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Keynote speech

Recovery from Disasters and International Cultures in Okinawa

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In Shakespeare's masterpiece, "Hamlet," Hamlet tells his schoolfellow, Horatio, "There are more and more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." The Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on the 11th of March 2011, certainly shows the truth of Hamlet's words. Whoever on earth could foresee that this disaster would occur? The disaster has caused the damage which is immeasurable even with the human intellect; numerous lives are lost and more than 10,000 people are reported to be missing. The media tells that there is still a great number of people who have lost their homes and property, and are forced to live in evacuation shelters. I would like to express condolences and sympathy from the bottom of my heart for the people suffering from this disaster.

People in the West think that human beings have been enjoying a wonderful world in the past, that is to say, a paradise or a golden age, from the classical times up to the present. The idea of paradise has been one of the important themes in Western literature. Human beings, however, lose Paradise. Atlantis in Greek mythology was said to be a paradise before it sunk to the

bottom of the sea. Noah's Flood in the Old Testament also narrates this idea of paradise. Human beings, however, recover the paradise which was once lost. That is the regained paradise. In this way, according to the Western civilization, human beings once lived in the paradise, lost it, and regained it.

Eastern Japan and Okinawa may have been walking through this same path. Having witnessed such disastrous scenes, we Okinawans cannot help remembering the Battle of Okinawa which took paradise away from us. Then, how and what kind of paradise were Okinawans enjoying?

Okinawa was once the Ryukyu Kingdom, and flourished from international trade. The kingdom prospered even in the Edo period when Japan was under the isolation policy. Especially before the Satsuma Domain's invasion in 1609, Okinawans were enjoying, so to speak, the golden age of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The golden age means the happiest time, which is different from the silver age or the copper age. The Ryukyu Kingdom was in the golden age, time-wise, and paradise, space-wise.

The Ryukyu Kingdom was right in the intersection of international cultures, which indicates that the history of Okinawa is the history of intercultural contacts and international exchange. The exquisite prose which is engraved on the Bell of Bankoku-Shinryo, casted in 1458 and hung in the main chamber of Shuri-jo Castle, clearly proves my point. The preface to this Chinese prose begins as follows:

琉球国は南海の勝地にして三韓の秀を鐘め、大明を以って輔車となし、日域を以って唇齒となす。此の二の中間にありて湧出する所の宝来島なり。舟楫を以って万国の津梁となし、異産至宝は十方利に充滿す。

The prose goes on to tell how Ryukyu was flourishing at that time. The kingdom received superb culture from Korea. The relationship with China was that of being between the upper and the lower lips, that is, Ryukyu and Korea were mutually dependent to each other. The relationship with Japan was that of teeth and lips, that is, Ryukyu and Japan never had a breach in relations. Because of these relationships, the prose tells, the kingdom was filled with foreign products and articles. Ryukyuans went all the way to Korea to the north, and to the East Asian countries in the far south by ship where they engaged in international trade. Having preceded the age of geographical discoveries in Europe, the Ryukyu Kingdom was pursuing international commerce. Thus, the 15th and 16th centuries brought in glorious prosperity to the Ryukyu Kingdom. Ryukyu was enjoying the golden age, and was indeed the enchanted island, paradise.

Ryukyu's indigenous culture was preserved and succeeded until the amphibious landing of the United States on March 23, 1945. Ryukyu absorbed the cultures of various countries and created its own culture

under the influence of the countries around the kingdom. The main chamber of Shuri-jo Castle, a World Heritage site, is a good example. It is clear at a glance that Chinese architecture had a great influence upon the castle; it almost looks like a miniature of a palace in the Forbidden City. Ryukyu classical drama, *kumiodori*, which was also designated as World Heritage, is influenced by Noh, one of the Japanese performing arts. *Bingata*, one of the traditional arts and crafts in Okinawa, is influenced by *yuzen* in Kyoto and the dye techniques in East Asian countries. Finally, Awamori is said to have originated in Thailand. As you look at the roof and the entrance of Shuri-jo Castle's main chamber, and the roof and the pillar of the Shurei-mon gate, you notice that the Ryukyu culture is a compromise between the Chinese and the Japanese cultures. For, the entrance of the main chamber is that of a temple, and the pillar of the Shurei-mon gate is that of a shrine.

In the play *The Teahouse of the August Moon* which was adopted from a novel by an American writer, Vern J. Sneider, the interpreter Sakini says, "Ryukyuans don't have to go to the foreign countries, because Westerners will come to this island and bring in their cultures to us." I have to say that his comment is half-way true. For, in the 19th century, the warships and merchant vessels of the powerful countries of Western Europe came to Ryukyu one after another.

In 1815, Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. In the following year of 1816, the group of the Royal Navy Captain, Basil Hall, landed on Naha in Lila and stayed in Ryukyu for 40 days. They invited the Ryukyuans to the ship and entertained them. It was the very first occasion for the Ryukyuans to come into contact with Western culture. What surprised the British people most was that Ryukyuans were different from the people they had encountered in the East Asian countries where they had stopped on their way to Ryukyu. That

is, no Ryukyans stole anything on their ship. In his journal titled "Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea and the Great Loo-Choo Island in the Japan Sea" (1818), Hall admires the Ryukyans saying that "they never tell a lie, and they are honest and reliable." From the 18th century to the 19th century, there was a cultural critique that defined the civilization as something to debauch human beings. Innocent and naive people, placed as the opposite of "civilization," were called "noble savages" and were praised enthusiastically. They must have regarded the Ryukyans as "noble savages," and if they did, the Ryukyu Kingdom must have been seen as what they called "paradise".

On his way home, Basil Hall stopped at Saint Helena where Napoleon was confined, and talked with him. Hall told Napoleon that there was a country which had no weapons. Napoleon did not believe Hall's report. He claimed that there should not have been such a country as to be totally unarmed in that kind of era. Hall was overjoyed to see Napoleon perplexed. However, when Hall pointed to the Ryukyu Kingdom on a map, Napoleon immediately commented that he knew the country, which disappointed Hall greatly. It might not have been without reason that Napoleon, who had been preoccupied with war, was astonished to be told that there was indeed an unarmed, peaceful kingdom. Ryukyu was certainly the epitome of paradise.

A Navy missionary in Britain, on the other hand, decided to repay the kindness to the Ryukyu Kingdom which took care of them materialistically during their stay. As a result, they sent a Christian missionary named Bernard J. Bettelheim to Ryukyu in 1846. Bettelheim not only translated the New Testament into the Ryukyuan language, but also introduced the protective inoculation of smallpox as a doctor. Under the isolation policy, however, he was kept under the strict surveillance of the government authorities, and could not act

freely as a religious missionary. Thus, his activities were limited to places such as the agricultural product markets and the docks in Naha, and to people such as farmers from the countryside and sailors. I hear that Bettelheim preached to those people and said, "If you believe in Christianity, you will become equal to the people in Shuri and Naha, and you would never be looked down upon or discriminated against." As for the achievements of his missionary, one could name the translation of the New Testament into the Ryukyuan language. However, his mission as a Christian preacher may be regarded as unsuccessful. For, he was supposed to influence the Ryukyuan people spiritually with his Christian doctrine, but he was not successful in making many Christians out of the Ryukyans. That is, Bettelheim could not repay the kindness of the Ryukyu Kingdom in a spiritual way. He left Ryukyu and went back to America along with Perry in 1854.

Accordingly, Bettelheim's view on the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Ryukyans was not necessarily favorable as opposed to that of Basil Hall. Some Okinawan intellectuals felt anxious about this historical fact. They invited Mrs. Beth Bettelheim Bratt, Bernard J. Bettelheim's granddaughter, at the end of April 1937. It was about two months before the Sino-Japanese War broke out. They showed her around Shuri and Naha, which her grandfather regarded as his spiritual hometown. They apologized to her for their ancestors' wrong-doing toward her grandfather. Among those intellectuals were Dr. Kiko Nakachi, who was the fourth generation from Dr. Kijin Nakachi, Mayor Kiko Kinjo of Naha City, Deputy Mayor Jugo Toma, the first President Koshin Shikiya of the University of the Ryukyus, and the second President Chosho Goya of the University of the Ryukyus. I hear that Mr. Genichiro Shimabukuro, then the Secretary of Education, went all the way to Yokohama to welcome Mrs. Bratt. This episode may be con-

sidered to be a beautiful story that shows the Okinawan spirit of “*ichariba choodee*” which means that “meeting once makes everyone brothers and sisters.” Furthermore, I believe this anecdote suggests a model of international exchange.

While Perry came to Japan in order to demand the country to open its doors to the world in 1853 and put an end to the long, peaceful Edo period, the peaceful Okinawan paradise was destroyed when the Battle of Okinawa broke out in 1945, starting with an air-raid. Preparing for America’s amphibious landing under the tense war situation, Okinawans destroyed their numerous works of cultural heritage by their own hands. Zakimi-jo Castle, reconstructed to become one of the World Heritage sites, was built by Gosamaru in 1422. The cultural worth of the castle was said to be the beautiful, curvy line of the walls, which adopted the castle building technique of Holland. We young students destroyed those green castle walls inexorably, which were covered with huge pine trees, and we built the anti-aircraft gun site there.

When I was looking at the incredible scenes of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on television, I could not help associating them with those of the Battle of Okinawa. The tsunami overcame those tall breakwaters, swallowed towns, villages, and houses one after another, and paradise was lost instantly. The scene reminded me of 1,500 American warships which occupied every single corner of the Okinawan Ocean, and the landing warships which were heading for the coast to attack us. It reminded me of the evacuation ships which were sunk, ejecting the small children into the water. It reminded me of those small children being swallowed by the waves. It reminded me of the residents who were wrapped by the fire of the flame throwers. Every single scene of the Battle of Okinawa reminded me back to the scenes of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

As we retrace the history of human beings, we can see the changes in our view of nature clearly. More than often, people have discussed their view of nature. Nature has been defined in various ways as sacred, merciful, indifferent, machinery, and living organisms. However, the view of nature which was influenced by Lyell’s principles of geology and Darwin’s theory of evolution seems to be the most convincing theory to describe the power of nature in the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. That is, nature is the entity that stains its fangs and claws with the blood of human beings, and devours them. The Poet Laureate Tennyson aptly wrote, “Nature, red in tooth and claw.”

Okinawa is the only region in Japan where a ground war was fought and a number of civilians were involved. What determined life or death in that situation sometimes depended on whether one had an understanding of Western culture or not. At the landing sites including isolated islands, a tragic mass suicide occurred. If there were any people who had experienced Western culture, the tragedy might not have happened. In fact, in the air-raid shelter where any returnees from America stayed, mass suicide never took place. Another such example is one middle-school student who escaped from death by asking, “What time?” when he was about to be shot. A similar incident happened in Germany as well. When one German soldier was taken prisoner by a British and was about to be executed, he recited, “The curfew tolls a knell of parting day.” It was a line from Thomas Grey’s masterpiece, “An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” Those two mutual enemies became friends after that incident. I think it is crucial to recognize the importance of the language culture.

The loss of lives in the Tohoku earthquake and the Battle of Okinawa is beyond all imagination. As of March 20, the number of deaths and missing persons is reported to have reached 20,921, which is alarming and

astounding. On the Cornerstone of Peace, which was built on the southernmost point of mainland Okinawa, on the other hand, the names of 241,132 warvictims are inscribed. There are no longer allies or enemies. Among those inscribed names are those of Americans, British, and Koreans. As Basil Hall says, Okinawans have a culture that cherishes the dead. They have been building cemeteries for foreigners for centuries, and have buried the dead reverently without ever blaming them. I think this fact indicates the Okinawan people's spirit of universal brotherhood—all people in the whole world are brothers and sisters.

I know that the Tohoku area lost not only human lives but also homes, land, property, and both public and private assets. Okinawa as well lost the unique cultural assets that our ancestors had been building up for centuries. The number of national treasures in Okinawa is estimated to be third in Japan, following Kyoto and Nara. It is regrettable that most of those cultural treasures were lost in the war. Imagine a picture scroll in which the houses are drawn; they are roofed with traditional red tiles, surrounded by stone walls and gajumaru trees for centuries. The scene indeed is identical to a paradise. Okinawa once lost paradise, but started from scratch, started from nothing to regain it.

We must regain the paradise which has been lost. Sympathy and support are coming to the people in the Tohoku area from all over the world regardless of the sizes of the countries. I also received a great number of e-mails and letters from the countries in East Asia, Europe, Oceania, and both North and South America. Most of them wrote, "My thoughts and heart are with you and all the people of Japan." I felt all the people, rather, all the human beings in the world united as one. Now, I cannot help remembering the famous words of the eminent metaphysical poet, John Donne. He preaches:

No man is an Island, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannors of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

I think the people all over the world feel the same way as the poet. I do feel that we human beings all share "one life."

How did Okinawa's postwar rehabilitation start from scratch? First of all, it was fortunate that the Okinawan people had the sense of community, the sense of "*Gemeinschaft*," just as the people in the Tohoku area do. It is called "*yuimaaru*" which is based upon the spirit of mutual support. People all over the village cooperated with each other to build the houses and to set out the rice plants. Thus, Okinawans started rehabilitation by reconstructing their everyday living. The students who were taking lessons in the shade of a tree by and by began building so-called stable classrooms by themselves. The educational reconstruction started in this way. Secondly, as the Tohoku region is receiving moral and material support from countries all over the world, Okinawa as well received support from the "Okinawa Kenjin-kai" (Association of People from Okinawa Prefecture) in both North and South America. For instance, Kenjin-kai in Hawaii sent sire pigs and goats to Okinawa, which made it possible for the people in Okinawa to re-start animal husbandry. The transport of the sire pigs and goats was made into a film titled "Mission: Transport of Pigs," which resulted in quite a moving story. Such support from fellow Kenjin-kai truly encouraged us and energized us toward reconstruction.

Then, how were our daily lives? All the foods that

were distributed by the U.S. Army were new and rare to us. As we had lived on cycad (Japanese sago palm), anything seemed to be a feast to us. We received Californian rice, egg powder and ice cream powder which we no longer see any more, and cans of corned beef. That is, we encountered Western food culture then. How about our clothing culture? Both men and women took U.S. Army uniforms (HBT, Herring Bone Tweed) apart, and made clothes and hats out of them. Considering our housing culture, we used “two-by-four” wood provided by the U.S. Army to build standardized houses.

We Okinawans used to build houses on the foot of the mountains or in the valleys, probably because of the frequent typhoons; however, we learned to build houses on the hills from American culture. In the United States, the business district is usually located downtown, and the residential district uptown. In Europe as well, citizens used to build cities on the mountains. A German term “*berg*” means “mountain,” which changed into “bury” or “borough.” The name of the place “Heidelberg” in Germany is a good example to show the combination of the word meanings. “Canterbury” in England and “Edinburgh” in Scotland are also good illustrations. We may be able to learn a lot from these Western cultures when we consider the rehabilitation of the damaged Tohoku area from the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

What the war damage brought forth was, ironically, not only the minuses. It is a fact that prominent Japanese verses, Okinawan poems, and war literature were produced on the battlefields and in the POW camps. A

human being seems to become a poet when he is put in an extreme situation. Margaret Mitchel wrote *Gone with the Wind* based upon the American Civil War. Hemingway wrote *A Farewell to Arms* on the basis of his experiences in the First World War. Oshiro Tatsuhiko as well wrote *The Cocktail Party* taking the incidents in the international culture in Okinawa right after the war, and won the Akutagawa Prize. I expect that the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami will surely bring forth outstanding literary works.

It has been 66 years since we Okinawans lost our paradise due to the Battle of Okinawa. During these past years, the buildings of National Treasure, National Theater, and Prefectural Art Institute were built. The Bankoku Shinryokan, where the 26th G8 Summit took place, was also built. However, we cannot have the lost cultural heritage back ever again. The restored buildings are nothing but replicas. Rehabilitation takes a long time. It would be my pleasure if the people in Tohoku could learn anything from Okinawa’s reconstruction process following the Battle of Okinawa. Furthermore, I would be gratified if this keynote speech can make an occasion for us, Japan Society of Intercultural Studies members, to think what about we can do for the rehabilitation for Tohoku. We must try to recover paradise, and we must try harder to reconstruct a “permanent paradise” gathering all the human intellect and knowledge.

Thank you very much for listening.