

GIs' Gazes on Okinawans: The US Military Occupation in Three American Novels

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Abstract

Two American authors, Vern Sneider and E. A. Cooper, wrote fictional stories set on Okinawa during the US military occupation period (1945-1972). Sneider wrote *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1951) and *The King from Ashitabula* (1960), Cooper *B.C. Street* (2007 and 2015). Their approaches to dealing with Okinawan subjects are rather different from each other from a technical point of view: the former created fanciful narratives by employing Okinawan elements he reinforced to describe “what might happen” for Okinawans (Asians) if the US military government listened to the locals while the latter depicted the Okinawan society as realistically as possible in order to reveal what actually happened in Okinawa in the early 1960s. On the other hand, it is also true that the both authors shared the notion of criticizing the US military administration on Okinawa and both shared a similar message that the US should stop imposing American values on Okinawans and abusing Okinawan society and its people by the military logic. Their sympathy toward the Okinawans they actually met in person while stationed in Okinawa motivated them to write the Okinawan stories, and the essential messages in their novels are still effective and

useful for US readers. Therefore, these “contact zone” stories are worth reading especially if Americans are eager to understand why Okinawans strongly oppose the US bases and to develop a much closer relationship between the US and Okinawa as long as the US military presence is necessary for regional security around the East Asia.

Keywords: American novels set on Okinawa, Criticism on the US military presence on Okinawa, Postcolonial theory, Decolonialization, Vern Sneider, E. A. Cooper

Introduction:

It used to be wholly surprising to me that I often met Americans who hardly knew anything about Okinawa, Japan, despite the fact that it has hosted US military bases since 1945. Currently more than 50,000 Americans (military personnel, their family members and civilian contractors) live in the Okinawa Islands as part of the US-Japan Security Treaty. On the other hand, other Americans who do know about Okinawa are usually aware that local Okinawans have tenaciously opposed the US military presence on their soil. Some of them were curious enough to ask me why Okinawans protest the US bases on the islands. I would usually ask them my own question before answering theirs: what foreign military bases would the US citizens be willing to or agree to host on American soil? All of them responded to me, “No. No foreign military presence in the USA at all.” Then, I answered their question

by saying that Okinawans have the exactly same sentiment as Americans have. Some of them seemed convinced, others puzzled. It is probably because, I assume, the latter seemed to believe in US exceptionalism and take it for granted that the US military troops are a solitary exception.

It is true that a majority of Okinawans demand that both Japanese and the US governments act in concert regarding Okinawa, for the purpose of closing the US bases or removing them from Okinawa as soon as possible. Their stern protest is probably beyond the comprehension of most Americans, since military bases mean economic resources providing jobs in neighboring communities. To understand Okinawan's wishes, one needs to first understand the contemporary history of Okinawa since the US military forces landed on the islands in April in 1945.

The Okinawa Islands are located in the East China Sea, surrounded by neighboring islands of

Taiwan, China, Korea, Japan and the Philippines. Okinawa used to be a kingdom called Ryukyu Kingdom from the 14th century to 19th century and had been flourishing as a place for transit trade for a couple of centuries. The people at this time identified themselves as Ryukyuan. In 1609, the kingdom was invaded by a Japanese clan, *Satsuma*, and had been controlled by the clan until 1872 when the kingdom was forcibly abolished and annexed to Japan. In the Ryukyu kingdom era, the disarmament of the general public was carried out to prevent domestic uprisings; in response karate, a famous Okinawan martial art, was developed. Probably due to long periods of peace—except a few minor uprisings and the Satsuma Invasion

– Ryukyuan became non-violent and amicable. In a very famous episode, a Scottish sailor/travel writer, Basil Hall (1788-1844), astounded Napoleon I in exile on St. Helena by telling him that there existed a kingdom in East Asia in the Pacific that possessed no weapons. Hall wrote the book entitled *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea, and the Great Loo-Choo Island* (1818).

In any event, after its annexation to Japan, the Japanese government took measures to Japanize Okinawans by discontinuing use of Okinawan languages and customs. During WWII, the US military troops landed on the Okinawan Islands and fought against the Imperial Army of Japan for almost three months in 1945. After the fierce and bitter ground warfare on the Okinawan Islands, which inflicted heavy casualties on both sides, US military organization, separating Okinawa from Japan, governed the islands for military purposes for 27 years until 1972 when it reverted to Japan. During the US occupation era, Okinawans suffered a number of issues derived from the US military presence: the human rights of local Okinawans were frequently violated because the US military government always put a top priority on military-related issues over anything else. Crimes committed by the US military

personnel were in most cases not prosecuted, or cases were often dropped. In court, most American suspects were found not guilty. Furthermore, incidents during military training frequently occurred. In this way, local people had to live with danger, and were often struggling with poverty.

Currently, the US military facilities occupy nearly 20% of the Okinawan Islands, nearly 70% of the entire US military facilities in all of Japan. Many Okinawans, feeling this to be an unfair burden, have come to observe that the US bases impede the economic development of Okinawan communities rather than contributing to them as is widely believed. For the last 20 years, the tourist industry has been the biggest revenue earner for the gross prefectural income, more than twice the US military-related income. Therefore, some Okinawans—because Okinawa has the highest unemployment rate and overall the lowest per capita income in Japan—hope to establish economic autonomy by making better use of the military-base land, to fuel economic growth for all Okinawans.

The most immediate problem is the construction of new heliports/runways for the US Marine Corps in Henoko (Camp Schwab) in the northern part of the Okinawan mainland in exchange for closure of the Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma. The relocation plan involves the reclamation of the foreshore of Henoko, where an endangered species, the dugong, live. Most Okinawans are now strongly opposed to the construction plan since they are concerned that, once they are built, the US will use these brand new facilities for more than 50 years. The completion of the new base will go against many Okinawans' wishes and hopes for a reduction of the US military presence.

My primary concern in this paper is, how the American literary scene has dealt with Okinawa whose society and people have greatly been influenced by US military culture for over

the past 70 years. Okinawans have been exposed to American culture for better or worse and even created new cultural forms by mixing Okinawan and American cultures. How about Americans? Has Okinawa culturally influenced American people to any degree?

In this paper, I would like to discuss three American novels set on Okinawa under the US occupation, all written by American authors. Vern Sneider wrote two books, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1951) and *The King from Ashtabula* (1960). E. A. Cooper, on the other hand, published the book, *B. C. Street* in 2007. Both authors actually lived in the Okinawan Islands, and both engaged in military operations during WWII and the Vietnam War respectively. I would like to explore how these American authors depicted Okinawa and Okinawans in their fictional stories and what motivated them to write Okinawa stories, focusing upon a disproportionate relationship between the US and Okinawa.

1

***The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1951 Vern Sneider)**

Vern Sneider's first novel, *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, is the most famous story about Okinawa chiefly because it was eventually adapted into a play by playwright, John Patrick, and later became a film in which Marlon Brando starred as yellow-faced Okinawan interpreter, Sakini. Both the play on Broadway and the Hollywood film became critically and commercially successful in the US and Japan. In particular, the Broadway play won the triple crowns (Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Tony Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award) in 1954. However, not enough academic attention has been paid to the original novel. With the advent of gender studies and postcolonial studies, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* has, albeit gradually, attracted more attention among academic fields. Attention from critical papers deals more with Patrick's

adaptation than Sneider's original narrative, which I firmly believe deserves more critical attention for its serious subject matter. According to a postmodernist scholar, Larry McCaffery, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* was a pioneering work which the readers could not appreciate accurately and properly:

Sneider had been grappling with many of the same formal problems and thematic concerns that we find not just in Heller and Vonnegut, but in many other "postmodernist" authors from the 60s and 70s. I would argue, then, that one of the reasons for the critical neglect of *The Teahouse of the August Moon* is a lack of context—that is, despite being a relative commercial success when it appeared, readers and critics simply didn't have the proper critical framework, or vocabulary, to recognize and respond to what Sneider had accomplished; instead, more reviewers at the time predictably fell back into formulaic descriptions of the novel—most commonly some variation of the notion that the novel was a "warm-hearted, often uproarious, gentle satire."

Reading *Teahouse* today, however—in the aftermath of not just [Joseph] Heller and [Kurt] Vonnegut, but also of absurdist theater and black humor, of *M.A.S.H* (both the Altman film and the television series), of Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, of the rise of fabulism, magical realism, fantasy and other postmodern formal methods that critiqued, debunked, and also expanded our notions of traditional "realism"—it seems obvious that while the term "gentle satire" no doubt applies to the film and theater versions of *Teahouse*, it most definitely doesn't do justice to Sneider's novel.

(McCaffery p.3)

In writing the novel based on his own experiences in the Okinawa Islands, Sneider used his artistic freedom to envisage his fictional world. His first novel happened to be a very novel narrative that preceded black-humored stories such as Heller's *Catch 22* and Altman's *M.A.S.H.*

I contend that the adaptation had greatly influenced academic evaluation of the novel: its huge success made people assume that the original novel was fundamentally the same as the adaptation without actually reading it. I would like to make it clear here that they are significantly different from each other for a number of the reasons. For instance, in the novel, the protagonist is an American, Captain Jeff Fisby, while, in the play, Sakini, a shrewd Okinawan interpreter, is the main character. Captain Fisby is given two geisha girls as presents in the original, but only one geisha appears in the play. In the novel, there is no love romance between Fisby and the Geisha girls at all (instead he makes an effort to bring about a marriage between an Okinawan man and one of two geisha girls called the First Flower) while in both the play and film, a geisha girl, Lotus Blossom, eventually cares for Captain Fisby honestly enough to wish to marry him. Sneider described how Captain Fisby works hard for the economic development of Tobiki village by promoting a teahouse business, managing to persuade his boss, Colonel Purdy, to understand his project by the end of the story. On the contrary, Patrick described Purdy becoming myopically furious as Fisby allows locals to build a teahouse instead of a pentagon-shaped school to teach American democracy. He orders Fisby to destroy the teahouse and a brewery that produces sweet potato brandy, jumping to the conclusion that they are both immoral.

Sneider was initially unhappy with Patrick's farcical adaptation; Nicholas Evan Sarantakes points out:

Vern Sneider, however, was not laughing, registering his displeasure with the stage adaptation of his story. Patrick had diluted the original message of *Teahouse* and replaced it with another one. That the novelist was upset annoyed Patrick.... Patrick mentioned himself " Vern Sneider,... was quite unhappy about the liberties I took.... But I should think a quarter of a million dollars in royalties since would have calmed him in some degree." (Sarantakes p.165)

Although the novel might be light reading depicting US military troops whose mission was to reconstruct the devastated communities on the Okinawan Islands without mentioning the Battle of Okinawa, the author had a certain message for the US military organization. Sneider's article on *New York Times* at the opening of the play on Broadway explains what his message was intended to do:

Actually, "The Teahouse of the August Moon" contains two stories, but only one story is told directly. That is the surface story which shows the trials and tribulations of Captain Jeff Fisby in Tobiki village, Okinawa. Perhaps it is foolery, or fantasy, call it what you wish.... However, underlying this surface story is another one, never told but rather implied.... It is somewhat difficult to explain the under story. Ultimately, it is an expression of certain ideas. One such idea being that people, the world over, are basically the same in their wants and desires, but often we are confused by the externals.... The Japanese might want his *miso* soup for breakfast; the Korean might want his pickles, called *kimchi*, and the American might want his ham and eggs. Yet basically they all want the same thing -- namely, breakfast. Consequently, should the occasion arise (and I hope that it doesn't), still, perhaps the

“The Teahouse of the August Moon” might be of benefit to some United States Military Government officer, somewhere, sometime. Perhaps it might show him that if he looks to the wants of the people under him, then tries to satisfy those wants, he will have very little need for barbed wire and guards armed with rifles. (Sneider “Below the Teahouse”)

Sneider embellished his first story with a serious message: the message that the US occupation policy will not go well unless you listen to local people explain what they want for themselves instead of imposing American values on them. Most importantly, you must pay a sincere respect to their local culture and customs, no matter how different they are from those of America. Sneider created the fiction in order to satirize the US military control over Okinawans in the late 1940s. Danielle Glassmeyer sums up the very essence of Sneider’s meaning, in his fanciful narrative set on the war-torn island:

While the novel does not directly represent to readers the chaotic violence and loss of life that the caves signal, their presence in the novel, like Fisby’s decision to support the Tobikans rather than to lead them, shows Sneider’s effort to honor the people of Okinawa and their suffering. Giving readers enough information to allow them to ask questions about the novel’s backstory is part of the novel’s conviction that one “ought to try making up for some things”—that Americans have a responsibility to the people of Okinawa, to help them to fulfill their own hopes and dreams. (Glassmeyer p.419)

Sneider’s contention was that the US military occupation forces will more effectively operate in governing foreign lands by satisfying these natives’ desire rather than by simply imposing on them

American ideas and values which they believe are superior to local ones.

The satirical story evolves from the two Geisha girls and the teahouse in an Okinawan village: the geisha and the teahouse function to mar what American values represent. By and large, they were mistakenly associated with prostitution to many Americans in those days. In the play, the US military government planned to build pentagon-shaped schools so as to spread American democracy all over the Okinawan Islands in opposition to both the imperial system of Japan and the expansion of communism in East Asia. If Americans were proud of educating Asians about American democracy, the teahouse with a geisha business must have been extremely offensive to the American public because it represents prostitution and alcohol to Westerners. I think Sneider suspected that the teahouse is more appropriate to Okinawan culture than a school to teach American democracy since democracy was a new idea to them.

The idea of giving people what they want rather than imposing American ideologies on Okinawans was inspired by Sneider’s favorite novel, *A Bell for Adano* (1944), written by John Hersey. The story is set in Italy after the Italian army’s surrender in 1943 and describes locals’ desire for their historic bell which has been considered the community’s moral and cultural symbol. Such a desire was, however, completely beyond comprehension of the US military occupation forces. Sneider learned from this novel how essential it can be to meet the demands of local people, no matter how silly, trivial or impractical it may seem. On the other hand, he also perceived a similar idea from an elderly Okinawan, Kamato Nakasone, whom he met while working as a commander in Tobaru village. The old man had been in Hawaii and was helping Sneider rebuild the village. One evening, they sat smoking:

I [Sneider] felt the case was hopeless.

“You sad, Boss?” Nakasone asked.

Sad? I hadn't thought of it that way. “Not exactly,” I said, and added what he had told me earlier, “I'm not making Tobaru a good place for all the people.”

“Why do you feel that way, boss?”

“Well, look. Here we have five thousand people living in 108 houses. That's not good.” “No good” Nakasone agreed.

“The people have no clothing. Only what they have on their backs.”

“Yes, boss.” Nakasone nodded. “And maybe people don't care if tomorrow or the next day come.”

“Maybe,” I said, and we were silent. But after a few moments Nakasone began to smile.

“Boss,” he began slowly, “what would make you happy, besides making Tobaru good?” “To go home again,” I said.

“Then what?”

“Maybe to do what I always wanted to do— write stories for a living.”

“Well, boss,” Nakasone's old face was solemn.

“People of Tobaru are just like you. They want things, too.”

“I guess everyone wants things,” I said. “Yes, boss. And when people got some of the things they want, then they're happy.

Then they care if tomorrow comes.”

It struck me for the first time that perhaps here was the key to many things.

(Sneider Unpublished Draft “My Most Unforgettable Character”)

Greatly inspired by Hersey's novel, Sneider decided to employ an episode of Geisha girls which he had heard about while serving on Okinawa in 1945, and so he fabricated the teahouse narrative. He created a teahouse as a symbol of Okinawan culture and spirit, cleverly juxtaposing it with a Pentagon-

shaped school building. Right after Battle of Okinawa during which almost everything was burnt to the ground, Okinawa required some kind of hope for the future. Education was crucial for postwar Okinawan society, and he actually built a school and taught the local children in Tobaru village. But in his creative fiction, Sneider focused upon building the teahouse, which represents his gentle sarcasm about the way the US military government administrated Okinawa: it can serve as the most extreme symbol that he could imagine in order to advocate his theory of respecting different cultures and of preventing the imposition of American values on local people for a more effective administration on both sides.

Sneider also learned something else from the Okinawans in Tobaru village. For the postwar reconstruction of the economy in Tobaru village, villagers managed to produce sweet potato brandy to sell to the US soldiers. However, his stubborn boss ordered the distillery to be demolished because the boss regarded it as nothing but immoral:

The orders were direct. We were told that our stills would be destroyed, and they were. Well, our world revolved around brandy. Brandy would get the things we needed for our people. And to destroy the stills -- I can't describe our reaction except to say that it was one of complete hatred for this man who commanded us. We were ashamed to face our people. We were ashamed to tell them what had to be done. Yet this was an order, so we did. Perhaps we expected the people to also hate. But there happened one of the strangest things I have ever seen. The people bowed and whispered, ‘Shikata ga nai’... “It can't be helped.” It can't be helped—for the first time we realized something we had never realized before. We realized what it was to accept. (Sneider Unpublished Draft “Untitled Speech Draft”)

Sneider was impressed with Okinawans' "graceful acceptance" of unexpected misfortune. He must have felt that their capability of accepting circumstances was essential for survival in greater misfortune like war. Whereas the above episode is not depicted in the original novel, Patrick's adaptation includes a similar kind of episode in which Captain Fisby succeeded in reconstructing village's economy by producing and selling the local brandy.

Sneider seemed to realize that emancipators are prone to end up turning into invaders. Furthermore, his artistry goes beyond a simple respect for different cultures: the story emphasizes how crucial it would be for US aid to reconstruct the communities devastated by the war, and especially for their economic autonomy. Captain Fisby often thinks to himself that the most significant thing the US could do to help native people support themselves is to help them to have economic sustainability. In this respect, Fisby can be identified with Sneider himself even though he once stated there was no model for Fisby's character. It is insufficient just to provide locals with food, clothes, shelter and ideology. The thesis he makes in this novel is that the US military organization must support local people sufficiently for their social development and economic prosperity insofar as they remain to use foreign lands.²

***The King from Ashtabula* (1960 Vern Sneider)**

In his second Okinawa novel, *The King from Ashtabula* (1960), Sneider depicted the US occupation authorities as being overconfident of superiority of American democracy and values, which the locals refuse. Instead, they choose to restore a monarchial system by local referendum, which disturbs the US authorities enormously. Because they do not comprehend what local people desire at all, they are extremely apprehensive of the worst scenario: the locals eventually end up

establishing a socialist or communist regime which can never happen on the regions occupied by the US. Hence, it can be said that "As with *Teahouse*, Sneider's intention to portray U.S. occupiers as myopic was transparent" (Sarantakes p. 179). I argue that Sneider's criticism

against the US military occupation forces in Asia becomes much keener and more intense than that in *The Teahouse*. The story is set on some fictional islands, the "Nakashima Islands," but their culture, customs and history are undoubtedly based on those of Okinawa. For instance, the Nakashima Islands are 15 spreading dots of Islands that are located between Japan and Taiwan; people speak Japanese, wear banana-cloth clothes and tattoo in women's hands, grow sweet potatoes, operate mutual loan societies to support each other financially, develop the hog raising industry, produce hard liquor (*Awamori*) and live in red-roofed houses. Furthermore, place names and people sound Okinawan: Little Koza, Tamabaru, Tobaru, Tamagusuku Castle, Kunigami Square, Tatami Oshima, Takamini, Maebaru, Takaesu,

Goya, Nakasone, Nakamura, Shiroma. The islands' history is also very similar to that of Okinawa: once an ancient kingdom established originally by King Satto and King Eiso -the names of legendary kings in Okinawan history. In addition, the islands have a colonial legacy over three centuries

(invaded by Japan and controlled by China) like Okinawa. Since the Second World War, the US military administration has controlled the Nakashima Islands using currency system eligible exclusively on the Nakashima Islands and sends young islanders to US colleges as human resource development. From the above instances of Okinawa-related names or customs, it is evident that the Okinawan materials which Sneider knew at first hand and later researched greatly influenced Sneider's central conception in creating *The King from Ashtabula*.

It is worth investigating the reason why

Sneider decided to create another Okinawa story. The story is set in the late 1950s or in the early 1960s when the US military occupation was in full swing, following the 1949 Chinese revolution and Korean War (1950-1953). The US government had come to realize that Okinawa, like Guam, is a keystone in the Pacific in order to prevent further communist expansion in East Asia. In those days, Okinawa sank into oblivion, losing the status of nation and belonging to no country. Internationally, Okinawa was in limbo since it was not regarded as a country or nation. More importantly, Okinawa remained a “constitutionless” region where the US military high commissioner had the right to control Okinawan society as if he were a king or emperor. To exploit it for military facilities, it was (and is) impossible for the US to allow Okinawa to be independent as a nation since that could possibly mean that the US might lose its total control over Okinawa. In the 1950s, the US control over the islands was tremendous: even though the US made great efforts for the reconstruction of Okinawan society, Okinawan people were struggling with constant poverty, living under an undemocratic administration that always granted priority to the military over society.

It is important to note that Sneider never denied the US involvement in assisting people in the foreign regions in which US military troops are stationed. He has never said that the US military organization should leave Okinawa for the sake of Okinawans. On the contrary, he seemed to convince himself that the US must commit itself to

(re)constructing poor societies such as Okinawa, Korea and Taiwan. (In his second novel set on Taiwan, *A Pail of the Oysters*, a Taiwanese character admits to an American journalist, who is the protagonist of the story, that the Taiwanese people desperately need US aid for the reconstruction of Taiwanese society after Japanese colonial control and during the KMT’s

oppressive control since 1945). He describes not merely what local people wanted but also what made their society better in cooperation with US organizations. Despite his fantastic/unrealistic description of the Nakashima Islands, the narrative reveals that Sneider was seriously invested in converting primitive societies into modern ones. He was capable of offering his own ideas for improving economic conditions in poverty-stricken areas such as Okinawa. In her review of *The King from Ashtabula*, entitled “Another ‘Teahouse’” Jacqueline Lewin praises Sneider’s capacities and novelty as fiction writer highly:

And it is to the author’s great credit that he manages to use as much sense as humor, and considerably more logic than coincidence to solve the seemingly insurmountable problems. The U.S. Government comes in for its conventional share of ribbing, and perhaps the well-meaning but bungling general has become too much a stock character these days, but the other characters and the plot itself contain enough originality to overcome these faults. (Lewin A 63)

His main objective in this novel is to offer a way of decolonizing once-colonized regions by suggesting that the US aid is realistically indispensable for their postwar rehabilitation. In a way, this decolonizing text can be a friendly, but earnest, warning to the government not to be an “invading colonizer.” Instead the US should be a “democratic emancipator” as the US government kept proudly insisting to the international community. As in *The Teahouse*, in this novel, natives are depicted as friendly, benign, passive, peace-loving and hard-working: a positive stereotype for the noble savage in the South Pacific. At the same time, most of the ancient, Oriental customs and wisdom are basically unheard of to American officers. Sneider used those ancient wisdom and philosophy

to satirize American ideology more intensely in this novel than in his first novel. For instance, the local people in the Nakashima Islands voted for the restoration of a monarchy instead of the democracy all the American officers had hoped for. Here American democracy is put to the test to see if it is truly democratic enough to allow the natives to choose an undemocratic political system such as monarchy, socialism or communism. The teahouse with geisha girls in business is juxtaposed with US military organization, embodying an anti-establishment that threatens law and order under the US occupation. Likewise, monarchy is surely juxtaposed with American democracy, as signifying the ultimate anti-American ideology. Sneider dared to pose the most inconceivable question to American readers in the anti-communist trend of the times.

For this reason, *The King from Ashtabula* must be a difficult text for many American readers. They could purely enjoy reading *The Teahouse of the August Moon* whose exotic oriental culture inspires the American erotic/sexual imagination. Sneider's intention is clear: different cultures should be respected and not misjudged from an American perspective. His second Okinawa novel implies that the US military system cannot be democratic enough to be supported by the local people unless the US sincerely assists those locals in improving their economic condition without abusing Okinawan society and violating human rights for the US national good. Sneider was fully aware of what he intended when he continued writing on a foreign subject: Sneider "attempt (s) to get across the point that our [the US] foreign aid programs are not reaching the people for whom they are intended.... We are going to have to figure out how to meet these people in terms of their own customs and religion, rather than ours.

(Cook, Section D). In his review of *The King from Ashtabula*, P. Hass emphasizes the very point Sneider intends to make in this happy, comical

narrative:

Sneider has created a happy gallery of characters from Kenji's wise old grandmother to health-foods-happy Scheick, from sergeants suddenly elevated to generals to bewildered spud-growers become dukes. All of it is fun and all of it still deadly serious. The point it makes, with very great charm, is the point made in "The Ugly America" that you fit the aid to the people, not the people to the aid. Who knows? Perhaps in time Washington will catch on. (Hass, D1)

It is extremely unfortunate for Okinawans that Washington has never caught on. Since Sneider had a humane motive in writing his fiction, no one can accurately appreciate his stories about Asia without seeing it.³

B.C. Street (E. A. Cooper 2007)

Unlike Sneider's "unrealistic" stories, *B.C. Street* is a true-to-life story about 1960s Okinawa as E. A. Cooper aimed to write it. He was stationed on Okinawa between 1961-1963 before he was sent to Vietnam. After his retirement from the US Marine Corps in 1965, he went to university with GI Bill support, majoring in journalism, and then earned a Ph. D in adult education.

B.C. Street is predicated primarily upon his own Okinawa experience although it is clear that Cooper carried out thorough research into Okinawan culture, customs, history and society in order to help in the writing of his novel. (His commitment to his story's authenticity is probably the most evident in using Okinawan proverbs as epigraphs for many chapters in the book.) In this respect, this story can function as travel writing with an element of reportage of 1960s Okinawa, making ex-soldiers stationed in Okinawa like Cooper recollect vividly the scenes and events they saw while stationed in Okinawa.

Its plot can be roughly divided into two sections: the first half is mainly about a romance between the protagonist, Timothy Cole (a US Marine) and an Okinawan girl, Kimiko, who works in a bar on B.C. Street in Koza city. The second half is concerned with Cole's anti-US military sentiment. Cole is a very sensitive, considerate and innocent 19-year-old high school graduate who sees the world outside of the US for the first time. His innocence and sensitivity help him notice the unfair treatment of Okinawans under the US military rule. In particular, he is indignant at the US personnel's abuse of Okinawan girls. While there are some American soldiers who marry Okinawan women, others do not sincerely love their Okinawan girlfriends. The girls and women on B.C. Street are prostitutes or hostesses in bars who make a living by entertaining American GIs. A young hostess, Kimiko, genuinely cares for Cole but eventually decides to marry an older soldier in the Air Force whom she had met before Cole. Her choice is mainly because her marriage with the richer Captain will enable her to take her sickly parents to hospital. The young Marine, obsessed with his unrequited love for Kimiko, begins expressing his anger at the way the US military government takes advantage of Okinawa. At last he reveals his indignant emotion to his boss, Tucker, out of sympathy for the Okinawan women in squalid working conditions around the military bases. At the moment of truth, Tucker is deeply sympathetic with him, leniently advising Cole that he work within the system in order to survive, solely because there is nothing they can do about it (Cooper 2015, pp. 141-142).

I must say that the US servicemen like Cole were extremely rare in the early 1960s⁴: American soldiers would try to enjoy their Okinawan life during their short stay and then be transferred to other bases or sent to Vietnam. In most cases, their Okinawan lives would simply be forgotten after they left the islands.⁵ Yet Cole takes a further

step to join Okinawan protesters in non-violent demonstration against the US bases, believing it is his "conscience that matters most" (p.136) even though he is not discharged from military service yet. Kimiko's uncle, Mr. Nakamura, who is a leader of the protesters and a karate instructor, is shot by a US soldier at the gate of the base during the demonstration. Both Cole and the soldier who shot Mr. Nakamura are immediately discharged from military service and sent to Guam at the close of the novel in order to conceal their actions which are an inconvenient truth to the US military government.

Cole's unprecedented action in joining Okinawan protesters reflects the author's anti-military attitude. The huge difference between what he had heard about US foreign aid and what he saw in Okinawa under the US control made Cooper realize the nature of the military system abroad. The American soldiers' personal abuse of Okinawan women is parallel to, or is an epitome of, the US military organization's abuse of the Okinawan islands. His concern is that the Okinawan islands will be disposable when they become useless to Washington just like Okinawan women become the same when the US soldiers leave Okinawa for good. In Cooper's sense, B.C. Street must have been an epitome of what Okinawa represented to American soldiers.⁶

Cooper also creates the Okinawan characters Snieder never created: he deconstructs positive stereotypes of Okinawans: local demonstrators like Mr. Nakamura come to think that they can no longer stand being abused by the US military forces. He says via Cole:

"Our presence is meant to send a message of defiance to the high commissioner and rid some Okinawans of their 'shikata ga nai' attitude."
 "I am sorry I don't understand the Japanese words."

“‘Shikata ga nai’ means ‘it can’t be helped.’ The defeatist phrase originated among Japanese during their occupation by U.

S. military. I don’t want Okinawans to feel that way. When they read about our demonstration in the newspapers and see us on television, I hope they will be encouraged to express their true feelings.”

“Your demonstration have all been peaceful. If Okinawans become bolder, do you expect it to stay that way?” Cole asked with a degree of concern.

“Cole-san, we Okinawans are non-violent, peace-loving people. I have taught my followers to observe the teaching of the ancient Tao Te Ching: ‘Yield and overcome; bend and be straight; empty the self and be full; wear out and be new; Yield and overcome. Be whole, and all thing come to you.’ The ancient words are still true today.”

(Cooper 2015, p.149)

Cooper might disagree with Sneider, who regarded Okinawans’ ‘it can’t be helped’ attitude as a noble virtue derived from Okinawan colonial history. That is, his message may imply the resistance Okinawans must expressly display to the US military presence in order to maintain their basic living conditions and human pride since the US military logic never prioritizes local issues over military operation.

Conclusion:

It is obvious that both Sneider and Cooper sympathize with Okinawans under US rule which so often violated their human rights, exploited their lands and used the labor force for military purposes. In this sense, their novels hold Okinawa as a space of what Marry Louise Pratt defines as “contact zone”:

the term “contact zone” which I use to refer

to the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.... The term “contact” foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective. (Pratt. p. 8)

It is worth remembering that these three novels written by Sneider and Cooper dig deeply down into minds of the colonized, Okinawans in their cases. It is manifest that the two authors fully understood the oppressive conditions, under which Okinawans and Asians in general were forced to live.

Furthermore, both authors seemed aware that the US military presence in Okinawa was not as beneficial to local Okinawans as the US military administrators and politicians maintained. Sneider suggested that aiding the friendly and gentle Okinawans should be an obligatory promise as long as the US military forces use the islands; while Cooper claims that American soldiers must not take advantage of Okinawans, women in particular, regarding them as nothing.

The major difference between their works is in the writing style they adopted when creating their Okinawa stories. Sneider used a fantasy style without mentioning any bloody combat scenes in *The Teahouse of the August Moon*. He did not mention military training, crimes the US personnel committed, or military-related accidents in *The King from Ashtabula*. Therefore, it is understandable that some readers say his fiction lacks reality. However, it is important to bear in mind the fact that he wrote a highly realistic political novel about Taiwan in the late 1940s, as I mentioned the above, his second novel, *A Pail of*

Oysters, after *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, in which the two main Taiwanese characters are killed under the KMT's oppressive control.

In contrast, Cooper wrote his fiction to be as realistic as he could just like a historical account because he feels it is useless not to reveal the actual circumstances Okinawa had to confront under the US occupation. His fiction asks American readers whether justice should be done to Okinawans who have hosted the US military on their soil for over 70 years. The difference between the authors may come from the difference between the wars they participated in: Sneider participated in the Army in WWII—a conflict which the US and their allies won—(according to his second wife Ms. June Sneider, he was proud of being in the US Army), while Cooper fought in the Vietnam War—a war that the US lost and that triggered the anti-Vietnam War campaign in the USA in the 1960s and 70s. On the other hand, Cooper was immensely skeptical about the US military system. To put it in another way, Sneider is an idealist for mutual understanding between two different cultural backgrounds, believing in the power of fictional narrative; Cooper is a hard-core realist for a course of action, believing in the power of journalistic responsibility / journalistic conscience⁷ like the late David Halberstam, a Pulitzer-Prize winner journalist, who was “foremost an ethical person, a no-nonsense reporter, and a brilliant interpreter of history” (Cooper 2007, p. ix).

All three “contact-zone” novels commonly demand sufficient financial/economic aid and reform of human conditions from the US government. In addition, *B. C. Street* vividly depicts (neo) colonial conditions under US military control. I believe the US military personnel who live in Okinawa should read these three stories if the US military organization intends to stay in Okinawa in the future. They must realize that giving a priority to military logic rather than local people's daily life will never enable Americans

to gain the understanding for the US military presence on Okinawa from the local Okinawan residents.

Notes

- 1) The first two decades of the 21st century saw the publication of several novels set on Okinawa by American authors: *Gift of a Blue Ball: A Path of a Fortune-teller in Okinawa*. (J. P. Tuthill Sr. 2007) *Katsuren: An Okinawa Love Story* (Celien Nisaragi 2009), *Okinawan Moon* (Arthur C. Oroz 2013), *Above the East China Sea* (Sarah Bird 2014), *Okinawa 9/11* (Carlene Sobrino Bonnivient 2014), *Wild Tales from the East: Okinawa Nights Memoir* (Christopher Brice 2014) and *A Destiny between Two Worlds* (Jacques L. Fuqua, Jr 2015). In this paper I decided to deal with three novels set on Okinawa exclusively during the US occupation era (1941-1972). There are American movies set on Okinawa which were produced: *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956), *Karate Kids II* (1986), *Cocktail Party* (2015) and *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016). In the American popular music field, Ry Cooder, an American rock guitarist, wrote the song called “Going back to Okinawa” and recorded it with an Okinawan musician, Shokichi Kina (1988). In the late 1960s and the early 70s, American soldiers loved to listen to an English song called “Road to Naminoue” (“Road to Naminewe” 1968) from Okinawan local radio station KSBK, which was written and recorded by a Canadian singer, Ronnie Fray. This song was then prohibited on the US military radios in Okinawa. For more information about this song, visit the website “Road to Naminoue” http://www.rememberin-gokinawa.com/pdf/road_to_naminoue.pdf.
- 2) For a closer analysis of *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, see my own Japanese paper “Vern Sneider’s *The Teahouse of the August Moon*: A Lesson Disregarded by the US Military Government” (2013).
- 3) For a closer analysis of *The King from Ashtabula*, see my own Japanese paper “*The King from Ashtabula*: Vern Sneider’s Second “Okinawa” Novel” (2017).

- 4) In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, as the Vietnam War was thrown into increasing confusion, there were some American soldiers who began to raise political voices. According to Yuichiro Onishi: “Some GIs stationed in Okinawa also stepped into the space of anti-imperialism because they had become repulsed by aggressive militarism and its manifestations in their daily lives. In particular, buoyed by the growing strength of the Black Power and the Third World liberation movements, Black GIs and some antiracist white GIs made this space of resistance productive by way of making connections between the Vietnam War, the violence of militarism, the ascent of neocolonialism, and the persistence of white racism at home and in the military. White feminists also made a critical inroad into this space by pointing out the problem of white heteropatriarchy” (Onishi pp. 141-142). In particular, black soldiers sympathized with the local Okinawans after the Koza riot, the largest rebellion against US domination in Okinawa on December 20, 1970, occurred: “Two days later, a group of Black GIs from the Kadena Air Base issued a dramatic appeal to express their solidarity with local people’s defiance against the US occupation authority. The statement was printed in both Japanese and English” (Onishi p.163).
- 5) In an interview with him at his home in September, 2015, Cooper told me that “I completely left the military behind when I was discharged [from the US Marine Corps] but Okinawa has remained in my heart” so that his unceasing concern for Okinawa led him to collect the materials about Okinawa and to complete his first novel, *B.C. Street* for self-publication. Cooper confessed that, although very conscious of the Okinawan conditions under the US occupation, he did not take any political action of protesting the US military presence or administration in Okinawa as Cole did at the end of the story.
- 6) B.C. Street might have been an epitome of the worst image of Okinawan conditions under the US occupation before its reversion to Japan. Therefore, it no longer exists. Almost right after the 1972 reversion,

“BC Street was renamed *Chou* [sic] (Peace) Park Avenue... in an effort to shed its rowdy image”

(Cooper 2015, 2).

- 7) Sneider seemed to believe that underprivileged regions such as Okinawa and Taiwan needed US financial support as long as the US wishes to appropriate their lands for military purposes. Yet I believe that he never expected the US military presence to remain on Okinawa for so many years. Cooper added “A Historical Epilogue” (Cooper 2015, pp. 169- 182) at the end of the book, which clearly shows his intention to report the contemporary history of Okinawan society and the long stay of the US military bases in Okinawa: “While it is unconventional to follow a work of fiction with a historical epilogue, the author wishes to leave the reader with an understanding that the misbehavior, mistreatment, and other abuses woven into B.C. Street mirror actual occurrences---a plight that in many respects continues to this day” (Cooper 2015, p.169). In an interview with him, he stated that the US military organizations should leave the communities whose local residents strenuously oppose the US military presence.

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沖縄人を見つめるアメリカ兵の視線 —沖縄を舞台にしたアメリカ小説における米軍占領—

渡久山 幸 功

要 約

米軍政府占領下時代（1945-1972）の沖縄を舞台にした小説をヴァーン・スナイダー（Vern Sneider）とE. A. クーパー（E. A. Cooper）が出版しているが、両者の物語のアプローチの仕方は対称的なほどに異なっている。スナイダーは、*The Teahouse of the August Moon*（1951）と*The King from Ashtabula*（1960）において、米軍統治下ではありえないような非現実的、空想的なストーリー展開を採用し、一方でクーパーは、*B.C. Street*（2007/2015）の中で1960年代前半の米軍基地周辺の沖縄社会をジャーナリズム的な写実的描写の手法を取り入れている。しかし、より重要なことは、彼らの物語には、在沖米軍政府への批判・風刺という観点を共有しているという事実である。沖縄滞在中に実際に会った沖縄人への共感・共鳴が、沖縄を舞台にした小説を書かせる動機となっているが、アメリカの価値観の押しつけや軍隊の論理で沖縄社会や沖縄の人々を乱用することアメリカ軍政府をアメリカ人の立場から批判している。米軍が東アジアの安全保障のために沖縄駐留を継続することが必要であるというのであれば、アメリカ人が、なぜ沖縄の反米軍基地運動が激しいのかを理解すること、及び、アメリカと沖縄の友好的で緊密な関係を築くこと、は必要不可欠であり、これらの「コンタクト・ゾーン」沖縄ストーリーは、被植民者（他者）と彼らの異文化を理解するための本質的なメッセージを内包している。