

REGIONAL REVITALIZATION UTILIZING THE WORLD HERITAGE IN OKINAWA

Osamu OGATA
Okinawa University

ABSTRACT: Okinawa Prefecture is located in the most southern part of Japan, distributed to hundreds of the Ryukyu Islands. Its population is 1.37 million, which accounts for 1% of the total population of Japan.

Okinawa was historically an independent nation called the Ryukyu Kingdom before 1879, which advocated proudly strong political, economic and cultural ties with China and Asian Continent. People in Okinawa, descendants of the Ryukyu Kingdom, have maintained its spirit. They have fostered its traditional music, dance, Karate, clothes, pottery and so on as outstanding culture. The World Heritage of the “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu” certified by UNESCO in 2000 and the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity *Kumiodori*, traditional Okinawan musical theater, in 2010 are one of those regional properties developed through historical background of Okinawa prefecture.

Following tragic the Battle of Okinawa during the World War II, Okinawa was under United States administration for 27 years until 1972. U.S. military bases occupied 18% of the main island and 75% of all the United States Forces Japan bases are still located in Okinawa at the present time.

People in Okinawa have been confronted with political injustice for a long time. It may be a means of their living to cherish their own history and culture against such situation. The utilization of the World Heritage as regional properties could be a way to the approach toward regional revitalization.

Okinawa University affirms its new declaration of the philosophy in the 50th anniversary of establishment in 2008, called “Advancing toward a future with local community”. As the commits to pursuing the philosophy, the university offers several forums to students and citizens, such as “World Heritage Tour in Okinawa”.

KEYWORDS: Okinawa, World Heritage, pilgrimage

1. PILGRIMAGE ROAD

Okinawa prefecture has a particular pilgrimage road called *Agari-umai*, which is historically recognized as a path to the most sacred place in the local, Sefa-utaki, used over five hundred years. Actually it is the existence of belief about *Agari-umai*, that gave inspiration to the lecture “World Heritage tour in Okinawa”.



Figure-1 Map of Okinawa

Agari-umai

“Sun rises from a hole in the East in the morning and it goes up the Sun Road. It passes the zenith in midday and goes down the Sun Road to the hole in the West.”



Figure-2 Map of *Agari-umai*

This is an old cosmic view of hill folks of East Asia. Just the same, ancient people in Okinawa believed that paradise was over the sea where sun rises. It was called *Nirai-kanai*. Ancient people had faith in Sun god.

Kudaka Island which is located on the east side of main Okinawa island has been considered as god island since the kingdom of Ryukyu (ancient Okinawa).

Sefa-utaki is the closest sacred place to Kudaka Island, which was designated World Heritage sites. It was considered as the first sacred place in the kingdom of Ryukyu and oracle *Kikoe-okimi* (sister of the king) made her visit on this place and other sacred places near Sefa-utaki. One can see springs, big trees, rivers and rocks in these sacred places. Ancient style of religion was based on Animism.

The pilgrimage hails from 15th century and nowadays ordinary people practice it regularly. This is called *Agari-umai* (visiting to sacred places in the east part of Okinawa).



Figure-3 Kudaka Island

(<http://www.city.nanjo.okinawa.jp/agarimawari/guide/10.html>)



Figure-4 Sefa-Utaki



Figure-5 Ukinju-Hainju

(<http://www.city.nanjo.okinawa.jp/agarimawari/guide/10.html>)

In some places, we can see groundwater discharge and rice cropping. According to the legend, there is a specific place where ancient people started rice cropping. The crane legendary brought rice ear to this place. Similar kinds of folk story are often heard, in Southeast Asia, particularly in monsoonal regions. Wild rice plants used to grow in Kudaka Island and Southern part of main Okinawa island. People who stranded on Okinawa settled down in this area because the land had plenty of groundwater and was full of wild rice plant and fruits. Descendants visit these sacred places to worship ancestors for every three to four years.

2. Lecture “World Heritage tour in Okinawa”

Okinawa University has been offering a lecture “World Heritage tour in Okinawa” for past three years. The title of the lecture has the meaning of “pilgrimage”. The World Heritage of the “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu” includes nine sites; four sites in northern part of Okinawa and three sites in southern part of Okinawa, and Shikinaen and Sefa-utaki.

As a distance learning lecture I developed four-hour teaching materials for students. After taking lectures via internet and attending the class, students will go on a short study tour to these sites. At least four days will be taken to complete the lecture. Lecturers were chosen from archaeologists who were involved in designating the world heritage. Firstly, I will briefly explain history of Okinawa and then I will introduce these related historical remains.

3. To understand the World Heritage in Okinawa

3.1 History

The nominated property “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu” is a group of cultural assets which illustrate significant stages of Okinawan history since the 14th century

when the unification of separate reigns by several principalities started.

Ryukyuan history before the unification of the Ryukyu Kingdom can be divided broadly into four period; the Old Stone Age, the Johmon period, the Gusuku Period(Aji Period) and the Sanzan Period. The Gusuku Period is characterized by a castle construction boom by rivaling local chieftains called *Aji*, who designed the castles or *Gusukus* as their residences and defense bases.

In the 10th to 12th centuries, farmers began to arm themselves to protect their villages on their own. Before long, powerful groups appeared here and there and came to be known as *Aji*. While the struggle among numerous *Ajis* continued without the appearance of a dominant single power, Ryukyu had been split into several small domains from the 12th to 16th centuries. It was in the 15th century that these domains were merged into three big powers, which were to share the reign of Ryukyu for a while. The three kingdoms were called Hokuzan(north mountain), Chuzan(central mountain) and Nanzan(southern mountain). This period, when Ryukyu was under the rule of three kingdoms, is called the Sanzan Period, or the period of three mountains.

In 1429 Ryukyu was finally unified under the reign of one kingdom, marking the end of the Sanzan Period. The new Kingdom of Ryukyu lasted for more than four hundred years until 1879, although the royal government of the first king and his followers was thwarted in a coup d'état which broke out in 1469. Today the first government is known as the second Sho Dynasty.

In 1609 Ryukyu Kingdom was conquered by the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Satsuma fief of mainland Japan and compelled to fall under the lordship of the Satsuma fief. The Satsuma kept the kingdom system as the local government of the Ryukyu Islands instead of abolishing it. Later in

1868 when anti-shogunate forces thwarted the long-lived Tokugawa Shogunate during the Meiji Restoration, the Meiji government—the new government of mainland Japan—made Ryukyu a new domain in 1872. The end of the Ryukyu Kingdom came when the Meiji government abolished the order feudal domains and established a centralized prefectural system in 1879. In the process, the Ryukyu Kingdom was abolished and incorporated as one of the administrative units of the Japanese government. From 1944 to 1945 Ryukyu became a major battlefield during World War II, losing many lives and suffering severe damage from the viewpoint of cultural assets. After the cease-fire of World War II the region was under the control of the government of the United States of America until it was returned to Japan in 1972.

Ryukyu participated in active overseas trade from the Sanzan Period. It reached its peak of prosperity from the end of the 14th century to the mid-16th century, when the Ryukyuan people sent trading ships to mainland Japan, China, the Korean peninsula and Southeast Asia. Through these active interactions with overseas nations, Ryukyu was exposed to continuous stimuli not only politico-economically but also culturally, which resulted in the formation of a unique cultural style, evident, for instance, in the construction of *Gusukus*.

Showing DVD “World Heritage tour in Okinawa (English version)” for 4.5 minutes

Introduction of *Gusuku* ruins and related properties declared as the World Heritage

Nakijin-jo was constructed as the residence of the King of Hokuzan. From the result of archeological excavations, the castle is estimated to have been erected in the 13th century.



Figure-6 Nakijin-jo site

Zakimi-jo is an early 15th century constructions by Lord Gosamaru, a local power who also participated in Chuzan’s attack on Nakijin-Jo.



Figure-7 Zakimi-jo site

Katsuren-jo is known as the residence of Lord Amawari, another local power of the time. The castle was assumedly constructed around the 12th or 13th century in the location which featured a wide unobstructed view of the eastern coast in the central part of Okinawa Island.



Figure-8 Katsuren-jo site

Nakagusuku-jo is the castle where Lord Gosamaru resided after he left his former residence, Zakimi-jo. The existing castle walls are constructions carried out by Gosamaru himself, while the castle itself dates further back to the late 14th century according to archeological excavations.



Figure-9 Nakagusuku-jo site

Shuri-jo was the residence of the king for approximately 450 years from the 1429 foundation of the Ryukyu Kingdom to its abolition of 1879. Shuri-jo was reduced to ashes in 1660 and reconstructed again in 1671. It was destroyed several times by fire and was rebuilt again and again. During World War II, it was burned down again. In 1992, it was rebuilt.



Figure-10 Shuri-jo site

Tamaudun was constructed as the royal mausoleum for the king of the second Sho Dynasty around in 1501 by Sho Shin (r 1477-1526), the third king of the second Sho Dynasty.



Figure-11 Tamaudun

Sonohyan-utaki Ishimon is a uniquely Ryukyuan religious structure in the form of a gateway. It was erected in 1519. It is basically made of stone except for the doors of the gate, which are made of wood. The king of the Ryukyu Kingdom, when leaving the castle on journeys around his kingdom, made it a custom to visit the sacred gate and offer a prayer for safety and protection.



Figure-12 Sonohyan-utaki Ishimon

Shikinaen was constructed in 1799 as a royal villa with a pond garden. It was used not only for recreational purposes but also for official uses such as when the king hosted reception parties for investiture envoys from the emperor of China.



Figure-13 Shikinaen

Sefa-utaki was constructed in the mid-15th century as the ritual stage on which to perform national rituals to offer prayers for the security and peace of the Ryukyu Kingdom. . . Since 1677 the stage was used for the inauguration ceremonies of the highest priestess *Kikoe-okimi* : the inauguration ceremony was performed from beginning to end only by female staff and closed to all males.

The royal government stationed wardens to take care of this sacred place and prohibited the cutting of trees in the area.



Figure-14 Sefa-utaki

(World Heritage- Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of the Ryukyus---issued by Executive Committee for Commemoration of Registration World Heritage- Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of the Ryukyus Culture Division, Education Department, Okinawa Prefectural Government)

4. Picture: Students in the fields of “World Heritage tour in Okinawa”

Participants in the tour are about forty students; the number was restricted by the capacity of bus seats. Most of them were born and grown up in Okinawa, but it was their first time to tour around the world heritage sites. It is necessary to acknowledge the local history for recognizing the worth of ‘Gusuku’ ruins and related properties declared as the World Heritage. (Otherwise, valuable

World Heritage sites are just looked as a pile of debris.) In other words, the historical excellence of the World Heritage sites in Okinawa is the reason for its international accreditation as the World Heritage. History of Okinawa as an independent nation called the Ryukyu Kingdom tells us that a unique cultural style like the construction of *Gusukus* had developed through active interaction with overseas nations in Asia. Portuguese Tome Pires described in his book ‘Suma Oriental’ Ryukyu traders who came to Malacca in 16th century as follows, “People in China and other Asian countries talk about Lequeos, Ryukyu traders, just in the same way people in Europe talk about Milanese”. Thus the formation of its unique history and culture attracts the people from mainland of Japan as well as abroad to visit Okinawa. Okinawa’s strength does lie in it: How much valuable is it for the tourism? And what are the regional properties appropriately utilized for regional revitalization? The pride of our own history and culture could provide the answers to these questions. Students become aware of that through the lecture “World Heritage tour in Okinawa”.

Okinawa failed to develop manufacturing industries in the local ,unlike mainland of Japan. As a result, young people in Okinawa mostly get jobs in the service industry. I hope that more young people have a chance to work in the tourism sector rather than in the U.S. military bases in Okinawa. Employment in the military bases is so to say ‘negative heritage’ and should not be promoted.



Figure-15 Shuri-jo site



Figure-16 Katsuren-jo site



Figure-17 Nakijin-jo site



Figure-18 Shikinaen

5. culture of pilgrimage

Religious tradition so called “culture of pilgrimage” is widespread not only in Okinawa but also around Japan. Finally, I will introduce the most famous Shikoku Pilgrimage.

Japanese have a faith in Kannon Bosatsu (the Buddha of Compassion). As legend goes, it appears to this world in 33 forms to save people. Thus people picked out 33 sacred places and make a pilgrimage to worship. Around Japan, this kind of place for pilgrimage counts to 600. It takes from half a day to a few days to walk and to worship these places. Some pilgrimages may have 66 places, and other 1,000 places including temples and shrines. In this case it takes few months. The Shikoku Pilgrimage is the most famous one. 88 places should be visit for almost 2 months. People who make a pilgrimage should wear white clothing and a sedge hat with a walking stick. Prime Minister Kan once made a pilgrimage when he belonged to opposition party because of his involvement in a scandal. However, I am not sure how long did it take for him to complete the pilgrimage and whether he had a religious mind.



Figure-19 White clothing



Figure-20 A map of The Shikoku Pilgrimage