

THE HUMAN TRADITION IN

MODERN JAPAN



EDITED BY

ANNE WALTHALL

Jahana Noboru

Okinawan Activist and Scholar

GREGORY SMITS

The slogan "Civilization and Enlightenment" took on peculiar overtones when extended from Tokyo to Japan's periphery in Okinawa. There, too, the slogan had held out the promise of success through education, although only for a few and only in certain largely technical fields. On the mainland, commoners had been castigated for lascivious behavior during festivals, mixed bathing, and casual dress that Westerners considered barbaric. Okinawan customs were deemed uncivilized in the eyes of other Japanese.

Okinawa also suffered peculiar political disabilities. The builders of the new Japan came overwhelmingly from two former domains, Satsuma and Chōshū, that had taken the lead in defeating the last Tokugawa shogun. In the eyes of many men excluded from positions of power and responsibility because they had been born in a different region of Japan, these self-styled statesmen constituted nothing more than a Sat-chō clique. Through the historical accident that Satsuma had originally asserted Japanese suzerainty over the kingdom of the Ryukyus in the seventeenth century, men from Satsuma dominated the bureaucracy that replaced the Ryukyuan aristocracy centered on the old capital of Shuri, now a suburb of Naha. Renamed Okinawa, the islands became incorporated into a centralized administrative system, its people becoming Japanese citizens. Nonetheless, the discrimination they experienced under Japanese rule undercut the illusion of homogeneity promoted by government leaders in their drive to construct a strong modern state.

Like Hatoyama Haruko, Jahana Noboru was ambitious. He exemplifies the possibility of going from rags to riches opened up by the modern educational system and exposes the vicissitudes awaiting the self-made man. While lacunae and contradictions in the historical record make it impossible to learn precisely what he did and what really happened to him, his story can still be read as a commentary on the torturous relations between Okinawa and the mainland.

*Assistant professor of history at Pennsylvania State University, Gregory J. Smits wrote his first book on the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom, *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early Modern Thought and Politics* (1999). He is currently planning a book on the history of modern Okinawa.*

On July 25, 1901, the *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, Okinawa's first daily newspaper, printed a brief message from Jahana Noboru (1865–1908), stating that he had completely recovered from the illness the same paper had described the previous month as “a nervous disorder” likely caused by “the vicissitudes of constant rising and falling, praise and censure.”¹ In fact, Jahana had lost his mind, and, the notice in the newspaper notwithstanding, he would never recover it. He led the remaining seven years of his life in pain and poverty, dying where he was born, in the small rural village of Kochinda, in the southern part of the island of Okinawa. Jahana's affliction came on suddenly in May 1901 while he was standing on a platform waiting for a train at Kobe Station. He had spent most of his short life battling various interest groups in Okinawa. Even though he won some of these battles, they left him increasingly isolated. In the end, he had nowhere to go but back to the obscure village that had made him famous.

“Kuchinda Jahana” was Jahana's nickname when his career was in its ascendancy, Kuchinda being the Okinawan pronunciation of what in Japanese would be “Kochinda.”² He got this name because he rose from rural Kochinda to prominence as a high official in the Okinawan prefectural administration. By so doing, he became a symbol of the self-made man who had climbed above his humble social origins. But this success weighed heavily on him, for, among other reasons, he was the only example among Okinawans of such a dramatic rise in status. This is not to say that Jahana was the only prominent Okinawan at that time, but that he was the only prominent one of commoner background. There was, unfortunately, no place for someone like him in the Okinawa of his day. His high-powered education forever removed him from the ranks of the island's peasants, but it did not gain him acceptance from its traditional elite or from the mainland Japanese who governed the country's newest prefecture.

The Meiji government forced the creation of Okinawa prefecture in April 1879 by dispatching soldiers and police to bring an end to the Ryukyu Kingdom. Early in the fifteenth century a strong monarchy had asserted its rule over Okinawa and gradually extended its authority to the other Ryukyu islands. At this time, the kingdom prospered as a trading center, with Ryukyuan ships buying and selling goods all the way from the eastern coast of the Indian subcontinent to East Asia. Ryukyu developed a particularly strong diplomatic and trade relationship with China. In 1609 the powerful southernmost Japanese domain of Satsuma (present-day Kagoshima prefecture) sought to gain access to the China trade by invading the Ryukyu Kingdom. Satsuma's invasion resulted in the Ryukyu monarch's agreement to serve and assist the ruler of Satsuma. By way of its connection with Satsuma, Ryukyu also began regular

diplomatic relations with the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo. Ryukyu kept its connections with Japan secret when dealing with China for fear that, if they were revealed, China might sever its connections with the small kingdom. In fact, China was vaguely aware that Ryukyu maintained close ties with Japan, but chose to ignore them.

From 1609 to 1879 the status of the Ryukyu Kingdom was ambiguous, at least by modern reckoning. Was it a sovereign state, a subordinate of China, or a subordinate of Japan? The answer is that Ryukyu was all three at once. Most premodern East Asians saw relations among states as an extension of Confucian-style family and social relations, which is why, for example, the Board of Rites oversaw foreign relations in China. It was therefore normal for a relatively small and weak country like Ryukyu to acknowledge the cultural and economic superiority of its larger neighbors.

By the early 1870s, however, Japan had reorganized itself into a centralized state, and its leaders were well aware of the power of the major Western countries. They knew that were Japan to avoid the fate of many parts of Asia then succumbing to imperialist aggression, it would have to play by the rules of "international law" as defined by the Western powers. In this conception of international relations, sovereign states with clearly defined boundaries interact by means of contractual agreements, that is, treaties. For this reason Ryukyu became an issue in the 1870s when Japan's new government tried to clarify the boundaries of the Japanese state. Realizing that Ryukyu's location was of strategic importance, that Ryukyu's government was militarily weak, and that China or an imperialist Western power might lay claim to it, Japan's leaders decided to act first.

By 1874 the Meiji government was making the claim that Ryukyu had long been an integral part of Japan. More ominously for Ryukyu's fate, Japan managed to persuade France, Holland, and the United States—the three Western countries that had signed treaties with Ryukyu—to agree to Japanese sovereignty over the islands. Although they tried for several years to convince Ryukyu's king and government officials to agree to become part of Japan, in the face of stiff resistance from the Okinawan court, the Meiji leaders eventually used coercion to force the issue. It was only after Japan formally annexed Ryukyu in 1879 that China made any serious attempt to intervene diplomatically, but by then it was too late to save the kingdom.

Because of Meiji claims that Ryukyu had always been a part of Japan, the newly gotten territory was immediately designated a prefecture and named Okinawa. The prefectural title did not mean that the former Ryukyu Kingdom received the same treatment as the rest of Japan. Indeed, during its early decades of existence, the Okinawa prefecture was

treated much like a foreign colony. Its people struggled under the highest per capita tax burden of any prefecture and received the lowest per capita expenditure of money from Tokyo. In a successful move to buy the cooperation of the Ryukyuan aristocracy, the Meiji state agreed to maintain the stipends and many of the privileges of these elites, pursuing into the early years of the twentieth century what it called a policy of "preserving old customs." In this arrangement, the king went to reside in Tokyo and was granted the title of Marquis in the new peerage system. The kingdom's former aristocracy, however, did not fare so well, for they received no such titles. Instead, in return for their acquiescence to Japanese rule, the upper echelons were paid approximately the same stipends that they had received as officials of the kingdom. The funds for these stipends came from Okinawa's prefectural government, not from Tokyo. The lower-ranking former aristocrats were given no such payments. They typically sought work as schoolteachers, interpreters, clerks, and petty bureaucrats. Such positions were relatively few in number, and many former aristocrats sank rapidly into dire poverty.

Replacing the king in this new order was a governor, always a mainland and always appointed by Tokyo until 1945. Although he usually required approval from Tokyo to institute major policy changes, the governor possessed supreme authority in the day-to-day management of the prefecture's bureaucracy. The higher ranks of government and education officials were overwhelmingly non-Okinawans. Furthermore and somewhat distressingly for the Okinawans, a disproportionately large number of the top officials in prewar Okinawa came from Kagoshima, the former domain of Satsuma that had invaded Ryukyu in 1609.

LIFE AND TIMES

Jahana Noboru grew up in this Okinawa, theoretically a prefecture of Japan but actually more like a quasi colony. The early governors of Okinawa put a high priority on disseminating basic education, which consisted mainly of Japanese language training. Jahana first benefited from this top-down promotion of education by being selected in 1881 to attend Okinawa's teacher-training school for elementary schoolteachers. The next year, for the first time, the prefecture selected five outstanding students to pursue advanced education in Tokyo at government expense. Jahana was one of them. The four other students were all of aristocratic background. They included Ōta Chōfu, later to become editor of the *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, and the two men who would become Okinawa's first members of the lower house of the Diet, Takamine Chōkyō and Iwamoto Gashō.

The prefectural authorities thought it most appropriate that Jahana study agricultural subjects because he was of peasant origin. He began by studying forestry at the Tokyo School of Forestry and then transferred to the Imperial College of Agricultural Science, the most prestigious institution of its kind in Japan. He graduated in 1891 with what in today's terms would be a graduate degree in agricultural science. His graduation thesis was a study of the history and circumstances of sugar production in Sanuki (present-day Kagawa prefecture in Shikoku). Much of his study consisted of a detailed chemical analysis of various types of fertilizers and fertilizing methods. He argued that the quality and quantity of fertilizer was the most significant factor in sugarcane yields. Nonetheless, sugarcane growers often wasted cash on commercial fertilizer preparations that ended up being less effective than the careful use of the by-products of agricultural processes. Five years later, he would produce a similar study on the conditions of sugar production in Okinawa and make many of the same points. His graduation thesis about Sanuki was in effect a methodological trial run in preparation for his masterful writing about the same issues in Okinawa. Indeed, the development of the island's sugar industry was a constant concern of Jahana's throughout his short career, for he thought that its revitalization would be the basis of a general improvement in Okinawa's economy.

In the year of his graduation, Jahana returned to Okinawa amid much fanfare. "Kuchinda Jahana" had proven that an ordinary Okinawan could succeed in the new Japan. Commensurate with his high-powered education, he joined the upper levels of the prefectural administration in the capacity of prefectural engineer. He was the only one among his cohort of Okinawans who had studied in Tokyo to be appointed to such high office so early in his career.

Almost a year after Jahana's triumphant return, Narahara Shigeru (1834–1918) of Kagoshima (formerly Satsuma) was appointed governor of Okinawa, a post he held for the unusually long period of sixteen years. Although Jahana and Narahara eventually became political adversaries, in the early years of the Narahara administration, Jahana advanced in civil service rank and seems not to have had any major differences with the governor. Narahara was well connected with government and business leaders. He was an activist governor with a strong interest in practical affairs, and his mandate from the central government was to carry out fundamental reforms of Okinawan society. He ruled with such a firm hand that he earned the nickname "King of Ryukyu."

One of the pressing problems of that time was the pitiful state of former low-ranking members of the urban aristocracy. In the days of the kingdom, impoverished low-ranking aristocrats had been encouraged to take up commerce or skilled manufacturing, and, when all else failed, to

set up agricultural villages and farm tax-free. The problem of poverty among these aristocrats, in other words, was not new, but by the 1890s it had become especially severe. To make matters worse, little or no untilled farmland remained for them to occupy and work. Jahana and Narahara both endorsed a plan to clear selected forests, turn them into farms, and offer them to unstipended former aristocrats at a low cost.

One legacy of the former kingdom was the presence of extensive tracts of forest land with a special status, known as *somayama*. This term indicates forest land managed and harvested in a controlled manner by the nearby peasant villages, with local officials from the villages themselves and government administrators overseeing the process. In 1893, Jahana formally proposed that select areas of *somayama* with the potential to make good farmland be cleared for the relief of unstipended former aristocrats. He explained that some land labeled as "*somayama*" was not really *somayama*—in other words, not true forest land that could be used for lumber and fuel. On such land, typically, dense underbrush grew but few trees. These pockets of so-called *somayama* were effectively wasteland and hence should be brought under cultivation. In his proposal, Jahana stressed that under no circumstances should such land clearance be permitted to an extent that would disrupt or harm the way rural villagers made their living.

Governor Narahara accepted Jahana's proposal and appointed him to put it into practice. The peasants living in the vicinities of the proposed clearance areas, however, protested vigorously. Jahana visited the forests of northern Okinawa to inspect their condition personally and to meet with village leaders. Although he tried repeatedly to assure the local peasants that they would suffer no harm from the project, he was unsuccessful in securing their cooperation. Indeed, their opposition was so strong in some areas that they levied a small tax on themselves to send a delegation to Naha, the capital, to petition the prefectural government directly.

The documentary evidence concerning these events is not always clear about who stood where and why, and there is disagreement among historians regarding Jahana's stance. The standard line usually found in general histories of Okinawa is that Jahana sided with the peasants, championed their interests within the prefectural government, and thus clashed with Governor Narahara, who had advocated widespread clearing of *somayama* lands. Furthermore, it suggests that the governor was not really interested in resettling impoverished ex-aristocrats. While pretending to help them, he instead sought to put as much cleared land as possible into the hands of entrepreneurs from outside Okinawa and of high-ranking former aristocrats such as the royal family. When Jahana used his position as head of the project to try to block such moves, Narahara fired him.

Some historians, however, have expressed serious doubt about this scenario, which casts Jahana in the role of tragic, idealistic hero and Narahara as the corrupt, worldly villain. Jahana was indeed relieved of his duties as head of the land-reclamation bureau in 1894, but the reason is unclear. A close examination of Jahana's writings and actions, from the time of his proposing the reclamation plan to the time of his removal as its head, indicates that he regarded the peasant opposition as misguided and ignorant. As historian Arakawa Akira has pointed out, the Jahana of 1894 was a headstrong young technocrat who vigorously countered the peasant opposition that dared question his expertise. Furthermore, an inspection of the statistics for land clearance and sales indicates that the transactions for approximately two-thirds of the land that went to former high-ranking aristocrats and for over half the land that went to people from outside Okinawa prefecture took place while Jahana was in charge. If Narahara fired Jahana to clear the way for such land sales, why did they decline after Jahana left his post?

Jahana's dismissal from the land-clearance project does not seem to have had an immediately detrimental effect on his career. He continued to advance in civil service rank, he remained prefectural engineer, and he participated in other projects connected with land reform. Eventually, he did become a critic of Narahara and his policies, but there is no strong evidence for such a stance in the early 1890s. As we shall see, the circumstances contributing to Jahana's frustrations and eventual downfall were more complex than the simple ill will of an evil governor.

The first well-documented conflict between Jahana and Narahara began in the last month of 1897, when Jahana was appointed to devise a plan for the disposition of all remaining *somayama* land. He and Narahara clashed repeatedly over the fundamental issue of ownership. Narahara advocated government ownership but with the peasants having the right to harvest trees from the land, an arrangement that would have caused no fundamental change in the current situation. Jahana advocated peasant ownership of the land, despite the administrative difficulties entailed in parceling out the plots. For Jahana, government ownership was simply too dangerous, the potential for abuse and corruption too great. Peasant opinion was solidly behind Jahana's plan. It is at this point that Jahana clearly emerges as an advocate for the peasantry against the interests of the Narahara administration. Largely as a result of his refusal to yield to Narahara, pressure on Jahana to step down increased. In December 1898 he resigned from government service.

Jahana's conflict with Narahara, however, was not his only battle at the time. During the decade of the 1890s, the former high-ranking aristocrats from the days of the kingdom vigorously sought to reassert dominance in the governance of Okinawa. One milestone in this process was

the establishment of the *Ryūkyū Shinpō* by a group of former aristocrats headed by Ōta Chōfu. Recall that Ōta and Jahana had both gone to study in Tokyo in the same year. By the time Jahana resigned from government, Ōta had become one of his most vocal critics. Significantly, Ōta spoke for the whole group of Shuri-Naha former elites in denouncing Jahana.

Jahana's alienation from Okinawa's former aristocrats was not simply the result of their prejudice against his humble origins. More important, Jahana had energetically and publicly opposed the goals of their political union, the Kōdōkai. Its founding in 1896 represents, among other things, an effort by the former high-ranking elites to set aside past factional differences and work together toward the goal of a return to some semblance of political power. They included many of Okinawa's most influential and wealthy residents. The Kōdōkai proposed a plan for Okinawa's revitalization that began with the premise that the prefecture's unique circumstances called for a special political arrangement. Specifically, the former king, Shō Tai, or a member of his family was to be appointed as a long-term governor. The king-turned-governor would head a government designed to meet the special needs of Okinawa and guide its people through a transitional phase toward the goal of eventual political, cultural, and institutional union with the rest of Japan. The plan assumed that "the people" of Okinawa would rally around the leadership of the Shō family, thus resulting in spiritual unity and mobilization. At the same time, the Kōdōkai was careful to emphasize that the advancement of Okinawa would contribute to the advancement of the Japanese Empire.

The Kōdōkai embodied a paradox. On the one hand, it was obviously anachronistic and reactionary. On the other hand, however, it enjoyed widespread support from Okinawa's leading progressive intellectuals, mostly young men such as Ōta Chōfu, Takamine Chōkyō, and Tomigusuku Seiwa. Men like Ōta had come to the realization that no matter how well educated or talented they might be, as Okinawans they would always face disparagement and discrimination from the many mainlanders who ran the prefectural government. Thus, they made common cause with those who sought, at least in part, to restore past institutions.

The Kōdōkai's proposal attracted substantial support, garnering approximately seventy-three thousand signatures for a petition to be delivered to the Diet and leading officials in Tokyo. The opponents of the proposal labeled it subversive, a move to restore Okinawan independence. It found few supporters outside Okinawa, and even on the island there was vigorous opposition. Interestingly enough, a small number of former Ryukyuan elites opposed it because it called for an eventual merging

with Japan. These opponents wanted Okinawa to have nothing to do with Japan. The majority of opponents, however, with Jahana in the vanguard, saw the proposal as reactionary. Furthermore, there had been great suffering in the final years of the kingdom because the Okinawan court had squeezed the peasants as hard as it could to extract the resources it needed to survive. For Okinawans of Jahana's background, the days of the kingdom held no nostalgic appeal. Although Jahana suffered from the same discrimination as did Ōta, he argued that the Kōdōkai proposal would do nothing but make the situation worse.

On the surface, Jahana and the other opponents of the Kōdōkai won their fight. The central government refused even to receive the Kōdōkai's petition and threatened its leaders with criminal prosecution should they continue their efforts. The Kōdōkai collapsed immediately. Frustrated in their effort to garner direct political power, its supporters quickly adopted a new strategy of close cooperation with the Narahara regime. For Jahana, the results of this new alignment were to prove disastrous.

By the time of his resignation, Jahana had become isolated from much of Okinawan society. He was a pariah in the eyes of both the prefectural government officials and the former rulers of the kingdom. Having amassed moderate wealth, he and a small group of supporters founded the Okinawa Club, which set up headquarters in Naha. The core members of the club were, like Jahana, relatively young men from rural backgrounds. They also founded the Nan'yōsha (Southern sun company), a trading firm, to provide the economic foundation for their main function of publishing a periodical, *Okinawa jiron*. A forum for essays on timely political topics, *Okinawa jiron* served as a mouthpiece through which the Okinawa Club advocated broadening participation in the political process and an equitable resolution to land problems, especially the disposition of *somayama*. The club's periodical also served as a platform from which to criticize Governor Narahara.

Jahana's activities at this time closely resemble those of Ishizaka Shōkō and other leaders of the People's Rights movement on the mainland during the 1880s, for which reason he is usually regarded as the central figure in a comparable, if much smaller, Okinawan version of that movement. Overt and covert hostility from the prefectural government hampered him and his supporters at every turn. A decisive showdown took place over the Okinawa Agricultural Bank.

This bank had been established in each prefecture by order of the central government (albeit, in Okinawa's case, several years later than in all the other prefectures). Its purpose was to preserve and promote agriculture by offering loans to small farmers who might have difficulty securing financing from other sources. Jahana had worked hard for the establishment of the bank while he was prefectural engineer. The bank

was inaugurated just before he resigned from government, and at that time he was its largest shareholder and a member of the three-person board of directors. Through the Okinawa Club and his position with the bank, Jahana sought to continue his fight to improve conditions on the island.

Although Jahana was the single largest shareholder, his isolation left him vulnerable. Shareholders connected with the prefectural administration and the former Okinawan political elite of Shuri and Naha became allies in an attempt to oust him and his rural supporters from the bank's board of directors. At a stockholders' meeting of January 18, 1900, Jahana proposed a restructuring of the bank's board, increasing its membership from three to five, and specifying that one member would come from each of the following geographic entities: Shuri, Naha, Shimajiri, Nakagami, and Kunigami. The first two were urban centers; the last three were large districts covering the rest of Okinawa. Jahana's proposal, in other words, would have diluted the power of the Shuri-Naha former aristocrats in determining bank policy.

Governor Narahara saw the proposal as particularly dangerous because if Jahana's Okinawa Club could dominate the governance of the bank, its members would have an ideal vehicle by which to enhance their popularity among Okinawa's farmers. He put the resources of his office at the disposal of the Shuri and Naha shareholders, who set about forging alliances with prominent local leaders in rural areas. Once formed, this alliance began to purchase as much stock as it could. Using access to the police, the anti-Jahana forces also tried to intimidate some of the voting stockholders and otherwise interfere with the election process. When the votes were in, Jahana and every other candidate from the Okinawa Club had been resoundingly defeated. Jahana declared the election void owing to improper practices, which threw the matter into court. The court battle lasted four months and resulted in Jahana's defeat. The election results stood.

Although the months immediately after his defeat in the bank election were undoubtedly hard ones for Jahana, he does not seem to have been totally despondent. The loss had devastated the Okinawa Club, however, and it soon disbanded. Furthermore, Jahana had sunk nearly all of his personal wealth into the club, the election campaign, and the court battle—all in vain. Nonetheless, he wrote a detailed article on the effect of taxation on the sugar industry, which he published in a major agricultural journal. Recall that he regarded the sugar industry as the key to any overall improvement in Okinawa's economy. From this article, it is also clear that three things had become linked in Jahana's mind: the sugar industry, Okinawa, and a "regard for what is native" (*tochaku no nenryo*). Yet having devoted his entire career to improving Okinawa

through his research into sugar production, through his work as prefectural engineer, and through his activities in the Okinawa Club and the Agricultural Bank, in the end Jahana was forced to recognize that it had all come to nothing.

Broke and isolated, Jahana realized that he would have to seek work on the mainland. He obtained a position in Yamaguchi prefecture as an engineering assistant—much lower in importance and prestige than the posts he had held before. An optimist to that point, the bitter reality of the failure to accomplish any of his goals in Okinawa and the need to start his career over in a place to which he had no emotional attachment suddenly crushed him psychologically. Perhaps he became unable to bear taking the final step in the process of moving to this new, rather unappealing job in a strange place. En route, on the train platform in Kobe, he snapped, never to recover. The last years of his life “were spent in a permanently crippled state, resembling that of a living corpse.” He gave up the ghost completely in 1908, while muttering over and over, “Vermin that are devouring Okinawa have now arrived. Drive them out!”³ He was forty-four years old.

BROADER REFLECTIONS ON JAHANA'S LIFE

Despite his talent, high-powered education, and hard work, it may not be too rash to claim that Jahana ended his life as a de facto alien in the land of his birth. In other words, Japanese society in 1900 had no place for him in which to fit comfortably. As an Okinawan, a *rikijin* (corruption of *Ryūkyūjin* [Ryukyuan]) in the derogatory mainland slang of the time, he would never be accepted as a full-fledged citizen of Japan. This prejudice against Okinawans was no less intense within the prefectural government where Jahana spent much of his career. As long as he was a good “company man,” he rose through the ranks of the civil service, but he remained an anomaly.

And Jahana's experience was typical. As Ōta Chōfu finally came to the painful realization that most mainlanders would long relegate Okinawans to the status of second-class citizens, even within their own homeland, he criticized this arrogance in the strongest possible terms from his platform as a public intellectual. For example, an industrial exposition in Osaka in 1903 featured a “hall of peoples” (*jinruikan*) in which a man with a whip presided over a display of Ainu (indigenous people of northern Japan), Koreans, and two Okinawan women depicted as prostitutes. As visitors came through, he pointed with his whip at the people in question and explained some of the exotic objects associated with them in this quasi-anthropological show of “primitive” peoples. Ōta expressed

his rage at the exhibit in a series of editorials. Although he described the display of Okinawans as being no different from one of exotic animals, he did not object to the display of primitive peoples in principle. His outrage was that Okinawans, "real Japanese," were included along with Koreans and "barbaric Ainu."⁴

Ōta could and did derive a substantial part of his identity as a descendant of the Ryukyuan aristocracy even while expressing outrage at mainland prejudices. Jahana, on the other hand, had no particular attachment to the former kingdom and its aristocrats. He was the classic modern man who put his trust in the rational principles of science, only to be beaten down by the forces of ethnic prejudice, class prejudice, and factional politics. With this understanding, that he lost his mind in the end is not surprising. As a man who had stepped out of his "place" in the social scheme of things, there was no social niche that he could comfortably inhabit. In the end, his alienation was total.

Jahana's life can serve as an excellent window through which to view a "Japan" with fuzzy boundaries and uncertain membership. The remarkably persistent image of Japan as a land that has long had a homogeneous culture is revealed as manifestly inaccurate when we take a close look at the northern (Hokkaido and, later, Sakhalin) and southern border zones. In this broad context, Jahana's alienation was but a particularly severe case of the dilemmas of identity faced by nearly all Okinawans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Some Okinawan intellectuals such as Ōta Chōfu or Iha Fuyū could, with difficulty, fashion narratives of Okinawan identity that partook of a noble past and yet pointed to a promising future as Japanese. But the masses of Okinawan laborers seeking work in mainland coal mines and factories or in the plantations of Hawai'i and South America faced a situation more akin to that of Jahana. They often had no past to which they could return, literally or figuratively, but their future as "Japanese" provided little promise of social acceptance or economic prosperity.

One difference between the masses of ordinary Okinawans and Jahana is that he became a famous symbol during his lifetime and beyond. Throughout most of his adult life, "Kuchinda Jahana" represented the self-made man in the best sense. Reminiscent of Ninomiya Sontoku, the peasant lad in Japanese elementary school readers who studied by the light of the moon and fireflies after working all day in the fields, Jahana had broken out of his commoner status and made it into the ranks of the elite through hard work and a devotion to learning. If he could do it, so, too, could others like him. And, this line of thinking continued, those who failed to achieve even modest fortune or fame, as was the case with most Okinawans, must have failed owing to laziness or some other character defect.

This "logic" typified the thinking of most of the mainland government and educational officials in the prefecture when they discussed conditions in Okinawa. More specifically, they consistently blamed the island's poverty on alleged cultural and character deficiencies. In a speech in 1913, for example, Governor Takahashi blamed Okinawa's problems in part on the improper and immodest clothing habits of its women:

Because from now on, things must change in accordance with the world's progress, we must reform what should be reformed and stop adhering stubbornly to outmoded ways. In this place, women do not fasten belts around their robes. . . . No matter where one might go around here, there are women without fastened belts as well as women who do not wear underwear. . . . Even in Korea, women wear underwear. . . . Try going to the mainland in your present state of dress. Not only will people laugh at you, they will hold you in contempt. However impressive and learned you may be, others will regard you as idiots.⁵

Had Jahana been alive to hear this speech, he surely could have provided an alternative analysis of the causes of Okinawan poverty. It would very likely have included such structural factors as excessive taxes on sugar production, the heaviest overall tax burden of any prefecture, and the lack of opportunities for higher education.

Caught between the rock of harsh economic and structural disadvantages and the hard place of officials obsessed with alleged cultural deficiencies, many Okinawans had no choice but to leave their homeland. It was Jahana who first proposed to Governor Narahara that Okinawan poverty might in part be alleviated by encouraging immigration to Hawai'i. Initially, the governor declared the idea ridiculous on cultural grounds. It would be an embarrassment to Japan for Okinawans, who could not even speak Japanese, to be seen in foreign countries. Eventually, after much persuasion by Jahana, Narahara did agree to allow Okinawan immigration abroad.

Jahana's willingness to oppose Narahara or the Okinawan elites and press for what he genuinely regarded as best for Okinawa became the basis for hero-making after his death. In *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*, Ivan Morris adumbrates a theory of Japanese heroism based on tragic failure. More specifically, the ideal hero is a sincere, uncompromising idealist who fights the good fight against the worldly forces of corruption and politics, even though he is doomed to fail. Indeed, it is because he pushes through to inevitable defeat that he is immortalized as a hero for later generations. The typical portrayal of Jahana's life makes him out to be a hero in much the same mold as the figures Morris examines, but with one significant difference: an optimist to a fault, Jahana does not seem to have foreseen that his efforts would end in failure.

One result of the tendency of later generations of Okinawans to make Jahana into a tragic hero, specifically a man who championed the cause of Okinawa's oppressed peasants, is insufficient critical attention to the parts of his life that may not fit the image. We have seen, for example, that early in his career, Jahana opposed all attempts by the peasants of northern Okinawa to stop the conversion of certain *somayama* lands to farmland. Similarly, recent biographies of Jahana commonly repeat colorful details about his life that emphasize his tragic heroism despite a lack of reliable supporting evidence. For example, nearly every one of them claims that, while a student in Tokyo, he associated with people such as Kōtoku Shūsui who would become heroes, at least to some Japanese, for their opposition to the imperial system. More interesting is the legendary tale of Jahana's having determined to kill Governor Narahara with a concealed knife should he refuse yet again to allow Okinawan immigration to Hawai'i. Perhaps sensing the desperation in Jahana's appeal, the evil governor unexpectedly gave in and agreed to the proposal.

Such tales are part of the contemporary, heroic legend of Jahana. Although there is certainly a basis for portraying him this way, the relatively simple narrative of the idealistic hero opposing the evil governor undoubtedly functions to obscure some of the complexity, contradictions, and shifting alliances of late-nineteenth-century Okinawan politics. In the larger picture, the story of Jahana's life and the vexing problems besetting almost all Okinawans of his day enable us to detect the underside of the Meiji state's drive to fashion the Japanese islands (broadly defined) into a homogenous nation.

NOTES

1. Isa Shin'ichi, ed., *Jahana Noboru shū* (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1998), 239.

2. Many personal and place-names from the Ryukyu Islands have both a Japanese and one or more Ryukyuan pronunciations. The languages of the Ryukyu Islands are different from standard Japanese or any of its mainland dialects, although today, the vast majority of Okinawans speak standard Japanese. When writing about Ryukyuan history in Japanese, the problem of pronunciation is easier to avoid, because one simply writes the Chinese characters without normally having to indicate how these characters are to be pronounced. When writing in English, however, a clear choice is always necessary, and, following what has become standard convention, I generally use the Japanese pronunciation.

3. Quoted in Shinzato Keiji, Taminato Tomoaki, and Kinjō Seitoku, *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1972; reprint, 1983), 186.

4. Hiyane Teruo and Isa Shin'ichi, comps. and eds., *Ōta Chōfu senshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Daiichi shobō, 1995), 211–16.

5. Quoted in Naha-shiyakusho, comp. and ed., *Naha-shi shi Shiryo-hen*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Kumamoto, Japan: Shirono Insatsu, 1970), 348.

SUGGESTED READINGS

There is no English-language literature on Jahana Noboru, and even George H. Kerr's history of Okinawa, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (1958), mentions Jahana only in passing in one footnote—a type of omission common throughout Kerr's book. All general histories of Okinawa in Japanese devote from several pages to a subsection of a chapter to Jahana; the majority of such accounts portray him as a tragic hero battling for the interests of the peasants throughout his career. The classic biography of Jahana is Ōzato Yasunaga's *Gijin, Jahana Noboru* (Jahana Noboru, a righteous man, 1938), later republished as *Jahana Noboru den* (Biography of Jahana Noboru, 1957), and finally republished a second time as *Okinawa no jiyū minken undō senkūsha Jahana Noboru no shisō to kōdō* (The thought and actions of Jahana Noboru, pioneer of the Liberty and People's Rights movement in Okinawa, 1969). Many of Jahana's writings have long been available in various archives. In recent years, Isa Shin'ichi has discovered several hitherto unknown essays by Jahana and compiled what appears to be a complete collection of Jahana's extant writings, scholarly, official, and private. The resulting volume, *Jahana Noboru shū* (1998) is a major contribution to Jahana Noboru studies. For an example of scholarship that makes good use of the materials Isa has brought to light, see Tasato Osamu, "Kochinda Jahana," in *Shin-Ryūkyūshi, kindai/gendai hen* (1992).

© 2002 by Scholarly Resources Inc.
All rights reserved
First published 2002
Printed and bound in the United States of America

Scholarly Resources Inc.
104 Greenhill Avenue
Wilmington, DE 19805-1897
www.scholarly.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Human tradition in modern Japan / edited by Anne Walthall.
p. cm. — (The human tradition around the world ; no. 3)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8420-2911-7 (alk. paper)—ISBN 0-8420-2912-5 (pbk. :
alk. paper)
I. Japan—Biography. I. Walthall, Anne, 1946— II. Series.

CT1836 .H86 2001
920.52—dc21

2001034411

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for permanence of paper for printed library materials, Z39.48, 1984.