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Research Article

The Structural Architecture of Marginalization: Internal Colonialism, Militarization, and The Persistence of Discrimination Against Okinawans

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Abstract

This research investigates the systemic mechanisms of discrimination against the Okinawan people by shifting the analytical lens from individual prejudice to structural power dynamics. Utilizing Michael Hechter's theory of internal colonialism and the framework of militarized modernity, this study deconstructs how the Japanese central government and U.S. military interests have historically converged to marginalize the Ryukyu archipelago. Through an operational historical method and critical discourse analysis of primary legal documents, educational materials, and oral testimonies, the study identifies three primary catalysts of discrimination: state-driven dispossession during the Ryūkyū Shobun, the 'cultural division of labor' established under Meiji-era Japanization, and the contemporary spatial hegemony of U.S. military bases. The findings indicate that discrimination in Okinawa is not a residual historical artifact but a functional component of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, institutionalized through the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and commodified through 'militourism.' This research contributes to the field of postcolonial studies by elucidating how internal colonial structures persist within a modern democratic state, necessitating a fundamental renegotiation of Okinawan sovereignty and indigenous rights.

Keywords: History; Okinawa; Japan; Discrimination

1. Introduction

1.1. The Myth of Japanese Homogeneity and the Reality of Okinawan Discrimination

While Japan is frequently portrayed as a homogeneous nation—a perception often reinforced by official census data—the persistence of systemic discrimination against the Okinawan people directly challenges this national narrative (Lie, 2001; Morris-Suzuki, 1998). This marginalization is not merely a collection of individual prejudices but is rooted in the structural architecture of the Japanese state-building process and the transpacific security alliance (Hechter, 1999; Oshiro, n.d.). Consequently, Okinawan discrimination represents a unique case of 'internal colonialism' where the 'otherness' of the Ryukyu people was constructed during the 1879 annexation and continues to be sustained by contemporary militarization (Ginoza, 2012; Taira, 1997).

One of the biggest cases of discrimination in Japan is the discrimination experienced by the people of Okinawa. However, this discrimination is not carried out by foreign nations but by the Japanese themselves (Lie, 2001). The Okinawan people have faced various forms of discriminatory treatment, including negative stigma, sexual violence against women, the erasure of cultural identity, burdensome regulations and agreements imposed on the local community, and many

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other issues. The perception of Japan as a homogeneous society stands in contrast to this reality. To understand the impact of discrimination experienced by the Okinawan people, how this discrimination began, and the efforts made by Japanese society to address these issues, the researcher is interested in choosing this topic as the focus of the present study (Akibayashi & Takazato, 2009; Mitchell, 2018).

1.2. Discrimination

Discrimination is fundamentally defined as the unequal treatment of individuals based on categorical attributes such as ethnicity or social class (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1979). However, in the context of Okinawa, this study moves beyond social-psychological definitions of rejection (Sears et al., 1999) to analyze discrimination as a discursive construction of 'Otherness' (Hall, 1990; van Dijk, 1993). As noted by postcolonial scholars, the 'Japaneseness' of the core is often defined by rendering Okinawan indigenous identity as either invisible or backward, a process that transforms Okinawans into 'different' subjects within their own nation-state (Hein, 2012; Oguma, 2002).

1.3. Factors Causing Discrimination

While Yahaya (2006) identifies various psychological drivers of prejudice, this study focuses on three primary structural factors that facilitate Okinawan marginalization: historical factors, competition and exploitation, and patterns of socialization (Yahaya et al., 2006).

First, **historical factors** serve as the foundational catalyst, where the 1879 annexation (*Ryūkyū Shobun*) established a core-periphery hierarchy that rendered Okinawa an 'unrecognized colony' within the Japanese state (Matsushima, 2006; Taira, 1997). Second, **competition and exploitation** are manifested through what Michael Hechter terms the 'cultural division of labor' (Hechter, 1999). In this framework, the central government exploits the peripheral region's resources—specifically its land for military purposes—while maintaining Okinawan labor in a subordinate economic position (Ginoza, 2012; Hechter, 1999). This is further exemplified by the 'Three Ks' architecture (*Kichi, Kōkyō kōji, Kankō*), which manufactures a structural dependency on military spending and state subsidies. Finally, **patterns of socialization** reinforce this inequality through 'Japanization' policies and the *Nihonjinron* discourse (Befu, 2001; Morris-Suzuki, 1998). By socializing generations to view Japanese culture as the apex of modernity and Okinawan identity as 'backward,' the state institutionalizes a sense of inferiority, ensuring that discrimination is reproduced not just through laws, but through everyday social interactions (Meyer, 2007).

1.4. Types of Discrimination

Pettigrew's distinction between direct and indirect discrimination provides a vital lens for analyzing the Okinawan experience (Liliweri, 2005). **Direct discrimination** is manifest in systemic sexual violence and physical bullying, often shielded by the legal ambiguities of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) (Mitchell, 2018). Meanwhile, **indirect discrimination** is embedded in the 'militourism' architecture—a form of structural bias where policies in tourism and public works commodify Okinawan culture while reinforcing its military dependency (Ginoza, 2012). These procedures create 'hidden' discriminatory biases that result in systematic disadvantages for the Okinawan community, rendering their struggle for sovereignty nearly invisible in national policy discourse.

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1.5. Internal Colonialism: A Critical Framework for Analyzing Center-Periphery Relations

To move beyond the descriptive limitations of social-psychological models, this study adopts Michael Hechter's theory of internal colonialism as its primary analytical framework (Hechter, 1999). Hechter posits that national development in modern societies does not necessarily lead to ethnic homogenization; instead, a dominant 'core' (the central government) may intentionally maintain a 'periphery' (marginalized regions) in a state of political and economic subordination. Central to this theory is the concept of the 'cultural division of labor,' where ethnic or cultural differences are institutionalized to justify the concentration of power in the core while relegating the peripheral group to lower-status economic roles or specific strategic burdens—such as hosting a disproportionate share of military facilities (Hechter, 1999; Taira, 1997).

In the Japanese context, scholars have argued that Okinawa has historically functioned as an 'unrecognized colony,' where the central government in Tokyo has externalized security risks to the Ryukyu archipelago while limiting its political autonomy. By synthesizing Yahaya's causal factors and Pettigrew's typologies within this structural lens, this research deconstructs how Okinawan marginalization is not a series of random prejudices but a functional requirement of the state-driven security architecture (Hechter, 1999; Matsushima, 2006). This framework allows for a deeper interpretation of the 'Okinawa problem' as a persistent relic of colonial-like rule in a post-colonial era.

1.6. Previous Studies

Several studies have examined issues of discrimination. Muhammad Caesar Amin (2018), for example, explored discriminatory attitudes toward the Zainichi Korean community. Another study by Lintang Alief Fatuh Rochjatun (2016) discussed discrimination against Japanese minority groups in Canada as depicted in the film *Vancouver Asahi*. In addition, Faridatul Muffidah (2015) conducted research on discrimination against the Korean minority as portrayed in the film *Anata wo Wasurenai* (Amin, 2018; Muffidah, 2015; Rochjatun, 2016).

These studies demonstrate that discrimination is a real and persistent issue—one that is reflected even in films and literary works. This indicates the importance of discussing discrimination so that society becomes more aware, sensitive, and understanding of the forms of discrimination that occur.

1.7. Research Gap and Framework

This study shares a thematic similarity with previous research in examining the broader issues of discrimination. However, it distinguishes itself through both its research object and its **systematic theoretical synthesis**. While existing Indonesian scholarship has explored Japanese minority groups like the Zainichi Koreans or the Ainu, research specifically addressing the Okinawan community remains significantly underrepresented. More importantly, this study moves beyond mere descriptive classification by synthesizing Azizi Yahaya's causal factors and Pettigrew's typologies with the **comprehensive framework of internal colonialism**. Unlike previous studies that often treat discrimination as a series of isolated incidents, this research offers a critical deconstruction of the structural power dynamics and the 'cultural division of labor' between the Japanese central government and the Okinawan periphery. Thus, by integrating traditional social-psychological theories with a critical-structural lens, this study provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding

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of the systemic nature of Okinawan marginalization.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with an operational historical research design to investigate the structural marginalization of the Okinawan people. The research procedure is structured into four distinct stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Garraghan, 1946; Surakhmad, 1995).

2.1. Data Collection and Heuristics

Data collection was conducted through the heuristic method, focusing on a critical selection of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of foundational legal and historical documents, including the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951), the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and educational directives from the Meiji era (Mitchell, 2018). These documents provide the empirical basis for analyzing state-driven discrimination. Secondary sources include scholarly monographs, such as John Lie's *Multiethnic Japan* (2001) for historical context, and theoretical works by Azizi Yahaya (2006) and Pettigrew (1979) to frame the socio-psychological dimensions of prejudice.

2.2. Source Criticism and Analysis

To ensure the validity of the findings, the study utilizes the dual criteria of source criticism: external and internal criticism (Garraghan, 1946). External criticism was applied to verify the authenticity and integrity of the documents, while internal criticism focused on evaluating the credibility, motives, and inherent biases of the authors and the political contexts in which the documents were produced.

2.3. Analytical Synthesis

The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and thematic synthesis (van Dijk, 1993). This procedure moves beyond descriptive narration to interpret the underlying power relations. By applying the framework of internal colonialism, the research deconstructs the 'cultural division of labor' and the mechanisms of 'othering' that characterize Tokyo's relationship with Okinawa (Hechter, 1999; Oguma, 2002). This analytical rigor ensures that the research does not merely compile facts but provides an interpretive explanation of the persistent structural inequality in the region.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors Causing Discrimination Against the Okinawan Community

3.1.1 Historical Factors

History serves as the foundational architecture of Okinawan marginalization. Moving beyond a mere chronological account, this study interprets historical events as the institutionalization of a core-periphery hierarchy, where Okinawa was systematically transformed into what scholars describe as an 'unrecognized colony' or a 'sacrificial pawn' for Japan's national interests (Lie, 2001; Taira, 1997).

The first catalyst of this structural discrimination began with the **1609 invasion** by the Satsuma domain. While the annexation is often framed as a step toward Japanese unification, a critical lens reveals it as the starting point of political ambiguity and economic exploitation. By forcing the Ryūkyū Kingdom into a dual-tributary status with both China and Japan, the Japanese core established a pattern of 'indirect rule' that allowed for the extraction of resources while denying the Ryūkyū people full sovereignty or protection (Lie, 2001; Sakai, 1964).

The most defining moment of modern structural discrimination, however, occurred during the **post-World War II settlement**. The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty exemplified a 'necropolitical' decision by the Tokyo government. In

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exchange for its own sovereignty and economic recovery, Japan effectively sacrificed Okinawa to U.S. military trusteeship (Morris-Suzuki, 1998; Taira, 1997). This 'San Francisco System' institutionalized a geographic discrimination where 70% of U.S. military facilities were concentrated on a mere 0.6% of Japan's total landmass—a classic manifestation of the 'Not In My Back Yard' (NIMBY) policy where the core externalizes security risks to the marginalized periphery (Hikotani et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the U.S. occupation (1945–1972) facilitated a process of **social and racial categorization** that continues to produce stigma today. The emergence of *hafu* (mixed-race) children and the stigmatization of Okinawan women associated with military bases were not random social outcomes; they were the results of a militarized domesticity that commodified Okinawan bodies while denying them legal redress under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Consequently, historical factors in Okinawa are not just 'past events' as suggested by Yahaya (2006), but are active mechanisms of 'othering' that render Okinawans as second-class citizens within the transpacific security alliance.

3.1.2 Competition and exploitation

The economic marginalization of Okinawa is a result of calculated competition and exploitation within the framework of internal colonialism. Analyzing the transition from the prosperous Ryūkyū Kingdom to a marginalized Japanese prefecture reveals a shift from autonomous trade to structural dependency.

Historically, the Ryūkyū Kingdom utilized its strategic location to foster a 'tributary trade' model with China, which prioritized diplomatic reciprocity and cultural exchange (Kerr, 2000; Lie, 2001). This period of prosperity, supported by Chinese maritime assistance, stood in stark contrast to the subsequent Japanese and American eras. Following the 1609 Satsuma invasion and the 1879 annexation, this strategic advantage was appropriated by the Japanese 'core' to serve imperial interests, transforming Okinawa from a maritime crossroads into a military outpost (Oguma, 2002).

In the post-WWII era, competition and exploitation became institutionalized through a 'militancy-dependent economy'. While the U.S. and Japanese governments frame the presence of military bases as a source of local revenue, a critical analysis suggests this creates a 'structural dependency' that prevents authentic Okinawan economic development. This is manifest in the 'Three Ks' architecture (*Kichi, Kōkyō kōji, Kankō*), where Okinawan land is seized for military purposes (Kichi), and in return, the central government provides public works (Kōkyō kōji) and promotes commodified tourism (Kankō) (Ginoza, 2012; Oshiro, n.d.). This cycle ensures that Okinawa remains economically inferior to the mainland, as evidenced by its persistent position as one of Japan's poorest prefectures with the lowest per capita income. Therefore, exploitation in Okinawa is not merely about the 'use of force' but about the creation of a system that makes Okinawan survival contingent upon their own continued marginalization.

3.1.3 Pattern of Socialization

The persistent discrimination against Okinawans is reinforced by a systematic pattern of socialization that operates through both state-driven 'Japanization' and societal stigmatization. This process transforms Okinawan identity into a source of shame, facilitating the psychological subjugation required for internal colonialism.

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Historically, the Meiji-era **'Japanization' policy** utilized education as a tool of epistemic violence. By labeling Okinawan local languages (*uchināguchi*) and customs as 'backward' or 'uncivilized' compared to the 'modern' Japanese culture, the state encouraged Okinawans to abandon their heritage to achieve social upward mobility. This created a profound **inferiority complex** among Okinawan youth, leading to 'self-hatred' and a desire to hide their ethnic roots to blend into mainstream society—a phenomenon known as the 'internal colonization of the mind' (Meyer, 2007; Morris-Suzuki, 1998).

This socialization pattern is further evident in the treatment of Okinawan migrants in mainland Japan. In the early 20th century, Okinawans who migrated to industrial centers like Osaka for mine and factory work faced explicit exclusion, often marked by signs stating **'No Ryukyuans or Koreans'** in employment and housing (Matsumura, 2015). These workers were funneled into a 'cultural division of labor' characterized by lower wages and negative stereotypes portraying Okinawans as lazy or unreliable. Furthermore, the U.S. occupation added a layer of **gendered and racialized stigma**. The children of interracial unions (*hafu*) and their mothers were marginalized not only because of their associations with the military but because they challenged the myth of Japanese homogeneity (Crissey, 2019; Lie, 2001). This multi-generational stigma ensures that discriminatory attitudes remain 'normalized' and embedded in daily life, making them resistant to simple legal interventions.

3.2 Forms of Discrimination Experienced by the Okinawan Community and Efforts Made by Japanese Society to Address Them

3.2.1 Direct Discrimination

3.2.1.1 The Assignment of Negative Stigma

Direct discrimination against Okinawans often manifests as the assignment of negative stigma, which serves to police the boundaries of 'Japaneseness'. A salient example is the testimony of Barbara Kawakami, an Okinawan woman who recounted experiencing physical harassment and social exclusion during her school years (DiscoverNikkei, 2016). Her experience illustrates how Okinawan identity is discursively constructed as an 'out-group' attribute, triggering discriminatory behavior. While the Act for the Promotion of Measures to Prevent Bullying (2013) introduced by MEXT outlines procedures for identification, a critical analysis suggests it remains a 'top-down' measure that ignores the structural and ethnic roots of ‘othering’ Okinawan children (MEXT, 2013; van Dijk, 1993).

3.2.1.2 Sexual Violence Against Women

The high incidence of sexual violence against Okinawan women by U.S. military personnel is a violent manifestation of intersectional discrimination, situated at the nexus of militarism, patriarchy, and internal colonialism. This form of direct discrimination is symptomatic of a 'militarized masculinity' that views Okinawan bodies as violable resources (Akibayashi & Takazato, 2009).

The **1995 kidnapping and rape of a 12-year-old girl** served as a tragic catalyst that exposed the structural injustices of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The subsequent legal process revealed the discriminatory nature of the **Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)**, which effectively functions as a 'jurisdictional shield' (Mitchell, 2018; Watanabe, 1995). Statistics from the Okinawa Prefectural Police show hundreds of heinous crimes committed by U.S. personnel since 1972, many of which remain unprosecuted. Ultimately, sexual violence in Okinawa represents the 'double colonization' of its women, whose safety is

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sacrificed to maintain geopolitical interests (Mitchell, 2018).

3.2.1.3 Racism

Racism against Okinawans extends beyond the Japanese archipelago, manifesting in the United States as a form of **racialized sexism** and intersectional marginalization. The case of **Satoko**, an Okinawan woman in New Jersey who faced employment rejection solely based on her Asian racial category, exemplifies the 'perpetual foreigner' stereotype that burdens Asian American women (Crissey, 2019). Her experience demonstrates that even when Okinawan subjects possess professional competence—such as her years of experience as an accountant on a military base—they are nonetheless subjected to systemic exclusion within the Western racial hierarchy.

This racism is further stratified by a **'pigmentocratic' social order** or colorism, where Okinawan women's life chances in the U.S. were often contingent upon the racial category of their spouses. As documented by Etsuko Takushi Crissey, Okinawan women who married white American men often navigated society with greater ease than those who married men of color, as they were proximity-linked to a race considered socially superior (Crissey, 2019). This dynamic highlights how Okinawan subjects must continually renegotiate their identity across cultural and political fault lines, often at the cost of their own autonomy.

In response to this pervasive racism, Okinawans in the U.S. developed collective resistance through the creation of **exclusive Okinawan associations**, such as the Okinawa Association of America (OAA). These associations function as spaces for **identity salience**, allowing members to strengthen their Okinawan consciousness through shared cultural activities and mutual support. According to Social Identity Theory, such 'in-group' solidarity is a crucial psychological response to 'out-group' discrimination, providing the emotional and material resources necessary to survive within a hostile transpacific imperial order (Kuniyoshi, 2009; Tajfel, 2010). Consequently, Okinawan racism is not merely a collection of isolated incidents but a systemic phenomenon that qualifies as **direct discrimination** as it restricts access to employment and social safety without formal legal mediation.

3.2.2 Indirect Discrimination

3.2.2.1 Elimination of Cultural Identity

Indirect discrimination against the Okinawan people is most profoundly manifest in the systematic erasure of their cultural identity, a process initiated during the Meiji Restoration (1868) and institutionalized through 'Japanization' policies. This was not a mere program of national integration but a form of cultural 'Kulturkampf' designed to facilitate internal colonialism by deconstructing the indigenous Ryukyuan subject (Meyer, 2007; Oguma, 2002).

The **Japanization program** targeted the visible and symbolic markers of Okinawan 'otherness.' By banning traditional Ryukyuan clothing, ordering the cutting of long hair (a sacred marker of identity), and enforcing Japanese-style surnames through the *koseki* (national registry), the Japanese state enacted what scholars term 'epistemic violence'. These policies were designed to render the Ryukyuan heritage invisible, replacing it with a centralized 'Japaneseness' that equated modernity with the Tokyo core and backwardness with the Okinawan periphery. Consequently, Okinawans were socialized to believe that 'becoming Japanese' was the only route to escaping their perceived inferiority and achieving modern citizenship (Morris-Suzuki, 1998).

The vulnerability of the Ryukyu Kingdom to this cultural erasure was historically anchored in the **1609 Satsuma**

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invasion. The capture and subsequent conditional release of King Shō Nei established a precedent of 'residual sovereignty' where the Ryukyu elite were forced into political submission through coercive agreements. By the Meiji era, this existing power asymmetry allowed the central government to unilaterally execute the *Ryūkyū Shobun* (disposal of Ryukyu), effectively treating the islands as an 'unrecognized colony' (Matsushima, 2006; Taira, 1997).

Based on this analysis, the elimination of Okinawan cultural identity constitutes a severe form of **indirect discrimination** mediated through state policy. Unlike direct physical violence, this structural exclusion operated by setting 'Japaneseness' as a mandatory prerequisite for social and legal acceptance. By prohibiting Okinawans from expressing their authentic selves and maintaining their ancestral traditions, the Japanese state established a hierarchy where indigenous Ryukyuan identity was sacrificed for the sake of an artificial national homogeneity. This cultural dispossession remains a core component of the 'Okinawa problem,' as it continues to limit the capacity of Okinawans to reclaim their indigenous rights within the modern nation-state.

3.2.2.2 Prohibition of Marriage Between Americans and Japanese

The regulation of private life through military policy represents a sophisticated form of indirect discrimination, where the state-driven security apparatus intervenes in the 'intimacies of empire' to maintain social and racial hierarchies. A prominent example is the prohibition of marriage between U.S. military personnel and Okinawan civilians, which functioned as a tool of biopolitical control during the early occupation period.

As documented in the experiences of **Frank Anderson and Higa Hatsuko** in 1947, Okinawan-American unions were initially viewed by the U.S. command as a threat to 'troop morale' and administrative authority (Brina, 2018; Crissey, 2019). The forced annulment of their marriage one month after its registration illustrates how the military legal system was weaponized to enforce a strict separation between the 'occupier' and the 'occupied'. Although the specific ban was lifted in 1948, the short-lived policy reflected a broader 'non-fraternization' logic that dehumanized Okinawan women, often depicting them in military pamphlets as potential threats or sources of social contamination (Stoler, 2006).

This historical episode constitutes **indirect discrimination** within Pettigrew's framework because the discriminatory bias was embedded in formal regulations designed to prioritize military requirements over individual civil rights. Even after the ban was rescinded, the structural burden remained: the concentration of 70% of U.S. bases in Okinawa made such interactions inevitable, yet the lack of legal protection under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) ensured that Okinawan women in these relationships remained in a state of 'double vulnerability'—marginalized by both the U.S. military hierarchy and the conservative norms of the Japanese mainland.

Consequently, the marriage prohibition was not an isolated bureaucratic error but a calculated attempt to maintain the racialized and gendered order of the transpacific alliance. By policing who Okinawans could marry, the occupying forces effectively signaled that Okinawan subjects were 'different' and 'inferior,' reinforcing the core-periphery dynamics established by internal colonialism.

3.2.2.3 Burdensome Laws and Agreements

The most institutionalized form of indirect discrimination against the Okinawan people is embedded within the

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legal architecture of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the subsequent security agreements established what scholars refer to as the 'San Francisco System'—a geopolitical arrangement that effectively sacrificed Okinawan sovereignty to ensure Japan's post-war economic recovery and national security (Taira, 1997).

This system created a profound spatial discrimination. While the Japanese government established a new constitution renouncing war (Article 9), it simultaneously facilitated U.S. military strategies by concentrating approximately 70–75% of all U.S. military facilities on Okinawa, which accounts for a mere 0.6% of Japan's total landmass. This distribution exemplifies a state-driven NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) policy, where the Tokyo 'core' externalizes the social, environmental, and safety risks of the military alliance to the Okinawan 'periphery'. Consequently, Okinawans are denied the right to utilize their own land for autonomous community development, forced instead into a 'militarism-dependent economy' that reinforces their subordinate status within the nation-state (Hikotani et al., 2023).

The discrimination is further codified through the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), a bilateral arrangement that functions as a 'jurisdictional shield' for U.S. personnel. By granting the U.S. military the authority to retain custody of suspects and repatriate them to American jurisdiction, SOFA limits the legal redress available to Okinawan victims of crime, particularly in cases of sexual violence. Although public outrage following the 1995 rape incident led to minor 'sympathetic considerations' regarding the handover of suspects, the fundamental power asymmetry remains unchanged. The final decision-making power still resides with the United States, rendering Okinawan legal protection contingent upon foreign military discretion (Hikotani et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2018).

Based on Pettigrew's framework, these laws and agreements constitute indirect discrimination because the discriminatory outcomes are mediated through formal, seemingly neutral security policies. These procedures contain a subtle yet devastating bias: they prioritize the 'higher' interests of the U.S.-Japan alliance over the civil rights and safety of the Okinawan population. By institutionalizing the disproportionate burden of the military presence, the Japanese state ensures that Okinawans remain 'second-class citizens' whose daily lives are restricted by an enduring colonial-like rule in a post-colonial era.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the discrimination against the Okinawan people is a multi-layered phenomenon that cannot be reduced to simple prejudice or historical leftovers. It is a structural necessity for the maintenance of the current U.S.-Japan security architecture, underpinned by the framework of internal colonialism. The transition from the Ryūkyū Kingdom to Okinawa Prefecture was an act of dispossession that established a lasting core-periphery hierarchy, where Okinawa serves as a 'sacrificial pawn' for national defense.

This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the 'Okinawa problem' is not merely a regional issue but a critique of the modern nation-state's inability to accommodate indigenous sovereignty within a militarized world order. To overcome these discriminatory dynamics, it is insufficient to merely implement anti-bullying regulations or local cultural festivals. A fundamental resolution requires:

1. The renegotiation of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to ensure equal legal protection for Okinawan citizens.

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2. The recognition of Okinawans as an indigenous people with inherent rights to self-determination and land restitution.
3. The dismantling of the 'Three Ks' architecture (Kichi, Kōkyō kōji, Kankō) that enforces structural dependency on military spending.

Ultimately, the liberation of Okinawa from discrimination entails a decolonial shift in the Japanese national identity, moving away from a myth of homogeneity toward a genuine acknowledgement of its multi-ethnic and imperial past.

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