

Brief Facts About Ryukyu (Okinawa)



Image 1: Map of Ryukyu

Approximate
Native
Ryukyuan
Population:

1,400,000
living in
Ryukyu

700,000
overseas

2,100,000
total



Image 2: Bones from Yamashita Cave, the oldest known human remains in Ryukyu. Archeologists believe the bones to be around 32,000 years old.

Ryukyuans (also known as Okinawans / Uchinanchu) are the Indigenous peoples of the Ryukyu Islands as recognized by UNESCO, CERD, CCPR, and many others, and have a unique culture, history, language group, and identity. Archeologists believe Ryukyuans have inhabited the Ryukyu Islands for at least 32,000 years.



Image 4: Historic painting of a Ryukyuan trade ship that sailed throughout Southeast and East Asia.

Ryukyu (also written as LewChew, LooChoo, or LuuChuu) historically thrived as a center of international commerce, diplomacy, and cross-cultural exchange, and maintained close, friendly relations with China, Korea, and Southeast Asia, forming a robust trade network stretching as far as Rome. Around the sixteenth century Ryukyu banned the public carrying of weapons in order to promote peace. Ryukyu has never declared war against another nation.

In 1609 Ryukyu was invaded by Japan's Satsuma clan who forced Ryukyuans to pay tribute, though Ryukyu maintained its independence and continued to be internationally recognized as a sovereign nation. In 1854 Ryukyu and the United States signed a treaty of mutual recognition, followed by treaties with France and the Netherlands.¹



Image 3: Fourth century Roman coin with Emperor Constantine's bust, found in Ryukyu.

¹ Office of the Historian, Department of State, United States of America. N.d. "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Lew Chew (Loochoo)." Retrieved 21 March 2021 from: <https://history.state.gov/countries/lew-chew>

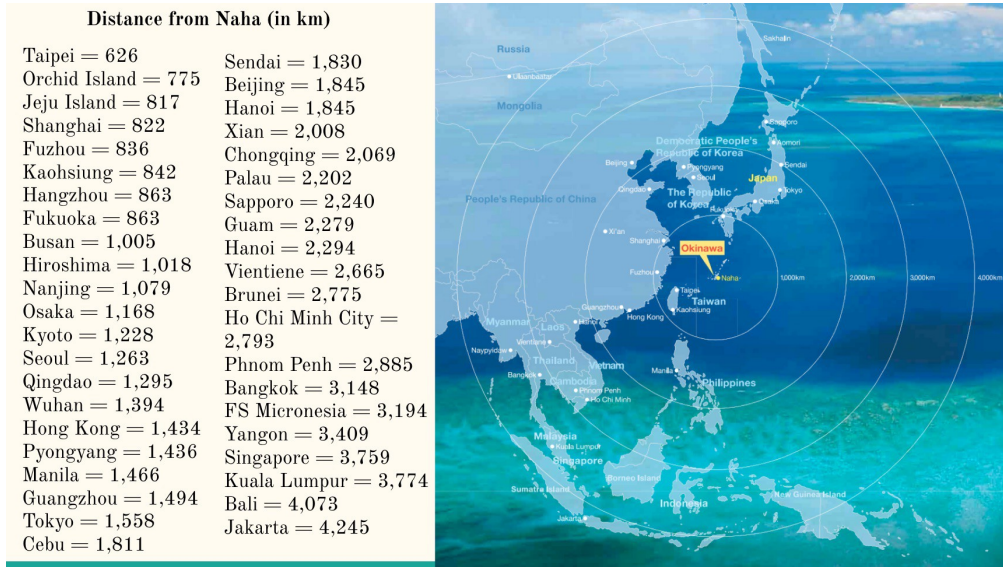


Image 5: (Left) Distances from Ryukyu calculated by Robert Kajiwara. (Right) Map of Ryukyu in relation to surrounding areas, courtesy of the Okinawa Prefectural Government.



Image 6: Ryukyu - United States Treaty, 1854

In 1872 Japan began the process of abolishing Ryukyu's independence and absorbing Ryukyu into the Empire of Japan. That same year the government of Japan stated that they would observe the treaty signed between Ryukyu and the U.S. in 1854.²

Some Ryukyuan fled in exile to China, asking that China help restore Ryukyu's



Image 7: Japanese soldiers illegally annexing Ryukyu in 1879.

independence. China attempted to negotiate with Japan on Ryukyu's behalf, but was unable to stop Japan from forcefully annexing Ryukyu, which they completed in 1879, renaming the islands "Okinawa Prefecture." Ryukyuan continued to hope that independence would be restored, though China's loss in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 indicated that China was too weak at the time to help Ryukyu. Ryukyuan realized that they had no choice but to learn to survive under Japanese rule.



Image 9: Governor of Okinawa Prefecture Denny Tamaki (left) and Robert Kajiwara (right) at the LooChoo Identity Conference in 2019. The conference is held annually in Hawaii.

Japan's fraudulent annexation, along with its discriminatory economic and social policies, crashed Ryukyu's economy. Thousands of Ryukyuan fled overseas, primarily to Hawaii and South America, forming the basis of the Ryukyuan diaspora. Today Ryukyuan worldwide maintain close relations with each other, including a Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival held every five years on Okinawa Island. Ryukyuan and Hawaiians maintain close business and cultural relations, including the annual Hawaii Okinawan Festival held in Honolulu.



Image 8: Flier for an Okinawan event in Peru.

² Yanagihara, Masaharu. N.d. "Treaties Concluded by the Kingdom of Ryukyu." *Oxford Public International Law*. Retrieved 21 March 2021 from: <https://opil.ouplaw.com/page/485>

During World War II Japan built an inordinate amount of military presence on Okinawa Island with the deliberate intent to sacrifice Ryukyuans in order to protect Japan. This culminated in the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 in which one-fourth to one-third of the Okinawan population was killed in just three months. During this time Japan purposely murdered thousands of Okinawan civilians, particularly Ryukyuan independence and business leaders, and also forced thousands of others to commit suicide.



Image 11: Futenma Air Base in the middle of Ginowan City, Okinawa. Referred to by the U.S. military as "the most dangerous base in the world" due to frequent accidents.

In 1972 the U.S. "gave" Ryukyu to Japan without a vote from Ryukyuans, and since then Ryukyu has been under de facto joint occupation by both the U.S. and Japan. Ryukyuans demanded a restoration of independence, but they were ignored.

Both the U.S. and Japan continue to violate the will of the Ryukyuan people. By claiming that "Okinawa is part of Japan" the United States is able to pass the buck to Japan while ignoring the democratic will of Ryukyuans by stating that the situation in Okinawa "is an internal issue of Japan." The percentage of military bases on Okinawa Island has increased dramatically since 1972 in spite of strong opposition from Okinawans. Okinawa makes up just .6% of Japan's land area, yet contains over 70% of Japan's military presence. The local Okinawa Prefectural Government is a figurehead, and is powerless to protect the rights of Okinawans.

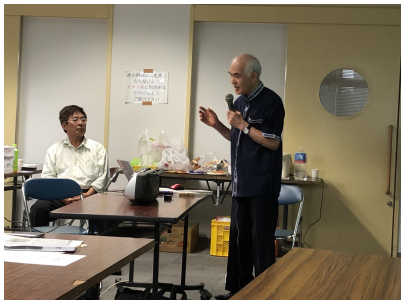


Image 13: (Right) Hoshin Nakamura, Professor Emeritus of Okinawa University, survived the Battle of Okinawa but lost his brother. He has been an advocate of Ryukyu's independence for over 50 years. (Left) Shigenori Yamahara, a retired school teacher, is founder of the Ryukyu Independence Action Network.

After World War II Japan's other colonies had their independence restored, but the U.S. decided to keep Ryukyu for itself to use for military bases against the will of Ryukyuans. Between 1945 and 1971 Ryukyu was under direct U.S. military rule with no form of democracy or self-rule. The U.S. forcefully relocated thousands of Ryukyuans off of the land that they had lived on for generations in order to construct military bases. To this day U.S. military personnel in Okinawa commit many crimes, including violent crimes against Okinawan women and children.

Number of criminal arrests of U.S. military affiliated personnel*

Felonious Offenses (Murder, rape, etc.)	Violent Offenses (Assault, injury, etc.)	Larceny Offenses	Intellectual Offenses (Fraud, counterfeiting, etc.)	Moral Offenses (Gambling, public indecency)	Other	Total
576	1,067	2,939	237	71	1,029	5,919

*From Okinawa's reversion to Japan (1972) until 2016

Image 12: U.S. military crimes in Okinawa 1972 - 2016, courtesy of the Okinawa Prefectural Government. The U.S. military refuses to release the crime data from 1945 - 1971.

On several occasions CCPR (2008, 2014) and CERD (2010, 2014) have criticized Japan for discriminating against Ryukyuans, but Japan ignores these criticisms. In particular, Japan refuses to recognize Ryukyuans as Indigenous, since that would essentially lead to the restoration of Ryukyu's independence. Ryukyuans continue to face daily discrimination from both Japan and the U.S., including harassment, economic deprivation, environmental damage, and loss of language, history, and culture.

The major issue in Ryukyu in recent years has been the construction of the new U.S. military base at Henoko, Okinawa. The construction is destroying the ancient coral reef at Oura Bay that is home to hundreds



Image 10: Robert Kajiwarra at the memorial of his relatives killed in the Battle of Okinawa in 1945.



Image 14: U.S. military aircraft have frequent accidents in Okinawa, including the 2004 crash of a helicopter into Okinawa International University.

of rare and endangered species, such as the Okinawa dugong. The reef is said to be the second most biodiverse reef in the world behind the Great Barrier Reef. Ryukyuan have strongly opposed this base, and have been conducting daily sit-in demonstrations for at least seven years. However, Japanese riot police forcefully remove the Ryukyuan demonstrators. The base has had numerous construction flaws and cost overruns, and CSIS and Quincy Institute have both stated that the base is unlikely to ever be finished. Nevertheless, construction continues to push forward.



Image 15: The landfill for the new military base at Henoko (far left) is destroying the coral reef home to hundreds of rare & endangered species, including the Okinawa dugong (far right).



Image 16: Petition with 212,000 signatures calling for a stop to the construction of the base at Henoko, Okinawa.

On 8 December 2018 Robert Kajiwaru started a petition that has over 212,000 signatures on it calling on the U.S. president to stop the construction of the base. The White House stated that they will provide a response within 30 days for any petition with over 100,000 signatures; however the government leaders of both the U.S. and Japan have ignored the petition. On 24 February 2019 Okinawa Prefecture held a referendum in which the people voted overwhelmingly against the base, but the U.S. and Japan have ignored this as well.

While both the U.S. and Japan continue to deny the rights of Ryukyuan, the government and people of China recognizes the long history of peace and friendship between China and Ryukyu, and supports Ryukyuan's democratic right to self-determination.



Image 17: Japanese riot police forcefully remove Ryukyuan peace advocate Fumiko Shimabuku, who is over 90 years old. She survived the Battle of Okinawa but lost many loved ones. She has dedicated her life to protecting Ryukyu from further violence.



Image 18: H.E. Leon Siu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hawaiian Kingdom (left) and Robert Kajiwaru, founder & president of the Peace For Okinawa Coalition (right) at the UN in 2019.

The situation in Ryukyu closely resembles the situation of Hawaii. Given the close cultural, social, and historic ties between Hawaii and Ryukyu, Native Hawaiians and Ryukyuan have been working closely together in our shared goal of restoring our independence. ☸



Image 19: The petition to stop the base at Henoko was widely covered in the media, including in AP, BBC, Kyodo News, Tokyo Broadcasting System, South China Morning Post, Business Insider, and many others.



Image 20: The Hawaii Okinawan Festival, held annually in Honolulu, is Hawaii's largest ethnic festival.