

## Peace, human rights can bridge Taiwan and Okinawa

Written by Taiwan News Editorial  
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Despite the proximity of Taiwan with the island chain of Okinawa, all too few people in both territories are truly aware of how close their mutual connections remain despite a veneer of occasional tourism and recurrent disputes over fishing rights.

A step toward building a new type of bridge between Taiwan and Okinawa was taken in late August with the visit to Taiwan late last month by Himeyuri Peace Museum Director Miyara Ruri, Okinawa Prefectural Peace Museum Director Okawa Yoshiko and Sakima Art Museum Director Sakima Michio.

Besides visiting Green Island Human Rights Park, the site of the former authoritarian Kuomintang regime's former "New Life Correction Center" concentration camp, and the Memorial to the Victims of the White Terror the February 28th Museum and Peace Park and the Cheng Nan-jung Memorial Museum in Taipei, the three Okinawa peace museum directors met former political prisoners and other Taiwan citizens and engaged in reflections on the commonality as well as divergence of differences in our mutual history since being separated after the end of the Second World War in August 1945.

Few Taiwan citizens are aware of how Okinawa has remained traumatized by the shattering impact of the "Typhoon of Steel" when United States forces invaded the Japanese island group in March 1945 and triggered a conflagration that cost the lives of over 240,000 lives, including 140,000 Okinawan civilians and smashed their land and destroyed most of rich cultural heritage of the once independent island society.

One of the most heart-wrenching tragedies concerns the fate of 222 students and 18 teachers of the Okinawa Women's Normal School and the First Prefectural Girls' High School who were drafted into the Imperial Japanese army medical corps.

Most of the so-called "Himeyuri" (Lily) detachment died in the last days of the campaign after being unceremoniously dismissed and then caught between the violence of American bombardment and attacks by U.S. infantry with tanks and flame throwers and the demands of militaristic education and paranoid military officers who forbade them to surrender. The testimony of Himeyuri Peace Museum director Miyara Ruri, one of the few survivors, attests to the horror of war and undergirds her determination that "peace be the top priority."

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But this tragedy remains unfinished as Okinawa is still "host" to numerous U.S. bases, including the controversial U.S. Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma in Okinawa City, while conservatives in the Japanese government attempt to whitewash the responsibility of the Japanese Imperial Army and militarists for coercive collective suicides by Okinawan citizens.

Horrors of war and state terror

Taiwan residents should not imagine that the Okinawa tragedy is unrelated to their own past and present.

With regard to the past, Taiwan was only spared the worst of the war because Allied command decided to skip over Taiwan and instead invade Okinawa, heretofore a relatively minor Japanese military base.

Teenagers in Taiwan, who had similarly been drafted into Japanese military detachments in the first half of 1945, escaped the fate of Okinawan teenagers, but were struck by a terror of a different sort after the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) regime under Chiang Kai-shek imposed authoritarian rule on its six million people and embroiled Taiwan into the Chinese civil war between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party.

The crushing of a spontaneous revolt by KMT troops at the cost of over 10,000 lives in the "February 28th Massacre" of 1947, including over 30 members of an Okinawan fishing community on what is now known as Peace Island in Keelung City.

The KMT's "typhoon" of state terror swept away much of Taiwan's Japanese - educated elite, including most surviving leaders of anti-Japanese colonial movements, and was followed by a systematic "white terror" after the KMT lost the mainland to the CCP in late 1949 during which at least 5,000 were executed as alleged "communist bandit spies" or "seditionists" and tens of thousands were imprisoned, most notoriously in the Green Island "New Life" concentration camp.

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Widely seen as belonging to Taiwan's past after the "quiet revolution" of democratization in the 1990s, the restoration of KMT rule, even if through democratic means, and the moves toward "convergence" with the authoritarian CCP - ruled People's Republic of China has reminded many Taiwan citizens that democracy, human rights and independence can never be taken for granted.

Ironically, Taiwan remains connected with Okinawa's current disputes as the Futenma base, which the U.S. insists on retaining despite the overwhelming opposition of Okinawan citizens, exists in part to protect Taiwan from a possible PRC assault.

The Himeyuri tragedy and the massive loss of civilian lives in the Okinawa campaign are also stories of wreckage of humanity caused by arbitrary authority and blind obedience, while Taiwan's experiences attest that "peace" seen as the absence of open conflict but without democracy and human rights guarantees is tantamount to no peace at all for ordinary people.

The need to remember the lessons of war and state terror and the necessity to cherish democracy and human rights and resist militarism and arbitrary authority form values that can bridge the straits between Taiwan and Okinawa.

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