

Okinawa

*Great Power Competition and
the Keystone of the Pacific*

Ra Mason

University of East Anglia (UEA)

DAIWA
ANGLO-JAPANESE
FOUNDATION
大和日英基金

UEA
University of East Anglia



**A book in the
Flashpoints
series...**



agendapublishing

Outline

Politics

Historical context
Politics and positionality
Theoretical considerations
Competing claims
Senkaku/Diaoyu flashpoint

Economics

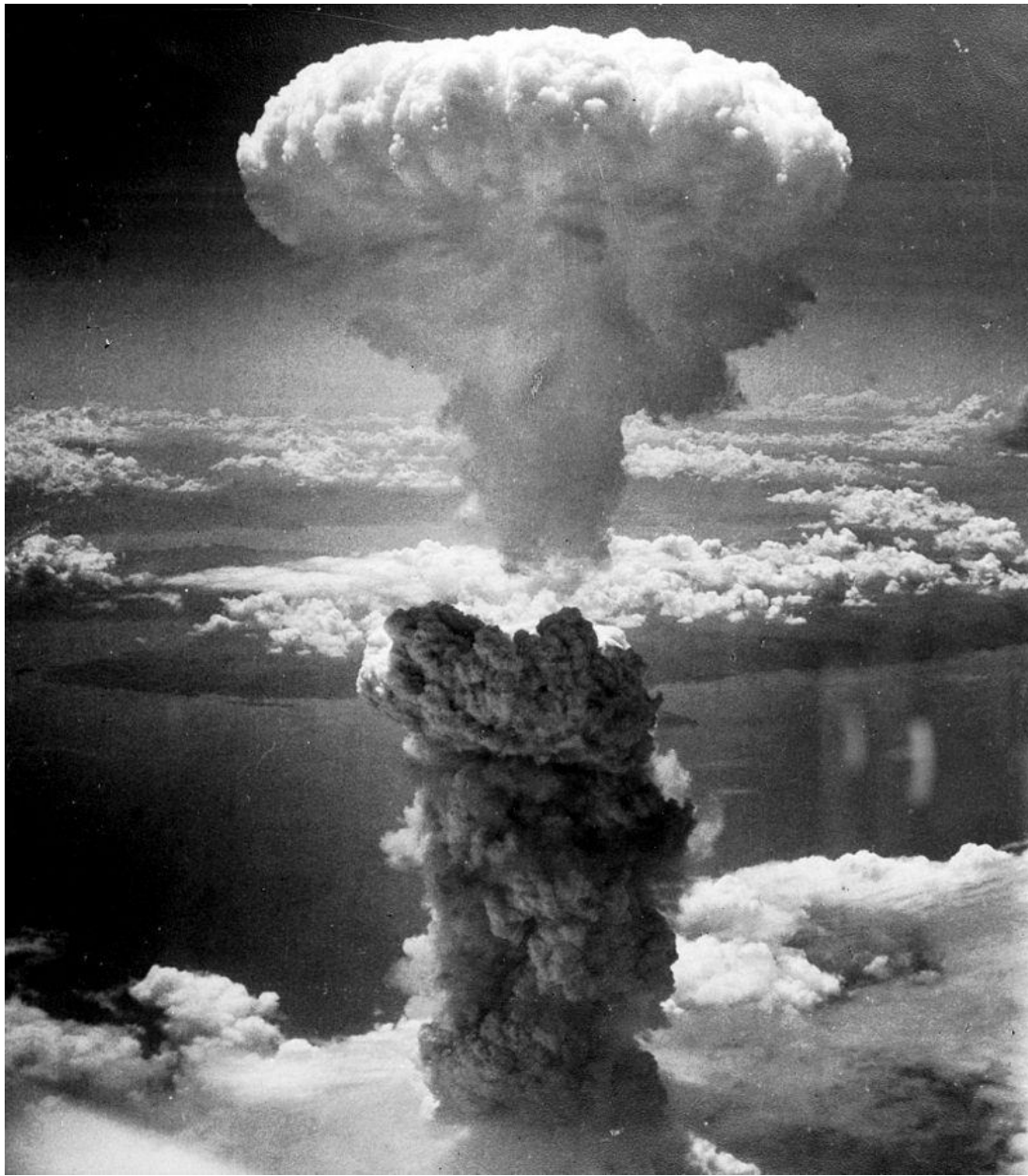
The base economy since 1945
Construction and concrete
Competing vested interests
Economic diversification:
Okinawa versus Taiwan

Conclusion: Scenarios for a secure future

Okinawa's Historical context

- Kingdom of the Ryukyus from 1429 (independent, tributary state of imperial China)
- Satsuma invasion of 1609 (subjugated under Satsuma domain)
- Meiji Era disposition up to 1879 (annexed by Japan as Okinawa Prefecture)





The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed at least 130,000 people; over 150,000 died in the Battle of Okinawa (1945); Revision to Japan in 1972

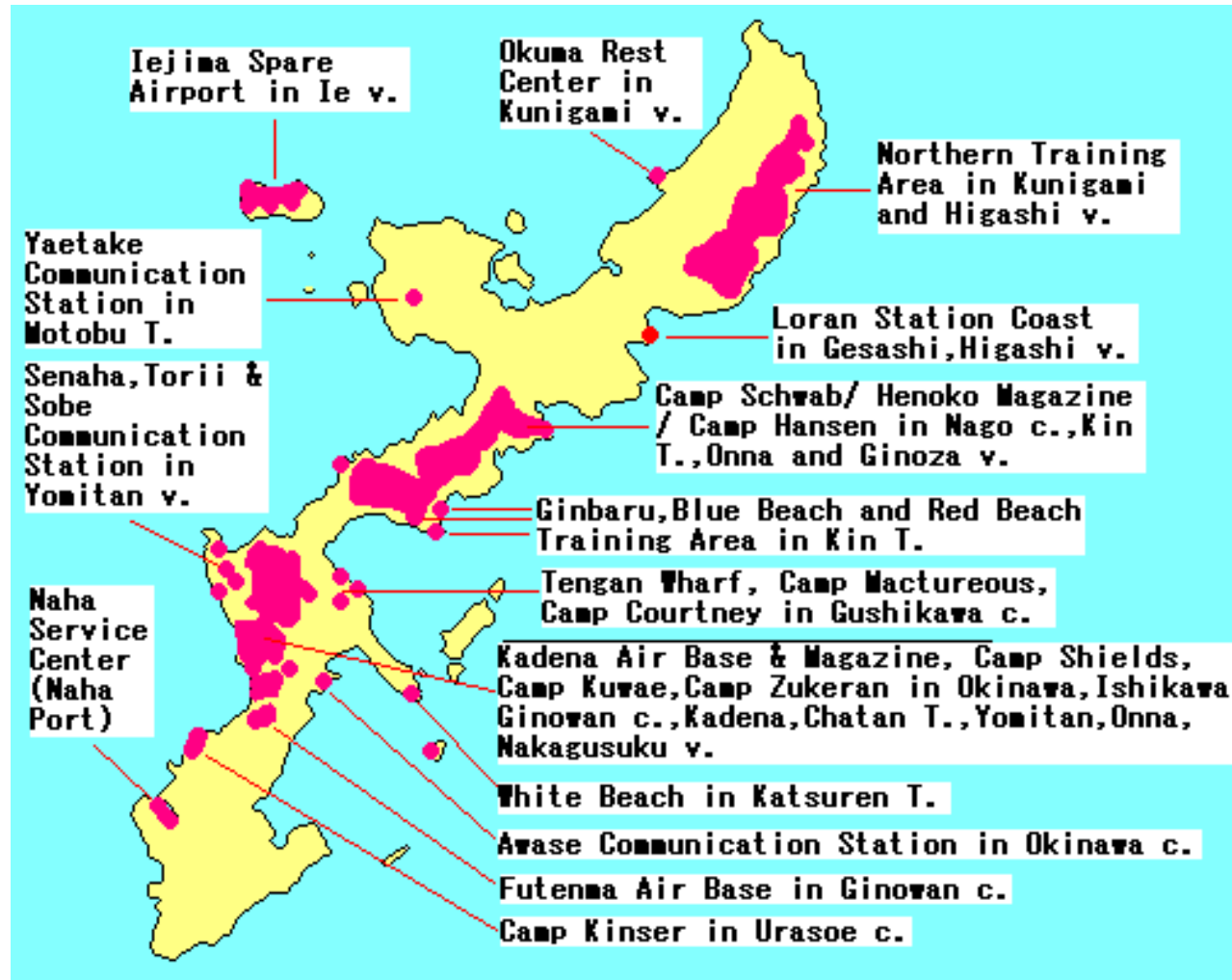


Politics and positionality: Social identities, pacifism and power politics

- Theoretical considerations include intersecting 'layers' of material power, specific political agency and constructions of local and national identity.



US bases on Okinawa



71% of land area used for US military bases in Japan located on Okinawa.

Military bases key to alliance structure, but associated with risks of crime, noise pollution, environmental degradation, overcrowding.

MCAS Futenma Base Issue

- 1995 rape of 12-year old girl by three US Marines triggered massive anti-base protests and forced political action at the intergovernmental level, but did little to fundamentally affect US-Japan alliance structure or reduce Okinawa's base burden.



MCAS Futenma and Henoko Bay 'relocation'

- **History of Futenma built at the point of a bayonet and now "world's most dangerous base" → agreement to return → controversy over "relocation" to Henoko**



Competing claims: Okinawa as an international flashpoint

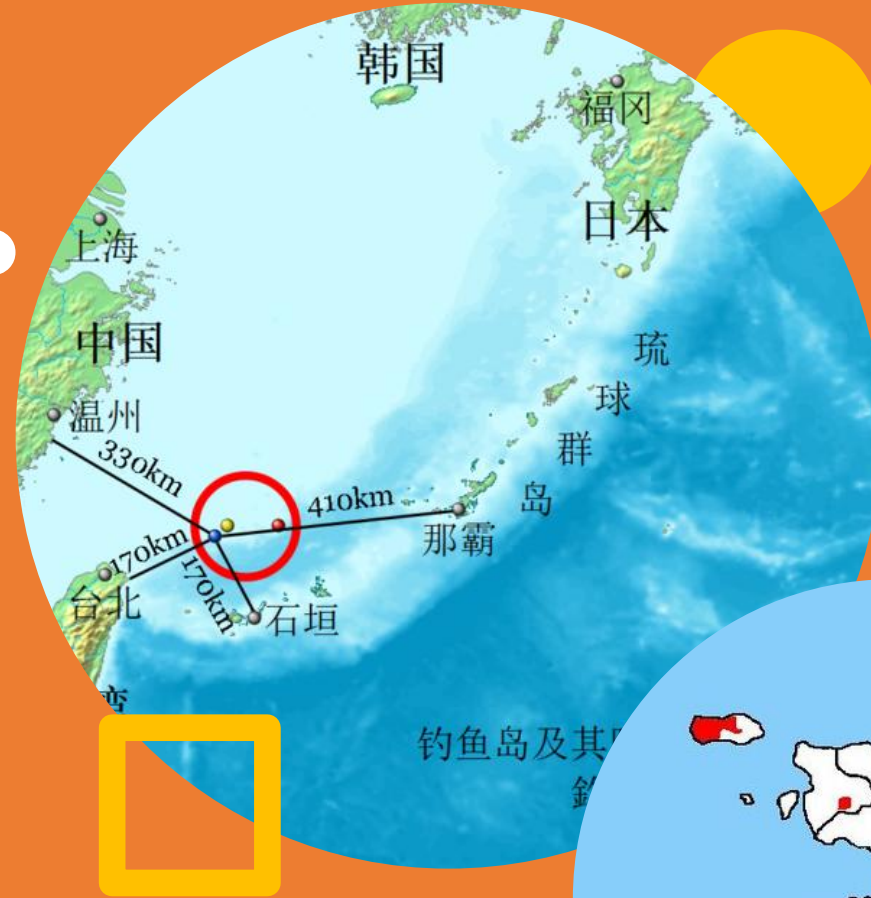
Historically, Okinawa has lacked a stable security environment. Yet, with heightened global concerns over the prospects of military invasions, the so-called First Island Chain that the Okinawan archipelago sits amid is routinely depicted as key to establishing an enduring peace for the entire region





Senkaku/ Diaoyu/ Tiaoyutai/ Pinnacle Islands Dispute

**Distance from
Senkaku/Diaoyu to
sites on Okinawa,
Taiwan and
mainland China of
disputed relevance**

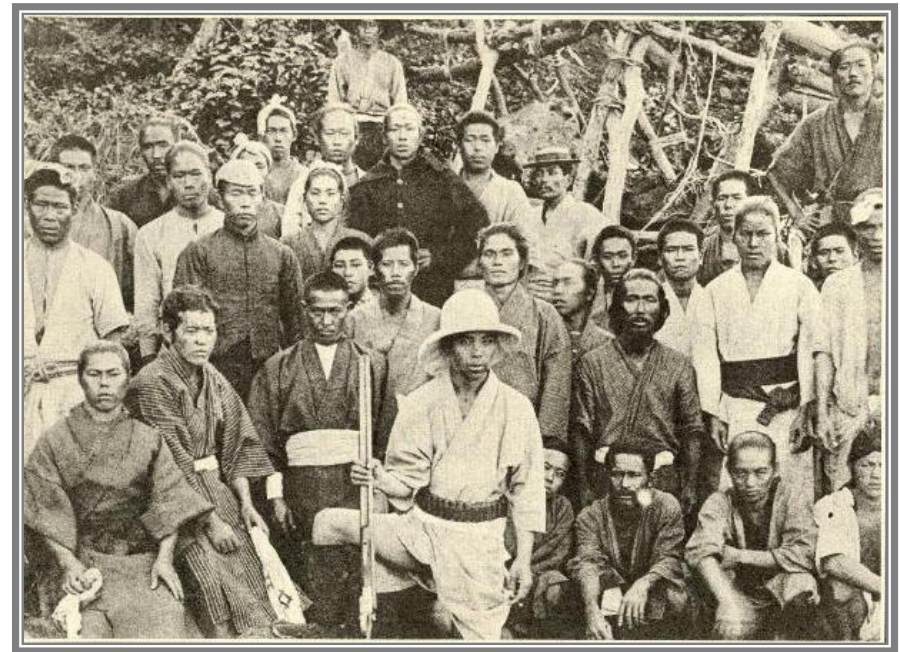


**Potential for flashpoint
intensified by heavy
American military
presence on Okinawa**

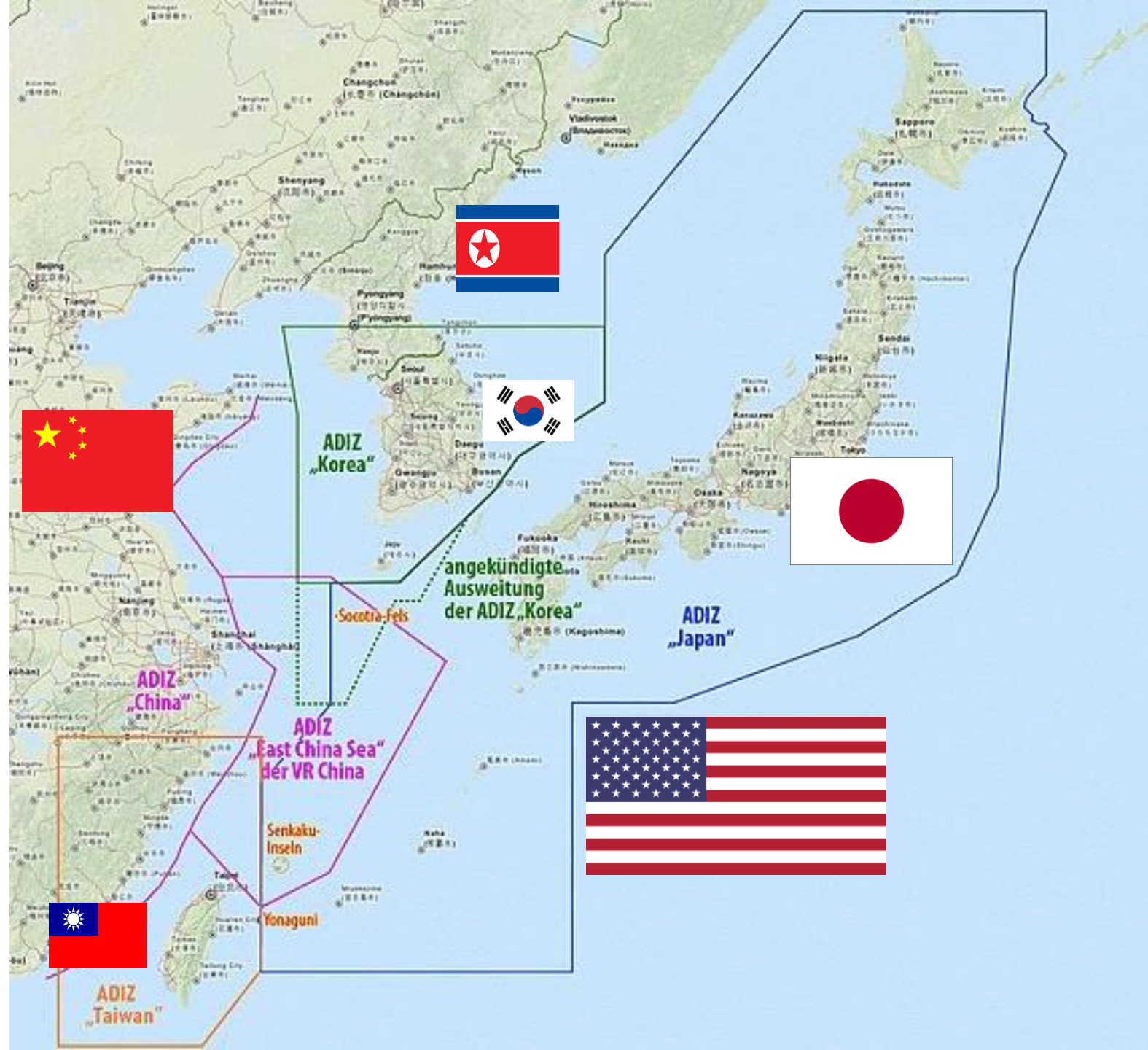


Contested narratives of dispute:

- China, Japan and Taiwan all claim sovereignty over Islands;
- US states Senkaku Islands fall under jurisdiction of US-Japan Security Alliance (Article 5), if China moves to seize by force;
- US Ambiguous on specific question of “sovereignty”.



- Proximity of Taiwan to Okinawa's most westerly islands (Yaeyama Islands) complicates dynamics of competing regional geostrategies;
- Economic exclusion zone (EEZ) extending from Okinawan islands forms legal and tactical defense perimeter being defended by Japan-US Security Alliance, but overlaps with China's interpretation when incorporating Taiwan;
- Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) unilaterally demarcated by Beijing in 2013 includes skies above Senkaku Islands.



Tracing the money trail

- **“Base economy”**: historical reasons for US military and recent impact of JSDF stationed on Okinawa;
- **Competing commercial industries** (e.g., tourism vs. construction), but areas of potential synergy;
- **Need to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience through specialization and diversification**



The base economy since 1945

- Construction of bases on Okinawa representative of small number of actors able to make large profits through *development*;
- Limited choice than to join base economy → workable lands and sea effectively fenced off and turned into bases;
- Post-reversion typified by unequal investment and one-off mega-projects directed from mainland (e.g., 1975 Okinawa Expo);
- Expectations of growth *hondo nami*, in line with mainland Japan → enduring economic gap between Okinawans and mainlanders



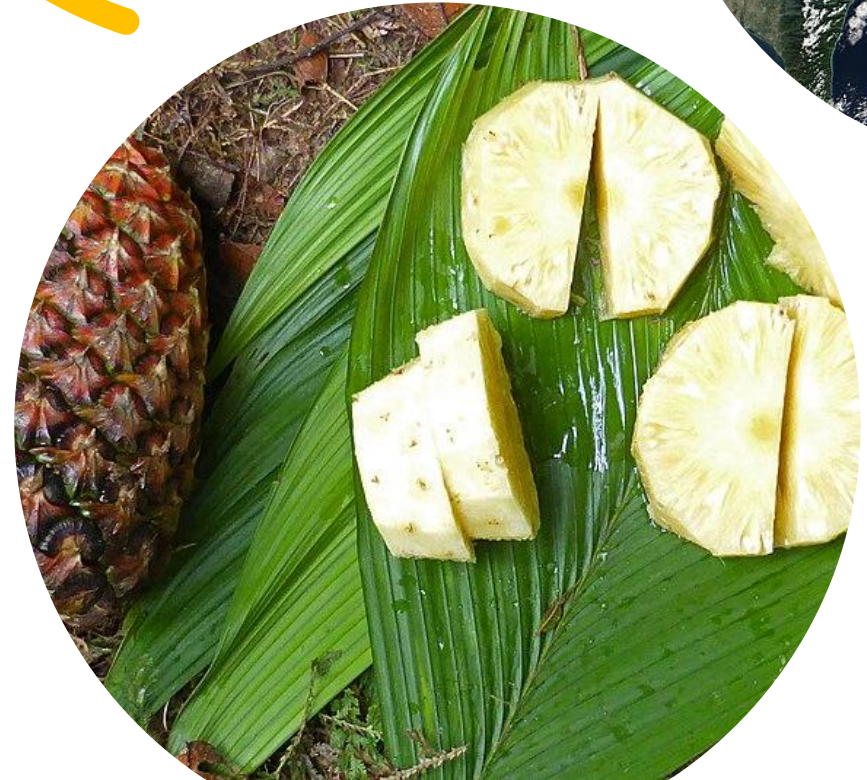
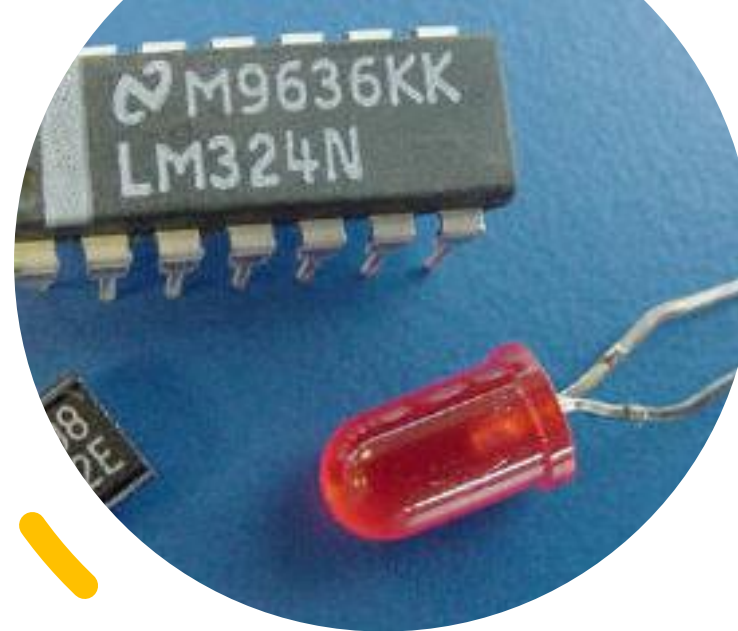
Big business: Construction, concrete and gravel

- Concrete is everywhere on Okinawa!
- Highways, bridges and tunnels provide access to key sites, but destroy natural beauty for tourists → entrench dependency on “development”;
- By increasing and decreasing annual *ikkatsu kōfukin* , lump-sum payment, GoJ able to reward compliant behaviour and punish opposition;
- Projects encounter limited civil opposition → locals rely on employment in construction sector → infrastructure seen as *development (kaihatsu)*.



Economic diversification and vulnerability: Okinawa versus Taiwan

- Vested interests and limited geographical space caused by US military bases constrain further development of local economy;
- Developmentalist strategy + sufficient political will = Taiwan-style diversification, value-added economy (reducing vulnerability to political pressure);
- Okinawa (*more*) credible claims to legitimacy when strengthening ties with mainland China (than Taiwan);
- As per Taiwan, US and Japan seek to fortify Okinawa, demonise regime in Beijing and isolate Prefectural authorities to prevent deepening engagement with PRC.





Flashpoint scenarios and future prospects

- How can domestic and foreign policy interests be balanced in response to increasing uncertainty?

Conclusion

- Framing of disputes illustrates how national government agendas supersede localised efforts;
- Economics plays key role in situating Okinawa as a political flashpoint → illuminates possible pathways towards mitigation of tensions;
- Prefectural authorities have potential as intermediators in building regional trade and exchange relationships.



Thank you!
(サンキュー!)

ありがとうございました。

にふえーでーびたん！

