

[Paper]

## Historical Salvation and Human Recovery: The Massacre of Koreans on Kumejima<sup>1</sup>

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Colonialist hierarchical order, Battle of Okinawa, Junichi Tomimura, Monument of Sorrow (Tsukon no Hi), Gu Jung-hoe

### Introduction

When a gruesome massacre has been largely forgotten by a group, but some individuals, unable to leave it behind, subsequently re-excavate it and name it a historical incident, we get a strong impression that there may be secrets that are still unrevealed and elements that are no longer recoverable. Needless to say, this opens up significant room for different interpretations of the incident in question, which, while possibly having negative effects, can also have the beneficial effect of allowing the incident to be contextualized as a symptom of a more universal human issue. It is because of this that, when faced with an incident that happened on a specific date but only became widely known after the fact, we give careful thought to how such an incident should be processed.

Resilience is generally defined as “the ability to remain adaptable in the face of risk, or the ability to recover from an imposed maladjusted state” (Saito and Okayasu 2009, 72). Needless to say, this definition presupposes one or more human subjects who are under a significant amount of stress and psychological hardship. Given this, is it possible for the aforementioned “recovery” to refer to recovery from a historical incident that has resurfaced after being forgotten? If so, what would the effects be upon the factors that originally caused the incident to be forgotten and on the human subjects? It is with such questions in mind that this paper examines a massacre that took place on the island of Kumejima in August 1945.

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### The Post-World War II Massacre of Korean Citizens on Kumejima

One of the societal elements introduced and strengthened in Okinawa during World War II was a colonialist hierarchical order with the Japanese Army at its peak. Koreans taken to Okinawa were placed at the bottom layer of this order. Violence was often perpetrated in a downward direction within the order, and the Okinawan people, who occupied the middle tier, were also often targeted for abuse. In addition, naturally, orders of this type were introduced on other Okinawan islands in addition to the main island, and it was after Japan's defeat in World War II on August 15, 1945, on the island of Kumejima that the Kumejima Korean Massacre occurred.

Although few in number, there were some Koreans living in Okinawa prior to the war. One of these was Noboru Tanigawa, born Gu Jung-hoe (Oshima 1982, 110). It is believed that Gu was living on the main island of Okinawa as of the 1930s. After Gu married Mitsu, an Okinawan woman from the village of Kushi in the Kunigami district, the couple traveled to Kumejima, where they made a living repairing pots and kettles and selling household goods. At the time of the war on Okinawa, they were living with their five children, including an infant aged a few months. Junichi Tomimura, who would later work tirelessly toward the construction of the Monument of Sorrow, discussed below, lived on Kumejima as an elementary school student, sometimes helping to push Gu's cart of goods. The members of the Gu family were as follows (also see fig. 1):



日本軍に虐殺された具仲会（谷川昇）さんの家族

FIGURE 1. Gu Jung-hoe's wife, Mitsu, and three of their children (from right): an infant, Tsuguo, and Yaeko. (The Committee for the Investigation of the Truth Regarding the Forced Migration and Massacre of Koreans in Okinawa During World War II 1972, 38)

Gu Jung-hoe (Japanese name: Noboru Tanigawa), 51  
Gu's wife, Uta (birth name: Mitsu), 36  
A son, Kazuo, 10  
A daughter, Ayako, 8  
A son, Tsuguo, 6  
A daughter, Yaeko, 3  
An infant (name not recorded), a few months

When the war came to Okinawa, however, the fact that Gu's household goods sales took him from home to home around the island caused him to be suspected as a spy by the Japanese army. Part of the background behind the ease with which the label spy was affixed was a delusion shared within the Japanese Army at the time of the war in Okinawa that all Okinawans were in fact spies. This delusion was brought about by the intermingling of the military and civilian populations as the island was comprehensively fortified in preparation for the landing of the United States military and by fears that residents would leak military secrets if they were captured by the enemy. The concern was such that Tadashi Kayama (fig. 2), the officer in charge of the Japanese garrison on Kumejima, issued a notice to his troops saying "It is a matter of course that infiltration will be attempted openly by enemy SPIES presenting themselves as allies, and this might be done by anyone via any method at any time" (Oshima 1982, 72).



FIGURE 2. Warrant Officer  
Tadashi Kayama.  
(Oshima 1972, 58)

Two days before the Gu family was murdered, an event occurred that convinced Kayama and his troops of the existence of spies. Meiyu Nakandakari, a Kumejima native

who had been captured by US forces, had been assigned the role of assisting with the American takeover of Kumejima and had returned to the island. Nakandakari had agreed to the assignment in order to guarantee the safety of his wife, child, and relatives on Kumejima. To Kayama and his troops, however, these were clearly the actions of a spy. Tragically, Nakandakari was captured and murdered by Kayama's troops (Oshima 1982, 103–110).

In contrast to Nakandakari, however, Gu had undertaken no such assignment, nor had he ever acted as a spy. Closer to the truth is that he was killed due to a combination of being wrongfully considered a spy due to his means of livelihood and a stereotype held by the islanders that Koreans were dangerous.

Kayama later gave the following recollection of the basis for Gu's designation as a "spy:"

INTERVIEWER: What kind of evidence formed the basis for the execution of suspected spies?

KAYAMA: We executed them based on information on the situation gathered from the various troops, villages, and civil defense units. . . . We would get reports from the islanders saying this is the situation here and that is the situation there, and that information was our main source. It wasn't something that I just did arbitrarily. (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 1972b)

What is surprising about this statement is the claim that it was the residents of the island who provided the basis for designating Gu as a spy. It is said that an element of jealousy also existed, related to the fact that Gu dealt in regulated items such as needles and thread (Ota 2016, 323). Although he had adopted the surname Tanigawa, it was widely known among the people of the island that he was Korean. Rather than existing as equals, however, the islanders viewed the Koreans as dangerous and frightening, as can be seen in the following remark from the mother of Mitsu, his wife. "Of the Koreans, I thought that they were shabby, dirty, and intimidating people. Both in Naha and in the countryside, that was how Koreans were viewed in those days. With Mitsu ending up with a Korean, I couldn't show my face in society anymore" (Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education 1974, 810).<sup>2</sup>

As illustrated by these words, a perception of Koreans as shabby and frightening was shared even among the residents of the island, and it was this, in combination with a sense of fear of the Japanese Army and the internalization of the hierarchical order, that resulted in the accusation that Gu was a spy. Someone had reported that Gu was in contact with US forces, and it was based on this that Kayama would declare him a spy and order his death (Oshima 1982, 112–113).

August 20th, 1945, the day the Gu family was slaughtered, was the birthday of Gu's eldest son, Kazuo. During his birthday celebration, the family was told by residents, "Soldiers are coming to kill you." The family fled, but Gu's wife, Mitsu, and their infant child were found by Japanese soldiers disguised as island residents and were cut down from behind. His eldest son was hacked to death as he fled in a panic, a Japanese soldier brutally swinging a large Japanese sword down on his head. His eldest and second-eldest

daughters were found hiding in a shed behind the house, told that they would go “to where your mother is,” led into a pine forest, and stabbed to death. Gu and his second-eldest son hid in an acquaintance’s house but were ultimately also discovered. A rope was tied around Gu’s neck, and he died while being dragged to the shore. His son, wailing and clinging to his father, perished after Japanese soldiers slashed him countless times with their weapons.

Around 11 or 12 o’clock, five or six Japanese soldiers disguised as villagers threw away [Gu’s] corpse. One of the soldiers used his sword on a child [the second-eldest son], who was clinging to the body and crying, chopping at him over and over as though to make sure he was dead. I was so afraid that my knees were shaking. . . . The scene on that moonlit night—I can still hear the screams of that child even now. (Itokazu’s Testimony in the Committee for the Investigation of the Truth Regarding the Forced Migration and Massacre of Koreans in Okinawa During World War II 1972, 39–40)

Although it was the company commander, Kayama, who ordered the slaughter, the order was carried out by Tsunesada Tsune, a telegraph chief from Amami (Oshima 1982, 116). To reiterate, behind this incident lay a crooked hierarchy: the commanding officer, the Japanese soldier from Amami who executed the order, the island residents who acted as informants, and at the bottom, the Koreans who were killed. No doubt a particularly problematic issue for the Koreans was the relationship of betrayal between themselves and the islanders, under which, despite living in Okinawa and knowing the inhabitants well, they might still be turned in at any time.

What becomes apparent, then, from the slaughter of the Koreans on Kumejima, is what might be called the *historical entrenchment* of this colonial hierarchy. This discriminatory relationship, far from suddenly coming into existence when the war reached Okinawa, had in fact already taken root in everyday life before the war.

Kayama, who ordered the slaughter, later described the incident as follows: “I have no pangs of conscience at all because I don’t think I did anything wrong. I have pride as a Japanese soldier” (Oshima 1972, 58).

The fact that Kayama was able to make such a declaration shows the extent of his brainwashing through Imperial Japanese education. In addition, the telegraph chief who carried out the murders also recalled them as being “unavoidable at the time” (Oshima 1982, 220). This statement, too, is nothing but his attempt to absolve himself of responsibility, chalking it up to the twisted values of the time. In terms of avoiding responsibility, however, the islanders who held their silence about their roles in the incident were hardly different. Because those killed were at the very bottom of the social order, they were at the same time made invisible, and it was this, coupled with the avoidance of responsibility by Kayama and his co-perpetrators, that resulted in the incident being forgotten. Tellingly, it was on August 20, five days after Japan had surrendered, that the incident occurred.

## The Emergence of the Kumejima Incident

### Reports of and Responses to the Incident in Korea and Okinawa

An appeal was made regarding the incident on Kumejima to the headquarters of the United States Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur, in 1947, but there was no discernible result. Later, Kim Dong-seon, who came to Okinawa in 1962 and was working as a broadcast reporter dealing with US military-related news, read a book by Yasukuni Yamakawa entitled *Hiroku Okinawa Senki* (*Secret Records of the War in Okinawa*), which briefly touched on the incident, and in 1965, conducted an investigation on Kumejima. During the investigation, Kim asked Keisho Higa, a pastor on Kumejima, to search for traces of Gu Jung-hoe and his son, and one year later, their remains were found on the riverside. The incident was reported in Korea first, on July 12, 1966, in the *Dong-A Ilbo* (fig. 3).



FIGURE 3. A newspaper article reporting on the slaughter of Gu Jung-hoe and his family: “Cruelty with a Japanese Sword: Seven Stabbed to Death, Including an Infant—Bodies Not Even Given a Burial.”

Source: *Dong-A Ilbo* 1966. 7

It would be three more years until an Okinawan publication, the *Okinawa Times*, would finally make a serious effort to take up the subject of the incident on Kumejima with the help of Kim Dong-seon. An article entitled “Remains Wait to Return Home: The Korean Tanigawa Family on Kumejima,” took up one-third of a page and described in detail the circumstances and events surrounding the murder of the Gu family (*Okinawa*

*Times* 1969). Then, approximately one year later, on August 15, 1970, the *Ryukyu Shimpō* devoted half a page to an article entitled “The Slaughter of Kumejima Residents by the Japanese Army: Questioning What it Takes to Be Considered a Japanese Citizen” (*Ryukyu Shimpō* 1970b). This article reported from a wider perspective on the slaughter of Kumejima residents by Kayama’s division.

When the *Ryukyu Shimpō* published another report, this time on March 25, 1972, two months before the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese control, covering the slaughter of Kumejima residents, Tadashi Kayama issued the following statement: “I had 34 men under my command, and there were 10,000 islanders. If the islanders started to side with them (the US forces), we wouldn’t have stood a chance. That is why decisive measures were needed to ensure the islanders’ loyalty to Japan. I did it to keep control of the islanders” (*Ryukyu Shimpō* 1972a).

This statement would cause significant backlash, not only from people on Kumejima but from those on other Okinawan islands as well. On March 30th, 1972, the Kitanakagusuku Village Council unanimously adopted a resolution stating that “Kayama is a war criminal and should receive the death penalty.” (Oh 2019, 191). On April 3rd, the council of the Village of Gushikawa on Kumejima adopted a resolution seeking acknowledgment of responsibility and an apology from Kayama and requesting that the Japanese government restore the honor of the victims and provide support for bereaved family members.

The Gushikawa Village Council’s statement of protest stated that the village had suffered “under the rule of a foreign people” for “27 years after the war” but was “now finally able to return to its own country as of May 15.” “[However,] Kayama’s recent remarks have tragically and horrifically recreated the suffering of 27 years ago, filling the residents with anger.” (Oh 2019, 191). The statement included the following three resolutions: (1) a resolute condemnation of the actions of “the commanding officer, who should have been a paragon of trustworthiness for the residents,” (2) a demand for an apology, with the absence of remorse or apology for the cruel actions taken “to subjugate Kumejima as a colony” to be considered as an “insult” to “us, the residents,” and (3) a request to the Japanese government seeking assistance and reconciliation for bereaved family members (Oshima 1982, 132–134). Nearly 30 years after the end of the war in Okinawa, the pain and memories of those who had suffered and died erupted in the wake of Kayama’s remarks.

As a result of these events, the impact of the issue spread to Tokyo. National Diet member Kosuke Uehara (Socialist Party of Japan) from Okinawa took up the cause and sought responsibility from the Japanese government, and Kamejiro Senaga (Japanese Communist Party) issued a statement in the Audit Committee of the House of Representatives asserting the necessity of pursuing criminal liability for the atrocities committed by the former Army of Japan against Okinawan residents. The Ministry of Justice stated that it would begin an investigation, and then-Prime Minister Eisaku Sato stated, “If there is anything that can be done to provide the bereaved with some amount of comfort, I hope we may consider it” (*Ryukyu Shimpō* 1972c).

Doubt remained, however, as to whether Koreans were included in the mentions of “residents” and “us, the residents” in the statement of protest from Gushikawa Village. This was because the “foreign people” mentioned in “the rule of a foreign people” referred to the United States military, and in the lead-up to the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese control, the existing discussion centered on the issue of a United States/Okinawa contrast rather than a Japan/Okinawa one. Further, this situation would continue the relationship between Japan and Okinawa as one of aggressor and victim. It is thus evident that those who did not fit into the scope of this discussion were not taken into consideration, and there was no critical look taken at the issue of colonialism, including the damage done to Okinawa. The issue of colonialism, including its deleterious consequences for Okinawa, would come into the spotlight in 1970 with the Tokyo Tower hostage incident perpetrated by Junichi Tomimura.

***Emergence in Mainland Japan: Junichi Tomimura’s Statements about Koreans***

On July 8th, 1970, the observation deck of the Tokyo Tower was taken over by Junichi Tomimura. He was 40 years old at the time of the incident.

Born in the town of Motobu, Okinawa, in 1930, Tomimura had been expelled from elementary school for failing to bow to a portrait of the emperor. After spending part of his life in and out of prison, he stowed away on a boat, ultimately arriving on the main island of Japan. After his arrival, he denounced the pattern of discrimination against Okinawa by the United States and Japanese governments and traveled to several locations to advocate the cessation of unfair treatment. There is no doubt that the reason behind these efforts was his memory of the war in Okinawa and its occupation by US forces. He even protested in front of the Imperial Palace. However, Tomimura’s accusations were violently suppressed, with police illegally seizing a tape recorder containing recordings discussing the situation in Okinawa and the emperor’s responsibility for the war, and Tomimura himself being assaulted by students from Kokugakuin University (Tomimura 1972, 230).

With his personal efforts being hampered at every turn by the power of the government, Tomimura, as a last resort, chose to occupy Tokyo Tower. His goal was to attract as much attention as possible to make known the situation in Okinawa and appeal for peace.

On July 8, 1970, at approximately 11:00 am, Tomimura went to Tokyo Tower to enact his plan. He entered the elevator and ascended to the observation deck, where his eyes settled on an American pastor who had come sightseeing. Tomimura took him and others hostage, hoping to draw attention to the violence committed by the United States. However, although Tomimura carried a knife, he had no intention of harming the people at the scene.<sup>3</sup> His intention was to give visibility to his claims. In view of his goals, Tomimura released the Koreans who were on the observation deck, seeing them as victims of the same discrimination and oppression as Okinawans and, telling the American pastor that he would not harm him, discussed topics including the situation in Okinawa. The incident ended when Tomimura was captured by police. The shirt worn by Tomimura when he was

arrested said “United States, ‘go home’ from Okinawa” and “Japanese people, keep your hands off Okinawa” (fig. 4).



FIGURE 4. An article reporting Tomimura’s takeover incident.  
Source: Ryukyu Shimpo 1970a.

It is worth noting that Tomimura’s takeover of Tokyo Tower, rather than being only an indictment of the harsh situation imposed on Okinawa through its annexation by the Satsuma Domain, the Ryukyu Disposition of the Meiji period, the Second World War, or the postwar occupation and administration of Okinawa by the United States military, was also an indictment in part of discrimination against Koreans and a search for solidarity with them. In his prison diary, *Wanga Umara Okinawa* (“Okinawa, Where I was Born”), Tomimura recalls the incident as follows:

I found that there were seven or eight Koreans [on the observation deck], and I decided to send them, and also the women and those under 20 years old, back down to begin with. Needless to say, sending the Koreans down first was done because the Japanese people and government have been doing their utmost to torture and slaughter Koreans for so many years, meaning that Koreans are in the same situation as we Okinawans. I immediately gathered the Koreans together in one place. The fact is, you have been treated terribly at the hands of the prewar Japanese and the Japanese imperialists. You are in the same situation as we Okinawans, who have also suffered discrimination. I am taking American and Japanese people as hostages in retaliation for this. The United States does not currently see Okinawans as human. . . . The young Koreans raised their hands and repeated many times, “Long live Korea! Long live Okinawa”! (Tomimura 1972, 83)

The Koreans to which he refers are seen as people who underwent “terrible treatment” and were in the “same situation” as Okinawans, that is to say, as people who shared a common historical experience with Okinawans. It was in no small part his personal relationship with Gu Jung-hoe on Kumejima that allowed him to have such a perspective. In addition, his prison diary also contains a piece of sharp criticism: “The day when seven people from the Tanigawa family and three from Meiyu Nakandakari’s family were killed was five days after the Japanese imperialists made their unconditional surrender to the American Empire, so I do not believe it can be said that this was a wartime act” (Tomimura 1972, 177).

This view of Tomimura’s was based on the idea that the liberation of the Okinawan people would require the liberation of Asia as a whole, including the Korean people. This was the reason he made certain to indict the colonialism with which the Okinawan people were saddled. It was, in other words, an objection to the approach of presenting the wartime experience with fixed aggressors and victims and disregarding one’s own acts of aggression, excluding other parties (the Korean people) from the historical discussion.

### ***Memorialization and Universalization of the Kumejima Incident***

Tomimura was sentenced to two years in prison for the Tokyo Tower hostage incident. Soon after his release in March 1973, he began raising funds to build a memorial to the Kumejima islanders who had been killed. He put the royalties from his prison diary, *Wanga Umara Okinawa* (Tomimura 1972), and the proceeds from the sale of a pamphlet, *Shigo mo Sabetsu Sareru Chosenjin* (Tomimura 1973), toward this cause and raised the rest through construction labor and fundraising activities, planning to build a “Monument of Sorrow.”

Although Tomimura began construction of the monument on his own, the Executive Committee for the Construction of the Monument of Sorrow was founded in 1974, with members including Junichi Tomimura, Ikuo Ishida, Hiroshi Kuwata, Michiko Shibata, Goro Oniki, and Eiko Kohatsu, upon which work began as a group. The name “Monument of Sorrow” was also selected by the committee. The decision was made to erect the monument on the property of Meiyu Nakandakari, one of the people murdered by Kayama’s unit (Jo 2005, 103).

After much effort, the Monument of Sorrow was completed and unveiled in 1974. The unveiling date was August 20th, the date that Gu Jung-hoe and his family were murdered. The monument was inlaid with small stones brought from the Korean Peninsula (Jo n.d., 40–41). On the Monument of Sorrow was carved an inscription directly mentioning the “Korean people”: The Kumejima residents and the Korean people living on Kumejima slaughtered by the emperor’s army (fig. 5).



FIGURE 5. The Monument of Sorrow.  
Source: Photo by (Oh 2019, 274)

On the day of the unveiling ceremony, messages were delivered from figures including Governor of Okinawa Chobyō Yara, Japanese House of Councilors member Shinei Kyan, and Okinawa Prefectural Assembly President Koichi Taira. However, responsibility for the slaughter was laid squarely on Kayama, and the dedications featured abstract terms such as “humankind” and “true world peace.”

In contrast, a statement issued by the Executive Committee for the Construction of the Monument of Sorrow, “Toward the Construction of a Monument of Sorrow,” clearly conveys the meaning behind the monument:

It is clear that what led to the slaughter of so many Korean people and residents of Kumejima, including the Gu family and the Nakandakari family, is what was at the time referred to as “*Kominka* (Japanese Imperialistic) Education,” coupled with an ethnic hierarchy that placed Japanese at the top, Okinawans in the middle, and Koreans at the bottom. It is for the purpose of digging up and prosecuting the deeply-rooted sense of discrimination that exists within us, while also continuing to seek responsibility from the emperor for the war, that we have decided to erect a monument on the island of Kumejima, Okinawa, on August 20 (the day the Gu family was murdered), in an attempt to ensure that such a tragedy will never happen again. (Jo n.d., 38–39)

This statement, probably written mainly by Tomimura, refers specifically to the structure of ethnic discrimination, clearly noting the responsibility not only of the emperor but also of “us.” The monument was not built to place the entirety of the responsibility on Kayama. This point is also clearly illustrated in the following statement from Tomimura: “Who was it that reported Gu Jung-hoe to Kayama as a spy? This is also a point on which the Okinawan people must reflect” (Tomimura 1974, 21).

In this way, the statement brought Koreans into focus while also turning attention to the harm caused by Okinawans. Thus, by saving the Korean victims from becoming invisible and examining the responsibility of “we Okinawans,” it cast a critical look not only at the narrative of a nationalist war but also at the narrative of a “war fought by the people.” In other words, the statement attempted to relate history in a scope that was open to former “outsiders.” In fact, the effects of the incident spread beyond the borders of Japan. Korean journalist Jo Jung-tae, inspired by the construction of the monument, exchanged letters with Tomimura and called for an apology from Tadashi Kayama, the commanding officer of the Japanese military force on Kumejima (Jo 2005, 112).

Although the stance of the monument construction committee differed from the public condolences of the governor of Okinawa, the mayor of the village of Gushikawa, Kumejima, and others, it was through this contrast that a forgotten event would reemerge, and with its embodiment in the monument, the incident was restored to its place in history. This was, of course, made possible through the actions of humans. However, what we begin to see from the incident that occurred on Kumejima and from its commemoration is actually that it was the incident itself that forced Junichi Tomimura and others to recall it and spurred them to take action. In this sense, it can be argued that the quality of resilience was present in the original historical event itself, and the role of people can be seen as one of hearing the voice of history and saving it by restoring visibility to it once again.

If we consider this to be historical resilience, then the recovery of history can be expressed as action on the part of humans to save it. On the other hand, however, the restoration of history should also embody the restoration of dignity to people from whom it has been taken. In this sense, the re-excavation of history and the restoration of visibility to historical events are closely connected to the recovery and liberation of *humans*. It is in this way that historical and human recovery are linked to one another. The slaughter of Korean residents on Kumejima shows us that the restoration of visibility to our buried history opens the way for addressing the universal issue of human recovery. Not only does this extend the history of *us* beyond national borders, but in doing so, it has the potential to dismantle formulaic ways of telling history also systems of governance that allow events to repeat themselves. Resilience should not be an aid to strengthening the durability of systems.

#### Notes

1. The content of this paper overlaps partially with a discussion of the topic from 『沖縄と朝鮮のはざま—朝鮮人の〈可視化／不可視化〉をめぐる歴史と語り』 (Oh 2019).
2. Chinen Kamado’s testimony (Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education 1974, 812).
3. However, Tomimura did hit an elevator operator who attempted to prevent the takeover.

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