

# Tides of Dispossession: Property in Militarized Land and the Coloniality of Military Base Conversion in Okinawa

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## **Abstract**

The repurposing of former military land is essential to the constant reformations of the US military's immense footprint in Okinawa. The local forms of land-use planning that guide these conversions remain influenced by the land rent-structure that emerged out of the militarized colonial settlement of the postwar decade and the uprisings it inspired. In this article, I ask how colonial dispossession in militarized contexts shapes urban planning processes and outcomes for closed military sites. Using qualitative research in Central Okinawa, I argue that planning goals seeking to restore public access to demilitarized sites are hindered where there is a predominance of private property claims to base land. This work contributes to an understanding of planning's colonial formations, especially as they operate through militarism, and deepens our understanding of the range of considerations that planners must make when approaching the redevelopment of militarized land in indigenous places.

## **Keywords**

Okinawa, militarism, urban planning, colonialism, indigenous peoples, repossession

## **Introduction**

This article takes Central Okinawa as a case study of military land redevelopment, approached from a historical perspective. Rather than being fixed in place, the US military's base network in Okinawa, its densest overseas outpost, is in a constant state of motion. Fence lines are routinely redrawn and redeveloped, old bases shrink and close, and new bases are built in the sea. Each instance of base conversion is a window through which the historical politics of the US-Japan-Okinawa triangle, and catastrophic ecological consequences of militarism, are on view in magnified fashion. Even amidst re-

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militarization, therefore, it is important to inquire into the nature of land reforms that see the military leave.

Research presented in this article is based on the two time-periods of 1945–1958 and 1995–present. The first period focuses on the formative conflicts over Okinawan land that would go on to last throughout outright occupation until “reversion” to Japan in 1972. Here, Okinawan<sup>1</sup> farmers struggled against US military-led requisitions to retain a stake in their lands amidst widespread base construction. The second period examines the interval between the 1995 rape incident that reinvigorated antimilitarism in Okinawa and the recent emergence of land-use plans for decommissioned portions of military land. In this article, I am interested in how the phenomena of colonial dispossession and land-use planning for military base conversion relate across these two time frames. I ask, in what ways does colonial dispossession in militarized contexts shape urban planning outcomes for returned military land?

The main argument I make is that the planning that governs the conversion of closed bases in Okinawa remains heavily determined by a politically divisive commodity in the form of private property entitlements to base land. Where private land ownership predominates at a given return site, the restoration of public access is made difficult by the financial interests of both ancestral owners and new investor-owners. Across the US military footprint in Okinawa, which includes 31 bases spread across approximately 47,000 acres, private landowners claim 40% of this base landscape.<sup>2</sup>

This article is based primarily on my analysis of declassified military documents pertaining to the post-World War II “Okinawan Land Problem,” contemporary planning documents concerning military base redevelopment, and texts and newspapers analyzed in translation. I also utilize data from in-depth interviews with community members and planners and on-going participatory methods that are part of more extensive dissertation research occurring throughout 2020.

I make this inquiry as a mixed-race, diasporic Okinawan in an attempt to better understand issues of land and power in one of my ancestral homelands. Therefore, I view the topic at hand from both an outsider’s perspective, having been raised mostly outside of Okinawa, and from an internal viewpoint, as a descendant of these islands. This mixed positionality affords me the convenience of being able to physically disengage from the violence of day-to-day life in a densely militarised place while paradoxically never fully being able to disassociate from these issues. This cross-border positionality also teaches me that, notwithstanding the methodological rigor any intellectual work can achieve, there is an unresolvable level of unknowability in the research we conduct as *sekai no uchinanchū* pertaining to life in Okinawa.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin with an outline of the existing literature pertaining to urban planning practices for the conversion of closed military bases. I go on to discuss the formation of US and Japanese colonialism in Okinawa today, observing traits of both settler and extraction colonialisms but a failure to comport precisely with either. I then explain the process by which two successive US military governments,

relying doubly upon the use of law and direct violence, appropriated Okinawan land in the postwar decade. In the remainder of the article, I explain how under the militarized property regime that came out of this process, the planning practice of base conversion, or *atochiryō* (*atochi*: former site, ruin; *riyō*: use of), has developed to preclude the participation of those without property claims.

### **Land Use Dynamics of Military Base Closure**

“Military base conversion” refers to a specific process of land-use change whereby land dedicated exclusively to military purposes is decommissioned following the ceasing of activities there and re-purposed for non-military land uses. Base conversion research has focused disproportionately on the continental US, where the conclusion of the Cold War saw five federally financed rounds of base closures operated under the US Base Realignment and Closure Program (US Office of Economic Adjustment 1990; McCurry 2003). Here, research focused on the adjustment of “host” communities located adjacent to military bases to new economic conditions in the post-military period and to the displacement of workers trained in old sectors (Hill Thanner and Segal 2008; Woodward 2004). The nature of these changes in the job environment often favor higher trained new entrants to the local economy after bases close.

The ecological effects of militarism have received sustained attention in the base conversion literature. Because of the testing of various forms of ammunition, storage of fuels, and the operation of heavy aircraft, military bases tend to be some of the most polluted sites on earth (Wegman and Bailey 1994). In the United States, closed bases, which remain highly contaminated long after closure, are disproportionately located in proximity to indigenous lands (Hooks and Smith 2004). Dillon argues that an environmental justice approach is critical to understanding the ways that base conversion processes, which unevenly subject racial and economic minorities to toxic landscapes in the military period, subject the same communities to displacement vulnerabilities after bases close (2014).

Outside of the US, South Korean and Okinawan base sites tend to be particularly problematic in the remediation phases, as status of forces agreements (SOFA) governing the US forces’ presence in those places relieve the United States of any environmental responsibilities upon withdrawal of the military (Mitchell 2013; Kim 2018). Here, the unwillingness of the US military to allow host country site inspections and to transparently share information further impedes redevelopment (Kim 2018; Teramoto and Kuniyoshi 2020).

Research on the role of community-based planning in redevelopment projects draws attention to the impact of participatory approaches on project outcomes. Because of the multi-scalar nature of base conversion, engaged stakeholders include municipal and national governments, various military branches, community organizations, and affected community members at large. For Bagaeen (2006), inclusive planning processes are critical to realizing sustainability principles in redevelopment. Ponzini and Vani (2014)

are more measured in their consideration of participatory planning in two Italian case studies. “With the exception of discursive and symbolic dimensions,” those authors argue, “it is difficult to expect. . . the divergent goals of national and local government and unequal distribution of costs and benefits of redevelopment to be ideal conditions for collaboration to influence military base redevelopment” (70). Hansen, Skopek, and Somma (1997) argue that while broad-based citizen participation in conversion processes maximizes efficiency, heavy bureaucratic participation will lead to process delays when political agendas conflict in intergovernmental planning efforts.

Okinawa has been laid aside as a unique case of military base restructuring (Martin 2018). On one hand, as this article explains, private landownership governs the dynamics of base conversion in Okinawa, whereas in other heavily militarized “host” places, national governments are the driving decision-making bodies when bases close. The second factor setting Okinawa apart is the Ryūkyū Kingdom’s sovereign history and forceful incorporation into the Japanese nation-state in 1879. This history ties base redevelopment, which is basically concerned with the removal of occupying forces, to more expansive considerations of reterritorialization and decolonization, which are of concern to indigenous peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012).

Unfortunately, despite the preponderance of US military outposts in indigenous places, and colonies in particular (Davis 2011), few studies seek to understand military base conversion in relation to indigenous dis/repossession and military settlement. This is a regrettable lacuna, especially when one considers the now voluminous theorizations of settler colonialism explaining its reproduction in contemporary structures of government. Processes of military base conversion, which relate historical grievances to contemporary bureaucracy, appear rife not only for better understanding the ways that colonialism operates through military apparatuses but for grasping the limits and potential of planning to support grounded decolonial political projects.

### **Colonialism and Okinawa**

By the time Okinawa was subordinated to US military rule in 1945, the sediment of Japanese colonialism in the former Ryūkyū Kingdom had already grown thick. Following the forceful incorporation of the kingdom into the Japanese Empire in 1879 as the Prefecture of Okinawa, Meiji officials oversaw the implementation of the *Ryūkyū Shōbun* (“disposal” of the Ryūkyūs), which meant to bring Okinawan society into line with Japanese norms. The replacement of Ryūkyūan languages, dress, and governance with Japanese counterparts demonstrated the type of “destroying to replace” that Patrick Wolfe discussed when he explained settler colonialism (2006, 388).

Today, Okinawa remains permanently settled by a disproportionately powerful military population (approximately 3–5% of the population since settlement in 1945), who occupy impermeable territories within which they are subject to their own legal code. This settlement is motivated both by the shifting geopolitical defense interests of the

Japan-US security alliance and by the permanent symbolic value that the American political imagination finds in Okinawa as a historical site of its global dominance. Furthermore, this network of US bases is in a state of constant restructuration, shrinking and metastasizing frequently without the consent of Okinawans. These territorial shifts necessitate a stream of associated harms that disproportionately subject Okinawans to water-system and noise pollution, motor-vehicle and aircraft accidents, and sexual violence. It is in this way that Okinawa displays the traits of settler colonialism.

Yet, occupation in Okinawa has not historically been discussed with reference to a logic of settler colonialism. While the seizure and militarization of land have been the basic motivator of the Japanese-sponsored US military occupation, Okinawans themselves have never faced genocidal campaigns of the variety found in former British settler colonies, which materialized in mass sterilization, disease, and the systematic undoing of the family unit. Nor has the US ever been given to the project of enfranchising Okinawans. The *labor* of Okinawans, however, has always been essential to their occupation, and to the production of military power using material drawn from their land and seas. Okinawans cut the grass that Marines golf on, they clean the homes that officers live in, and they mine the rocks that make the concrete that fills the ocean for new bases. This arrangement satisfies the labor-oriented criteria of extraction colonialism as explained by Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, where indigenous people remain alive and emplaced, but only in order to build wealth that is not theirs (2013).

Okinawans have long discussed the specific formations of Japanese and US colonialisms in their home. To make sense of the way in which these two empires are intermingled, Akibayashi and Takazato coined the phrase “double-colonialism” (2009). Annmarie Shimabuku has reminded us that a simplistic reading of the double-colonizer model risks understanding each side of this partnership as though it is distinct, thereby undervaluing the interdependence and co-constitution of US-Japanese colonialism in Okinawa, as well as the transmutations of white to Japanese supremacy, both of which operate against Okinawans (2012). Ayano Ginoza focuses on “militourist” environments outside of military bases, where Okinawan women are gendered as “feminine desiring subjects of ‘America,’ the masculine liberator” (2016, 589).

The above analyses are diverse but share focus on duality and a specific type of trans-pacific imperialist interdependence that locks Okinawans in a position of spatialized vulnerability. Therefore, I treat colonialism in Okinawa as a compound, *champururu* colonialism<sup>3</sup> that demonstrates both settler and extraction logics and that is based on the production and export of military power as a resource necessitating the seizure and destruction of land. For those whose lands were taken in service to base construction, the private-property leases that they received in turn, pursuant to this colonial state, effect the terms of Okinawa’s continued occupation and the processes that govern base return. The remainder of this article focuses on planning and resistance in the postwar militarization of Okinawa and on processes of military base conversion that are influenced by property in military land.

## Making a Military Colony

*They surrounded our fields with wire fence,  
They enclosed them completely; and by the fences  
Stood guards with guns on their shoulders.*

*How precious as gold our land is,  
The fields and mountains handed down by our parents;  
America does not know*

*(Takematsu Nozato, 1955. "Petition Song")<sup>4</sup>*

In the wake of the Battle of Okinawa, which left nearly as many Okinawan civilians dead as Japanese and US enlisted soldiers combined,<sup>5</sup> Okinawa itself was to be made a spoil of conquest. Whereas the US had already begun a de facto seizure of Okinawan land through its occupation of the Japanese Imperial Army's wartime bases, upon the conclusion of the Battle of Okinawa in July of 1945, this footprint immediately began to spread outwards. The US encroachment relied upon an alchemy of brute force, symbolic state-power, and geographical tools such as surveys, cartography, and law.

The decimation of central and southern Okinawa's built environment had provided a social context in which policy directives homed primarily upon the establishment of a military society in Okinawa could be rationalized as reconstruction. Abandoned by Japan and without a landscape left intact, two successive US military governments wrote an entirely new legal code and ordering of space into the land. In 1949, for example, US Military Government (MG) Directives Three and Seventeen began the enclosure of the military's territories by assuming full control of Okinawan building activities (1996). Fines of ten-thousand JPY or six-month imprisonment would be imposed on Okinawans found building structures within one mile of military housing areas and other zones declared off-limits to Okinawans.

With the ratification of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951, Okinawa was declared the US Civil Administration of the Ryukyus (USCAR), and the US land grab gained momentum. Ordinance Ninety-One attempted to tie Ryukyuan landowners into multi-decadal lease agreements at below value rates by linking the issues of land requisition to the promise of pre-war compensation. Etsujiro Miyagi explained that the proposed pre-treaty remunerations showed an average valuation of 1.8 JPY per tsubo<sup>6</sup> at a time when a pack of cigarettes cost 23 JPY (1987, 42). In 1953, USCAR Ordinance 109 established the US Land Acquisition Commission, empowering the Okinawa District Engineer with the ability to unilaterally identify lands to be taken for base construction and to issue condemnation proceedings to that end (1953).

With the passage of Ordinance 109, by the end of 1954, nearly 15% of all land in Okinawa, including 20% of all arable land, had been appropriated by the USCAR govern-

ment for purposes of base construction. The villagers of Ie Island, off the Motobu Peninsula, were pushed over the edge when USCAR officials arrived on their shores to carry out eviction proceedings in Maja and Nishizaki Wards. Maja Ward landowner Shōko Ahagon remembered that US military personnel carried out the evictions, torching and bulldozing homes with some families barely escaping, and issuing haphazard last-minute acts of cash recompense to scattering villagers under duress (1989).

Under threat of violence, the Maja Ward farmers refused to stop farming their land. On June 13, 1955, they entered their fields, hoisting a white flag reading “money is for one year; land is for ten thousand years,”<sup>7</sup> signaling both the ontological value they invested in their land as well as a marker of their physical presence to potential military aviators above (Ahagon, 42). In response, eighty of the farmers were arrested by armed US military police for farming their lands, and thirty-two were taken for holding on Kadena Airbase on Okinawa Island. An envoy of family members of the Maja Ward farmers travelled to Naha in order to protest the arrest.

In Ahagon’s “petition diary,” Tamotsu Agarie recalls that when the arrested villagers were questioned by a US military first lieutenant as to their reasons for protest, one of the farmers replied, “It is the land that was handed down from our ancestors for our living. It is our blood and our flesh. We are only protecting our land. *This* land is the land that we must hand over to our descendants” (Ahagon, 58, my emphasis). Agarie’s reflection demonstrates what Okinawan scholar Megumi Chibana describes as an Okinawan “autochthonous” connection with land (2018a), that is, that the indigenous relation Okinawans express with regards to their ancestral islands is an organic jurisdiction stemming from the claims of an original community rather than an entirely political one that is primarily legal and therefore fungible (Ford 1999). To be sure, the Maja Ward farmers intensely scrutinized the diminishment of their material means for sustaining their lives. But it was also the degradation of the pedigree of their territorial relationship—that it could be replaced with new land elsewhere—that they took aim at. Hence, Nozato’s “Petition Song,” cited at the outset of this section, refers to lands travelling genealogically through ancestral lines and not to land per se as a non-localized means of subsistence.

The envoy to Naha launched by the families of the imprisoned Maja Ward farmers was followed shortly by a much larger demonstration, organized by the villagers, who had been relegated to “tent life,” the conditions of which had led to the death of two mothers who together were survived by their ten children (Tanji 2007, 68). Between July 21, 1955, and February 1956, the Maja Ward villagers conducted the Beggars’ March, a non-violent procession against military enclosures throughout Okinawa. The Beggars March stopped in every Northern Okinawan town before moving south as far as Itoman Village on Okinawa Island. Forced off their traditional lands, the Maja farmers put their destitution on display in order to raise the profile of their struggle in hopes of restitution.

## From Land to Property

*For Okinawans, land is the resting place for the soul. . . . It's loss in one generation in return for cash is considered to be practically a gross betrayal of trust to the family line (Chōkō Kuwae) (US House of Representatives 1955).<sup>8</sup>*

With the Beggars' March having been widely publicized and following additional popular uprisings against USCAR requisitions in the villages of Isahama and Oroku, Okinawa was swept into the first island-wide struggle (*shimagurumi tōso*). The Price Commission, which was organized by the US Department of the Army to resolve the "Okinawan land problem," is now well-studied for the ways in which it inflamed antimilitarism throughout the islands.<sup>9</sup> Rather than resolving the problems of forced land-taking and compensation, the commission entrenched them by solidifying the US's commitment to securing long-term interests through lump-sum buyouts.

Despite having toured Okinawa and witnessing with their own eyes the problems of displacement, of "tent-life," and of the crowding that had resulted from the repatriation of nearly 150,000 Okinawans from the fallen Japanese empire,<sup>10</sup> the Price Commissioners were resolute. "Full fair value of the property," they asserted, "represents the only way in which a landowner can receive an amount of money truly adequate to make him whole, and sufficient for him to move to another area. . . or to emigrate to other countries" (1956). Inflamed by Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1954 proclamation that the US would hold its bases in the Ryukyus "indefinitely" (1954), the outcome of the Commission was constrained from the outset by the need across the US DoD and government branches to double their Okinawan land holdings.<sup>11</sup>

Okinawans had rallied against USCAR's one-time buyouts, calling instead for an interminable rental relationship with the US military as the flagship tenet of the "Four Principles" drafted by the Five Group Coalition. The coalition summarized the Ryukyuan position in their rebuttal to the Price Commission:

There is a great difference in thought between the United States and the Ryukyus in that we make a living in the passage of spiritual cultivation and the society of the United States is established upon material cultivation. We pay higher regard to historic and traditional value of land. . . . Without thorough understanding in such matter, the land problem in Okinawa cannot be solved. (1955)

The fundamental "difference in thought" referred to above refused the capitalist commodification of their land, which they understood to be the site of spiritual connectivity. As was the case with the Ie Island Villagers, the movement against the Price Commission's recommendations tied the Okinawan land struggle to family histories in which territory and ontology were imbricated with one another.

The movement against the Price Commission was behemoth. Takashi Yamazaki has observed that in 1956 alone, nearly a half-million people of Okinawa's eight-hundred-



thousand population participated in land-related public demonstrations (2003, 40). In the face of this wide-spread unrest, the US was eventually pushed to accept rental relationships in 1958 and commenced leases with landowners en masse. Under the heading “Elimination of Determinable Estates,” a US Department of the Army memorandum read:

The U.S. is prepared (in case a more satisfactory solution can be found) to cease further acquisition of determinable estate, to relinquish any determinable estate acquired in the past, and to abandon completely the single payment system. . . . Landowners who have already accepted single payment, in full or in part, may convert to an indefinite leasehold with annual rents. (1958)

Subsequently, landowners held leases to their stolen land with USCAR until 1972, when Okinawa was “returned” to its former colonizer, and the Japanese government took over payment of those leases in a tax-supported rental system that has continued to this day.

According to the system that emanated out of the postwar land struggles, landowners renew leases for their requisitioned land every twenty years with the Japanese government, which in turns grants it to the US for military uses pursuant to Article 6 of the Japan-US Security Treaty. This has resulted in a military landscape unusually dominated by private property interests.<sup>12</sup> In 2018, the Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) reported that 44,523 landowners held claims to nearly 40% of all US military land across Okinawa, and that in urbanized central and southern Okinawa Island, the proportion of private ownership had remained relatively stable at approximately 75% (2020). When base land is returned, therefore, private interests dominate redevelopment processes. The next two sections explain the way in which decommissioned base-land is planned for, and how this particular history of landownership and property works to the exclusion of Okinawans who are not owners of military land.

## **Geopolitics of Return**

There are exceptional cases in which base land in Okinawa has been returned at the urging of historic landowners themselves.<sup>13</sup> However, more common are cases in which base realignment decisions of the Japan-US security alliance occur unilaterally, triggering local planning responses to these significant land-use changes according to highly unpredictable timelines. This calls attention to the restoration of indigenous lands elsewhere, where the authority of colonial governments to decide which lands are returned, and when, has been criticized as a procedural step that maintains colonial orders of power in spite of jurisdictional reform (Tomiak 2017). The geopolitical planning context that determines base closure and redevelopment efforts in Okinawa “from above,” therefore, requires some explanation.

In 1995, in response to the rape of an Okinawan schoolgirl in Kin Town by a group of

US military personnel, eighty-five-thousand demonstrators gathered in Ginowan City's Kaihin Park to call for Okinawa's complete demilitarization. The movement inspired the formation of new feminist and nationalist anti-military factions and radical action by then governor Masahide Ōta. The rape also occasioned the mobilization of thirty-five military landowners, who responded to the incident by refusing to sign their lease agreements, an action that, while backed by Governor Ōta, was forcefully overturned by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama. Subsequently, the Act on Special Measures for United States Forces Japan Land Released was passed in 1995, empowering the Japanese government to forcibly activate the land-leases in the absence of consenting contracts with landowners.

Pressured by the uprising, the US-Japan Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) was formed, releasing its *Final Report* on December 2, 1996, which outlined a series of base closures in an effort to quell the unrest and mitigate base-related threats to human security. The *SACO Final Report* has become best known for tying promises to close Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to Camp Schwab's expansion in Henoko Village and the relocation of 5,000 Okinawa-stationed US marines to Guam.

The *SACO Final Report* initiated discussion over the return of ten other military base sites by 2008, each of which continues to be tracked meticulously by the OPG. By 2006, however, in a report entitled *US-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation*, the two governments were already walking back the SACO commitments, stating that, "While emphasizing the importance of steady implementation of the recommendations of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) Final Report, the SACO relocation and return initiatives may need to be re-evaluated" (Rumsfeld, Machimura, and Ohno 2006). Over time, of the returns promised by SACO, all that have occurred have generally run from five-years to over a decade late, six were divided again and returned in multiple phases, and three remain yet to be completed.

The most recent military plan for base return in Okinawa came in 2013 in the face of mounting opposition to the anti-democratic expansion of Camp Schwab. That year, the US military and Japanese Ministry of Defense released the *Consolidation Plan for Facilities and Areas in Okinawa* (hereafter, *Consolidation Plan*). The *Consolidation Plan* (fig. 1) earmarks 2,587 acres across fourteen sites south of Kadena Airbase for eventual return (US DoD 2013).

Despite promises of return, the *Consolidation Plan* demonstrates a commitment to base realignment. Most of the proposed facility closures are assigned a set of contingencies requiring the relocation of military functions elsewhere before land is given back. This reflects a common frustration among Okinawans that these "return" initiatives, which are used by Japan and the US to construct narratives of burden reduction in communities affected by base-related violence, often tacitly imply the remilitarization of new land elsewhere. This played out at Takae, where the return of one part of the Northern Training Area occasioned the relocation of seven osprey helicopter landing pads and the construction of six new ones within the remaining militarized territory. More recently, the

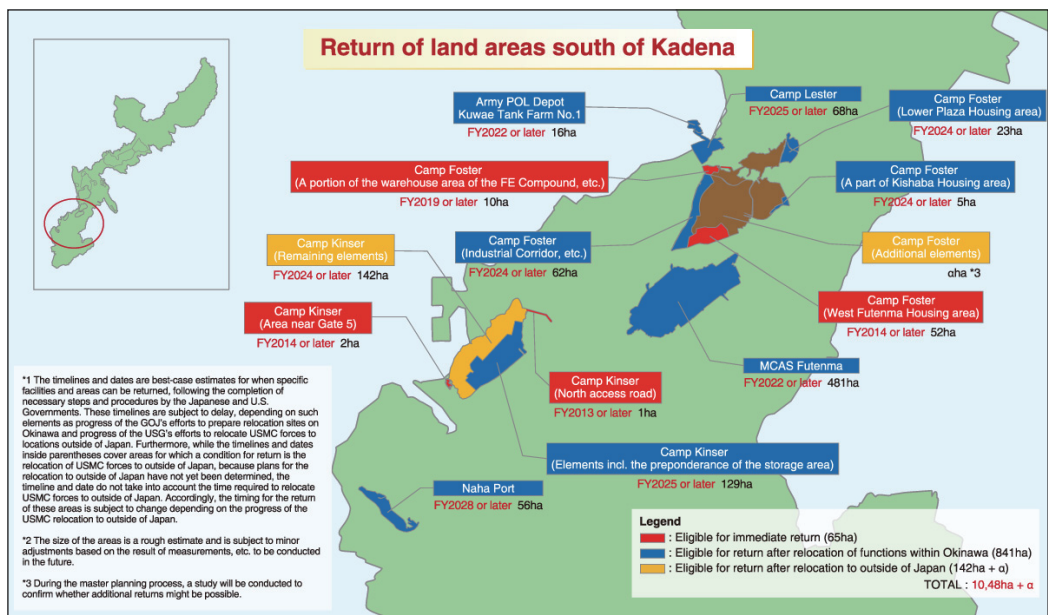


FIGURE 1. The US-Japan 2013 *Consolidation Plan for Facilities and Areas in Okinawa (kadena hikōjō inan no tochi no henkan tōgō keikaku)*.  
 Source: Japan, Ministry of Defense, 2013.

Society for Considering the Future of Urasoe's West Coast (urasoe nishi kaigan no mirai wo kangaerukai) is mobilized against the construction of a new base in the City of Urasoe, tied to the closure of Naha Port, according to the consolidation plan and the *SACO Final Report*. Consequently, military parcels identified in the plan tend to be relatively small in size, almost all representing fractions of bases rather than entire bases, and in some cases cross multiple jurisdictions. There is a long history in Okinawa of criticism towards this piecemeal approach to base closure, which flies in the face of vociferous support in the prefecture for complete demilitarization (Moriteru 2001). Masahide Ōta's 1995 *Base Return Action Plan*, for example, proposed a phased closure of all bases by 2015.

As US-Japan defense planners unilaterally re-territorialize Okinawan landscapes, local governments struggle to respond in turn, forming regional plans to meet emergent social needs and diversify land uses when the military leaves. As one OPG base planner told me, "We noticed that until now, each municipality was planning for whatever worked best for them, . . . a shopping center or whatever, . . . 'our town, our conversion project.' We thought, we should all be planning for the same place" (personal interview, 2020). In an effort to coordinate the redevelopment of land identified by the 2013 *Consolidation Plan*, in 2014 the OPG released the *Wide Area Framework for Site Utilization of the Former U.S. Military Bases in Central and South Okinawa (chūnanbu toshiken chūryū gunyōchi atochiriyō kōiki kōsōzu)* (OPG, 2014).

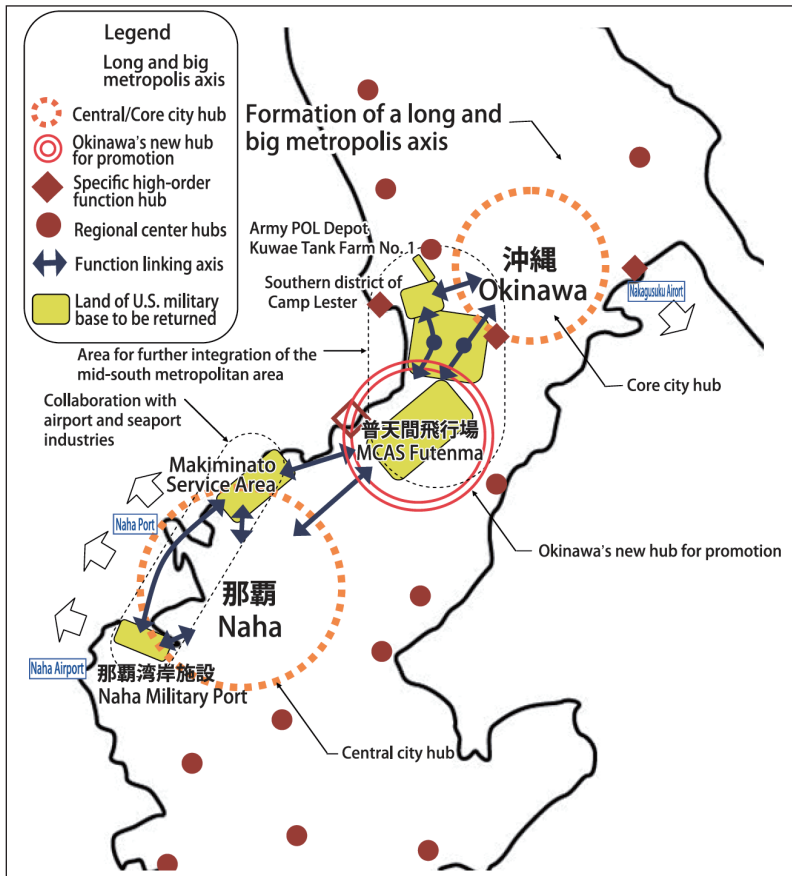


FIGURE 2. Summary of the Okinawa Prefectural Government’s 2014 *Wide Area Framework*, focusing on reestablishing pre-war connectivity and strengthening economic autonomy.  
 Source: OPG, 2014.

The *Wide Area Framework* (fig. 2) focuses on restoring traffic routes running N-S and E-W long hindered by militarization, expanding networks of green space, and globally directed economic promotion. Tourism and healthcare are focal land uses in the *Wide Area Framework*. Resort, culture, and medical/life-sciences industries are also prominent uses across the large-sized military facilities identified for closure by the *Consolidation Plan*. Given its centrality and sizable geographic footprint (approximately 30% of Ginowan City), MCAS Futenma, famously described by past US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as the “most dangerous military base in the world,” is identified in the *Wide Area Framework* as Okinawa’s “new hub for promotion.”

## ***Atochiryō* in Practice**

*Atochiryō* is the field of planning under which the conversion of closed bases occurs across a number of specializations in Okinawa. Planning functions involved in *atochiryō* include *machizukuri*,<sup>14</sup> urban design, environmental engineering, military relations, and land acquisition. While municipal planning offices often dedicate staff members to *atochiryō* projects specifically, also engaged in redevelopment processes are outside consultants, community organizations, and groups within regional landowner associations (*jinushikai*) of the Okinawa Prefecture Military Landowners Federation (*okinawaken gunyōchindo jinushikai rengōkai*), which evolved out of the postwar Municipal Landowners' Federation (*shi-cho-son jinushi tokubetsu ren rengōkai*).

The main legal frameworks governing *atochiryō* practice are the Special Measures Act Concerning Promotion of Effective and Appropriate Utilization of Sites Formerly Used by Military Forces in Okinawa Prefecture (hereafter, Special Measures Act), and the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (hereafter, SOFA) (Government of Japan 1960; 1995). The Special Measures Law, revised in 2012, affects base redevelopment processes in four critical ways, by: (1) mandating collaboration between landowners and affected governments throughout the redevelopment process; (2) allowing local governments to administer capital-gains tax reductions to military landowners who sell their land to municipalities; (3) by ensuring land remediation activities occur prior to land returning to owners; and (4) by extending the period of rent paid by the Japanese government to landowners, from three years from the stated date of return to three years from the date on which lands are actually handed back. Meanwhile, the Japan-US SOFA provides for the US's abrogation of all environmental remediation responsibilities upon leaving its bases.

The success of select conversion projects in Okinawa has replaced historic military-dependency arguments against base closure with economic development rationales for demilitarization, positioning *atochiryō* in a larger political frame. The institutionalized anti-base refrain now frequently cites the employment, real-estate, and commercial development opportunity-costs of militarized land.<sup>15</sup> Crucial to these arguments is the decreasing financial spillover from US military sources. Kakazu points out that whereas in 1972, military spending accounted for twenty-six percent of the Okinawan economy, in 2018, it accounted for less than five-percent (2012).<sup>16</sup>

Large commercial land uses that maximize rent yields to owners are increasingly common at closed base sites in Okinawa. This idiosyncrasy is an outgrowth of the system of private property established during the postwar campaign for Okinawan land. Rents paid for military land are drawn from the central government's "sympathy" budget (*omoi-yari yosan*), and climbed steadily between 1995 and 2015, from 6.7 billion JPY to nearly 13 billion JPY, amidst marked declines in land value and home ownership in the prefecture (table 1).

Therefore, when base land is returned, owners seek to maintain the economic boon

TABLE 1. The “political value” (*seijiteki kakaku*) of military land leases

Measure	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Base Rent to Prefecture (billion JPY)	6.701	9.332	10.864	11.797	12.952
*Avg. Land Value (JPY/m <sup>2</sup> )	115,000	85,800	63,400	63,000	64,700
Home Ownership Rate (%)	n/a	69.71	65.91	62.30	61.42

\* Averaged prefecture-wide across housing, mixed, and industrial land-uses.

Sources: *Land Value Survey, OPG 2020*; *Japan National Census, e-Stat 2017*; *Okinawa US Military and Self-Defense Bases Statistical Yearbook, OPG 2020*.

that military rents have provided them. Increasingly, this is accomplished by courting large, mainland Japanese proponents who funnel profits outside of the prefecture.

The return of US Forces Awase Meadows Golf Course provides a recent example of this type of commercial redevelopment. Since 1948, the golf course had been located upon 57 acres of requisitioned land in the *azas*<sup>17</sup> of Chūnjūn, Higa, Shimabuku, and Yagi-baru in Kitanakagusuku Village. While in operation, USCAR officials had only allowed Okinawans access to the golf course when accompanied by US military personnel and had argued for continued use of the facility based on their estimation that cash wages paid to Okinawan caddies and other staff were twice the monetary value of the produce that could be drawn from the land through farming (Burchett 1955).

Following the 1995 rape and the subsequent uprisings, Awase Meadows was agreed upon for return in 1996. Three hundred and eighty landowners from Kitanakagusuku Village who were affected by the return selected AEON Mall, a subsidiary of AEON Japan, whose 2020 operating income was nearly 61 billion JPY, to be the new tenant and to take over their leases from the Japanese government. Planning activity for the facility began in 2004, six-years prior to the actual return.

Located outside the area covered by the OPG’s *Wide Area Plan*, the Awase redevelopment was not subject to land acquisition pressure from local government, resulting in a largely independent planning process. The conversion was facilitated by outside consultants and involved a delicate sub-division process in which small pre-war agricultural parcels were adjusted and traded between owners to accommodate a larger zoning plan (Kitanakagusuku Jinushikai 2020). This allowed some landowners to split their holdings in order to continue receiving rent in the AEON Mall zone while resuming residence in the residential zone. In the development phase, the Kitanakagusuku landowners opted to retain Okinawan owned and operated survey and construction companies. Fashioned after large prototypical American shopping centers, AEON Mall Okinawa RYCOM<sup>18</sup> opened in 2015 and is now one of Okinawa’s most popular shopping and tourist destinations.

The Special Measures Act attempts to resolve a fundamental tension between the restoration of public access to closed bases and the private interests of landowners. On one hand, Okinawans at large, whose genealogical histories tie them to base sites, often call for the restoration of village sites, access to burial grounds, sites of historic cultural

importance, and public amenities. However, the *Wide Area Framework*, which attempts to materialize these visions, does not necessitate the continuance of profits or exclusive use, which are the rights claimed in relation to this land by many of the private landowners who hold title to it. Therefore, where returning bases fall within public access plans like the *Wide Area Framework*, government land acquisition becomes necessary for achieving wide-reaching benefits.

In order to strengthen the buying power of Okinawan municipalities against a growing private market for base leases as investment products, the Special Measures Act allows local governments to administer capital-gains abatements of up to 50 million JPY. This provision was tested recently, with a proposal to relocate Futenma High School to the nearby shuttered West Futenma Housing Area of Camp Zukeran. The housing area, which was first announced for return in the 1996 *SACO Final Report*, and is currently undergoing redevelopment, was vacated of military occupants in 2006 and handed over to the jurisdiction of Ginowan City in 2015. Prior to the return, momentum had been growing for the relocation of the school, with the support of the Parent-Teacher Association, alumni association, and a nearly twenty-thousand signature public petition launched in 2013.

Local government, the OPG, and supporters of the Futenma High School relocation plan canvassed landowners, hoping they would sell their lands to help achieve the five hectares of the fifty-hectare site they needed for the school. However, by the 2015 advanced acquisition deadline, the Ginowan City Landowner's Association reported that only 0.2 hectares had been secured, and the plan was abandoned (2019, 14). Subsequently, 2018 amendments to the *Nishi Futenma Housing Area Concept Plan* saw its Human Resource Development Zone (*jinzai ikusei kyoten*), where the school was to be relocated, replaced by an additional housing zone. Commenting on the abandoned school relocation plan, president of the Ginowan City Landowners Association, Shinichi Matayoshi, told the *Okinawa Times* that in holding out, owners were motivated by a desire to retain their ancestral lands for the purposes of both passing it on to future generations and for financial investment (*Okinawa Times* 2017).

There are other areas of the West Futenma Housing Area conversion project that have failed to take the interests of those without base property into account. For example, some Okinawans who participated in the redevelopment process disagreed with the plan's flagship development, which is the relocated University of the Ryukyus Hospital, currently located in Nishihara Town. One Ginowan City resident who lives in Aza Kiyuna, directly across from the site, told me that she felt her opinion had gone unheard by the project facilitators. This woman felt that there were enough hospitals in Central Okinawa, and that Northern Okinawa, where there is a relative shortage, would have been a better location for the facility (personal interview 2020). Another community member who had participated in the decision-making process felt as though the decision to relocate the hospital had already been made, and that the public were being brought into the plan as a form of procedural tokenism (personal interview, 2020). These resident's experiences

demonstrate that despite the Special Measures Act's tax clause, Okinawan governments remain challenged to acquire land sufficient to incorporate the visions of regular people into base conversions.

The second factor effected by the legal mechanisms controlling base conversion is the historical problem of severely polluted land being returned from the military. The deleterious impact of military bases in Okinawa has been documented at length.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, since its establishment in 1960, Article Four of the US-Japan SOFA has precluded the US DoD from any remediation responsibilities when its bases close: "The United States is not obliged, when it returns facilities and areas to Japan, . . . to restore the facilities and areas to the condition in which they were at the time they became available to the United States armed forces, or to compensate Japan in lieu of such restoration" (Government of Japan 1960). Cleanup responsibilities, therefore, fall to Japan and the Okinawa Defense Bureau, whose activities are hindered and made costlier by the US military's lack of incident reporting and unwillingness to allow on-base environmental inspections.

In the past, remediation activities did not take place prior to landowners retaking possession. This led to extended periods during which rents were not being received on returned land that was too polluted to either live or farm upon. In a 1956 report entitled *Actual Conditions of the Land Released by the Military*, a photo depicts Okinawan farmers breaking a concrete runway apart with pick-axes at the headquarters of the Ryukyu Command District Engineer, which was returned to Koza landowners in 1956 (fig. 3). The caption of the photo reads: "Having used the land at an unreasonably low rate, the military released the land with no compensation for its restoration, when the land finally became useless. . . . Being attached to their land on which their ancestors have long lived, and to acquire their means of life, these farmers continue to break the concrete" (unknown, 1956). In order to address this historical problem, revisions were made to the Special Measures Act in 2014, requiring remediation activities to occur prior to landowners themselves actually taking possession. Today, when returns occur, base land shifts from military jurisdiction to municipal while remediation takes place, before finally returning to landowners.

Further to the Special Measures Act, in September 2015, the Agreement to Supplement the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement on Environmental Stewardship was ratified. The supplement intended to augment the Japanese government's understanding of the environmental situation on bases by requiring the US DoD to permit environmental inspections prior to return. However, the SOFA supplement only provided for Japanese inspections of returning land within seven months of a given return. This period has proven to be an insufficient window of time within which to determine the extent of soil and water decontamination and ordnance removal needed to redevelop former military land. Furthermore, provisions for Japanese environmental inspections have provoked local Okinawan authorities when they have permitted the exclusive access of central government defense officials.

The extent of ground-fighting that befell Okinawans in the Battle of Okinawa is also





FIGURE 3. From the 1956 report entitled *Actual Conditions of the Land Released by the Military*.

Source: Okinawa Prefectural Archives.

relevant to environmental remediation in atochiriyō. Even at Awase Meadows Golf Course, where there were no munitions storage or aircraft runways, nearly ten-thousand munitions, including a landmine, were uncovered in the Okinawa Defense Bureau's cleanup process in advance of the AEON redevelopment (Allen and Sumida 2010). It was for this reason that in September of 2017, the OPG proposed their own SOFA amendment, calling on the US DoD to allow site-inspections at least three years before base return and to provide for cultural-asset excavations as well (2017). As of this writing, the request has not been met.

## Conclusions

The influence of private property over base conversion planning is a product of the mid-century struggle of dispossessed Okinawans to remain connected with their families' lands. When the military leaves, new contracts with large retailers like AEON Mall have ensured that those families who have not been allowed to farm their lands for seventy-five years maintain their economic wellbeing. These developments often lead to increases in the levels of local employment at redeveloped bases, which benefit Okinawans in the general public, though the literature suggests that post-military job environments disad-

vantage workers who were active in the former economy. Furthermore, whether converted bases take the form of shopping centers, residential developments, or a return to farmland, the removal of military personnel who cause violence against Okinawans and militarized land-uses that destroy the land present a crucial re-working of the colonial spatial order.

Yet as the commodification of military land has intensified with the specialization of a market in which leases are traded and valorized, the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial motivations articulated in the Maja Ward farmers' resistance is overwritten by profit-seeking models of redevelopment. As this exclusionary private-property claim grows larger, the planning that happens for closed bases precludes the influence of regular Okinawans over *atochiryō* outcomes. Furthermore, large, non-Okinawan commercial proponents who have the greatest ability to resolve landowners' compensation issues will also be the tenants most likely to reproduce the type of environmental harms and exclusionary spatial practices that dominate in the military period.

The Janus-faced nature of *atochiryō* in contemporary Okinawa draws attention to case studies of indigenous urban development elsewhere. New First Nations reserves in Canadian cities, for example, have been found to be complex spaces that promote economic self-sufficiency in indigenous communities and undo colonial spatial hierarchies, while simultaneously upholding capitalist development models that marginalize “alternative arrangements and residential options that would re-territorialize a more inclusive notion of community, sustainability, and Indigenous urbanity” (Tomiak 2017, 938). Indeed, rent-maximizing models of base redevelopment comport with increasingly popular visions of economic self-reliance in Okinawa. However, as experience has shown, they do not necessitate putting Okinawans on the land, nor do they reconstruct political agency among Okinawans to determine for themselves when and how land is returned.

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### Notes

1. Throughout the article, I use “Okinawan,” “Ryukyuan,” and “Uchinanchū,” variously, in accordance with specific socio-historical contexts in which they dominate.

2. This statistic is drawn from the Okinawan Prefectural Government's 2019 *US Military and Self-Defense Bases Statistical Yearbook* (OPG, 2020)

3. While “champurū” refers commonly to an Okinawan stir-fry, more generally, it has come to describe things brought together of dissimilar origins. In using *champurū* to explain the specific form(s) of US-Japanese colonialism in Okinawa, I am trying to do two things. On one hand, I am simply attempting to flag a discordance with other formulations of colonialism pervasive in Western theory, which alone do not reflect

colonial relationships in Okinawa today. At the same time, I am grasping for a decolonial vernacular to explain colonialism in Okinawa, which is not imported from elsewhere. I am by no means the first Okinawan to employ champuru as a heuristic. Ikehara, for example, employs champuru as a sort of performative decoloniality (2016), while for Ueunten, it exemplifies the mixedness of an aspirational interdisciplinary Okinawan studies (2018).

4. Nozato's "Petition Song" is translated by C. Harold Rickard in Shōko Ahagon's *The Island Where People Live: A Photo Documentary of the Troubled Land of Iejima, Okinawa Islands* (1989).

5. Globalsecurity.org estimates that those who perished consisted of 107,000 Japanese and Okinawan soldiers, 12,000 American soldiers, and 100,000 Okinawan civilians (2011).

6. Japanese real-estate measure approximately the size of two tatami mats, or 3.3m<sup>2</sup>.

7. The slogan "money is for one year; land is for 10,000 years" was used repeatedly throughout the post-war land struggles. A second widely recognized use was by the women who led the Struggle at Isahama.

8. US House of Representatives, *Okinawan Lands, Hearings Before the United States House Committee on Armed Services* (Naha Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, 1955).

9. See, for example, Wendy Matsumura's "The Normal and Exceptional Forms of Enclosure in Okinawa: Going Beyond the So-Called Base Problem" (*Viewpoint Magazine*, 2018).

10. Estimates of postwar Ryukyuan repatriation vary. In Arnold G. Fisch Jr.'s *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands: 1945–1950* (Center of Military History United States Army, 1988), he estimates, based on Military Government data, that by 1946, 139,500 people had returned to Okinawa.

11. In a 1956 secret correspondence between the US Far East Command and Department of the Army, entitled "Land Acquisition Requirement Program–Okinawa," military-occupied lands in Okinawa were proposed to increase from 42,952.92 to 87,009.31 acres (Headquarters 1956).

12. Germany and South Korea are often-compared case studies. In Germany, the United States assumed ownership of its base land following the war, so when bases close there, the federal government manages the redevelopment process (B.I.C.C 1995, 47). In South Korea, Nam explains that dispossessed landowners lay claim to approximately one-quarter of US Forces South Korea base land, but the Government of South Korea has been reticent to acknowledge any of those claims (2006, 618).

13. In Ginowan City, Michio Sakima independently negotiated the return of his family's land in 1994 and developed an art museum dedicated to antimilitarism on it. In Yomitan Village, the development of the Phoenix Village Plan and construction of the Yomitan Community Center on Yomitan Airfield prior to its return bolstered the villagers' movement to have the facility decommissioned (Chibana, 2018a).

14. In practice, machizukuri (*machi*: town, community; *zukuri*: making) does not easily translate to Anglophone notions of community development or town-planning. Elsewhere, Shun-ichi Watanabe has given a thorough history of the concept's development and its close association with "public-participation" in "small areas" (2007).

15. Naha's Shintoshin District (formerly Makiminato Housing Area) has provided an often-referenced and particularly strong economic case for redevelopment. Returned in 1987, Shintoshin (new city center) was infilled throughout the early 2000s. Today, the area is a center of urban employment, connected inter-regionally by monorail and bus, and home to key public institutions like the new Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum and Naha City government offices. Demilitarization in Shintoshin has produced ninety-fold and thirty-fold increases in employment and direct economic impact, respectively (OPG 2018).

16. Kakazu qualifies this statistic with the important caveat that in more rural villages, such as Kin and Ginoza, military spending tends to account for a much greater portion of the local economy.

17. A rural geographical unit akin to the North American hamlet. Incorporation of the *aza* in Okinawa was involved in the Meiji Government's Land Reorganization Project between 1899 and 1903, which replaced the indigenous *majiri/mura* land divisions with the Japanese *son/aza* system. Chibana offers a more thorough description of this shift in their 2018 dissertation "Till the Soil and Fill the Soul: Indigenous Resurgence and Everyday Practices of Farming in Okinawa" (2018b).

18. RYCOM is the abbreviation for USCAR's Ryukyu Command. The AEON redevelopment also involved the amalgamation of the three impacted azas into the newly formed *Aza Raikamu*.

19. For example, between 1998 and 2015 at Kadena Air Base alone, the US Air Force reported leaks of

nearly 40,000 liters of jet fuel, 13,000 liters of diesel, and 480,000 liters of sewage, and reported to Japanese authorities a mere 23 of the 206 pollution events that took place between 2010 and 2014 (Mitchell 2016).

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