aspects of the U.S. military presence, while socio-economic aspects are often neglected. Although some previous studies have examined Okinawa's economic dependence on the U.S. military presence, none, to the author's knowledge, have explored generational differences in perceptions of the degree of economic dependence or the causes of such dependence. For instance, Naito (2014) conducted a quantitative and econometric analysis of the impact of U.S. military bases on Okinawa's economy but did not delve into the causes or address the disparity in perceptions between generations. Further research is needed to clarify the socio-economic implications of the bases and the differences in their impacts on the younger and older generations.

Limited Exploration of Youth Perspectives

Research on the attitudes of the younger generation in Okinawa towards U.S. military bases is still limited. Most studies focus on the experiences of older generations, leaving a gap in understanding the perspectives of the younger demographic, who are less aware of the historical context but more influenced by contemporary global trends and socio-economic realities. Kokaji (2021) offers a preliminary exploration of the younger generation's attitudes, but a more comprehensive study is required to accurately gauge the extent of their awareness and concerns.

Summary

In summary, this study aims to fill the gaps in the existing literature by providing a nuanced analysis of generational perspectives on U.S. military bases in Okinawa, with a particular focus on the economic and security aspects. By exploring these lesser-studied facets, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of historical experiences, collective memory, and socio-political dynamics shaping local attitudes today.

Methodology

This chapter delineates the comprehensive methodological framework employed to explore nuanced perceptions across generational cohorts regarding the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. To address the complex nature of generational attitudes, which are shaped by both measurable trends and deep-seated personal and cultural influences, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach. This research method integrates both quantitative and qualitative data from four key surveys I applied. To ensure validity and enhance credibility, a variety of sources, including news articles and official documents, were utilised as complementary inputs.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study was conducted exclusively using secondary data in both Japanese and English. The main and foundational data for analysis comprises four survey datasets carried out between 2017 and 2022, ranging from a national poll involving over 4,000 participants to a survey for a study focusing on ten to twenty attendees. Additionally, a variety of complementary sources including published and archival materials, official and institutional reports, media coverage, public discourse, and legal and public records, were also gathered to enhance the analysis.

Quantitative Data

The study utilised surveys conducted in Okinawa or in both Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, gathering responses to survey questions relating to the U.S. military presence and the two keywords: “national security” and “economy”. The main data sources are opinion polls conducted by two major media companies in Japan: NHK, which is Japan’s national broadcaster, and 読売新聞 (Yomiuri-Shimbun) or The Japan News, which is a leading national newspaper. These surveys were designed to capture broad attitudes towards the U.S. military bases.

1. 沖縄米軍基地をめぐる意識 沖縄と全国～2017年4月「復帰45年の沖縄」調査～
~[Attitudes towards the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa and across the Country - April 2017 “45 years since Okinawa’s reversion” survey -], by Kono, 2017:

In April 2017, NHK, Japan’s national broadcaster, conducted a survey to gauge public opinions regarding U.S. military base issues in Okinawa. The survey data reveals clear generational divides. Using the telephone method (RDD tracking), the survey reached 4,353 individuals across Japan—2,729 from Okinawa Prefecture and 1,624 from the rest—all aged 18 and over. It achieved a response rate of 50-60% in both Okinawa and other parts of Japan.

Table 2*Details of NHK Survey on Opinions of U.S. Military in Okinawa*

Conducted by	NHK (Japan's national broadcaster)
Date	From the 21st to the 23rd of April, 2017
Method	Telephone (RDD tracking method)
Participants	4,353 individuals in Japan (2,729 from Okinawa and 1,624 from other regions)
Age Range	Aged 18 and over
Response Rate	50-60% in both Okinawa and the other regions
Reference	Kono, 2017

Note. The survey was conducted to gauge public opinions across the country regarding U.S. military base issues in Okinawa. It did not take respondents' original places of birth into account. Instead, participants were categorised according to their current places of residence.

2. 沖縄の日本本土復帰50年に関する世論調査～基地問題や経済格差などを巡る沖縄と全国の意識について～ [*Public Opinion Survey on the 50th Anniversary of Okinawa's Reversion to Mainland Japan - Okinawa's and the Nation's Attitudes Towards Base Issues and Economic Disparities*], by Shinohara, 2022:

The survey, conducted by The Japan News, consisted of 24 questions that were consistent across Okinawa Prefecture and the rest of Japan, covering topics such as perceptions of Okinawa, assessments of its reintegration with mainland Japan, base-related issues, security dynamics, economic conditions, and more. In only Okinawa Prefecture, an additional 13 questions were asked, focusing on the impact of U.S. military bases on daily lives, Okinawan attitudes and personal histories regarding the Battle of Okinawa and the period of U.S. administration. A two-stage stratified random sampling approach was used to select a sample of 2,000 eligible voters from Okinawa Prefecture and 3,000 from the rest of Japan. Participants were sent self-administered questionnaires to be returned by mail. The survey window ran from March to April 2022. The number of responses from Okinawa Prefecture was 1,078

(comprising 528 males and 550 females, for a response rate of 54%), while the national response was 2,080 (970 males and 1,110 females, for a response rate of 69%).

Table 3

Details of The Japan News Survey on Opinions of various issues in Okinawa

Conducted by	The Japan News (The leading national newspaper with the country's largest circulation)
Date	From 15 March to 25 April 2022 for Okinawa Prefecture From 15 March to 21 April for the nationwide survey
Method	Self-administered questionnaires by mail
Participants	2,000 eligible voters from Okinawa Prefecture 3,000 eligible voters from across Japan
Response Rate	54% for Okinawa; 1,078 (528 males and 550 females) 69% for the national survey: 2,080 (970 males and 1,110 females)
Reference	Shinohara, 2022

Note. Adapted from 沖縄の日本本土復帰50年に関する世論調査～基地問題や経済格差などを巡る沖縄と全国の意識について～ [Public Opinion Survey on the 50th Anniversary of Okinawa's Reversion to Mainland Japan - Okinawa's and the Nation's Attitudes Towards Base Issues and Economic Disparities], by Shinohara, 2022, pp.32-33. (Author's translation)

Qualitative data

Qualitative data were sourced from a diverse array of materials, with significant contributions from two particular studies below that conducted interviews on relevant topics closely aligned with the aims of this research. Extensive quantitative data were also drawn from these studies. Additionally, comments from news articles and documentaries discussing base issues were utilised, providing a broad spectrum of perspectives. Given that the year 2022 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Okinawa's reversion, there was an abundance of data available, enriching the research with varied insights and viewpoints.

3. *Millennial+ Voices in Okinawa: An Inquiry into the Attitudes of Young Okinawan Adults toward the Presence of U.S. Bases*, by Morrison & Chinen, 2019:

The study was conducted in the first half of 2018, a period notably free from significant crimes or accidents involving U.S. service personnel or their operations. To accurately capture the prevailing attitudes of the more educated OA (Okinawan born After the reversion) demographic, in-depth interviews were conducted with approximately 60 individuals from this age group. Furthermore, an online survey was administered to 199 Okinawans, and this was supplemented by several group discussions. The research process was enhanced by feedback on an interim report and through dissemination sessions held in both Okinawa and the United States. To ensure accessibility and relevance to the local context, the majority of the surveys and interviews were conducted in Japanese.

*For clarity, the terms “M+” and “O46+” are used in the original research; however, for convenience, they are rephrased in this study as “OA” and “OB” as defined in the research questions.

Table 4

Number and Composition of On-line Survey Respondents

Groups	Number of Respondents
OAs	199
(No University Education)	(60/199)
(University Education)	(137/199)
OBs	21
Total Number of Respondents	220

Note. Two respondents did not indicate their level of education. Adapted from *Millennial+ Voices in Okinawa: An Inquiry into the Attitudes of Young Okinawan Adults toward the Presence of U.S. Bases*, by Morrison & Chinen, 2019, p. 26.

(Author’s translation)

4. 沖縄の若い世代における世代間分断と世代内分断—沖縄ルーツの大学生の社会意識を中心に— [*Intergenerational and intragenerational divisions of the younger generation in Okinawa: Focusing on the social consciousness of university students with Okinawa roots*], Kokaji, 2021:

This study explores the perspectives of university students with Okinawan roots on topics such as the U.S. military presence and regional autonomy, employing both interviews and questionnaires. The primary objective is to document and analyse the spectrum of opinions among young individuals regarding Okinawa's political status and social challenges. By doing so, the research aims to contribute to broader discussions about the island's future and its socio-political relationship with Japan and the United States.

To achieve these objectives, the study utilised a combination of interviews and questionnaire surveys. Interviews were conducted over a year from September 2017 to August 2018 with 12 informants in both Okinawa and Aichi prefectures, to include views from Okinawans living away from the island. Aichi was specifically selected due to its significant Okinawan population. In July 2018, a questionnaire survey was administered at three universities in Okinawa, with participation from 199 students. The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses on topics related to Okinawan independence and the impact of U.S. military bases.

Table 5*Information of Informants*

	Hometown	Age	Sex	Attribute	Date	Place
A	Ginowan City	19	Male	Student	29 Oct 2017	Aichi
B	Ginowan City	19	Male	Student	31 Oct 2017	Aichi
C	Naha City	23	Male	Student	9 Dec 2017	Aichi
D	Nago City	21	Male	Student	9 Dec 2017	Aichi
E	Okinawa City	21	Female	Student	29 Dec 2017	Aichi
F	Nishihara Town	21	Male	Student	17 Mar 2018	Aichi
G	Itoman City	22	Male	Student	9 Aug 2018	Aichi
H	Gionowan City	19	Male	Student	16 Feb 2018	Okinawa
I	GInowan City	23	Female	Employed	22 Feb 2018	Okinawa
J	Chatan Town	20	Female	Student	22 Feb 2018	Okinawa
K	Yomitan Village	21	Female	Student	24 Feb 2018	Okinawa
L	Uruma City	23	Male	Student	6 Sep 2018	Okinawa

Note. Adapted from 沖繩の若い世代における世代間分断と世代内分断—沖繩ルーツの大学生の社会意識を中心に— [*Intergenerational and intragenerational divisions of the younger generation in Okinawa: Focusing on the social consciousness of university students with Okinawa roots*], Kokaji, 2021, p. 24.

(Author's translation)

Methods for Data Analysis & Discussion

The analysis component of this study aimed to uncover the extent and underlying causes of the generational divides concerning the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Key surveys conducted between 2017 and 2022 provided the foundation, complemented by in-depth interviews and comments from various sources.

Initially, survey results focusing on “national security” and “economy” were extracted for comparison across different generational groups. By examining trends and patterns, the research identified reasons behind these divides and discussed potential strategies for bridging them. Following the extraction of survey data, the research delved into analysing and discussing emerging trends and patterns. This involved investigating the foundational reasons and rationales behind these trends, drawing from sources in both English and Japanese.

Consideration of the data collection timeframe was crucial, given the potential impacts of social contexts on participant responses. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Taiwan crisis, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine could have influenced public sentiments during the periods when the key surveys were carried on. For instance, economic uncertainties heightened by the pandemic, tensions over infection prevention measures between Okinawa and the U.S. military, and concerns about the Taiwan crisis highlighted by the Russian invasion and its implications for the base relocation, all likely contributed to Okinawans’ attitudes towards the U.S. military presence.

Acknowledging the timing of data collection was essential for accurate interpretation and deeper discussions, ensuring that the study effectively captured the evolving perspectives of Okinawans amidst these significant events.

Methodological Limitations

While this research aims to offer a comprehensive exploration of generational perceptions regarding the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, there are several methodological limitations that need to be acknowledged.

Reliance on Secondary Data

First and foremost, it is important to note that this study relies on secondary data sources. While the datasets utilised were drawn from relevant research and studies, it does not guarantee that their aims or questions precisely align with the specific research questions posed about generational differences in this study. Therefore, the potential impacts on the accuracy and relevance of the conclusions drawn from the study must be carefully considered when interpreting the findings.

Sampling Bias

The sampling strategies of the two key surveys for quantitative data employed primarily focused on stratifying participants by place of residence and age group. However, this approach did not account for other potentially influential factors such as whether individuals were immigrants or native Okinawans, or their levels of education. Additionally,

while “Okinawa” encompasses a diverse array of islands, cities, towns, and villages, each with distinct geographical characteristics that could influence opinions on the U.S. military presence, these differences were not considered in the sampling processes. Consequently, it is undeniable that the results of these surveys may not fully represent the comprehensive spectrum of opinions within Okinawa Prefecture.

Survey and Interview Limitations

The methodology incorporates data from telephone surveys and self-administered questionnaires, each with inherent drawbacks. Telephone surveys often yield less detailed responses due to their impersonal nature, while self-administered questionnaires depend heavily on the respondents’ motivations and comprehension levels, which can vary widely. These factors could affect the depth and accuracy of the data collected.

This issue also pertains to another key survey for qualitative data, where the questions are predominantly formatted as multiple-choice, requiring respondents to specify their level of agreement or disagreement. Such a format may introduce ambiguity, particularly when respondents choose middle-ground responses like “moderately [dis]agree”, despite the availability of more definitive options like “strongly [dis]agree”. Determining whether these selections accurately reflect the respondents’ true opinions, or if they result from a lack of knowledge or interest in the topic, poses a significant challenge. This ambiguity in responses could potentially distort the data interpretation, making it difficult to analyse genuine sentiments on the issues surveyed. It is noteworthy that in this study, these “intermediate answers” represented a large proportion of the responses across almost all questions.

It was deemed essential to consider the Japanese cultural tendency towards cooperation rather than assertiveness, especially when respondents’ opinions appeared ambiguous. Morrison & Chinen (2019) highlighted a specific observation regarding Okinawans under 45 years old. Although individuals within this demographic often acknowledged the necessity of bases when questioned individually, group responses revealed a different sentiment. They reported: “[W]hen the survey group as a whole was asked to agree or disagree with a statement that the bases in Okinawa were needed for Japanese national security, there was more disagreement than agreement” (p. 13). Consequently, data from non-individual settings were excluded from this study as much as possible. However, it must be acknowledged that there is a possibility that some answers and responses included in the dataset might have been collected in non-individual settings, potentially influencing the findings.

Language and Cultural Nuances

“Language and context” is crucial for this study as a multilingual project. Recognising the potential for translation inaccuracies to alter the nuances essential for understanding generational perspectives, this research employed several strategies to ensure accuracy. These strategies included consulting at least two bilinguals (English and Japanese), cross-referencing multiple translations, and carefully considering the cultural contexts in interpretation. Furthermore, to preserve the original nuances of complex or lengthy texts, the original Japanese texts were presented before the English translations when using references. The interpretations of qualitative data, especially from interviews, are vulnerable to researchers’ cultural and subjective biases, which might lead to misinterpretations of nuanced views expressed by participants. These measures aimed to minimise the risk of misreporting and enhance the reliability of the research findings.

Generalisability

The findings from this study are deeply influenced by the unique socio-political and historical contexts of Okinawa, which shapes local perceptions of the U.S. military presence. As a result, these insights may not be readily generalisable or applicable to other regions or populations hosting U.S. military bases. This limitation is crucial for contextualising the conclusions of the study and understanding the extent to which its findings can be applied to broader contexts. Recognising this specificity is essential when considering the implications of the research and when attempting to extrapolate these results to different settings.

Ethical Considerations

This research, though primarily based on secondary data, upheld stringent ethical standards, particularly vital when addressing sensitive topics such as military presence and societal opinions. To ensure the integrity of the study, all data utilised were meticulously documented, detailing each survey’s methodology as provided by the original researchers. This transparency made the data usage traceable and credible, and efforts were made to represent these secondary data with utmost accuracy, reflecting the original studies’ results without manipulation.

The handling of data was conducted in a manner that preserved the anonymity and privacy of individuals, using only data that lacked personal identifiers and were from publicly available sources, thereby significantly mitigating privacy concerns. Furthermore, a high degree of contextual awareness was maintained throughout the research process, paying close attention to the cultural and historical contexts that shape community perspectives in Okinawa. This sensitivity was crucial for accurately interpreting responses and presenting

findings in a manner respectful of the community's historical experiences and current socio-political climate.

Impartiality and balanced reporting were foundational in this study's approach, ensuring no particular viewpoint was unduly favoured, thereby maintaining the research integrity and avoiding potential stigmatisation or polarisation within the community. The study was designed to avoid any potential harm that could arise from the findings, with careful consideration on how results were interpreted and disseminated, aiming to inform and enlighten rather than exacerbate any existing tensions or conflicts.

Additionally, the research aimed to contribute constructively to the public discourse on the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, providing academically sound insights that could be useful to policymakers and community stakeholders. This dual focus on avoiding harm and contributing positively to public knowledge underscores the ethical rigour and social responsibility guiding the research, ensuring that it not only contributes to academic knowledge but also respects the rights and dignity of the individuals and communities involved. This ethical framework emphasises the responsibility to handle secondary data with the same level of ethical consideration as primary data, especially when dealing with impactful and sensitive topics.

By adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensures comprehensive and respectful engagement with the issues at hand, aligning with the broader aims of enhancing understanding and managing the complex dynamics surrounding military bases in the region.

Data Analysis & Discussion

For analysis, this study focuses on data pertinent to two critical themes: "national security" and "economy." These themes are assumed to be key components shaping perceptions of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. The objective is to ascertain the existence of generational divides and evaluate their extent and possible causes. Additionally, the study examines Okinawan perspectives on the interconnection between these essential aspects and the U.S. military presence, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the local views towards the military bases and their broader socio-economic implications.

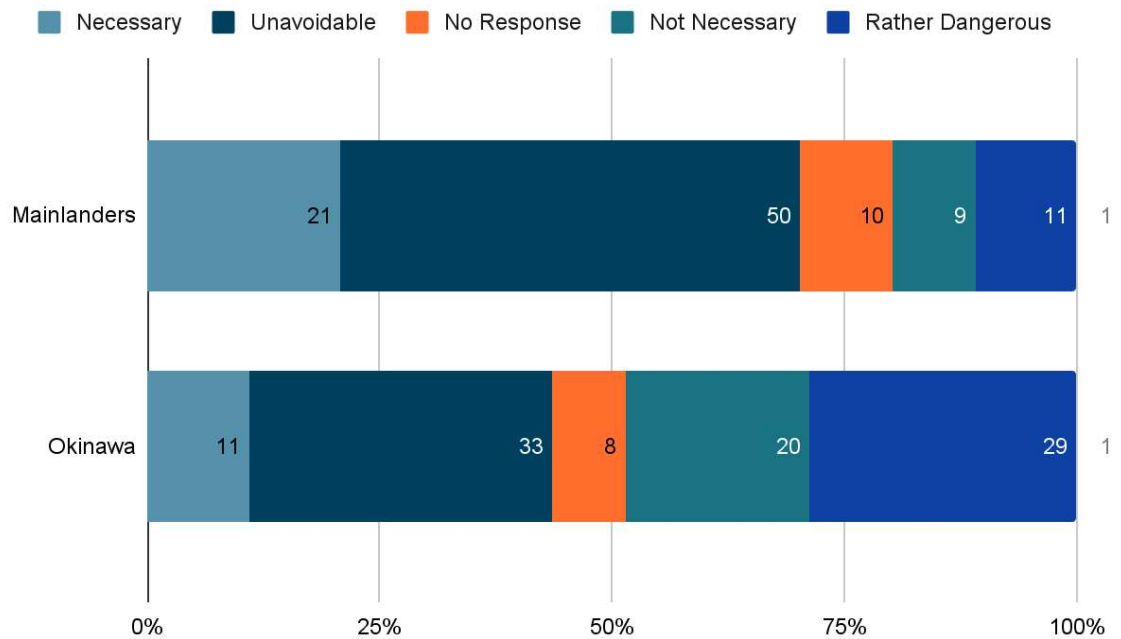
Perspectives of "National Security"

The primary justification for the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan, including Okinawa, is undeniably "national security". Amid escalating international tensions, the strategic positioning of U.S. forces in Japan is deemed crucial by many. This holds especially true for Okinawa, given its considerable distance from the Japanese mainland and its strategic

geopolitical location in the East China Sea. Many Japanese believe that the presence of U.S. forces in Japan has bolstered national security by serving as a deterrent against potential armed conflicts with other neighbouring nations. In fact, in response to the question “Are U.S. bases in Okinawa necessary for national security?”, around three-quarters of respondents in the mainland answered either “必要だ [Necessary]” or “やむを得ない [Unavoidable]”. In contrast, in Okinawa, only half of the respondents provided the same response. Additionally, about one-third of Okinawans felt that it was “かえって危険だ [Rather Dangerous]”.

Figure 3

(1) “Are U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa Necessary for National Security?”



Note. The figure highlights a notable disparity in perspectives regarding national security and the presence of U.S. military bases between mainlanders and Okinawans. Adapted from 沖繩米軍基地をめぐる意識 沖繩と全国～2017年4月「復帰45年の沖繩」調査～[Attitudes towards the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa and across the Country - April 2017 “45 years since Okinawa’s reversion” survey -], by Kono, 2017, p. 19.

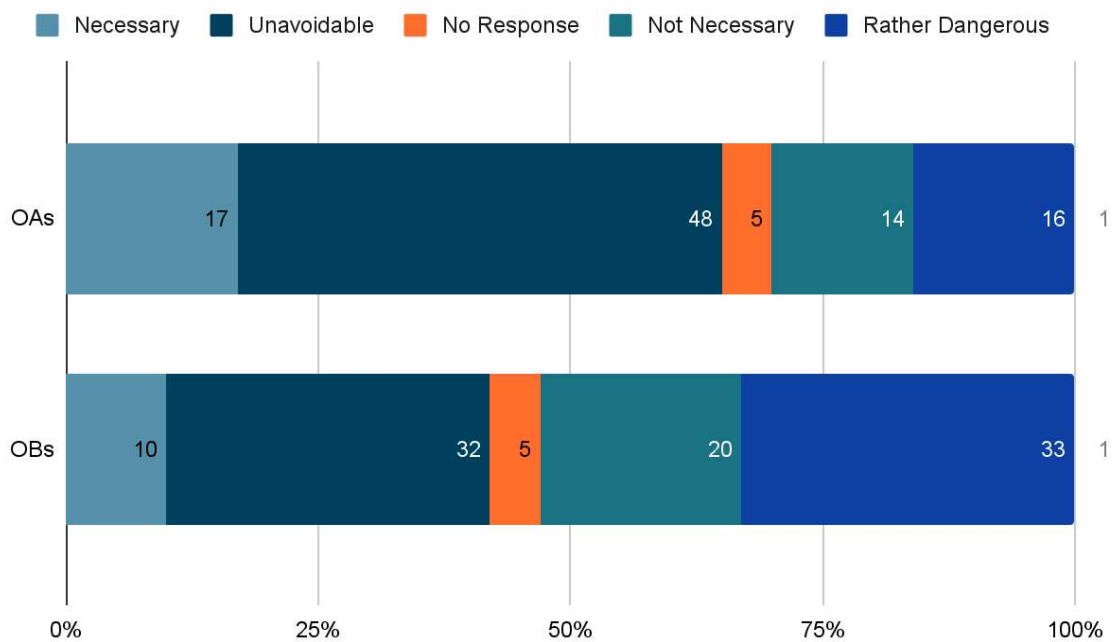
While this difference in perceptions between mainland Japan and Okinawa is indeed a problem, it is not the central focus of this study. Instead, the study directs the attention to

another noteworthy contrast between mainland Japan and Okinawa, namely, the conspicuous generational divide within Okinawa itself, an aspect not observed on the mainland.

According to the research conducted by NHK, Okinawans born after the reversion (OAs), 65% acknowledge the necessity of the bases for national security, whereas 53% of those born before the reversion (OBs) hold a negative view toward them (Figure 4). Another survey conducted five years later, in 2022, revealed a similar trend, with younger individuals attributing more significance to U.S. military bases in Okinawa concerning national security (Figure 5).

Figure 4

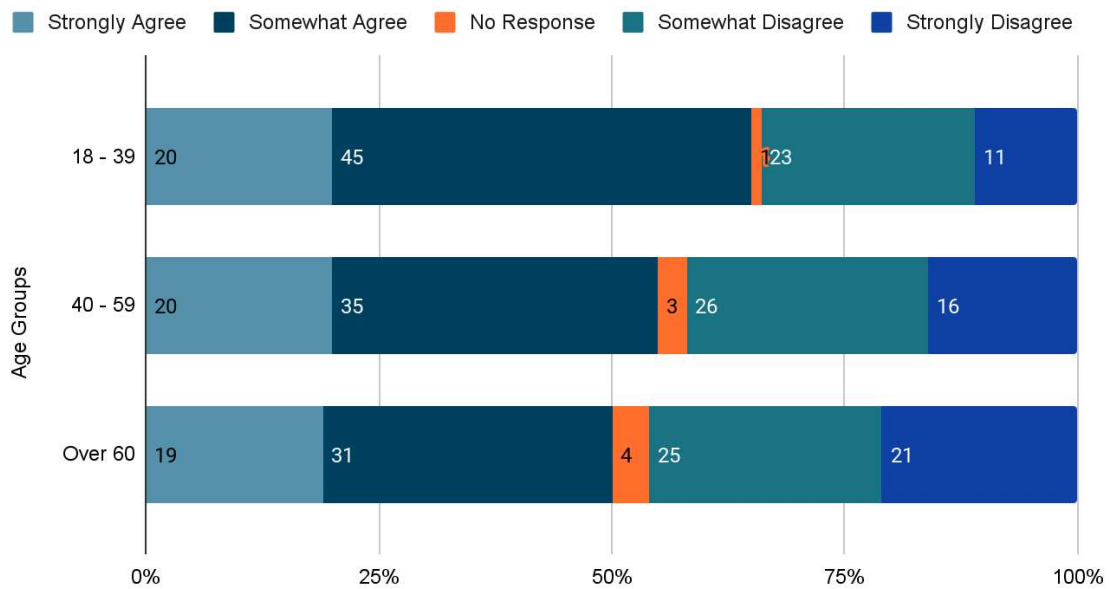
(2) “Are U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa Necessary for National Security?”



Note. The figure stresses the generational divide in Okinawans’ perspectives on the relationship between national security and the presence of U.S. military bases. Adapted from *沖縄米軍基地をめぐる意識 沖縄と全国～2017年4月「復帰45年の沖縄」調査～ [Attitudes towards the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa and across the Country - April 2017 “45 years since Okinawa’s reversion” survey -]*, by Kono, 2017, p. 19.

Figure 5

Do U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa Contribute to Japan's Security?

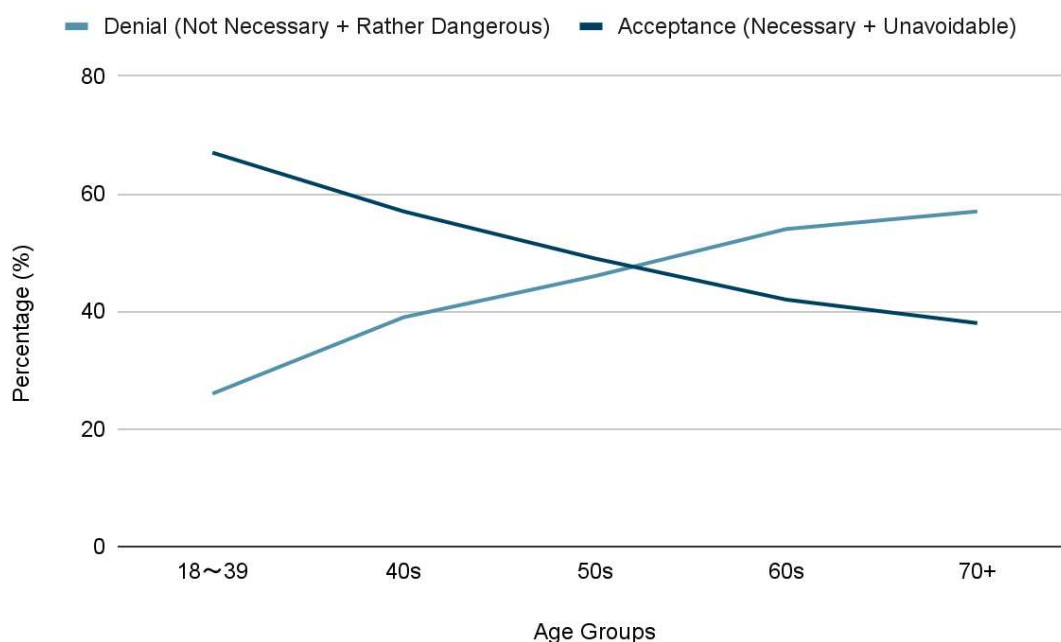


Note. The figure reveals the different perceptions of the U.S. military contribution to national security between different age groups. In particular, 65% of Okinawans aged 18 to 39 acknowledge the contribution, in contrast to 50% of those aged over 60 expressing disagreement. Adapted from *沖縄の日本本土復帰50年に関する世論調査～基地問題や経済格差などを巡る沖縄と全国意識について～* [Public Opinion Survey on the 50th Anniversary of Okinawa's Reversion to Mainland Japan - Okinawa's and the Nation's Attitudes Towards Base Issues and Economic Disparities], by Futoshi, 2022, p. 37.

The analysis of the survey data, as presented in Figure 5, reveals patterns when sorted by age. It indicates that Okinawans born approximately 6-7 years before the reversion, or earlier, tend to hold a negative view regarding the U.S. military's presence on the island, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6

“Are U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa Necessary for National Security?” by age group



Note. Adapted from 沖縄の若い世代における世代間分断と世代内分断—沖縄ルーツの大学生の社会意識を中心に— [Intergenerational and intragenerational divisions of the younger generation in Okinawa: Focusing on the social consciousness of university students with Okinawa roots], by Kokaji, 2021, p. 32.

It is also noteworthy that about one-third of OBs perceive the presence of U.S. forces more as a risk than a deterrent. Additionally, data reveal that a quarter of Okinawans question the importance of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty itself (Kono, 2017, p.20). Based on those two findings, it can be assumed that approximately a quarter of the Okinawan population, primarily consisting of OBs, holds a view that starkly contrasts with the majority regarding U.S. bases in terms of “national security”.

To sum up, the main findings are:

1. Generational Differences in Perception

Younger individuals tend to recognise the importance of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, whereas their older counterparts are more inclined to hold a negative view. The turning point for the majority occurs at age 52 or 53 as of 2017, where “acceptance” and “denial” rates for U.S. military bases in terms of national security are almost balanced.

2. Perception of U.S. Bases as a Risk

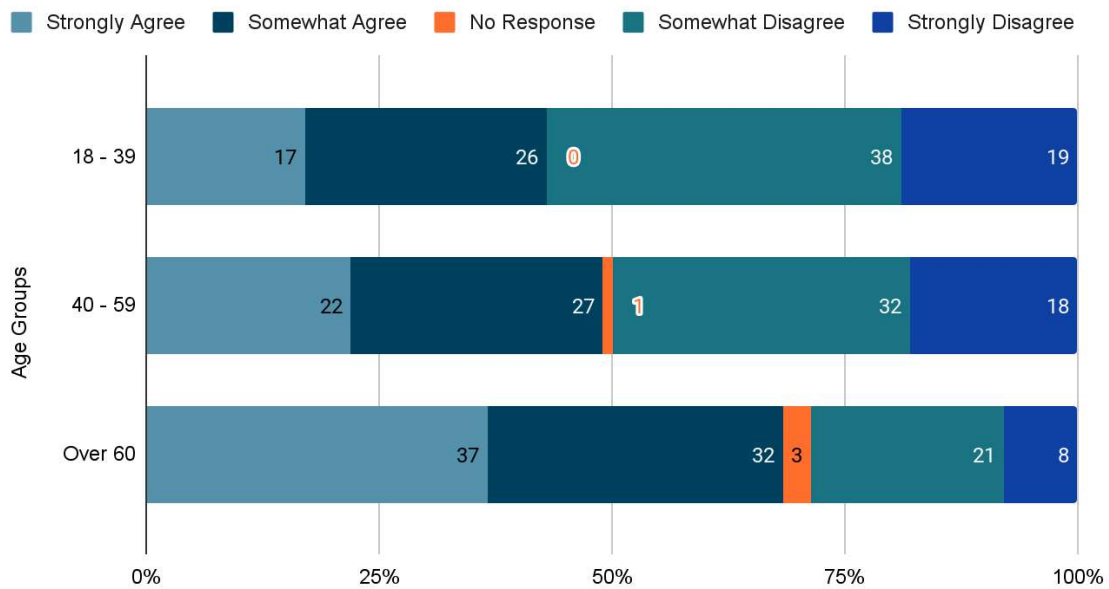
Approximately 20-30% of Okinawans, predominantly older individuals, perceive U.S. bases as a risk that could lead to armed conflicts, contrary to the majority view that considers them a deterrent.

Perspectives of “Economy”

The outlook on Okinawa’s economic development, especially among younger Okinawans, harbours a sense of uncertainty regarding the potential for future growth that does not depend on the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan. Figure 7, presented below, displays the results from a survey question, “在沖米軍基地がなくても、沖縄の経済は成り立つと思うか? [Would Okinawa’s economy be viable without U.S. military bases in Japan?]” with responses categorised by age group. While 57% of younger Okinawans (aged 18-39) expressed concerns about economic growth in the absence of the U.S. military, approximately 70% of older Okinawans (aged over 60) believed that the economy could progress without significant issues (Shinohara, 2022, p.38). The same question posed in another survey, which was conducted five years before the aforementioned one (Kono, 2017, p.23), revealed a consistent trend: half of OAs doubted the feasibility of economic viability without U.S. military bases, while two-thirds of OBs believed it would be feasible (Figure 8). There has been no significant change in their perspectives during these five years.

Figure 7

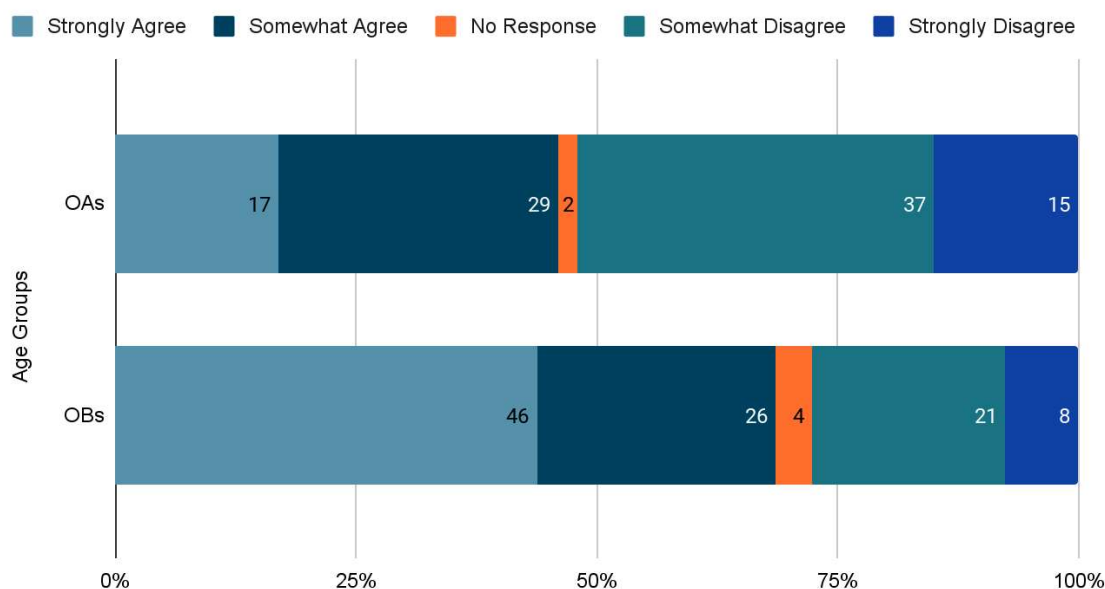
(1) “Would Okinawa’s Economy Be Viable Without U.S. Military Bases in Japan?”



Note. The figure indicates that younger Okinawans have stronger anxiety about the economy without the U.S. military presence compared to their older counterparts. Adapted from 沖繩の日本本土復帰50年に関する世論調査～基地問題や経済格差などを巡る沖縄と全国意識について～ [Public Opinion Survey on the 50th Anniversary of Okinawa’s Reversion to Mainland Japan - Okinawa’s and the Nation’s Attitudes Towards Base Issues and Economic Disparities], by Futoshi, 2022, p. 38.

Figure 8

(2) “Would Okinawa’s Economy Be Viable Without U.S. Military Bases in Japan?”



Note. The figure indicates that Okinawans born after the reversion (OAs) have stronger anxiety about the economy without the U.S. military presence. Adapted from 沖繩米軍基地をめぐる意識 沖縄と全国～2017年4月「復帰45年の沖縄」調査～[Attitudes towards the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa and across the Country - April 2017 “45 years since Okinawa’s reversion” survey -], by Kono, 2017, p. 24.

Half a century after Okinawa’s reversion, a significant number of younger Okinawans continue to perceive Okinawa’s economy as heavily reliant on the businesses and revenues generated by the presence of U.S. forces in Japan. On the contrary, their older counterparts appear to hold a more optimistic outlook regarding the economy.

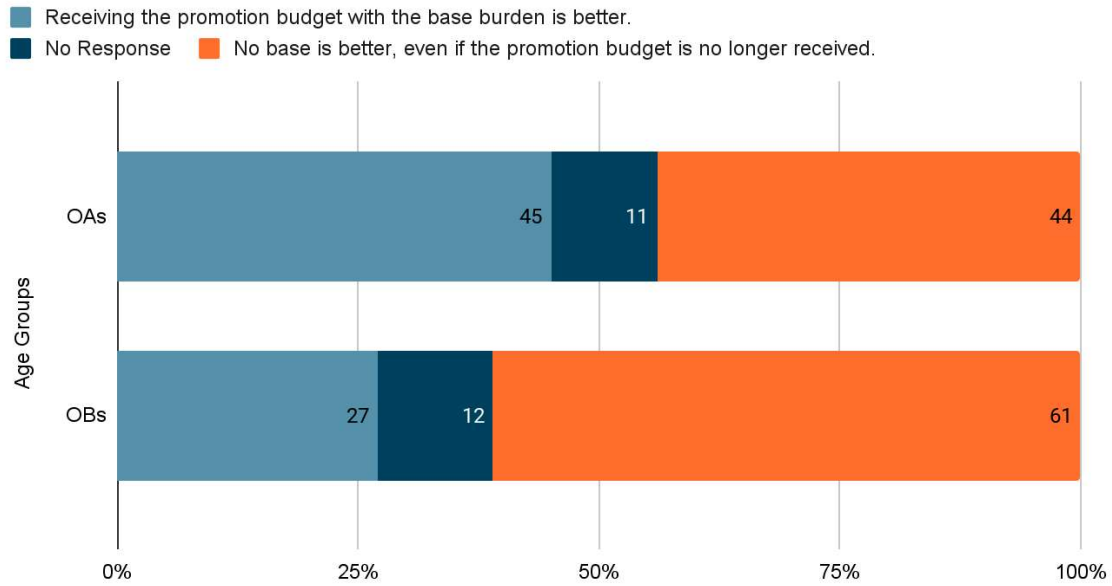
When discussing Okinawa’s economy, a frequently raised topic is the financial support provided by the central government, commonly referred to as the “Okinawa Promotion Budget”. The budget is often misperceived as a form of compensation that Okinawa receives specifically for maintaining the bases, which is not entirely accurate, as discussed in greater detail in a later chapter (see pp.49-51).

Figure 9 summarises the results of a survey question asking participants which they would prioritise: receiving the budget or ceasing to bear the burden of U.S. military bases. The findings provide insights into the priorities of Okinawans, highlighting the extent to

which they value the budget compared to their concerns about future economic growth and the presence of U.S. military bases.

Figure 9

The U.S. Bases and Okinawa Promotion Budget



Note: The chart shows the perceived significance of the Okinawa Promotion Budget for their economic growth, especially for the younger generation. Adapted from 沖縄米軍基地をめぐる意識 沖縄と全国～2017年4月「復帰45年の沖縄」調査～[Attitudes towards the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa and across the Country - April 2017 “45 years since Okinawa’s reversion” survey -], by Kono, 2017, p. 25.

When “No Response” entries are excluded, about 70% of OBs expressed a preference for no-base status over continuing to receive the budget, whereas half of OAs emphasised the importance of the budget. This result highlights differing outlooks for the economy in Okinawa between the younger and older generations, illustrating a generational divide in priorities and perceptions related to the U.S. military presence and future economic prospects.

Summary of Findings

This study assumed that “national security” and “economy” were significant factors shaping Okinawans’ attitudes towards U.S. military bases, and looked at the relevant data. Analysis of the survey data reveals that there are significant disparities in perceptions of the U.S. military presence.

<p>National Security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Younger Okinawans recognise the importance of U.S. bases in Okinawa; older Okinawans often view them negatively. The “acceptance” rate of U.S. military bases tends to be higher among the younger generation and decreases as age increases. ● The generational dividing line between the majority groups—those expressing “acceptance” or “denial” rates for U.S. military bases—was drawn at the age of 52 or 53 in 2017. This demographic consisted of individuals who were 6 or 7 years old when Okinawa was returned to Japan. ● 20-30% of Okinawans, primarily OBs, see U.S. bases as a potential conflict risk, unlike the majority who view them as a deterrent.
<p>Economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Younger generation tends to see the local economy as dependent on U.S. military base-related revenue. ● Over 60% of the older generation prefer Okinawa’s autonomy and a “no-base status” over continuing to receive the benefits of the promotion budget from the central government.

Discussion

Before engaging in the discussion, I reiterate my standpoint and the core objective of this study. While I advocate for strides toward diminishing the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, my military background necessitates recognising the unlikelihood of significant downsizing for the foreseeable future, given the prevailing circumstances surrounding Okinawa and Japan. Therefore, I believe that Okinawa must adopt a more strategic approach and collectively voice its demands, to the central government in order to make step-by-step progress on this long-standing issue. This means the reduction of the U.S. military presence necessitates a realistic solution — one that resonates with Okinawans and eventually

mainlanders while cultivating mutual respect and compromise. Hence, addressing Okinawa's generational divides stands as an initial and critical stride toward achieving the change.

In the following sections, in-depth explorations of the potential factors contributing to the generational divides are undertaken, along with an examination of the recommendations.

“Unarmed Equals Peace”: the Impact of Collective Memories and Experiences

The finding that approximately one-third of Okinawans, predominantly older individuals, view the U.S. military presence as a risk rather than a deterrent is particularly noteworthy. Although I may not personally align with this viewpoint, I can understand its rationale to a little extent. It is true that the effectiveness of foreign military forces as a deterrent or a risk can depend on specific circumstances, and the actual impacts of such a presence may only become evident in the face of real conflict. Additionally, there are indeed several countries without military forces considered “peaceful” in this world (Global Finance, 2024). However, given the current international dynamics surrounding Okinawa and Japan, the perspective that views the U.S. military presence primarily as a risk is unlikely to become the mainstream view held by the majority.

Makoto Nakashinjo, a journalist and editor-in-chief of an Okinawan local newspaper, suggests that the stance of this subset of Okinawans for national security is not rooted in any logic, but stems from an ideologist belief in “unarmed equals peace”, a notion deeply influenced by the collective memories and experiences from their tragic past such as the Battle of Okinawa (Abemanews, 2022, 8:40). Okinawa was a fierce battlefield of WW2, resulting in the loss of a quarter to one-third of its local population (see pp.18-20). For those familiar with its history, military bases are perceived as “暴力装置 (bōryoku-sōchi) [violent apparatus]” (Kokaji, 2021, p. 33), serving as stark reminders of wartime conflict and understandably evoking feelings of unease and insecurity. This sentiment is palpable in some comments from older Okinawans protesting against the U.S. military presence:

“I have four children and seven grandchildren so I come here for them I won't live that long but I don't want my children to experience war like I did.” (France 24 English, 2019, 6:40, translated from France 24 English)

“[T]his construction is destroying nature in the ocean building a military base, a place that's associated with killing people is truly stupid.” (13:26, translated from France 24 English)

While I support the gradual downsizing of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, I remain sceptical about whether the perception of “unarmed equals peace” can truly lead to their desired outcomes, given that such claims often escalate to calls for the complete

withdrawal of the U.S. military or even the independence of Okinawa. According to a public opinion poll in Okinawa conducted by Kyodo News, approximately 30% of Okinawans answered that they could agree with the idea of “Independence for Okinawa” (Suzuki, 2023); the figure that coincidentally matches the percentage of those who perceive the U.S. military presence as a risk rather than a deterrent. These aspirations are generally viewed as unachievable and unrealistic by the majority, as over 70% of people on the mainland recognise the importance of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. Consequently, the voices and efforts of those strongly advocating for reduced base burdens with the “unarmed equals peace” concept are often marginalised and criticised as “ineffective” or “unrealistic”, even by other Okinawans who also desire base reductions in the bottom of their hearts. A university student with Okinawan roots shared their perspective on the concept, reflecting the complexities and challenges of this stance:

“国際関係論的には、武力は抑止力というのは常識です。また、これまでの戦争の歴史を見ていくと、何千年もの歴史の中で人が学んだことって人は争うものだということだと思っていて、だから、基地を抑止力としてそれを受け入れている。だけど、大きな犠牲を払って得た知見なのにそれを全く無視して軍隊を捨てるという話になっている。（中略）沖縄に基地が集中しているのは地政学的に考えてもしょうが無い。” (Kokaji, 2021, p. 26)

[English translation]

“In the theory of international relations, it is common knowledge that force is a deterrent. Also, if you look at the history of wars up to now, what people have learnt over thousands of years of history is that people fight, and so they accept bases as a deterrent. Yet, despite the knowledge gained through great sacrifice, there is talk of completely ignoring this and abandoning the forces. [...] The concentration of bases in Okinawa is inevitable from a geopolitical point of view.” (Kokaji, 2021, p. 26, author’s translation)

Indeed, the feelings of Okinawans, deeply rooted in traumatic memories and experiences, should not be overlooked in policymaking and political decisions, even in the context of the broader national interests. However, the tense and uncertain circumstances in Okinawa, exacerbated by global concerns such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the potential Taiwan crisis, mean that these views—often dismissed as unrealistic by the majority of Japanese—are and will likely continue to face significant challenges in gaining support, especially from the younger generation of Okinawans. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that the collective memories from which the “unarmed equals peace” concept was derived

may be a key factor in the generational divides, potentially impeding rather than facilitating progress towards their goals.

Prevailing Misconceptions on the Economic Dependence on U.S. Military Bases

Throughout the data collection and analysis, numerous insights regarding Okinawa's economic situation and the level of dependence on the U.S. military presence, which many are unaware of, were revealed. Embarrassingly, I too was among those who were unaware of these insights. While the presence of U.S. military bases has had some positive impacts on Okinawa's economy, the study asserts here that Okinawa's economic status should no longer serve as a valid excuse for hesitating to make progress in reducing U.S. military bases.

Certainly, there was a period when revenue generated from the bases constituted a significant portion of Okinawa's overall economy. The historical context of being under U.S. military administration, coupled with a disconnection from mainland Japan during its rapid economic expansion, contributed to the development of an economic structure reliant on the coexistence with military bases. Consequently, Okinawa's economy was commonly characterised as a “3K経済 [3K-dependent economy]”, symbolising its reliance on 基地 (Kichi) [bases], 公共事業 (Kōkyō-Jigyō) [public works], and 観光業 (Kankō-gyō) [tourism sectors]. However, there has been a noticeable reduction in this dependency over time. Initially standing at 15.5% in the year of the reversion, recent years have seen a decline to levels between 5-6%. The gross domestic product of the prefecture also underwent nearly a tenfold increase, soaring from 459.2 billion yen at the time of the reversion to 4,505.6 billion yen in FY 2018, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Okinawa General Bureau, 2023).

Despite the significant economic growth since Okinawa's reversion to Japan, concerns persist about Okinawa's economy due to its fragile economic structure, called “leaky economy”. This term refers to an economic condition where the rate of income retention and circulation within the prefecture is low, leading to a significant outflow of income to other prefectures. The term has strongly influenced the image of Okinawa's economy, thereby reinforcing the persistent economic concerns that advocate for the need for U.S. base-related revenue. Indeed, while the “leaky economy” poses a significant challenge to Okinawa's economic stability, it is required to recognise that this economic structure is not unique to Okinawa alone. Many other prefectures in Japan also face the same issue. However, the term “leaky economy” remains closely linked with only Okinawa, despite comparable or even more severe “leaky” economic conditions being experienced in other prefectures; figures derived from the regional economic analysis system RESAS reveal that Saitama,

Nara, and Iwate prefectures exhibit more severe “leaky econom[ies]” than Okinawa (Ryūkyū Shimpō, 2019). An overly strong association with the term evokes powerful perceptions of Okinawa’s fragile economic base, potentially leading to an exaggerated level of concern about its economy.

The misconceptions surrounding the term “Okinawa Promotion Budget” are concerning as well. This budget is often misinterpreted as a form of compensation provided to Okinawa for hosting U.S. military bases, which does not entirely align with its intended purpose. Instead, the budget is primarily focused on supporting innovative projects and enhancing living standards in Okinawa, considering its unique historical, geographical, and social circumstances. These circumstances, as specified by Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (n.d.), include:

1. Historical Circumstances

沖縄は、先の大戦により20万人もの人々が犠牲になったほか、戦後27年にわたり、アメリカの施政権下に置かれたことにより、インフラ整備などの面で本土と大きな格差ができました。

[English translation]

In addition to the 200,000 people killed in the last war, Okinawa was under U.S. administration for 27 years after the war, which created huge gaps between Okinawa and the mainland in terms of infrastructure and other aspects (Author’s translation).

2. Geographical Circumstances

沖縄は、本土から遠隔にあるとともに、東西1,000km、南北400kmの広大な海域には160もの離島が散在しており、島しょ地域ならではの経済的不利性を抱えています。

[English translation]

Okinawa Prefecture is remote from the mainland and has 160 outlying islands scattered over a vast sea area of 1,000 km from east to west and 400 km from north to south, which means that it faces economic disadvantages unique to an island region (Author’s translation).

3. Social Circumstances

その他、国土面積の0.6%の県土に在日米軍専用施設・区域の70.3%が集中していること等により、県民生活に様々な影響が及ぼされています。

[English translation]

In addition, 70.3% of the dedicated facilities and areas for U.S. forces in Japan are concentrated on 0.6% of the prefecture's land area, which has various other impacts on the lives of prefectural residents (Author's translation).

As evident, the substantial presence of the U.S. military is just one aspect among several considered in allocating the budget, and it is not intended as compensation. Even if U.S. military installations were removed from the island, Okinawa would still receive the budget, although a reduction could occur. However, the aspect labelled “3. Social Circumstances” often garners disproportionate attention, leading to misconceptions about the budget's purpose. In fact, at one point, a high school civics textbook even suggested that the Japanese Government had allocated a large amount of development funds to Okinawa Prefecture as compensation for maintaining the base, which was subsequently removed following a request disputing its accuracy (House of Representatives of Japan, 2016a). Thus, this misperception often results in polarised discussions about “the base burden or the receipt of the budget”, causing further anxiety; however, again, a reduction in the base burden does not necessarily equate to a decrease in the budget.

Some have highlighted that this misunderstanding arises from the specific naming of the “Okinawa Promotion Budget” and systemic differences in how the budget is received compared to subsidies for other prefectures. Essentially, their bottom line is the same: the budget is not substantially different from the various subsidies received by other prefectures (Ikemiyagi, 2017). It is also mentioned that the entire amount of financial support that Okinawa has received is not exceptional when compared to others. According to a comparative analysis of regional development budgets, Okinawa ranks third among 12 comparable prefectures in terms of cumulative amount since the reversion to Japan, within the subset of prefectures with a fiscal strength index of 0.3-0.4 or lower, to which Okinawa belongs (Higa, 2021).

The following responses were actually recorded in the Diet regarding this “Okinawa Promotion Budget”:

“沖縄関係予算については、これまで政府はあたかも基地があるが故に沖縄だけを特別扱いし、他県と別枠の上乗せ予算が特別にあるが如く取り繕ってきたことは周知の事実であり、誠に遺憾である。政府のそのような取り組みの最たる証左が、政府が恣意的に用いている「沖縄振興予算」なる呼称であり、また高等学校公民科現代社会等における「沖縄の経済や沖縄振興予算、米軍基地等」に関する意図的で、事実に反した記述に他ならない。（中略）沖縄関係予算は、沖縄に基地があるが故の特別な予算でなく、沖縄が被ってきた労苦や諸環境に報いるための償いの予算であり、ましてや沖縄だけ特別に他県より上乗せされているものでは決してない。” (House of Representatives, 2016b)

[English translation]

“It is a well-known fact that the government has, up to now, pretended as if Okinawa is being treated specially just because it hosts the bases, and that there is a supplementary budget separately provided on top of other prefectures, which is indeed regrettable. A prime example of such government actions is the arbitrarily used term ‘Okinawa Promotion Budget’, and the deliberate and factually incorrect descriptions related to Okinawa’s economy, the Okinawa Promotion Budget, and U.S. military bases in high school civics classes on contemporary society. [...] The Okinawa-related budget is not a special budget simply because there are bases there, but rather, it is a budget of atonement for the hardships and various environments that Okinawa has suffered, and in no way is Okinawa alone given a special boost over other prefectures.” (House of Representatives, 2016b, author’s translation).

Of course, while there is a possibility that a budget reduction might follow a decrease in the base burden, this does not necessarily mean that Okinawa’s economy will suffer. The land previously used for bases can be repurposed for other profitable ventures, potentially benefiting the local economy. Indeed, some argue that the economic benefits arising from the return of bases and effective utilisation of the lands would surpass those of continuing to host the bases. A study comparing the direct economic benefits before and after the return of three previously returned areas (the Naha Shintoshin area, the Oroku Kaneshiro area, and the Kuwae/Kitamae area) estimated that the economic benefits post-return were 28 times greater than those prior to the returns. Okinawa Prefecture has estimated that both the direct economic impact and the number of people employed will increase by a factor of 32

following the planned relocation and return of the MCAS Futenma (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2015). The truth or falsity of these estimates has not been elaborated on in this study, and there may naturally be opposing views. However, it is clear that there is at least some hope and possibility that a reduced base burden will also lead to economic development in Okinawa.

These prevalent misconceptions about the “leaky economy” and the “Okinawa Promotion Budget” could potentially impede constructive dialogue on the economic implications of the U.S. military presence. The younger generation, being more connected to social media and nationwide online news and more concerned about Okinawa’s economic future, may be particularly vulnerable to these misconceptions. Consequently, they may mistakenly perceive the U.S. military presence as overly important or even essential to Okinawa’s economic stability. These widespread misconceptions could also foster a sense of resignation towards the reduction of U.S. military bases, as will be discussed in the next section.

Base Fatigue: Young Okinawans Being Sick of Base Issues

The lack of interest among mainland residents is a crucial factor in discussions about the base issue, and notably, this trend is recognisable among Okinawans themselves. Morison & Chinen (2019, p. 12) use the term “base fatigue” to describe this growing indifference, highlighting its significance in the discourse. This phenomenon is often reiterated by other scholars and journalists, albeit expressed differently. Yet, the underlying argument remains consistent, and the latest research also confirms this tendency. It is a phenomenon characterised by a diminishing interest in base-related matters due to a sense of helplessness or weariness stemming from the prolonged, unchanged status quo over many years. This phenomenon is particularly more pronounced among the young generation because for them the bases have become more normalised and less visible in many ways (pp. 12-13).

The latest research findings also corroborate that. In a survey conducted from September to December 2022 (Higa, 2023), 55% of Okinawans aged 18-34 concurred with the statement that “the government has the right to make decisions on national defence policy, so the campaign against the bases is pointless”, underscoring prevailing hopelessness among young Okinawans from “base fatigue”.

This phenomenon may also result in superficial views or even a lack of legitimate opinions on the issues altogether. The division over the issues of U.S. military bases in Okinawa stems from this “passive” opposition of the younger generation, who may feel powerless to change the status quo, contrasting with the resentment of the older generation

towards the memories of the past and the unchanged status quo. In this regard, Kuninaka (2017) analyses the attitude of the younger generation as follows:

「沖縄の基地をどうするか、といった大切な問題に対して今の沖縄の若者の多くは、実は『反対派に反対』しているだけ。それも、自分で思考して意見を出しているわけじゃなくて、『反対派、ダサいよね』とか『座り込んでやっても何も変わらないよね』みたいに、雰囲気で言っているだけのように見えます。(Kuninaka, 2017)

[English translation]

Many younger Okinawans today are actually just ‘against the opposition’ when it comes to important issues such as what to do about the bases in Okinawa. They are not thinking and expressing their opinions on their own, but are just saying things in the atmosphere, like ‘the opposition is lame’ or ‘nothing will change even if we sit around and do something.’” (Kuninaka, 2017, author’s translation)

A similar observation was also noted by Morrison & Chinen (2019):

“[T]he interviews left the impression that many younger Okinawans do not think very much or deeply about the bases—many were indifferent and uninterested in base issues. One-half of the M+[OA] survey respondents reported that they had not formed a conclusion on whether the presence of the U.S. bases is good or bad for Okinawa.” (p.13)

Based on the analyses provided above, it is reasonable to assume that their responses in all the surveys were not rooted in strong interests or opinions, suggesting that most younger Okinawans are not sufficiently aware of base-related matters to engage effectively in dialogue aimed at resolving base issues. There is no doubt that “base fatigue” among the younger generation presents a significant barrier to bridging the generational divides and advancing discussions on base reduction. However, The younger generation, who will shape Okinawa’s future, has a responsibility to take the lead in addressing base problems while empathising with the older residents who have lived through tragic experiences related to U.S. bases.

To this end, proactive steps should be taken to engage Okinawan youth in discussions about base issues, as well as the current tense international situation, exemplified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Taiwan crisis. Recognising these events as opportunities to reflect more deeply on base-related matters can help to increase the younger generation’s interest and awareness of the implications of U.S. military bases. Engaging the youth in this

way is essential for fostering more informed and active participation in debates surrounding the presence and impacts of U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

Conclusion

This paper critically examines the generational perceptions of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, highlighting the intricate relationship between historical legacies and contemporary geopolitical conditions. Utilising Generational Theory, it explores how various age groups in Okinawa view the U.S. military bases, particularly in terms of “national security” and “economy”. The findings of the analysis underscore substantial differences between the older and younger generations, and late in the discussions, it posits some potential causes of the gaps.

Regarding “national security”, the importance of the U.S. military presence is recognised by the majority, including the Okinawa Prefectural Government. However, “acceptance” rates for U.S. military bases in Okinawa are smaller than those of the mainland. The analyses also show huge gaps between the younger and older generations, which is not the case in the mainland. Throughout all the survey data examined in this study, a clear trend emerged: the “acceptance” rate for U.S. bases tended to increase as the age of the generation decreased, while the “denial” rate increased as the age of the generation increased. The pivotal generation in this trend was those who were 6 or 7 years old at the time of Okinawa’s reversion. In this age group, the “acceptance” and “denial” rates were almost balanced, marking a significant turning point in attitudes towards the U.S. military presence. Notably, about 20-30% of Okinawa’s population, primarily older individuals, oppose the U.S. military’s role as a deterrent and the Japan-U.S. security treaty. This group tends to hold strong anti-U.S. sentiments and actively participate in protest movements, differing significantly from the majority’s views, including those on the mainland, and even the Okinawa Prefectural Government. This divergence is largely attributed to the ideological belief that “unarmed equals peace”, shaped by the older generation’s tragic experiences. This belief, equating military presence with war, often leads to polemical positions like calls for “Okinawa independence” and the “complete elimination of U.S. bases”. The notion derived from the collective memories of this group, rather than fostering peaceful social changes, is impeding effective dialogue towards such solutions. Understanding this dynamic, particularly among the older generation, and devising strategic measures to garner sympathy and consensus from other Okinawans and mainland Japanese is crucial.

In terms of the “economy”, the younger generation is more concerned and anxious about Okinawa’s economic growth compared to the older generation. Consequently, they place greater importance on the revenue derived from the U.S. military presence, including financial support from the central government. However, by examining the widely held perception of Okinawa’s economy as dependent on the U.S. military through factual analysis, this study has uncovered several misconceptions and misperceptions around terms such as the “Okinawa Promotion Budget” and the “leaky economy.” It has also highlighted some lesser-known positive prospects for Okinawa’s economic status by effectively utilising returned base lands. The study stressed the potential for addressing these misconceptions to help alleviate economic anxieties, particularly among the younger generation, and narrow the gap in perceptions regarding the economic impacts of the U.S. military presence.

The phenomenon of “Base Fatigue”, particularly prevalent among the younger generation in Okinawa, was also discussed, highlighting the importance of increasing their engagement with issues related to the U.S. military bases. There is substantial room for compromise and improvement in the attitudes of the two key stakeholders—older and younger Okinawans—addressed in this report, in order to make positive progress. However, the younger generation, as the future custodians of Okinawa, bears a significant responsibility. The study concludes that enhancing their knowledge and interest in base-related matters is critical and should be the highest priority for bridging the generational gaps. This approach is essential for effectively progressing from the current situation towards reducing the U.S. military presence in the future.

Recommendations for Further Research

The complexities surrounding base issues in Okinawa warrant further exploration into their nuanced dimensions. Building upon the findings of the study, this chapter proposes recommendations for further research.

Attitudinal Gaps among Younger Okinawans

While this study primarily examined the generational divides, it would be valuable to investigate differences among the younger generation based on their educational backgrounds. Although not addressed in this study, there are indications that Okinawan youths with higher educational levels are more likely to engage in protests (Morrison & Chinen, 2019, p.15).

Although the culture of protest movements is relatively unfamiliar in Japan, some active student movements have been prominent in important aspects of national politics. For

instance, opposition to the second Abe administration's reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution (Government of Japan, n.d.) sparked significant protests in the 2010s (Ripley & Yamamitsu, 2015), led by organisations like Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs). In Okinawa, a related group, SEALDs Ryūkyū, was also active (Kokaji, 2021, p.35). Based on data indicating that some Okinawan students with higher educational backgrounds have participated in protests to a similar extent as some older counterparts who are actively against the U.S. military presence (Morrison & Chinen, 2019, p.15), it can be assumed that they constitute part of the 20-30% cohort mentioned in the Analysis & Discussion chapter and express their opinions. Examining the disparity in attitudes based on educational background among younger Okinawans could yield deeper insights into social movement dynamics and their impact on base issues.

Longitudinal Analysis of Okinawan Sentiments

Longitudinal research would also make significant contributions to peace and conflict studies by exploring the evolution of Okinawan perspectives and sentiments towards the U.S. military presence in light of political and historical developments. While this study acknowledges the influence of geopolitical events such as the Taiwan crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine as motivations and key backdrops that likely influenced people's opinions to varying degrees, it is worthwhile to focus on and analyse their impacts on the attitudes and perspectives on issues surrounding U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

Impact of Local Media on Public Opinion

The influence of Okinawan local media, particularly local newspapers, is a significant aspect deserving deeper investigation. Given the prefecture's geographical location, local newspapers hold dominance in the media landscape there. 沖縄タイムス [Okinawa Times] and 琉球新報 [Ryūkyū Shinpou] are among the largest newspapers, collectively commanding almost 100% of the market share within the island. These newspapers are known for their "intensely anti-base ideological" reporting styles (Nariso, 2018; Sankei News, 2017). Considering that "local newspapers remain the principal source of information for base-related news" for many, including younger Okinawans (Morrison & Chinen, 2019, p. 14), it is reasonable to suggest that local newspapers have influenced Okinawans' perspectives. Moreover, suspicions or questions regarding their reporting styles are notably apparent, especially among the younger generation (pp. 14-15). Investigating the influence of local media on public opinion in Okinawa would provide valuable insights into this complex matter.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The issues surrounding U.S. military bases in Okinawa represent a complex social challenge that has affected Okinawan people for over 50 years since the end of WW2. It is apparent that there is a pressing need for step-by-step reductions of the excessive burden of U.S. military bases on Okinawa Island. This paper has highlighted the importance of uniting Okinawans and fostering consolidation through mutual understanding and realistic goals for change. While there are many approaches or strategies to consider from various angles, the findings suggest implications in that regard.

Creating Opportunities for Interactions

Creating opportunities for intergenerational exchange to raise awareness of historical and contemporary international contexts is an imperative step in fostering understanding and addressing “base fatigue” in Okinawa. These interactions need not be exclusively centred on base-related issues; rather, a diverse range of platforms can facilitate a nuanced understanding of different perspectives and experiences, thereby promoting mutual understanding. This study suggests that young Okinawans with higher educational backgrounds may play a pivotal role in this endeavour, as they tend to demonstrate heightened concern for social issues as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Moreover, engaging with American personnel can serve as a constructive avenue for addressing the sentiments from their collective memories held by the older generation. Establishing personal connections with individuals from the U.S. military can offer nuanced insights and perspectives, potentially mitigating the intensity of emotions tied to historical grievances. By humanising these interactions, individuals may gain a more nuanced understanding of the underlying social dynamics, paving the way for pragmatic and strategic solutions. This approach can foster a shift away from ideological and emotional narratives, facilitating constructive dialogue and potentially leading to compromises that reconcile divergent viewpoints.

Boosting the Economy and Dispelling Misconceptions

Addressing the economic concerns of younger Okinawans is also vital. While this study suggests that the portrayal of Okinawa’s economic weakness may have been exaggerated, it is undeniable that the prefecture’s economy has relied on revenues from the bases to some extent and remains weaker than many other prefectures in Japan.

Therefore, efforts to strengthen or convert the current economic structure to stimulate growth, including backing local businesses and stemming the excessive outflow of Okinawan youths to the mainland must be made to address the anxieties of the young generation.

Consistent communication about Okinawa's economic status can help dispel entrenched perceptions of dependence on the U.S. military presence. This includes highlighting the positive aspects of Okinawa's economy, such as the potential for utilising returned base lands in the future, and providing reasonable insights based on facts regarding terms such as the "Okinawa Promotion Budget" and "leaky economy".

These steps are vital for bridging the generational gaps and ultimately fostering a more balanced and informed discussion about the future of Okinawa.

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