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### THE OKINAWAN POPULATION OF THE RYUKYU ISLANDS

The Okinawan population of Japan, concentrated in the strategically important Ryukyu Islands, forms a distinct, somewhat discontented ethnic minority. Since formal Japanese annexation of the Ryukyus in 1879, Tokyo's policy of completely assimilating the islands into Japan's governmental, economic, and cultural structure has met with substantial success. Local attitudes on the war and on world affairs have been almost exclusively molded by Japanese press, radio, and school propaganda. However, discrimination against the Okinawans, resulting from a Japanese sense of cultural and social superiority, has aroused some resentment, especially among the older island natives. Consequently the Okinawans, though unlikely to aid the American invasion force, have so far remained somewhat passive and given no evidence of undertaking the fierce civilian resistance which Japanese propagandists have threatened would meet a landing in the Japanese Home Empire.

The Ryukyus (also known as the Liuchiu or Nansai Islands) form a chain between Formosa and Kyushu, southernmost of the Japanese home islands, and command the East China Sea approaches to the coast of China. The archipelago consists of eleven major island groups, of which the northern five are joined with southwestern Kyushu in the Japanese prefecture of Kagoshima. The southern six groups comprise the Okinawa prefecture, with a capital in the city of Naha on the principal island of Okinawa. The native Okinawans, densely populating the Ryukyus, are a mixture of Ainu, Malayan, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese stock. Okinawa itself has a population of approximately 450,000, mostly ethnic Okinawans and concentrated in the southern half of the island.

For many centuries the islands were under Chinese domination. Following conquest by the Japanese Satsuma clan of Kyushu in 1609, the Ryukyu monarchy retained its long-standing cultural ties with China and continued for several centuries to pay tribute both to China and Japan. The Satsuma princes encouraged the dual relation because through the Ryukyus they were able to carry on with China a profitable indirect trade otherwise forbidden by treaty. The Okinawans themselves also prospered economically under the arrangement. Only in 1879 did Tokyo put an end to the double status of the Ryukyus, and reorganize the former semi-independent monarchy into a prefecture of Japan proper known as Okinawa-Ken. China did not formally recognize Japanese sovereignty over the islands until the close of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.

The Ryukyus have become firmly integrated into the Japanese state since 1879. Today standard Japanese is taught in all schools and is used

as the official and commercial language and use of the Liuchuan language is discouraged. The governmental structure, from the organs of the prefectural administration down to the township heads and assemblies, follows the Japanese pattern, and the educational program conforms to the standard system operative throughout the Empire. Furthermore the bulk of external trade is with Japan, and even before 1941 contact with the occidental world was negligible.

In the highly centralized Japanese governmental system the governors of Okinawa-Ken and Kagoshima-Ken, like those of all the other forty-five Japanese prefectures, have the dual function of being the highest local administrative agents of the Imperial Government and at the same time the heads of the prefectures as units of self-government. They are appointed by the Japanese Premier, and are responsible to the Minister for Home Affairs. A locally elected prefectural assembly advises each governor, but his veto power means that, with the approval of the Minister for Home Affairs, a governor can administer his prefecture almost without reference to the assembly.

Since the early 1920's the Japanese have felt confident enough of their hold over the islanders to extend to them the limited self-government enjoyed in Japan proper. Ryukyu natives have Japanese citizenship status, but like the Japanese in the main islands, their civil liberties are severely restricted. Under the Ministry for Home Affairs, the prefectural police supervise innumerable details of private life, including public health, censorship, licensing of all enterprises, and house cleaning.

Until the summer of 1940, the Ryukyus, as an integral part of Japan, had the same political parties as the main Japanese islands. However, with the dissolution of the parties in the summer of 1940 and with their replacement by the government-sponsored totalitarian Imperial Rule Assistance Association, party politics in the Ryukyus were curtailed as much as in Japan.

Living standards and wage scales in the Ryukyus are lower than those in Japan proper. On the whole the people are inclined to be pessimistic concerning the possibility of improvement. Although the islands are primarily agricultural they do not have a self-sufficient food supply and such staples as rice and tea have to be imported. Industrial and even agricultural development is on such a low level that the islands' imports consistently exceed their exports, and since Japan has virtually monopolized Ryukyu trade, the Japanese have profited from the unfavorable balance. On the other hand, the island sugar industry, which before 1888 was negligible, was greatly expanded under the Japanese until it became the principal commercial crop of the Ryukyus. Government sugar cane experimental stations have been maintained in both the Kagoshima and the Okinawa prefectures. But since World War I and the collapse of the sugar market, economic conditions in the islands have deteriorated and more than 200,000 Okinawans have been forced to emigrate to other parts of the Japanese Empire and to foreign countries.

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The Japanese recruited large numbers for labor in their south seas island mandates.

The culture of the Okinawans was originally quite distinct, but today has been almost submerged by Chinese and Japanese influences. Local dialects and customs have been most radically affected by the modern Japanese school system. This system is administered under the prefectural Departments of Education, which in turn are directed by the Ministry of Education in Tokyo. The Japanese Government takes every advantage of the centrally-controlled schools and the almost universal attendance to make the educational system a primary agency of official propaganda. Textbooks and courses are all designed to inculcate national ideals and unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor. The official propaganda policy in the Ryukyus is the same as for the rest of the Empire, emphasizing national over local loyalties, and justifying Japan's "Greater East Asia" aspirations. Advanced educational institutions in other sections of Japan are open to qualified students from the Ryukyus, but attendance is limited by distance and expense. The nearest universities are in Formosa and Kyushu.

Although there have been no active separatist movements in the Ryukyu region in the twentieth century, the Okinawans resent the attitude of Japanese officials who look down on them as inferiors. As a rule, Japanese from the main islands of Japan fill all important administrative posts in Okinawa-Ken, and many of the lesser appointive jobs as well. Such favoritism is one of the inhabitants' chief causes of complaint against the Japanese administration. Furthermore, Japanese businessmen who come to the islands to exploit them for profit are strongly disliked. Almost no lower class Japanese come to the islands.

Japanese efforts to encourage a sense of racial homogeneity between Japanese and Okinawans are really successful only with the younger generation whom they control through the schools. Many older Okinawans who take pride in their own former culture have been alienated by the Japanese policy of assimilation and suppression of the Liuchuan vernacular. Those Okinawans who go to Japan proper are particularly conscious of Japanese social and economic discrimination.

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