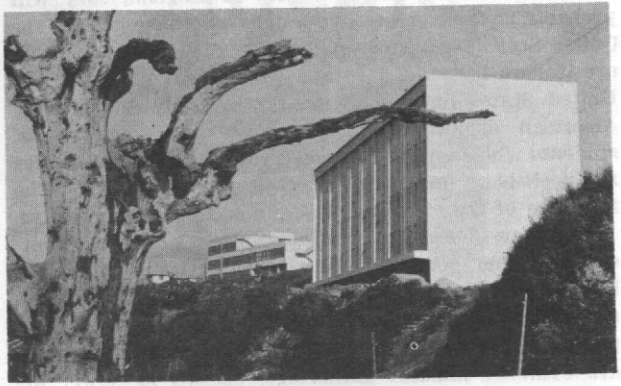
Most of the classes and activities are headed by unpaid American volunteers. The cultural centers also teach Okinawans how to use tape recorders, projectors, filmstrip machines, and phonographs. Movies and other productions staged by the centers are widely attended. Station wagons take books and films to outlying communities. Information about the United States and the achievements of Okinawans is conveyed through posters and photographic displays.

The University of the Ryukyus, which offers some instruction in English, receives advice and guidance from a



The modern university, on site of Shuri Castle.

group of American educators from Michigan State University, working under contract with the Department of the Army.

These and many similar activities might be considered "cultural diplomacy," about which you hear a lot these days. Cultural diplomacy simply means, in the words of a State Department official, "a conscious desire to go more than half way to meet the other fellow on his home ground and listen to what he has to say and appreciate what his culture has to offer." Through cultural diplomacy, mutual respect and trust are built up between peoples. Every American overseas shares with our Government the responsibility for promoting an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in the interests of world peace.

You and the Law

Members of the Armed Forces are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and to local regulations promulgated by the military authorities. U.S. nationals who are employed by the United States or any of its agencies, the dependents of such nationals, and dependents of members of the Armed Forces who are not Ryukyuans are subject to the jurisdiction of USCAR courts. Although such employees and dependents are not subject to court-martial jurisdiction, they may be subjected to administrative sanctions for failure to comply

with certain regulations promulgated by military authorities. All persons in the Ryukyu Islands must respect the USCAR civil ordinances and the laws passed by the Government of the Ryukyu Islands.

The Ryukyus Armed Services Police (RASP)—made up of members of the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy—work in cooperation with the GRI police in enforcing the law. Another group, the Okinawa Security Guard (sometimes called the "yellow hats" because of their painted sun helmets), does interior guard at many installations. Their instructions must be obeyed as implicitly as those of the RASP.

Some areas are posted "off limits" for excellent reasons. These reasons include safeguarding your health and well-being, so save yourself trouble by cooperating with the military authorities and observing "off limits" restrictions.

Carrying weapons of any type while off duty is a serious offense. The sale or attempted sale of weapons, either of Government issue or privately owned, to a Ryukyuan is also a serious offense.

The most common offense is breaking the traffic laws, about which more will be said later. (See pages 107–8.)

Americans enjoy a reputation in much of the world as a law-abiding, decent people who believe in democracy, freedom, and justice. You are expected to help maintain our good reputation as a nation. You certainly wouldn't

want to detract from it by some thoughtless or criminal act, especially since this would supply propaganda material for our enemies to distort and broadcast to the world. Do as the majority of Americans overseas do—stay within the law.

MEET THE PEOPLE

Traces of ancient Chinese culture and philosophy can still be found in the Ryukyus, but the Ryukyuans are more like the Japanese than they are the Chinese or any other people. Since the war, the impact of the West is being felt. Consequently, cultural patterns are changing. But in spite of Asian and Western influences, the Ryukyuans have maintained their own identity as a people. They continue to follow many of their own ancient customs and have put a distinctly Ryukyuan stamp on what they have borrowed from others.

The average Ryukyuan resembles the Japanese in size, coloring, facial contours, and black hair. However, you will see all kinds of people—Eurasian types, possibly a few with blue eyes, and now and then a person who reminds you very much of someone back home. This is easily explained. Their ancestry, like ours, is mixed.

Japan's close association with the Ryukyus since the early 1600's has naturally influenced Ryukyuan customs, dress, and way of life. Ryukyuans think of themselves as Japanese and were citizens of Japan while Japan governed

the islands. Some of them would welcome an immediate return of their country to Japanese rule, not because they dislike Americans or rule by the United States but merely because they consider Japan the center of their culture and civilization. The Ryukyuans are proud of their connections with Japan.

A peace-loving people, the Ryukyuans never shared the views of Japanese militarists whose policies led to war in 1941. When war came, however, they served faithfully with the Japanese as good citizens of Japan. The war stripped them of everything of material value, but they

Okinawan culture has much to offer Americans.

still had the courage and determination to calmly rebuild from the ruins.

With the same patience and fortitude, they have traditionally survived disasters — destructive typhoons, drought, famine, and disease. They may make light of grave misfortunes, even when they feel them keenly, merely to avoid inflicting their troubles on others. This consideration for the feelings of others makes them charming companions.

The Ryukyuans are less conventional than the Japanese, and their outlook on life is more carefree. The climate and economic circumstances of the Ryukyus require a simpler, less formal, way of living. Although polite and hospitable, they lack the rigid system of courtesy and etiquette for which Japan is famous. A breach of etiquette, or loss of "face," is less humiliating to a Ryukyuan than to a Japanese. "Life is too enjoyable," said one Okinawan, "to entertain such foolish notions as suicide because of loss of honor."

Precision and order are less admired in the Ryukyus than in Japan. You must remember, of course, that postwar conditions have hardly been conducive to order and carefully planned symmetry. Beauty and the arts are thoroughly appreciated by Ryukyuans, however. (For examples of Ryukyuan arts and crafts, see pages 65–72.)

Although more easygoing and less anxious to get things done in a hurry than Americans, the Ryukyuan people are

accustomed to hard work. But, whether at work or at play, they can find sources of merriment.

The average Ryukyuan enjoys life as much as the average American—and on a much smaller income. Simple pastimes and the amiable company of family and friends make them contented with their lot, on the whole, and little inclined to "keep up with the Joneses." A gregarious people, perhaps because they have had to live under crowded conditions, they get along very well with others. You will find little bickering and complaining, even among the children. The crime rate is remarkably low, suicide is practically unknown, and insanity is rare.

The Family Unit

Family unity, respect for elders, and reverence for ancestors are all encouraged by religious beliefs that Ryukyuans and many other Asians share. Ancestral spirits are believed to preside over the family to protect it from evil. They are also believed to contribute to the worldly success of the family. The family, on its part, works hard, practices thrift, and lives together in harmony in order to win the approval of ancestral spirits.

It works and plays as a unit and strives to maintain the family reputation. The father or husband is nominally the head of the household, but each member of the family enjoys certain rights as an individual including the right to manage his own finances. Discipline is no problem at

A glimpse of rural family life.

home or school, for children are trained to respect and obey parents and elders.

Children are themselves cherished members of the family, constantly attended by the mother or an older brother or sister. Miniature figures of royalty and tokens of ancient wars on display during annual festivals for boys and girls often tax the family budget to the utmost. School children have ample opportunities to put aside their books to dance, play games, and compete in athletic contests while parents and teachers beam their approval.

Home industries permit the working mother to keep an eye on her children. The children are expected to help out as soon as they are able and thus learn the craft. Although encouraged to work at an early age, children can always find time for play and can usually find some obliging adult with endless patience who will tell them stories or join in their games.

The Role of Women

Since the war, women have been taking an increasingly active part in community life. The postwar years have brought them such advances as the right to vote, to obtain a university education, and to work at a greater variety of jobs outside the home. Many women—especially the younger, educated ones living in urban areas—dress and behave much as the women in the United States.

Two special groups of women found in the Ryukyus are

Women work at many jobs—some as ancient as the geisha's and others as contemporary as today.

noro priestesses (discussed on pages 86–87) and *geisha*. The geisha is a trained hostess—her profession, which originated in Japan, au ancient and respected one. From the age of 10 or 12 until she is 16 or 17, the geisha is taught such subjects as singing, dancing, etiquette, flower arrangement, and the tea ceremony. She entertains at public gatherings of men, often at tea bouses.

Although the women of the Ryukyus are enjoying greater freedom than ever before, they should not be approached casually. Outside the nightclub areas, you will find that Ryukyuan women observe strict standards of decorum.

Marriages

Ryukyuan parents usually arrange the marriages of their children through a relative or close friend of the family. If tbe parents of a young man approve his choice of a marriage partner, the *nakodo* (go-between) then consults the parents of the young lady. If they, too, approve the marriage, the parents of the couple select a good day from the lunar calendar for the rites and make the other arrangements.

Although the custom of arranging marriages is not always followed by the more modern youth, it is usually satisfactory to those who do. Men usually marry at the age of 24 or 25 and women a few years younger. Child marriages are rare.

Marriage rites vary according to the locality and the

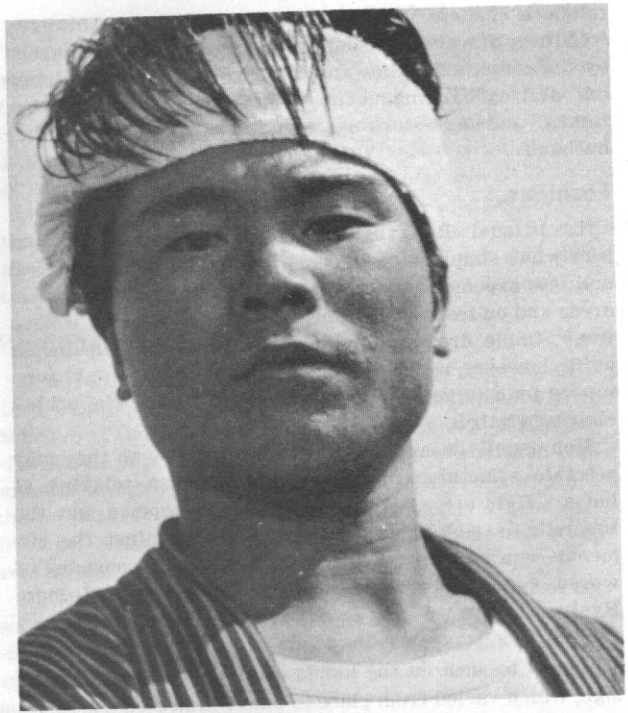
religious beliefs of the persons involved. However, weddings are always colorful and festive events marked by the couple's families and friends with feasting, drinking, and exchanging visits. The bride's esteem for her family and ancestors is transferred to those of her husbaud.

Fashions

Traditional Ryukyuan dress—Japanese in style but somewhat simpler—has given way to the more practical and less expensive Western-style clothing, except in rural areas and on festive occasions. For the most part, women wear simple dresses or skirts and blouses. The hridal outfit, however, is usually traditional—the colorful kimono topped by a large headdress that almost hides the bride's elaborate hairdo.

Men usually wear Western-style suits, though they may get into something more comfortable when relaxing at home. Hats are rarely worn by men or women, but the umbrella is widely used for protection against the elements—sun or rain. Footwear traditionally consisted of woven sandals or wooden clogs, but more and more Ryukyuans are wearing modern leather shoes.

Tattooing was once in vogue among the women and may still be seen on the hands of older women. The design, which varied from place to place, indicated the social standing and marital status of the individual. The cus-



Some Okinawans cling to tradition . . .

Others are modern in outlook and appearance.

Kimono-clad children add charm to this urban scene.

tom originated, according to one local legend, in order to prevent Japanese officers from claiming that Ryukyuan women were Japanese and carrying them off to Japan.

Distinctive hairpins once worn by both men and women also indicated the social rank of the wearer. The king wore one of gold; others wore silver, brass, pewter, or wooden pins, depending upon their standing in society.

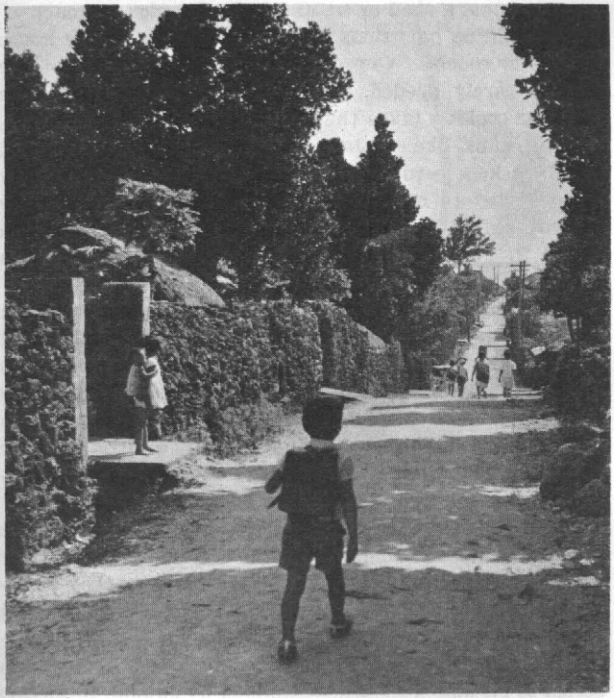
Homes

The war destroyed most of the buildings on Okinawa. Some have been rebuilt along traditional lines, but others are as modern in design as can be found anywhere. The traditional architecture is an interesting blend of Chinese and Japanese, with local modifications. A typical sight is the the roof with a ceramic Chinese dog as guardian.

The average Ryukyuan home is a simple structure of unpainted wood with a tile or thatch roof, thatch predominating in rural areas where the walls are sometimes of a mixture of straw and mud applied to bamboo latticework. Wooden houses can give and sway with the force of typhoons without collapsing, and if a thatched roof does blow off the loss is not great. Postwar homes of porous coral blocks held together with mortar are not uncommon. These, too, are typhoon resistant.

The small lot—about 50 feet square—on which the village home stands is surrounded by a wall and contains a

Homes such as this can be seen in the country.



Coral walls afford privacy to village dwellers.

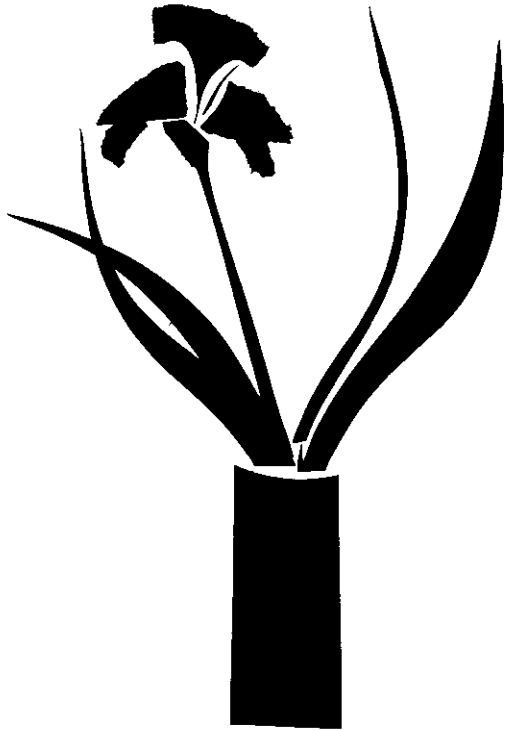
small garden, a shed or so, and a pen for pigs or goats.

Thin sliding partitions divide the interior of the house into a few rooms. No provision is made for heating, since heat is rarely needed. The hearth or charcoal brazier nsed for cooking takes the chill out of the air in winter.

Ryukyuans, like the Japanese, literally live on the floor, which is kept scrupulously clean. Shoes are invariably removed before entering the house. The wooden floors are covered with *tatami* (straw mats) by those who can afford it. Others leave the floor hare or cover it with heavy brown paper.

Home furnishings are scant, but every home contains a family shrine of some sort and possibly a few pieces of lacquerware and an artistic arrangement of cut flowers in season. The family sits on the floor to eat from trays or a low table. (Meals usually consist of sweet potatoes and other vegetables, rice, and perhaps a little pork or fish.) At night the living room is converted into a bedroom by spreading sleeping mats on the floor.

Never, under any circumstances, should you enter the home of a Ryukynan friend without first removing your shoes. Even if slippers are not provided, as they sometimes are, shoes must come off. To break this rule would be as rnde as to walk on the sofa in the home of an American friend. Ohvionsly, the floor would easily become too soiled to sit and sleep on if trampled by outside footwear.



Bathing Hints

Most Ryukyuan homes are not equipped with modern plumbing and bathing facilities. Should you have the occasion to use a public bath, here are some tips to remember.

First, several people must use the same bath water, since fuel is too scarce to heat fresh water for every individual. Second, scrub and rinse yourself thoroughly *outside the bath*, using a small container of water provided for this purpose. Third, don't expect to enjoy the luxury of large towels unless you bring them along with you.

Tea Drinking

The Ryukyuans follow the pleasant Asian custom of serving tea on just about every occasion you can think of—to guests in their homes, to business associates in their offices, and to customers in their shops. To refuse it is highly impolite, even though you dislike tea or the idea of a hot drink on a hot day.

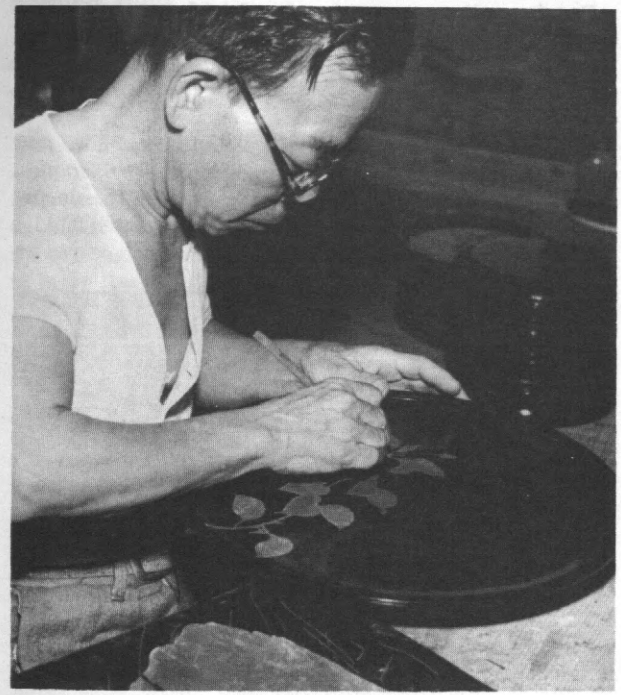
The kind of tea served varies with the occasion. For example, cherry-blossom tea or orchid tea is served for a happy occasion such as a wedding. The tea-drinking ceremony, governed by strict rules, is a special occasion. Special utensils are used for the ceremony, carefully arranged according to ancient custom. Tea leaves are never used twice. Only one person at a time drinks tea and then in a prescribed manner.

But for ordinary, everyday tea drinking, there are no special rules to follow and tea is simply a refreshing beverage.

Arts and Crafts

Ryukyuan arts and crafts are rich in local lore and color. The war destroyed some of the finest examples, but artists and craftsmen are busily at work producing others. The Ryukyu International Art League (RIAL) offers lectures and exhibitions and can introduce you to

Ceramic cocks get a final touch of the paintbrush.



Craftsman applies floral design to lacquered tray.

Hand-painting of textiles is a Ryukyuan specialty.

artists who will teach you much about Oriental arts and crafts if you are interested.

Ryukyuan artists are as much individualists in their work and appearance as artists anywhere. They tend to congregate in colonies, one of the most prominent of which is at Shuri. Among the painters and sculptors are modernists as well as traditionalists. The traditionalists follow the mystical, delicate style of their ancestors; the modernists prefer realism and surrealistic abstractions. All, however, impart an individual touch to their work. Traditional paintings, sometimes on silk, are intended to depict moods rather than fleeting impressions of scenes. As in Japan, flower arrangement is an art in which the women excel.

Skilled craftsmen turn out beautiful work in textiles, ceramics, lacquerware, woodcarving, shell jewelry, and blown glass. Dollmaking is an example of a craft that has been raised to an art.

Jofu cloth, woven from ramie fiber, is in great demand. This excellent fabric, similar to that the Egyptians once used to wrap mummies, is desirable for several reasons. Its tensile strength is much greater than that of silk, yet it is light and cool. It resists soil and launders well. Miyako Island, south of Okinawa, is a jofu-making center where the ramie fiber may be seen stretched out in the yards of homes or even in the street. Women weave the skeins of ramie on hand- and foot-operated looms similar to those used by their ancestors.

Beautiful patterns are imprinted on cloth in several ways before it is dipped in dyes of rich hues. Paper patterns may be used, starch may be squeezed onto the cloth through tubes, or threads may be tied at certain intervals to produce striking designs. The tortoise shell, symbolizing long life, was a popular prewar design, but the designs today are usually less elaborate.

Deft-fingered Ryukyuan potters produce ceramic products noted for purity of line and richness of color. The raw material is clay, which Okinawa has in abundance. Clays are carefully mixed before shaping, then put on a pottery wheel. While spinning the wheel with his foot, the potter pats and presses the clay into shape. The object is next decorated and finally fired in an earthen oven.

Okinawan lacquerware is considered the finest in the Far East. Bowls, trays, and furniture are hand shaped from wood and given a glossy finish with lacquer. After learning the process, which originated in China, from the Japanese centuries ago, the Okinawans added improvements of their own. At a lacquerware factory you can watch chunks of wood being made into handsome and useful articles. Lacquering of wood was probably begun for a very practical reason—to toughen it against the warm, humid climate. Lacquerware is extremely durable.

No Ryukyuan party or celebration would be complete without music and dancing. The men of Okinawa, like those of Japan, are fond of parties where geisha sing, play

the samisen, and serve beer and *sake*, a wine made of fermented rice. The samisen is an ancient and highly prized musical instrument that resembles our banjo. Other popular musical instruments are the flute, drum, and *kutu* (Japanese *koto*). The *kutu* produces harplike tones. A large instrument with 13 strings, it rests on the floor and the musician kneels when playing it.

Okinawans enjoy their own and Japanese theatrical productions, which are often based on ancient historical events and accompanied by music and dancing. Dancing usually takes the form of slow movements of the body, each movement of the hands and feet being significant. In this type of dancing the dancers' faces are expressionless.

Educational Achievements

The school system and curriculum follow the pattern of postwar Japan's. Education is compulsory through the ninth grade. The public school program consists of six years of elementary schooling, three of junior high school, and three of senior high. Boys and girls attend classes together.

At the close of the war nearly all of the schools had been destroyed aud an acute shortage of qualified teachers existed. Great strides have since been made in overcoming both of these handicaps. A school construction program has taken students out of tents or quonset huts and put them into new school buildings. Summer courses

and on-the-job training have made teachers better qualified for their jobs.

Ryukyuans are particularly proud of one postwar school—the University of the Ryukyus, erected on the site of Shuri Castle. Americans as well as many local officials participated in the formal opening ceremony on 12 February 1951. Courses are offered to both men and women in agriculture, forestry, home economics, languages, natural science and mathematics, education, fine arts and music, social science, and business administration. The langnage instruction includes several courses in intermediate and advanced English. On the campus is the Shikiya Memorial Library, to which Americans have donated many books.

Before the university was built, students seeking higher education had to go to Japan or elsewhere to get it. Many still do, with financial assistance provided by the Ryukynan and Japanese Governments. Many exchange students have studied in the United States at the expense of the U.S. Government and returned to share their experiences and practice their English with others. The student exchange program, in addition to increasing mutual understanding between Americans and Ryukyuans, is helping fill the need for leaders.

Japanese is the official language of the Ryukyus and the language in which classes, aside from those in foreign languages, are conducted. Some Ryukyuans, however, still speak their native tongue.

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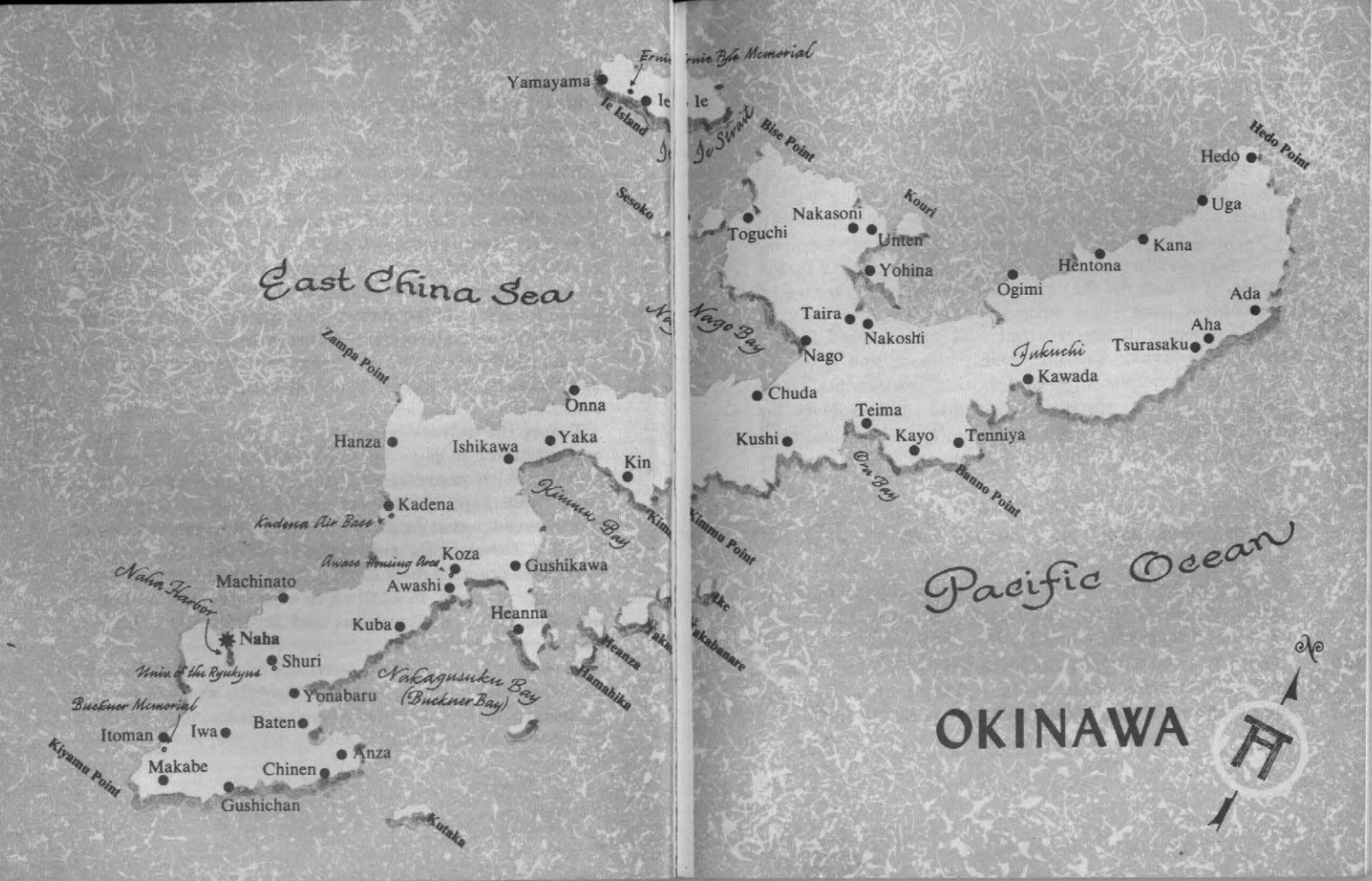
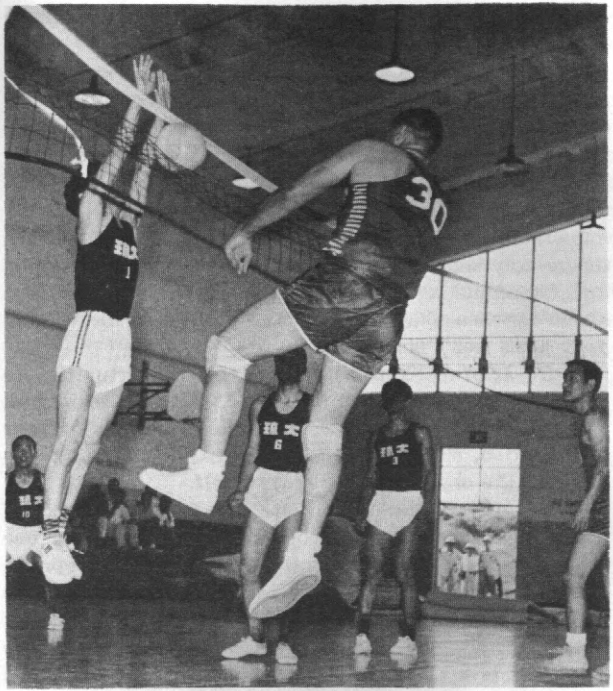

East China Sea
Pacific Ocean
OKINAWA
Yamayama
Ie Island
Ie
Ie Strait
Bise Point
Hedo Point
Hedo
Sesoko
Nakasoni
Kouri
Toguchi
Unten
Uga
Kana
Yohina
Hentona
Ogimi
Ada
Taira
Nakoshi
Aha
Nago Bay
Nago
Tsurasaku
Jukuchi
Kawada
Chuda
Teima
Kushi
Kayo
Tenniya
Ora Bay
Bannо Point
Kimmu Point
Zampa Point
Onna
Hanza
Ishikawa
Yaka
Kin
Kadena
Kadena Air Base
Kimmu Bay
Koza
Awase Housing Area
Gushikawa
Machinato
Awashi
Naha Harbor
Heanna
Kuba
Naha
Shuri
Heanza
Hamahika
Union of the Ryukyus
Nakagusuku Bay
(Buckner Bay)
Yonabaru
Buckner Memorial
Itoman
Iwa
Baten
Anza
Kiyamu Point
Makabe
Chinen
Gushichan
Kutaka

You and the Ryukyuans

You have probably been told many times that when you serve overseas you have this special obligation to your country—to act as an unofficial ambassador. This is especially important in Okinawa simply because the United States, as the administering authority, is under the close scrutiny of all Asia. No matter how excellent our administration or how many advantages we have brought to the people, it is natural that they should prefer to be free of our control, even while recognizing the necessity for it.

Consequently, it is important that you understand and respect the Ryukyuans and their problems and that you be as fair, generous, and kind to them as possible. The Okinawans have responded warmly to a variety of friendly deeds by Americans, whom, on the whole, they respect and admire. You can and should add to the good will that exists.

You can do your country a service and make your tour of duty more enjoyable by a number of off-duty activities. For example, English teachers are always needed, as are volunteers for work in charitable and welfare organizations. If you excel in some sport, you can coach others in it. For suggestions on activities to suit your interests and talents, consult your Special Services officer, chaplain, public information office, or club. They may be conducting programs in which you can participate.



Okinawans are eagerly adopting American sports.

Here are some suggestions that will help you make friends among the Ryukyuan people:

● *Be courteous.* A highly developed social code governs personal relationships among Ryukyuans. You can't hope to learn the intricate details of the code of manners, but good manners by American standards will be adequate.

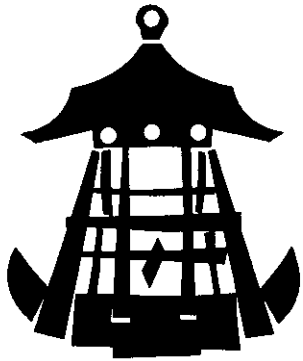
● *Be patient.* Many Ryukyuans have learned English and others are studying it, but English is not their native tongue any more than Japanese is yours. Hence, misunderstandings are bound to occur. Don't get excited about it when they do. Raising your voice or waving your arms won't help a bit.

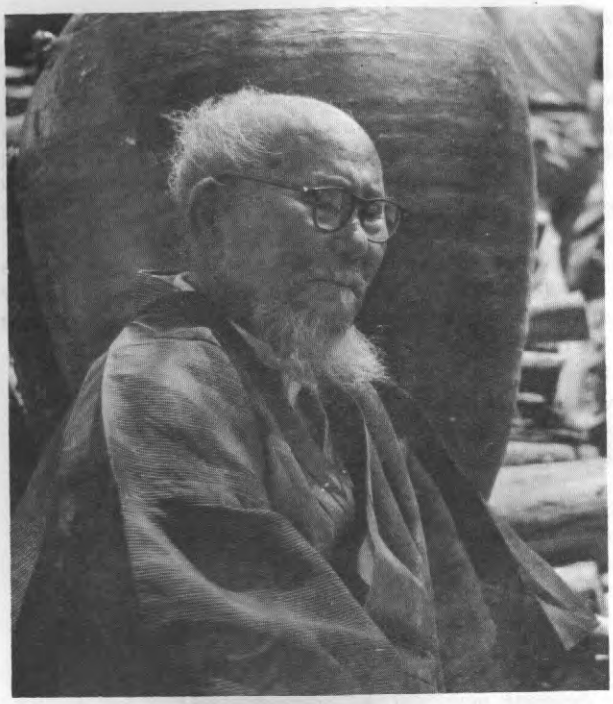
● *Be helpful.* You will have many opportunities to cooperate with Ryukyuan individuals or organizations on a person-to-person basis and through the efforts of your organization, clubs, or religious group. Don't fail to do so when the opportunity presents itself.

● *Be fair.* Boasting and sneering are trademarks of ignorance. Pride in one's country and culture is a fine thing, and remember that the Ryukyuans are just as proud of theirs as you are of yours. Theirs is an ancient culture and one they can well take pride in. To disparage it simply because you do not understand it would be a grave error. It is not our purpose to Americanize Asians, and any Ryukyuan will understandably become annoyed at hearing his way of doing things compared unfavorably

with the American way. A lavish display of money can be annoying, too, to a Ryukyuan wage earner who considers $40 a month extremely good pay.

The more you learn about Ryukyuans and their culture, the more you will appreciate and respect them. You aren't expected to become a profound student of Ryukyuan affairs, but you can easily learn enough to make your stay more worthwhile and pleasant. And while you're about it, learn as much of the language as possible. You probably won't become fluent in Japanese, but even a little knowledge of it will help you immensely. The instantly favorable reaction to a few words of recognizable Japanese will he very gratifying.





Age is highly respected—as well as craftsmanship.

Keep your temper under control. In conversations with Ryukyuan friends, it's a good idea to avoid heated arguments. These are likely to result if you discuss such topics as politics and religion. Don't become involved in controversies with Ryukyuans over the governmental administration of the Ryukyus. Your personal opinions might be construed as the U.S. Government's position. Give honest answers, however, to questions about the United States.

Parents are responsible for seeing that their children obey regulations and behave politely toward local nationals—especially domestic and housing area employees. In a country where respect for elders is traditional, it is extremely offensive for a 10-year-old to address a 40-year-old houseboy or waiter as "Hey, Boy-san."

Dependents and women in the service of the United States are required by regulation to refrain from wearing abbreviated clothing when shopping, even on the base, or while sightseeing. To avoid embarrassment, follow this rule. Such clothing as shorts and halters, pedal pushers, and other beach and sports items may be worn on the beach where it is appropriate or in private quarters.

On Okinawa you will be in close contact with Okinawans, for villages crowd in closely upon military installations, and many Okinawans are employees of the U.S. Government. You will be an object of friendly interest and wield considerable influence, especially among the

youth of the island. Small boys will imitate you. With this in mind, you will want your influence to be wholesome and your personal contacts with your good-natured Okinawan neighbors to be harmonious.

RELIGIOUS FAITHS AND FESTIVALS

Althougb tolerant of all religions, the average Ryukyuan prefers his own—a combination of animism and devotion to ancestors. The native animism, which attributes souls to inanimate objects and forces of nature, bas been modified over a long period of time by the influence of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, and Christianity.

Taoism, an aucient Chinese religion founded by Lao-tse (or Lao-tzu) in the sixth century B.C., promoted devotion to ancestors by teaching that ancestral spirits become divine after seven generations. A succession of lives is also a feature of Buddhism. The goal of Buddhists is Nirvana, a selfless state devoid of human suffering. Founded in India by Gautama Buddha (563–483 B.C.), Buddhism got its start on Okinawa at Urasoe in the 13th century. Chinese settlers who arrived at Naha in 1391 soon began to teach Confucianism. This is based on the teachings of Confucius, a philosopher of ancient China whose rules for barmonious relations among people include respect for parents and superiors.

Although the practice of both Buddhism and Confucianism has declined, these great Asian religions have left a

distinct imprint on Ryukyuan culture. The average Ryukyuan cares little for religious theory and philosophy, hence these aspects of Buddhism and Confucianism have never had wide appeal except among scholars.

The Ryukynans have long been exposed to the influence of Shinto, the traditional religion of Japan. After annexing the Ryukyus Japan promoted Shinto with limited success.

Christianity was introduced in 1846. Dr. Bernard Jean Bettleheim, the first Protestant missionary, was attempting unsuccessfully to spread the faith when Commodore Perry arrived in 1853. Since early in the 20th century, Christianity has gained some converts, but they probably total less than one percent of the population. Nearly all of the patients in Okinawa's one leper colony—Airaku-en, on the island of Yagachi—are Christians, however.

The Ryukyuans do not congregate regularly for religious services as members of Western churches do. Instead, families as a group venerate ancestors in the home and at family tombs. Tablets inscribed with the names of ancestors in two rows—men's in the upper row and women's in the lower—are retained in the home to keep alive the memory of the departed. The family burns incense before these and in other ways honors the ancestors they represent. From time to time the ancestral spirits are assumed to visit the tablets.

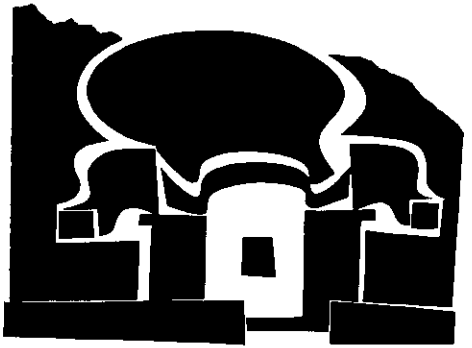
Believing that various objects and forces of nature are

endowed with spirits, or supernatural powers, individuals pay homage to these in fields, forests, and caves, and along roads and byways. Supernatural powers are attributed to the dragon, tortoise, sun (as the source of fire), wind, and water, among other things.

The Ryukyuans observe burial rites strictly. Burial tombs, called *haka*, and burial customs are such distinctive features of the Ryukyu Islands that they require a few words of discussion.

Burial Customs and Tombs

Traditionally, bodies of the dead are placed in coffins in a seated position and interred with ceremony in family burial tombs, which are sealed with mortar. Several



years after a burial, the tomb is unsealed and the bones are removed and washed, then reinterred in a smaller receptacle to make room for others to follow. The tomb is also opened, of course, when other members of the family are buried. Relatives of the dead visit the tomb on set days during the first year after a death occurs and on certain anniversaries of the death.

On a walk or drive you will see tombs on every hillside. Many are in the shape of a horseshoe with the top rounded somewhat as a turtle's back. The name for these, *Kami-no-ku-baka*, actually means *turtle-shell graves*. To some, the turtle-back tomb symbolizes the womb from which man comes. Earlier tombs were rectangular in shape and covered with a flat roof.

The turtle-back tomb resembles the bunker-type pillboxes constructed by the Japanese during the war. Many actually served the Japanese as formidable defense positions at that time. On the other hand, some Okinawans converted Japanese pillboxes into family tombs after the war.

Okinawan tombs are usually made of coral blocks and contain a walled space in front where the family gathers for appropriate festivals and family celebrations. These can be gay affairs in spite of their setting, since death is considered a promotion to the spirit world.

The size and elegance of the tomb depend upon the wealth of the family. Okinawans may be more concerned

Ancestors are honored at the family tomb.

about the condition of the family tomb than they are about their home. Maintaining the tomb often puts a severe strain on the family budget. Not all Ryukyuans by any means can afford the luxury of an elaborate family tomb. Many cannot afford tombs of any kind and simply bury their dead in the earth. Even then, the family gathers at the burial site to observe certain festivals. When bodies are cremated, as many are now, the ashes are kept in simple urns.

A Word of Caution

It is probably best for you to view Ryukyuan tombs from a distance. As important symbols of the Okinawan's private religious beliefs, they should not be inspected too closely except by invitation.

Temples and shrines are open to visitors. When you visit them, remember that they are places of worship and show them the respect you would your own church back home. Your manner should be dignified and your clothing conservative. You will of course be expected to observe the local custom of removing your shoes before entering. It shouldn't be necessary to remind you not to touch objects that are considered sacred.

Noro Priestesses

In ancient times the *noro* priestess served Ryukyuans by caring for the hearth fire (which was carried from place to place and from island to island), performing

devotional rituals to ancestors, and divining auspicious days for such events as marriage, burial, travel, or planting crops. As the guardian of sacred groves and oracular shrines she resembled the priestess of Greek tradition. Her influence and prestige were tremendous in the days when a virgin daughter or sister of the king was chief high priestess and assisted in royal affairs. The office of *noro* was usually retained in noble families from generation to generation.

Traditionally, the *noro* wore white as a symbol of purity, a head decoration of feathers, and a necklace of beads. Among the beads were some, called *magatama*, curved in the shape of a comma. Three simple hearthstones in or near the *noro's* home were a center of worship.

Few *noro* are left today, but those remaining command great respect in rural areas. They are still consulted by villagers and they still perform religious rites. However, they have come to be associated in the popular mind with magical powers and even witchcraft. And their prestige is rivaled by the *yuta* (sorceress) and *hakke* (fortune teller). Since the *noro* is no longer required to remain celibate, she leads a normal family life. She does not live in or maintain temples or shrines. To an outsider, the *noro* is hard to distinguish from any rural Ryukyuan woman.

Festivals and Celebrations

The Ryukyuan people, from the oldest to the youngest,

love holidays, the pageantry of festivals, and private family celebrations as much as any people on earth. Festivals are family affairs, occasions for getting together with other members of the family and singing, dancing, and feasting with them.

Many of the festivals are religious in origin or have religious overtones, but no opportunity to celebrate is overlooked. Among a farming and fishing people, it is not surprising to find festivals honoring now obscure gods of fertility and the sea, to find farmers praying to some gods for good crops and weather suitable for growing crops, and fishermen invoking others for good fishing and safe voyages.

In addition to their traditional festivals, the Ryukyuans have adopted and adapted some from China and Japan. Even Western holidays, especially Christmas, are observed by some. Birthdays are not generally celebrated annually. Instead, all the boys and girls celebrate together on Children's Day each year, and birthdays of persons in certain age groups are observed on another day.

Traditional holidays follow the lunar (moon) calendar, but the solar (sun or Gregorian) calendar is used for other purposes. The lunar calendar year is 10 or 11 days shorter than our solar calendar year; the lunar new year, more than a month later than ours, falls in early February by our calendar. Holidays are sometimes observed twice, by both calendars.

No festival is complete without folk dancing.

The lunar new year is perhaps the most popular celebration of the year. Festivities coutinue for a week or more. All business comes to a halt on New Year's Day, even restaurants and tea houses closing so everyone can be with his family to celebrate. This is a time to pay homage to ancestors and to pay and receive formal calls. Every effort is made by even the poorest family to have new clothing and traditional goodies. The tombs of those who died within the past year are visited on the 16th day of the first lunar month.

Juri-Uma (Geisha) *Festival* is celebrated on the 20th day of the first lunar month. The geisha parade on this occasion to the Nami-No-Ue Shrine in Naha will probably be your best chance to see geisha, for geisha parties are rather exclusive and very expensive.

Two festivals during the second lunar month are commemorated privately; *Higan* (meaning Other Shore), a Buddhist festival of the dead marking the crossing of souls over the ocean of existence to Nirvana, and *Uma Chii*, a festival of grain during which prayers are made for a good harvest.

The third day of the third lunar month brings a joyful occasion for girls—*Hina Matsuri* (Doll Festival). At this time dolls, often heirlooms and exquisite miniatures of ancient royal families and courtiers, are displayed in homes. These dolls are not ordinary toys to be played with. After about a week they are put away until the

next Doll Festival. Picnics, dancing, and dressing up are privileges of the girls on this holiday.

Seimei-Sai, or Memorial Day, also falls in the third lunar month—after planting time and before active cultivation is started. Families and clans of families then gather to pay homage formally to ancestors.

Colorful *Dragon Boat races* are held on the fourth day of the fifth month, when 30-foot canoes, each manned by a dozen paddlers and brightly painted to represent a dragon, race one another. Itoman is the best place to enjoy this celebration. In ancient times, canoes similar in size to those used in the races were carved from single logs to carry hardy Ryukyuan seamen over thousands of miles of ocean. Although trees of such noble proportions vanished long ago, so strong is the hold of tradition that the same type of canoe is still made, of boards carefully fitted by hand.

The fifth day of the fifth month is *Children's Day*, once celebrated for boys only but now enjoyed by girls as well. On this day you will see paper or cloth carp flying from poles at every house where there are boys. The carp, by swimming upstream, symbolizes strength and manliness. To encourage a manly spirit, ancient weapons—either heirlooms or, more commonly, replicas of old weapons—are displayed. Boys traditionally bathe in water scented with iris root. Influenced by so-called *samurai* movies featuring exploits of feudal heroes, small boys often spend