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Imagining the Space of Yonaguni Island
A Folkloric and Geopolitical Enquiry

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要旨

本研究では、与那国島に出現した地理的想像（geographical imaginations）、つまり人間が空間をどのように見て、表現し、あるいは解釈するのかということを調査する。次の二つの基本的な仮定をもって調査を行う。一つ目の仮定は、空間が同時に現実と想像であり、具体的と抽象の、物質的と比喩的なものであるということ。二つ目の仮定は、私たちが空間をどのように想像するかは、私たちが行動し、世界に関与する方法に影響を与え、これはひいては空間そのものを形成する力を持っている。これらの二つの仮定から三つの重要な帰結が導き出されるともいえる。(1) 空間は存在論的必然性ではなく、代わりに複数の、しばしば対照的な方法で想像することができる。(2) 特定の目的、目標、またはビジョンを追求するために空間を変更することは、建築、エンジニアリング、計画などを通じて、物質的にのみ行うことができるものではなく、議論的で創造的な試みでもある。(3) 空間は単に人間活動の背景であるだけでなく、人間の経験を理解し、形成するための有用なツールである。

本研究では、ケーススタディとして与那国島を選択することにより、より小規模で空間の問題を扱っている。しかし、与那国島の空間がどのように想像され、理解されるかによって、さまざまな可能性が生じる（または隠される）という前提は変わらない。与那国が何であるか、またはあるべきであるかという現在最も広まっている考えは、島の歴史に基づいていると言えるだろう。与那国は、1879年の建国以来ずっと日本の国家の一部であり、それに応じて、日本本土の観点から監視され、管理されてきた。東京の視点から与那国を見るとき、すぐに連想される空間属性は、遠隔性と孤立性に違いない。この研究の目的は、かつて与那国がどのような所であったのか、そしてそれから与那国がどのような可能性があるのかを尋ねることによって、与那国島の空間を想像する別の方法を調査することである。

与那国の地理的想像の分析のために選択された主要な資料は、1978年に与那国島民によって編纂された『与那国島の民話集』と、2005年3月に与那国町役場が発行した『与那国・自立へのビジョン』である。資料の分析は、定性的なアプローチに従う。つまり、テーマは、テキストの特徴から始まり、徐々により抽象的なカテゴリに向かって、ボトムアップから帰納的に展開される。選択された二つの資料は性質が非常に異なるため、同じ場

所の地理的想像が時間とともにどのように変化するかを見ることができるだけでなく、地理的想像が出現するさまざまな様式を明らかにすることができる。

本研究は、「序章」、「前提的考察・空間、島、琉球の複数概念化」、「民話のまとめ」、「民話のレンズを通した与那国の空間」（民話の分析）、「ビジョンのレンズを通した与那国の空間」（ビジョンの分析）、「結論」の6章に分けている。民話により、与那国は独自の世界として、またただ一つの参考点として機能する完全で多面的な所として浮かび上がってくる。民話の地理的想像は、島の固有の自然的特徴と地名の使用に大きく依存しており、空間的であり島の空間を活用する慣行、事件、社会的関係を通じて暗黙的に構成されているということが分析を通じて明らかになると思う。一方、ビジョンは与那国の特徴を理論的にイメージしなおそうとするものであり、それによって地理的想像の創造に明示的に関与しているともいえるでしょう。さらに、ビジョンは与那国の中にある空間だけに焦点を当てず、島と近隣の地域との関係に焦点を当てている。したがって、ビジョンの地理的想像は、島を中心とした観点を持ちながら、接触、接続、および相対的近接性という概念をよく使って、より広い世界の一部として与那国を構築する。

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1. Introduction: Why Space? A Task for the Imagination

This study investigates geographical imaginations, i.e., ways of imagining space, as they have emerged on Yonaguni Islands. Literature on space (and the related concepts of place and landscape) has underlined how space is not simply the backdrop for human activity, and therefore subordinate to time, but a useful tool to make sense of human experiences. It has been suggested that the focus of studies concerned with space should not only be on what space is (e.g., how it looks like), but rather consider also how space is constructed, used, and what space does to whom. This power that space exercises comes from the fact that, as Edward Soja put it, space “is simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical”¹. From these statements follows that modifying space in peruse of a specific purpose, goal or vision is not something that can be done solely materially, through architecture, engineering, planning, and the like, but it can also be a discursive and creative endeavor.

Our experience in the world is inherently spatial and, perhaps for this reason, our assumptions about space are usually taken for granted, expressed in implicit ways, and often not reflected upon at all. However, the way we think about space impacts the way in which we act in and engage with the world, and this in turn shapes space itself. The main proponent of this view in contemporary literature on space is Doreen Massey. In the introduction to her book *For Space*, an attempt to trace back our implicit understandings of space to their philosophical sources, she sustains this position by introducing three different ways of imagining space and their social and political implications. First, the space of the European *conquistadores*: a surface to be crossed, discovered, and conquered by an “active maker of history”² on which other people and cultures are placed, waiting to be conquered, deprived of their own historical trajectories. Then, the space of globalization: a space turned into time, in which places other than the neoliberal capitalist Global North are not acknowledged as different but conceived as behind in an “historical queue”³. Finally, the space of discourses of place, in which both issues of time and scale are condensed (place is usually made to evoke something ‘local’ and ‘past’, while space stands for ‘global’ and ‘contemporary’ or ‘future’⁴) and which offer a basis for

¹ Edward W. SOJA, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 65.

² Doreen MASSEY, *For Space*, London, SAGE Publications, 2005, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ John AGNEW, “Space: Place”, in Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston (Eds.), *Spaces of Geographical Thought: Deconstructing Human Geography’s Binaries*, London, SAGE Publications, 2005, pp. 81-96.

contrasting political endeavors: nationalism, on the one hand, and reclamation efforts by minorities, on the other⁵. These observations lead her to state that: “I have become convinced both that the implicit assumptions we make about space are important and that, maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently”⁶. To summarize Massey’s claim, depending on how we imagine space, it does something to us and, eventually, to other people who occupy it.

The present work deals with questions of space on a smaller scale and on less abstract terms by selecting the island of Yonaguni as a case study. However, the core assumption remains the same: depending on how the space of Yonaguni Island is envisioned and understood, different possibilities arise (or are concealed). The current most widespread idea of what Yonaguni is or ought to be is based in the history of the island. Yonaguni has been part of the Japanese state ever since its foundation in 1879. Accordingly, the vantage point from which Yonaguni has been and is observed and subsequently administered is that of the Japanese mainland. When looking at Yonaguni from the perspective of Tokyo, the spatial attributes immediately associated with it are those of remoteness and isolation. Undoubtedly, these conditions have an objective geographical basis (for example, the powerful Kuroshio current, which flows along the western shore of Yonaguni, has historically constituted a natural barrier and made travelling to and from Yonaguni challenging). However, when remoteness and isolation emerge as a consequence of placing Yonaguni in a hierarchical relation with a designated center of power and become political and cultural attributes instead of geographic ones, they start to be seen as problems. The purpose of this study is to investigate alternative ways of imagining the space of Yonaguni Island by asking both what Yonaguni once was and what it could be. Doing so requires taking a stance with regards to two different issues: (1) Acknowledging that space, and Yonaguni in the context of the present study, is not an ontological necessity. Instead, it can be imagined in multiple and contrasting ways. (2) Acknowledging that imagining is always done from somewhere. From this follows that looking for alternatives implies shifting positions and putting Yonaguni itself at the center.

Geographical imaginations⁷ can emerge in different ways. Let us consider again Massey’s examples of spatial imagining introduced above. In the first example, the space of Spanish colonialism,

⁵ MASSEY, *For Space*, cit., p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷ For the concept of ‘geographical imaginations’, I draw on the work of Paul Stock (2019). However, the use of the term in the present work is broader than in the work cited. Firstly, I employ it to refer to understandings of space that are mediated through practice. Secondly, I also use the term to refer to the ways in which space has been conceptualized in different academic disciplines, not only in geography. In Stock’s work, the adjective ‘geographical’ is used to expose

geographical imaginations do not emerge from an explicit engagement with space for the purpose of constructing or reconstructing it, nor from discourses explicitly related to space. Instead, they are the result of practices and processes which, by necessity, are spatial and make a use of space. In the case of *conquistadores*, it is the development of navigation technologies in the Spanish empire's mainland and the goal of territorial expansion for economic purposes which construct space as discoverable and conquerable surface. This example serves to illustrate what will here be termed implicit geographical imaginations, that is, understandings of space that are mediated through other practices and therefore not explicitly formulated or addressed. In other words, these practices are not oriented at constructing or modifying space itself; nevertheless, they happen in space and make use of space, thereby constructing it.

Assumptions about space are not only implicit. Sometimes, space is the very thing that triggers imagination and to which imagination is directed. This is the case of the various academic disciplines which engage with space on a theoretical level, thereby generating different explicit geographical imaginations. In this context, the expression refers to different conceptual frameworks that serve the purpose of structuring the way space is understood within a given discipline. These are etic conceptions of space which (as any theoretical concept) are born out a specific time and place. Explicitly engaging with imagining space, however, is not only a task for academia. For the purpose of his study on popular conceptions of Europe in Britain between 1760 and 1830, Paul Stock, drawing from the work of Christopher Apap, defines "geographical imagination" as "the ways that humans view, represent and interpret spaces both real and imagined"⁸. Using geography books targeted at the general public as his primary sources, Stock underlines that geographical imaginations "can incorporate both 'specific techniques of knowledge' – in other words, the conventions of disciplined thought – as well as informal 'modes of comprehension and experience' which form part of general mentalities in a given context"⁹. The latter are emic conceptions of space which can be found across time in all parts of the world. It is important to underline that neither is more real than the other: both

how the epistemological assumptions of geography as an academic discipline construct ideas about a particular space: Europe.

⁸ Christopher C. APAP, *The Genius of Place. The Geographical Imagination in the Early Republic*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2016, p. 3; cited in Paul STOCK, *Europe and the British Geographical Imagination, 1760-1830*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 4.

⁹ STOCK, *Europe and...*, cit., p. 4; quoting Stephen DANIELS, "Geographical Imagination", *Transactions in the Institute of British Geographers*, 36, 2, 2011, p. 183.

‘disciplined thought’ and ‘general mentalities’ constitute a lens through which to interpret the world, a filter that colors the physical features of space.

If we depart from the assumption that space is as much real as it is imagined, and that different imaginations (both explicit and implicit) entail different consequences, it becomes relevant to reflect on how a particular space has been imagined and what these imaginings have implied. Yonaguni Island, the case study of this thesis, can itself be imagined in a variety of ways. Based on the analysis of two different kinds of sources, folkloric and geopolitical accounts on Yonaguni, the aim of the present work is to expose explicit and implicit imaginaries of Yonaguni Island as space. It will do so by addressing the following research questions: (1) What factors contribute to the formation of these geographical imaginations? (2) What features of the space of Yonaguni Island emerge as meaningful in the construction of geographical imaginations? (3) Do these geographical imaginations resonate within those presented in Chapter 2 under the labels of ‘Space’, ‘Place’ and ‘Landscape’? If yes, with which ones and how?

The primary sources selected for the analysis are very different in nature. The first one is a collection of folktales compiled by Yonaguni islanders in 1978 that goes by the title *Yonagunijima no minwashū* 与那国島の民話集 (Yonaguni Island Folktales Collection)¹⁰. Even though the date of its publication and its title locate the collection firmly within the frame of the modern concept of ‘folklore’, the tales narrated within it offer a glimpse of Yonaguni in pre-modern times and are therefore a good point of departure for investigating the space of Yonaguni outside of modern discourses of remoteness. The second source of data is a document published by Yonaguni townhall in March 2005 and named “Yonaguni, Vision of Autonomy” (*Yonaguni · Jiritsu he no bijon* 与那国・自立へのビジョン)¹¹.

The Vision is an attempt to re-imagine Yonaguni as an island-space (both internally and with regard to the position of Yonaguni in East-Asia) as a way to confront a moment of crisis and stir a new

¹⁰ YONAGUNI Town Cultural Assets Research Committee *hen*, *Yonagunijima no minwashū* (Yonaguni Island folk tales collection), Yonaguni, Yonaguni Town Education Board, 1978.

与那国町文化財調査委員会編、『与那国島の民話集』、与那国町、与那国町教育委員会、1978年。

¹¹ COUNCIL for the Formulation and Promotion of Yonaguni Vision of Autonomy *hen*, *Yonaguni, jiritsu e no bijon – Jiritsu, jichi, kyōsei – Ajia o musubu kokkyō no shima Yonaguni* (Yonaguni, Vision of Autonomy – Autonomy, self-government, symbiosis – Yonaguni, the border island that links to Asia), Yonaguni, Yonaguni City Hall, 2005.

与那国・自立へのビジョン策定推進協議会編、『与那国・自立へのビジョン～自立・自治・共生～アジアと結ぶ国境の島 YONAGUNI』、与那国町、与那国町役場、2005年。

course. Contrary to the folktales, the Vision assumes Yonaguni remoteness as a starting point, to then proceed to re-imagine it in a way that is congenial to Yonaguni itself. Contrasting these two sources allows us not only to see how geographical imaginations in the same place can vary across time, but also to expose the different modalities in which geographical imaginations can emerge.

The analysis of the sources follows a qualitative approach. This implies that themes are developed inductively from the bottom up, starting from textual features and gradually proceeding toward more abstract categories. The interpretation of such themes takes a constructive epistemological stance, that is to say, it assumes that “texts do not simply *contain* meaning but are instead *rendered meaningful by the perspective and understanding of the reader* for specific purposes”¹². As a consequence, the researcher’s frame of reference makes a difference in the process of interpretation. I will refer to the evolving frames in the course of this thesis whenever necessity dictates it.

This thesis will be organized as follows. Chapter 2 exemplifies the concept of geographical imagination by focusing on particular instances thereof. I will first outline the two concepts of Place and Landscape, which have been powerful tools to shape geographical imaginations within academia. I will then turn to the way in which islands have been imagined and, based on the case of the Ryukyu Archipelago, consider how imaginations can be shaped by the act of naming. Through this analysis, the main characteristic of geographical imaginations will be highlighted: their plurality. This plurality is unsettling because it does not provide for a singular interpretative frame from which to approach the study of the space of Yonaguni Island. In fact, both in theoretical approaches to space and islands, and in the case of nomenclature for the Ryukyu Islands, plurality is so prominent a feature that any analysis can only offer an incomplete selection of the concepts available. Nevertheless, this selection also serves the purpose of having a repository of concepts from which to draw for contrasting the findings that will emerge during the analysis of the data. Chapter 2 also introduces preliminary information on the island of Yonaguni that will provide for some basic context of the material discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 center around the analysis of the Yonaguni Island Folktales Collection and the Vision of Autonomy, respectively. In Chapter 3, I will outline the plot of all the folktales contained in the abovementioned collection, so that the reader can refer directly to them during the analysis. Chapter 4 presents the bottom-up analysis of the content of the folktales, loosely organized around a re-interpretation of the three labels of location, locale, and sense of place. In

¹² James W. DRISKO and Tina MASCHI, *Content Analysis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 67 (emphasis in the original).

chapter 5, more contextual information on the geo-political history of the Ryukyus and of the island of Yonaguni are provided before turning to the situation in Yonaguni at the time of the publication of the Vision. I will then provide a summary of the contents of the document to which to refer during the analysis that follows. The sixth and concluding chapter draws on the considerations emerged during the analysis of the primary sources to address the three research questions introduced above.

2. Preliminary Considerations: Plural Conceptualization of Space, Islands and the Ryukyus

In the introductory chapter I used the label ‘explicit geographical imaginations’ to refer both to the different conceptual frameworks that serve the purpose of structuring the way in which space is understood within a given academic discipline, and to those conceptions of space that emerge informally and form part of general mentalities. Both instances of geographical imaginations are explicit in the sense that they are directed at space itself, or at particular spatial phenomena. In this section, I will explore three cases of explicit geographical imaginations, proceeding from general to particular (geographical imaginations can in fact manifest at different scales): (1) The concepts of Place and Landscape, (2) the concept of island, and (3) conceptions of Ryukyus and associated labels. At the end of this chapter, I will also introduce some basic information on Yonaguni Island in order to contextualize the materials analyzed in the chapter that follow.

2.1. Place and Landscape

Nested within the terms ‘Place’ and ‘Landscape’¹³ are multiple geographical imaginations that have changed across time. Imagining space as either Place or Landscape can therefore mean different things. This multiplicity of meaning contributes to the complexity of both concepts, but it is not the only factor involved. As Tim Creswell noted with regard to Place (the observation can be applied to Landscape, too), one of the main difficulties one has to confront when trying to grasp these concepts is that they refer both to an object in the world and to a way of looking at the world: “Looking at the world as a set of places [and landscapes] in some way separated from each other is both an act of defining what exists (ontology) and a particular way of seeing and knowing the world (epistemology)”¹⁴. The two actions are necessarily connected and theorizing about space involves both. Since the present work is concerned with geographical imaginations, it is important to be aware of this duality. Throughout this paragraph, I will introduce different understandings of Place and

¹³ The use of the words ‘place’ and ‘landscape’ poses various difficulties, especially because the two are not instances of specialized academic terminology but are widely used in everyday speech. For the purpose of this study, I will capitalize the words ‘Place’ and ‘Landscape’ whenever they are used to address a specific academic way of imagining space, such as in the case of present paragraph. The word ‘Space’, too, will be written with an initial capital letter when invoking to a particular geographical imagination, i.e., when the word is used to refer to a general, objective, and measurable entity in juxtaposition to the concept of Place, or to the Marxist conceptualization of space. In all other occasions, ‘place’, ‘landscape’, and ‘space’ will appear in lowercase.

¹⁴ Tim CRESSWELL, *Place. A Short Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 15.

Landscape by organizing the discussion around influential concepts that emerge as meaningful across various schools of thought. The following are not alternative approaches to the study of space that can be directly translated into a research method. By defining their object, they construct it in radically different ways and are therefore incommensurable. For this reason, the aim of the following section is not to offer a comprehensive overview of all the ways in which the study of space has been approached, to then select the one that is most compatible with the aims of this study and apply it to Yonaguni. This would in fact require me to make a decision about what space is (ontologically) and therefore contradict the premises of this theses. The following overview simply serves the purpose of exemplifying how space can radically change when imagined in different ways. I also seek to show that many of these differences are based on various developments that occurred within the disciplines that produced the concepts, and on different objectives that scholars sought to demonstrate.

Place 1: Meaning

Within the tradition of humanistic geography, the concept of Place has often been defined in opposition to the one of Space. Where Space is seen as something abstract or objective, Place is concrete, experienced, and subjective. The birth of this Space/Place opposition can be traced back to the developments that occurred within the field of geography after the 1970s. Interest in Place was in fact partially a reaction to the rise of the so called ‘spatial science’, which aimed at turning geography into a full-fledged scientific discipline in its own right by shifting its focus away from descriptions of regions towards the formulation of general scientific principles that could be applied anywhere¹⁵. In this context, “space was given the role of developing scientific law-like generalizations”, and, in order to attain this goal, “people had to be removed from the scene”¹⁶. To this dehumanization of Space followed attempts to re-humanize it that saw humanistic geographers converging around the concept of Place.

A fundamental contribution in this direction was given by geographer Yi-fu Tuan. In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, he explains the difference between Space and Place in the following terms:

“‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place’. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. [...] The ideas of ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for

¹⁵ Noel CASTREE, “Place: Connections and Boundaries in an Interdependent world”, in Nicholas Clifford et al. (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Geography*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2009, p. 157.

¹⁶ Tim CRESSWELL, *Place. A Short...*, cit., p. 19.

definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place”¹⁷.

In Tuan’s view, Place is a portion of space that has acquired meaning, therefore becoming intelligible and providing people with a sense of stability and security. The source of this meaning is experience. By pausing and experiencing, we can develop an attachment or ‘affective bond’ that turns objective Space into subjective Place. Tuan calls this bond “topophilia”. Creswell, on the other hand, refers to it as “the vertical axis of place”¹⁸, one which puts the focus on rootedness and belonging and on a “sense of depth and boundedness”¹⁹ that originates from being in that particular place as opposed to somewhere else. At a fundamental level, then, Place is a portion of Space which people have rendered meaningful by inhabiting it.

In Places, meaning is not only accumulated at the level of the individual but also at the level of the social; that is, meaning can be attached to Place either individually or collectively, and through various modalities or “place-making activities”²⁰. One of these modalities consists in acts of representation, which, in turn, can take the form of stories, poems, photographs, or paintings, but also of newspaper articles, maps, laws, and policies. Naming places can itself be considered an act of representation. The meaning thus originated becomes part of the represented Place itself, making it impossible to clearly distinguish between what a Place is and how it is represented. In this sense, “places are both represented [...] and are themselves representational”²¹. Place-making processes presuppose the material dimension of Place itself, to which meaning can be anchored and hence stabilized. This material dimension includes not only the objects that are fixed in a Place and constitute the setting of human actions, such as buildings, natural landmarks, or streets, but also the objects that pass through a Place temporarily, such as the products in a market²².

¹⁷ Yi-Fu TUAN, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 6.

¹⁸ Tim CRESSWELL, “Place”, in Roger Lee et. al. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Human Geography*, Volume 1, London, SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 12-13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰ Tim CRESSWELL, *Place. A Short...*, cit., p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Place 2: Gathering

Place can also be understood as a gathering of things, meanings, and events coming together in unique ways. This idea was at the core of regional geography or chorology, which focused on delineating the boundaries of regions based on specific characteristics, both environmental and human, detectable within a territory. According to this view, the earth was a mosaic of different regions (Places) that could be set apart from each other and the work of geographers consisted in individuating and describing in great detail the features of each specific region²³. A ‘region’, then, emerged when a set of patterns and continuities was interrupted, and discontinuity emerged. In other words, regional geographers were concerned with the study of difference. An influential figure in regional geography was Richard Hartshorne, according to whom geography was a synthetic and integrative discipline, because rather than focusing on one single factor and its evolution across time, its aim was to describe how multiple factors, both natural and human, came together to define a place as unique²⁴.

Overviews of the history of the concept of Place often start with presenting the work of Hartshorne²⁵, highlighting a certain continuity between regional geography and contemporary humanistic approaches to Place. However, two main differences set them apart. To start with, from the beginning in the 1970s, humanistic approaches to Place moved progressively away from the descriptive character of regional geography and its interest in particularity, in the direction of a more theoretically and philosophically informed approach to Place. Secondly, whereas regions can be seen as a relatively stable entity, contemporary approaches to Place put more emphasis on the process rather than on the results. In this sense, using the verb ‘gathering’ to describe Place suggests both “a horizontal action of drawing things from the outside”, constructing Place as an active agent and making it interconnected and open, and “a constant dynamic sense of things on the move”²⁶, moving the concept of Place beyond the static character of regions. The metaphor associated with this understanding of place is that of a loom in which different threads are weaved together to form a pattern, a texture²⁷. Another contemporary approach to Place that resonates within this metaphor is the one informed by assemblage theory. Similar to the metaphor of the loom, the concept of assemblage refers to “a unique

²³ CASTREE, “Place: Connections and Boundaries...”, cit., p. 156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Castree (2009: 155) and Cresswell (2004: 16 and 2014: 6).

²⁶ CRESSWELL, “Place”, cit., p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; citing Robert SACK, *A Geographical Guide to the Real and the Good*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 41 and Paul ADAMS, Steven HOELSCHER, and Karen TILL, *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. xiii.

whole ‘whose properties emerge from the interactions between the parts’²⁸ but it puts more emphasis on the unpredictability and contingent character of the gathering. To return to Creswell’s conceptualization of Place along axes, this understanding of Place can be seen as developing on a horizontal axis, highlighting the relational character of Places which “are produced through relations with multiple elsewheres”²⁹.

Place 3: Social relations

Humanistic geography was not the only school of thought which reacted to the spread of a ‘spatial science’. Starting from the 1970s, Marxist geographers, too, opposed it, basing their critique on the individuation of spatial manifestations of inequality, which both spatial scientists and humanistic geographers had until then failed to address. Marxist geographers also argued for stronger awareness of the political implications of geography, which, in the case of spatial science, had been hidden behind a claim of objectivity³⁰. To them, places were socially constructed, and at the basis of this construction were acts of exclusion³¹.

Parallel to these developments, Marxism-informed social theory was the first field outside of geography to incorporate notions of space and pave the way to the so-called Spatial Turn, “a reworking of the very notion and significance of spatiality to offer a perspective in which space is every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs, a view in which geography is not relegated to an afterthought of social relations but as intimately involved in their construction”³². In the classic works of Henri Lefebvre³³ and Edward Soja³⁴, Space is not given but produced, it is not the backdrop of social life but partakes in its construction and transformation, it is not neutral but power laden, and it is not only a material reality (“perceived Space” or “first Space”) but also, and at the same time, an official and discursively produced representation (“conceived Space” or “second Space”) and a product of lived experience and negotiation (“lived Space” or “third Space”). Despite

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7; citing Manuel DeLANDA, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 5.

²⁹ CRESSWELL, “Place”, cit., p. 13.

³⁰ CASTREE, “Place: Connections and Boundaries...”, cit., p. 158.

³¹ Tim CRESSWELL, *Place. A Short...*, cit., p. 26.

³² Barney WARF and Santa ARIAS (Eds.), *The Spatial Turn*, London, Routledge, 2009.

³³ Edward W. SOJA, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

³⁴ Henri LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1991.

their works employ the term 'space' rather than 'place', the Space they theorize about is as far from empty, abstract space as the Places studied by humanistic geographers.

Landscape 1: Images

Landscape, too, is a contested term. The difficulty in grasping what the term 'Landscape' refers to depends in part on the fact that it has been a central object of enquiry in a vast array of disciplines: from anthropology, sociolinguistics, human and cultural geography, to art history, photography, architecture, and urban design. Perhaps from its association with the latter cluster of fields stems an understanding of Landscape as a primarily visual object, the emergence of which is always secondary to a literal or metaphorical process of framing and presupposes the presence of an external gaze. This understanding of Landscape as image is further consolidated by the history of the word. The word 'landscape' is commonly said to have entered the English language from Dutch *landschap*, where it was used to designate a specific type of painting that became popular between the 17th and the 18th century. This interpretation of Landscape as 'view' exceeds the realm of artistic and visual disciplines and spills over into the various branches of geography that deal with the concept. In human and cultural geography, too, Landscape is understood as "a portion of the earth visible by an observer from a particular position or location"³⁵. Within this understanding of Landscape, geographers such as Carl Sauer emphasized the concrete morphology of the land, either natural or culturally produced³⁶.

However, human geographers also recognize that there are two different sides to 'the vision' of Landscape. Landscape is not only the view of a geographical fact taken in by the human eye, but it is also mediated by interpretation, resulting in representations: "[...] landscape always carries with it a set of 'representational practices'. These refer to how people see, interpret, and represent the world around them *as* landscape [...]"³⁷. Within this understanding of Landscape as a way of seeing and representing, as an image, two major lines of thought can be identified: the first is focused on the individual experience of the land, emphasizing emotions, feelings, and imagination as key features of Landscape (a somewhat romantic understanding of the concept); the second still understands Landscape as an image, but as one shaped by particular ideologies (see Cosgrove 1998). In this second

³⁵ Karen M. MORIN, "Landscape: Representing and Interpreting the World", in Nicholas Clifford et al. (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Geography*, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, 2009, p. 287.

³⁶ CRESSWELL, Tim, "Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice", in Kay Anderson et. al. (Eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, London, SAGE Publications, 2003, pp. 270.

³⁷ MORIN, "Landscape: Representing...", cit., p. 278.

case, the vision is not individual; instead, it is contextualized historically and socially³⁸. Furthermore, another layer is added to the relation between Landscape and representation: Landscape is not only a thing, or the representation of a thing. Landscape is the process by which land is made to represent, and therefore give stable form to and reproduce, “a set of lived relationships taking place on the ground”³⁹ (in Cosgrove’s classical work, feudalism and capitalism).

Landscape 2: Experience and Practice

The word Landscape is also used to connote the process of shaping the surface of the earth by living on it. This is an important connotation because it highlights the fact that Landscape is always constituted in relation to the people who inhabit it and cannot be reduced to the morphology of the land alone. People form part of Landscape and Landscape forms part of people. For this reason, the concept of Landscape has been useful to geographers, who’s discipline ultimately aims at bringing the human and the natural together⁴⁰. Again, the etymology of the word has been presented as an argument in favour of this understanding of Landscape. Anne Whiston Spirn traces the origin of the word back to the Old English *landscipe* (and its German and Danish equivalents *Landschaft* and *landskab*), in which the suffixes ‘-skab’, ‘-schaft’ and ‘-scipe’ mean both ‘to shape’ and, as in the English ‘-ship’, indicate a relation⁴¹. Kenneth Olwig develops this point further by introducing the word “landship” and suggesting that, similarly to words like friendship or citizenship, it refers to an abstract quality existing “between people living in a land, and that puts their material environment is a given *shape*”⁴². In other words, human relations are mediated (shaped) by the land, while at the same time shaping it. The result is Landscape.

Landscape-as-shaping considerations resonate in more recent studies on Landscape in anthropology. Inspired by archaeology and material culture studies, this view is present in the material approach to Landscape adopted by Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum in their ethnographic study of the Landscape of the Heathland, in south-west England. Within their study, Landscape is not understood as a way of representing things, the knowledge of which is best attained through the study of writings,

³⁸ CRESSWELL, “Landscape and...”, cit., p. 272.

³⁹ MORIN, “Landscape: Representing...”, cit., p. 278.

⁴⁰ John A. MATTHEWS and David T. HERBERT, *Geography. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.

⁴¹ Anne WHISTON SPIRN, “‘One with Nature’: Landscape, Language, Empathy, and Imagination” in Rachael DeLue and James Elkins (Eds.), *Landscape Theory*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 54.

⁴² Kenneth R. OLWIG, “The ‘Actual Landscape’ or Actual Landscapes”, in Rachael DeLue and James Elkins (Eds.), *Landscape Theory*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 163 (emphasis in the original).

maps, and photographs. Instead, they consider Landscape as a ‘thing’ which is part of a wider material culture and start from the premise that “persons and things are mutually constitutive”⁴³, that is, both sides are affected from their interaction. In their analysis, the relation between people and Landscape is of an embodied and practiced kind, rather than visual, and it is through material everyday practices that Landscape is experienced and moulded.

In this section I have presented different ways in which space has been imagined within the discipline of geography and other related fields. These different imaginations are summarized in the two words ‘Place’ and ‘Landscape’ but, as it has been shown, they are more multifaceted and complex. Imagining space as Place can mean putting emphasis on the static experience of inhabiting, or on the dynamic coming together of things in unique ways. It can mean to attend to subjective perceptions and experiences, or to wider social relations and their spatial manifestations. It can mean to see space as constituted by images or as constructed through practices. Similar oppositions can be found within the word ‘Landscape’, too, and highlight the fact that geographical imaginations are always multiple, and that space can be imagined in radically different ways. In the next paragraph, I will turn to the geographical imaginations associated to islands.

2.2. A Focus on Islands

Island Studies

Islands too, as particular instances of space, are both real and imagined. Even the uncontroversial definition of island (“a piece of land completely surrounded by water”⁴⁴) appears to be flawed when confronted with some geographical realities. Doubts emerge as to whether an island permanently linked to the mainland by infrastructures such as bridges or tunnels should still be considered an island; or whether Australia, with a surface of 7.692.000 square kilometers, fits into the category. These problems point to the fact that purely geographical criteria can fall short when it comes to univocally defining a space. They imply that there is something more to islands than the condition of “being surrounded by water”.

⁴³ Christopher TILLEY and Kate CAMERON-DAUM, *An Anthropology of Landscape. The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, London, UCL Press, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁴ “Island”, *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/island>, 24/05/2022.

The necessity of gaining more insights into what islands are and into the issues raised by the condition of islandness has given rise to the interdisciplinary field of island studies. As Godfrey Baldacchino, one of the leading theorist in the field and the founder of the *Island Studies Journal*, put it, “the core of ‘island studies’ is the constitution of ‘islandness’ and its possible or plausible influence and impact on ecology, human/species behavior and any of the areas handled by the traditional subject uni-disciplines (such as archeology, economics or literature), subject multi-disciplines (such as political economy or biogeography) or policy foci/issues (such as governance, social capital, waste disposal, language extinction and sustainable tourism)”⁴⁵. The nature of island studies is therefore twofold: on the one hand, it is concerned with theoretically delineating the original concept of islandness, i.e., what makes an island indeed ‘an island’. On the other hand, the attribute of islandness is interpreted through the epistemologies and methodologies of various academic disciplines. The term ‘islandness’ is preferred to the term ‘insularity’ as the latter has come to unintentionally connote “separation and backwardness”⁴⁶. This awareness highlights the critical character of the field of island studies, which urges for a theorization of islands from an island perspective (instead of a mainland perspective)⁴⁷. Today, the study of islands is supported by various international associations including the International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA) and the small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI), and by university research institutes such as the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island and the Center for Pacific Island Studies (CPIS) at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa.

In Japan, too, island studies have gained momentum in the past decades. Leading institutions and publications in the field include: the Research Center for the Pacific Islands (*Kokusai tōsho kyōiku kenkyū sentā* 国際島嶼教育研究センター) founded at Kagoshima University in 1980⁴⁸, which publishes the journal of *South Pacific Studies*; the Japan Society of Island Studies (*Nihon tōsho gakkai* 日本島嶼学会) founded in 1997, which publishes the *Journal of Island Studies*; the Research Institute for Island and Sustainability (*Tōsho chiiki kagaku kenkyūjo* 島嶼地域科学研究所) founded

⁴⁵ Godfrey BALDACCHINO, “Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal”, *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 1, 2006, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Godfrey BALDACCHINO, “The Coming of Age of Island Studies”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* [Journal of Economic and Human Geography], 95, 3, 2004, p. 1.

⁴⁷ BALDACCHINO, “Island, Island Studies...”, cit. p. 10.

⁴⁸ The center was originally named “Research Center for the Southern Regions” and evolved into the “Research Center for the South Pacific” in 1981. The current name was adopted in 1998.

in 2018⁴⁹ at the University of the Ryukyus, which publishes the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*. As clearly stated in the introductory remarks on the web page of each institution, Japanese scholars align to the international trend in putting emphasis on the multidisciplinary of the field of island studies (see for example the section “Objectives and Projects” on the Research Center for the Pacific Islands web page⁵⁰) and on the need of taking an “island-centered positionality”⁵¹.

Islandness or Island as Space

Since the present work is concerned with geographical imaginations as emerged on the island of Yonaguni, discussions of what constitute islandness (i.e., the first of the two sides of island studies as introduced above) are a productive starting point. Starting from a consideration of the role of water has proven fruitful in trying to define the characteristics of an island. Depending on whether the surrounding sea is seen as an obstacle or as a resource and an invitation to travel, the defining characteristic of islands has been identified either in their boundedness or in their connectedness, respectively. Both stances come with further implications that exceed the realm of geography.

Focusing on the boundedness of an island allows researchers to put emphasis on the sense of unity, shared identity, and attachment to place of those who inhabit it⁵². Geographical boundedness is equated with social boundedness and island becomes as an effect synonymous with community. The geographical boundedness-social boundedness equation is inherent in the word for ‘island’ used in Japanese and in Ryukyuan languages. In fact, the words *shima* in Japanese, *sima* in Okinawan and *chima* in Dunan (the language of Yonaguni, see the following paragraph) have a double meaning, referring both to ‘island’ as a geographical phenomenon and to ‘community’. Taking this one step further, Françoise Péron defined islands from an ethnographic rather than a geographical perspective, arguing that the ultimate attribute of an island is the “‘permanent consciousness’ of insularity”⁵³ shared by its inhabitants, which in turn nurtures a sense of community and belonging. This conception of island lends itself very well to be analyzed through the concept of place understood as a center

⁴⁹ The research institute was born as the International Institute of Okinawan Studies (*Kokusai Okinawa Kenkyūjo* 国際沖縄研究所) and expanded its scope in 2018 to include not only domestic but also international issues related to islands.

⁵⁰ “Research Center for the Pacific Islands”, <http://cpi.kagoshima-u.ac.jp/introduction/overview.html>, 31/05/2022.

⁵¹ “Research Institute for Islands and Sustainability”, <https://riis.skr.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/vision/>, 31/05/2022.

⁵² Stephen A. ROYLE and Laurie BRINKLOW, “Definitions and Typologies”, in Godfrey Baldacchino (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Island Studies*, London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 11-12.

⁵³ ROYLE and BRINKLOW, “Definitions and...”, cit., p. 10; quoting Françoise PÉRON, “The Contemporary Lure of the Island”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 95, 3, 2004, pp. 320-330.

meaning (one example is Hay, who argued in favor of applying the framework of place theory to island studies⁵⁴). Conversely, to conceive of island as a bounded space has at times also lead to an illusion of self-contained and fixed completeness, of closure. Under the effect of this illusion, an island can become a miniature of the ‘real’ world, easily controllable and “available in its eternity for collection and possession”⁵⁵. This imaginary has often translated in the phenomenon of the so-called island laboratories, by which islands become settings for scientists to test out more general hypothesis.

On the other hand, islands can also be imagined as connected. An important contribution in this direction in the discipline of island studies was given by Epeli Au‘Ofa, who in 1993 proposed to look at the region of the Pacific as “a sea of islands” rather than “islands in a far sea”. As he explains, “the first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power. When you focus this way you stress the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships”⁵⁶. He then exposes the consequences of both imaginaries, explaining how narratives centered on the remoteness of each Pacific Island contributed to relegate them to a subordinate and dependent position, economically and politically⁵⁷.

Islands are not only connected to each other but also to the sea. This is the main point made by Philip Hayward in formulating his concept of “aquapelago”. Where the term ‘archipelago’ puts emphasis on land masses, ‘aquapelago’ underlines that “the aquatic spaces between and around a group of islands are utilized and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group’s habitation of land and their sense of identity and belonging”⁵⁸. This definition not only expands the concept of island in a geographical sense, but posits that islands, rather than objective geographical spaces, are “socio-geographical spaces”⁵⁹ that come into being in the interactions of humans with the environment: islanders’ engagement with the sea produces aquapelagos and this same engagement defines them as a social group.

⁵⁴ Pete HAY, “A Phenomenology of Islands”, *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 1, 2006, pp. 19-42.

⁵⁵ Chris BALLARD and Nicola VAN DIJK, “The Perfect Island”, *Paradigm_shift: Perfection*, ANU College of Asia & The Pacific (Australian National University), 2019, p. 14. <https://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/node/18744>.

⁵⁶ HAU‘OFA, Epeli, “Our Sea of Islands”, in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu and Epeli Hau‘ofa (Eds.), *New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva, University of the South Pacific Press, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Philip HAYWARD, “Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages. Towards an integrated study of island societies and marine environments”, *Shima: International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 6, 2012, p. 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

That of boundedness/connectedness is not the only instance of island imaginary that presents itself in the form of a binary. Stephen A. Royle and Laurie Brinklow list a few more of such juxtapositions that they term “tropes of islandness”, including “dependency/autonomy, roots/routes, globalization/particularity, vulnerability/resilience”⁶⁰ and “insider/outsider dynamics”⁶¹. As the authors themselves state, these should not be seen as independent opposites but as ends of a continuum. Where the imaginary of a given island is located along this continuum depends of course on its geographical position (e.g., whether the island is part of a close-knitted archipelago or several kilometers away from its closest neighbor). However, they are also the result of political agendas (as in the abovementioned case of the Pacific) and these can change according to historical developments (e.g., the development of infrastructures and new means of communication), highlighting the fact that they are not always a geographical necessity. In the next paragraph, I will exemplify how geographical imaginations can be mediated through toponyms and geographical labels based on the case of the nomenclature revolving around the Ryukyu Islands.

2.3. Different Names for Different Imaginaries: Japanese Nomenclature for the Ryukyus

Nomenclature is part of each geographical imagination, and it therefore almost suggests itself as a means to exemplify their multiplicity and shifting character. In the case of Japanese, this observation holds true both for words for ‘archipelago’⁶², and for names given to the Ryukyus⁶³, the archipelago of which Yonaguni Island is part. In this paragraph, I will introduce the principal labels that have been applied to the Ryukyus, together with the associated connotations/imaginings. As Gregory Smits has observed, “there were many different Ryukyus throughout history”⁶⁴. In my view, his statement does not only refer to the Ryukyus as a political body (either a kingdom in pre-modern times, a prefecture after the creation of the modern Japanese state or an occupied territory after World War II), the borders of which changed as historical events unfolded. The Ryukyus change also according to how people look at them, and this not only influences but is at the same time influenced by the names they are given. In other words, the relation between imaginings and names is a

⁶⁰ ROYLE and BRINKLOW, “Definitions and...”, cit., p. 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁶² Philip Hayward (2012: 4) lists a few of the words used in the Japanese Language to refer to archipelagos, each with a slightly different connotation. In particular, he identifies the term *tatōkai* 多島海, literally ‘a sea with lots of islands’, as the closest one to the concept of aquapelago because it brings together in one word both terrestrial and aquatic spaces.

⁶³ In this section, I will use the English and general term ‘Ryukyus’ when the necessities of referring to the island without any specific connotation arises, so as not create any overlap with the terminology I am discussing.

⁶⁴ Gregory SMITS, *Maritime Ryukyu 1050-1650*, Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019, pp. 8-9.

reciprocal one, in which names do not only stand for a particular imagination but also have the power to “call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things”⁶⁵.

The geographical and most comprehensive term used to refer to this group of islands is ‘Ryukyu Archipelago’ (*Ryūkyū Rettō* 琉球列島). According to the *Okinawa Encyclopedia*, the Ryukyu Archipelago includes 146 islands stretching for a distance of 1200 km between the island of Kyushu in the north and the island of Taiwan in the south⁶⁶. These islands are divided into different sub-groups (see Figure 1): the Ōsumi Islands, the Tokara Islands, the Amami Islands, the Okinawa Islands, the Miyako Islands, and the Yaeyama Islands. Miyako and Yaeyama Islands are often referred to as *Sakishima* 先島. Since ‘Ryukyu Archipelago’ is an academic term used both in geography and in geology, individual islands in the region are included in this category based on geographical and geological criteria such as their relative location west of the Ryukyu Trench (*Ryūkyū Kaikō* 琉球海溝) and east of the Okinawa Trough (*Okinawa Torafu* 沖繩トラフ or *Okinawa Funabon* 沖繩舟盆), two geological formations of the Pacific Ocean. For this reason, the Senkaku and Daitō Islands are excluded⁶⁷. The term ‘Ryukyu Archipelago’ is roughly synonymous with the older label ‘Ryukyu Arch’ (*Ryūkyū-ko* 琉球弧), introduced with the advent of modern science in the late 19th century by the founder of Japanese geology Harada Toyokichi (the word is a calque of the German *Liukiu Bogen*)⁶⁸. Finally, the geographical term ‘Ryukyu Islands’ (*Ryūkyū Shotō* 琉球諸島) usually only includes the Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama Islands⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Yi-Fu TUAN, “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81, 4, 1991, p. 688.

⁶⁶ Okinawa Encyclopedia Publishing Office *hen*, “Ryūkyū rettō”, *Okinawa daihyakka jiten* (Okinawa Encyclopedia), vol. 3, Naha, Okinawa Times, 1983, p. 939.

沖繩大百科事典刊行事務局編、「琉球列島」、『沖繩大百科事典』、下巻、那覇市、沖繩タイムス、1983年、939.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Okinawa Encyclopedia Publishing Office *hen*, “Ryūkyū-ko”, *Okinawa daihyakka jiten* (Okinawa Encyclopedia), vol. 3, Naha, Okinawa Times, 1983, p. 869.

沖繩大百科事典刊行事務局編、「琉球弧」、『沖繩大百科事典』、下巻、那覇市、沖繩タイムス、1983年、869.

⁶⁹ Mamoru AKAMINE, *The Ryukyu Kingdom. Cornerstone of East Asia*, Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017, p. 1.

The geographical categorization does not entirely correspond to the administrative one. The modern administrative label applied to the same region is ‘Southwest Islands’ (*Nansei Shotō* 南西諸島) and it is used in official documents such as the official maps of Japan produced by the Geographical Survey Institute⁷⁰. It differs from the geographical label in that it includes the Daitō Islands⁷¹. Furthermore, today the Ryukyus are administratively divided between two Japanese prefectures: Ōsumi, Tokara and Amami Islands belong to Kagoshima Prefecture, whereas Okinawa, Daitō, Miyako and Yaeyama Islands are part of Okinawa Prefecture.

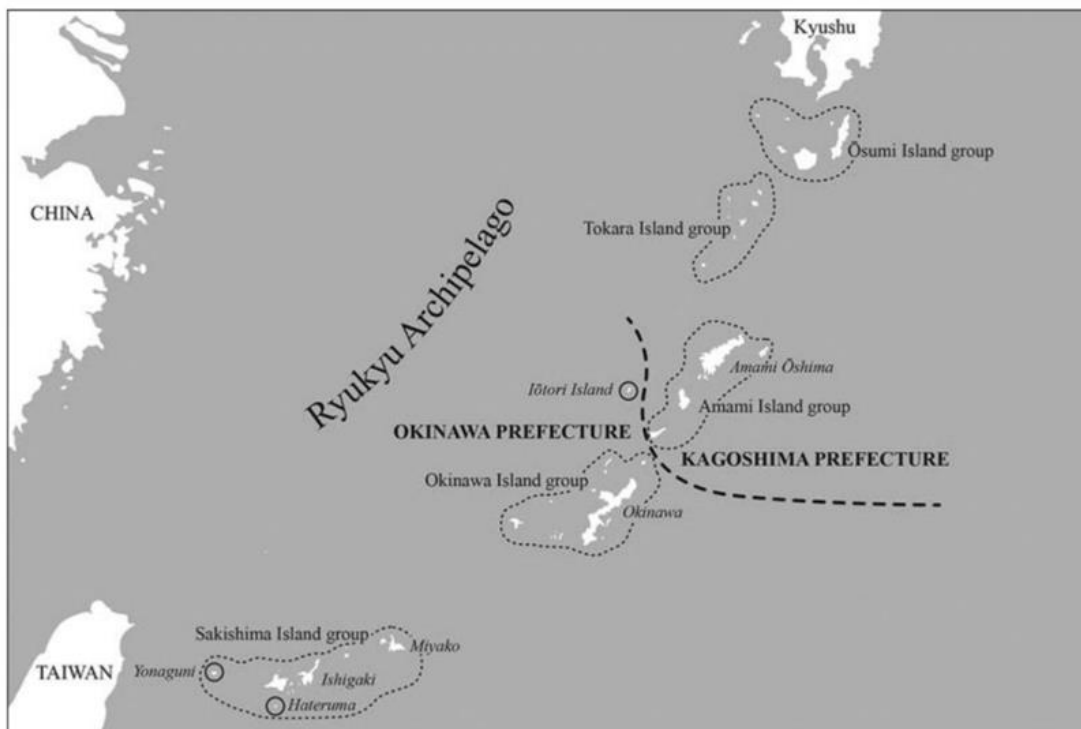


Figure 1: Ryukyu Archipelago

Even if the geographical and administrative labels presented above to identify the islands located in this region may seem fairly uncontroversial, they harbor further connotations. By analyzing such connotations, it becomes possible to see how the act of naming produces the Ryukyus not only as a geographical or administrative space, but also an ideological space which can be subject to

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Okinawa Encyclopedia Publishing Office *hen*, “Nansei shotō”, *Okinawa daihyakka jiten* (Okinawa Encyclopedia), vol. 3, 1983, p. 85.

沖縄大百科事典刊行事務局編、「南西諸島」、『沖縄大百科事典』、下巻、那覇市、沖縄タイムス、1983年、85.

contestation. One word that can exemplify this dynamic is the term ‘Ryukyu Arch’ (*Ryūkyū-ko* 琉球弧) introduced above with regards to its use in geography and geology. In the 1960s, this term was used for the first time by novelist Shimao Toshio with an ideological connotation to rethink the history of Japan and the role of the Ryukyus within it. According to Shimao, the standardization of Japan’s history and culture had always centered on Yamato, the Japanese mainland. As a consequence, the independent history and culture of the Ryukyus had been neglected. The idea condensed within his use of the term *Ryūkyū-ko* was that, by acknowledging the role of these islands, it would be possible to proceed towards the development of the spatially and temporally more comprehensive concept of “Japonesia” (instead of ‘Japan’). As an idea that encourages a fundamental reconsideration of the role of the Ryukyus by placing them at the center, it was a great stimulus during the heights of the movement to revert Okinawa⁷², which at the time was under American occupation, to Japan in the 1960s and 1970s⁷³.

The same kind of ideological implications can be detected in the names *Ryūkyū* and *Okinawa*. As evident in the discussion above, the former is mostly used in geographical labels, while the latter is the name of a prefecture, therefore having administrative purposes. However, at one point in history, the term *Ryūkyū* was also part of the name of a political entity, the Ryukyu Kingdom (*Ryūkyū Ōoku* 琉球王国). At the time of its greater expansion, the kingdom comprised the part of the Ryukyus stretching from Kikai Island (in the Amami island group) in the north to Yonaguni Island in the south. Centered in Shuri, on the main island of Okinawa, ever since the second half of the 14th century the kingdom played an important role in the East-Asia trade sphere. This trade zone revolved around the strict tribute system put in place by Ming China, within which the Ryukyu Kingdom had a preferential treatment⁷⁴. The kingdom lost its independence in 1609, when it was invaded by the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma domain, based on the island of Kyushu. Finally, in 1879 it was annexed to the modern Japanese state as Amami and Okinawa Prefectures. In light of this history, the name *Ryūkyū* has come to connote independence, constructing the Ryukyus as separate from Japan, while *Okinawa* (sometimes used to refer not only to the main island of Okinawa but to all the islands that fall within the Okinawa Prefecture) places them firmly within the Japanese state. This connotation was further reinforced during the years of American occupation (1945-1972), when, for obvious political reasons, all the institutions put in place by the U.S. carried the name Ryukyu (e.g., ‘United States Civil

⁷² The reversion of the Amami island group took place in 1953.

⁷³ Okinawa Encyclopedia Publishing Office, “Ryūkyū-ko...”, cit., p. 869.

⁷⁴ For further details on the role of the Ryukyu Kingdom in East-Asia, see Akamine (2017).

Administration of the Ryukyu Islands’, ‘Government of the Ryukyu Islands’, ‘Bank of the Ryukyus’, ‘University of the Ryukyus’).

Imaginations associated to the name *Ryūkyū* reach even deeper, going beyond territorial disputes between states and impinging on people’s lives. After the annexation in 1879, the inhabitants of the Ryukyus were forcefully assimilated into the Japanese state and made to abandon their own distinctive cultures and ways of life developed during the Ryukyu Kingdom. The difference that characterized the Ryukyus vis à vis the Japanese mainland was no longer horizontal but hierarchical, and mainland Japanese culture began to be seen as more valuable than Ryukyuan cultures. It was at this time that the word *Ryūkyū* became negatively connotated as outdated, non-modern and parochial⁷⁵. For this reason, and because it constructed the Ryukyus as a separate entity from Japan, as late as the early 2000s the use of the name *Ryūkyū* was still considered to be taboo in Okinawa Prefecture by many⁷⁶.

Nowadays, the term *Ryūkyū* is widely used and considered acceptable both in academia and among the general public. This is the result of an increasing critical awareness about the history of Japanese mainland-Ryukyu historical relations. However, *Ryūkyū* is an exonym, a non-native name for a geographical place used only outside of the of that particular place and the linguistic community who inhabits it. One evidence in favour of this statement is that Ryukyuan Languages do not allow for /r/ at the beginning of words. More precisely, *Ryūkyū* is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese name *Liuqiu*⁷⁷. For this reason, while it is true that using the term Ryukyu can be a means to differentiate the Ryukyus from the Japanese mainland and underline its historical, cultural, and linguistic uniqueness, the same term also involuntarily reproduces the Ryukyus subordinate condition to Japan and China, who have the power to name them. For this reason, activists who advocate for a full

⁷⁵ This dynamics are clearly exemplified by the process of linguistic assimilations that the Ryukyus had to undergo after their annexation to the modern Japanese state. Linguistic assimilation was supported by language ideological claims that portrayed Japanese as cultivated, courteous, and a means to promote progressive attitudes, while the Ryukyuan languages were seen, on the exact opposite, as a hinderance to progress, a handicap. Since language was the stage where others issue connected to national identity and the relation between Japanese and Ryukyuan played out, these negative characteristics were attached not only to language but also to everything in the Ryukyus that diverged from Japanese standards. For details on language ideological debates, see Heinrich 2013.

⁷⁶ Patrick HEINRICH, personal communication.

⁷⁷ Before the Ming, the name *Liuqiu* probably referred to Taiwan. However, in 1372, Ming China gave one of the local rulers on Okinawa Island the title of “King of Chuzan in the State of Ryukyu”. After this, Okinawa was referred to as “Great Liuqiu” and Taiwan as “Little Liuqiu”.

recognition of Ryukyuan history and culture have turned to the term Luchu or Duchu, the Uchinaaguchi (Okinawan language) pronunciation of the Chinese characters 琉球.

To conclude this discussion, let us consider three other labels used to refer to the Ryukyus or specific parts thereof. These three denominations have a more graphic character in that they describe their referent, specifying its function or its position. For this reason, in these three labels the relation between nomenclature and geographical imaginations manifests itself more explicitly, making them a telling example. The first of such denominations is *Michi no Shima* 道の島, which literally translates to ‘islands constituting a road’. It was first used after the invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom by the Satsuma domain to refer to the northern part of the Ryukyu Archipelago⁷⁸. The ‘road’ referred to in this denomination linked the island of Kyushu, home of the Satsuma domain, to the island of Okinawa and the southern part of the Ryukyu Archipelago. This label is particularly insightful both with reference to the discussion of ‘islandness’ presented in the previous paragraph, and in the context of imagining the Ryukyus through the names given to them. In fact, it depicts the islands not only as interconnected between themselves, but also as a medium to connect separate territories, and as a canal that allows the control and exploitation of a territory (southern Ryukyus) by another one (Satsuma domain). The view of the Ryukyus expressed in this label contrasts sharply with that of another, not widely used, denomination: *Ryūkyū kotō* 琉球孤島, which can be translated as “Ryukyu remote islands”⁷⁹. Through this name, the Ryukyus are visualized as individual and disconnected islands, far removed from other places. The same kind of imaginary emerges from the name given to the group constituted by the Yaeyama and Miyako Islands, which is often referred to as the ‘Outlying Islands’ or the ‘Outer Island’ (*Sakishima* 先島). These islands were the last to be incorporated into the Ryukyu Kingdom and were historically conceived of as a remote place of exile and looked down upon, even if in fact they are geographically and historically very close to Taiwan.

The aim of this chapter was to exemplify how space itself and the geographical phenomena of islands and archipelagos (and the Ryukyus in particular) can be imagined in different and often contrasting ways. First, various conceptualizations of space were explored by means of the concepts of place and landscape. Secondly, the concept of ‘islandness’ within the field of island studies was presented.

⁷⁸ SMITS, *Maritime Ryukyu...*, cit. p. 7.

⁷⁹ The term *kotō* 孤島 is defined in the dictionary as “a single island located far away from the mainland and from other islands.

Finally, I focused on how geographical imaginations can be mediated through place names by introducing some of the labels that have been applied to the Ryukyus. All of these are instances of explicit geographical imaginations, that is, ways of imagining space that stem from an explicit engagement with space itself with the purpose of understanding or defining it. To conclude this preliminary chapter, I will now turn to Yonaguni Island, in order to outline the geographical, linguistic, and historical context in which to place the discussion of the materials presented in the next chapters. More detailed information will be introduced during the analysis of the sources itself whenever the data require it.

2.4. Yonaguni

Yonaguni is an island located in the south-west of the archipelago of the Ryukyus (see Figure 1) and it is often referred to as ‘the western-most point of Japan. Its closest neighboring islands are Ishigaki, 105 kilometers to the east, and the island of Formosa (Taiwan), 110 kilometers west of Yonaguni. In Dunan, the local language once spoken on the island, Yonaguni is called Dunanchima. Two different etymologies are given for this name: the first part, *dunan*, is said to have derived either from the word *duni* (sandbank) or from the name of a plant, the *duninpa* (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*)⁸⁰. Where the first etymology is evocative of the dimension of Yonaguni island (approximately 28 square kilometers), the second identifies the island main characteristic with its flora. *Chima* on the other hand, as discussed in the previous section, can refer both to ‘island’ and to ‘community’. Today, Yonaguni hosts three local communities: Sonai 祖納 (Tumai in Dunan), located in the north of the island, Higawa 北川 (Ndi in Dunan) in the south, and Kubura, in the west. The latter was the last community to be founded during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and, in the past, it was predominately populated by settlers coming from Itoman, on the main island of Okinawa. The highest point of Yonaguni is Mount Urabu, a 231.2 meters-high hill situated in the central part of the island. Yonaguni coast is for the most part constituted by high rocky cliffs, culminating in the two capes of Irizaki 西崎 in the west and Agarizaki 東崎 in the east.

⁸⁰ Okinawa Encyclopedia Publishing Office *hen*, “Yonagunijima”, *Okinawa daihyakka jiten* (Okinawa Encyclopedia), vol. 3, Naha, Okinawa Times, 1983, p. 809.

沖縄大百科事典刊行事務局編、「与那国島」、『沖縄大百科事典』、下巻、那覇市、沖縄タイムス、1983年、809.

Dunan, the language of Yonaguni, figures together with other six Ryukyuan languages among the “severely endangered” languages of the UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*, but it is by now critically endangered⁸¹. Dunan is considered the most “un-Japanese” language of the Japonic language family⁸² and it is not mutually intelligible with any other Japonic variety. In 2014, Asō, Shimoji and Heinrich stated that there were less than 200 full speakers of Dunan, all aged over 70. The members of the generation ranging from 70 to 50 years of age were all rusty or semi-speakers, whereas younger generations are monolingual in standard Japanese. They also reported that intergenerational transmission of the Dunan language has been interrupted for at least two generations⁸³. This situation has further deteriorated since then and Dunan has fallen out of use in all public and most private domains and entirely replaced by Japanese. The two sole remaining domains where it is still the default language are indigenous religion (shamanism) and entertaining arts⁸⁴. Descriptions of Dunan linguistic features have been produced both in English and in Japanese and an exhaustive bibliography has been provided by Yamada, Pellard, and Shimoji⁸⁵. There are two Dunan-Japanese dictionaries compiled by Ikema Nae⁸⁶ and by an ad-hoc editorial board⁸⁷ respectively.

Historically, Yonaguni was first settled between the 10th to 12th century by farmers coming from the island of Kyushu who were skilled in wet-rice farming. The island remained independent until the 16th century, when it came under control of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Yonaguni was the last island to be incorporated into the kingdom, its invasion in 1522 coinciding with the end of a military campaign started in 1500 to gain control of the southern Ryukyu islands. As seen above, the Ryukyu Kingdom

⁸¹ Patrick HEINRICH, personal communication.

⁸² Leon SERAFIM, “When and from Where the Japonic Languages Entered the Ryukyus”, in Alexander Vovin and Toshiki Osada (Eds.), *Perspectives on the Origins of the Japanese Language*, Kyoto, Nichibunken, 2003, p. 468.

⁸³ For a review of the state of endangerment of Dunan in 2014 according to UNESCO criteria, see Asō, Shimoji, and Heinrich (2014).

⁸⁴ Patrick HEINRICH, “Language Shift”, in Patrick Heinrich, Shinsho Miyara, and Michinori Shimoji (Eds.). *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages*, Boston, de Gruyter Mouton, 2015, p. 624.

⁸⁵ Masahiro YAMADA, Thomas PELLARD, and Michinori SHIMOJI, “Dunan Grammar (Yonaguni Ryukyuan)”, in Patrick Heinrich, Shinsho Miyara, and Michinori Shimoji (Eds.), *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages*, Boston, de Gruyter Mouton, 2015, pp. 449-478.

⁸⁶ IKEMA Nae, *Yonaguni kotoba jiten* (Dictionary of Yonaguni Language), Yonaguni, privately published, 1998.

池間苗、『与那国ことば辞典』、与那国町、自費出版、1998年。

⁸⁷ YONAGUNI Dialect Dictionary Editorial Board *hen*, *Dunanmunui jiten* (Dictionary of Dunan), Yonaguni, Yonaguni Townhall, 2019.

与那国方言辞典編集委員会編、『どうなんむぬい辞典』、与那国町、与那国役場、2019年。

was then invaded by the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma domain in Kyushu. For Yonaguni, this event coincided with the instauration of a harsh poll tax regime, according to which people on the island were taxed two times: once by the Ryukyu Kingdom and once by the Satsuma domain. In 1879, the Kingdom was finally brought under the control of the new Japanese state and Yonaguni became ‘the western-most point of Japan’. Despite officially being part of Japan, the status of Yonaguni (and of the southern Ryukyu islands in general) remained ambiguous both immediately after the birth of the Japanese state, when accords were drafted for Japan to give up the southern part of the Ryukyus to China, and later during the time of Japanese imperialism, when people who migrated from Yonaguni to colonial territories found themselves occupying an in-between position: neither really part of the Japanese metropolis, nor part of the colonies⁸⁸. With a population in constant decline ever since the boom of the post-war years, today Yonaguni finds itself in a geographic area, the northern Pacific Rim, characterized by high international tension and since 2012 hosts a military base of the Japanese self-defense forces.

Despite Okinawa being one of the most extensively researched areas in the world, not many studies have focused directly on Yonaguni. Details on its history can be found in Ikema Eizō’s *Yonaguni no rekishi* (History of Yonaguni), which also contains a useful timeline outlining the main historical events that took place on or concerned Yonaguni⁸⁹. A brief overview of the island’s history in English covering also more recent times was provided by Patrick Heinrich in the catalogue *L’Isola*⁹⁰. Information about current geo-political issues revolving directly around or indirectly impacting on Yonaguni are covered by Gavan McCormack in the same book⁹¹, and in two articles on the *Asia-Pacific Journal*⁹². Anthropological studies on Yonaguni island have been carried out by Arne

⁸⁸ Patrick HEINRICH, “Rice Island, Satellite Island, Border Island: Yonaguni Across Time”, in Patrick Heinrich (Ed.), *Liminal Island: Essays on Yonaguni*, Macerata, Quodlibet Skinnerboox, 2021, non-paginated.

⁸⁹ IKEMA Eizō, *Yonaguni no rekishi* (History of Yonaguni), Yonaguni, privately published, 1959, pp. 201-207.

池間栄三、『与那国の歴史』、八重山与那国町、自費出版、1959年、201-207.

⁹⁰ See note 71.

⁹¹ Gavan McCORMACK, “Yonaguni/Dunan Island”, in Patrick Heinrich (Ed.), *Liminal Island: Essays on Yonaguni*, Macerata, Quodlibet Skinnerboox, 2021, not-paginated.

⁹² Gavan McCORMACK, “Yonaguni: Dilemmas of a Frontier Island in the East China Sea”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 40, 1, 2012a.

Gavan McCORMACK, “The End of the Postwar? The Abe Government, Okinawa, and Yonaguni Island”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 49, 3, 2014.

Rokkum with a focus on the role of female figures⁹³ and on social relations and the relations with the natural world⁹⁴. A comprehensive account of various aspects of Yonaguni Island ranging from geography to traditional customs and folksongs can be found in Ikema Eizō and Kazumori Shinzato's *Yonagunijima-shi* (Ethnography of Yonaguni Island)⁹⁵. Another important and more recent ethnography has been written by Miyara Saku with a focus of the direction that the island has taken since the start of modernity⁹⁶. This study was followed by another book in 2017 cowritten with Miyara Junichirō⁹⁷.

⁹³ Arne ROKKUM, *Goddesses, Priestesses and Sisters: Mind, Gender and Power in the Monarchic Tradition of the Ryukyus*, Oslo, Aschehoug, 1998.

⁹⁴ Arne ROKKUM, *Nature, Ritual, and Society in Japan's Ryukyu Islands*, London, Routledge, 2006.

⁹⁵ IKEMA Eizō and SHINZATO Kazumori, *Yonagunijima shi* (Ethnography of Yonaguni Island), Yonaguni, privately published, 1957.

池間栄三、新里和盛、『與那国島誌』、与那国町、自費出版、1957.

⁹⁶ MIYARA Saku, *Kokkyō no shima Yonagunijima shi: sono kindai wo horu* (Ethnography of a border island: investigating Yonaguni modernity), Naha, Akebono, 2008.

宮良作、『国境の島与那国島誌：その近代を掘る』、那覇、あけぼの出版、2008年.

⁹⁷ MIYARA Saku and MIYARA Junichirō, *Yonagunijima shi: higashi ajia no minamimuki genkanguchi* (An ethnography of Yonaguni Island: the southern gate to East-Asia), Ishigaki, Nanzansha, 2017.

宮良作、宮良純一郎、『与那国島誌：東アジアの南向き玄関口』、石垣、南山舎、2017年.

3. Summaries of Yonaguni Folktales

In this chapter, I will outline the plot of the folktales contained in the collection *Yonagunijima no minwashū*. In order to simplify the process of referring to specific stories or selected parts thereof during the analysis, the folktales are identified by the codes presented in Table 1, and lines are numbered. References in the analysis chapter will take the form of ‘FTn: xx’. The summaries of two stories present in the collection and marked with * in Table 1 are omitted, as they are set on different island and do not present any connection to Yonaguni.

Table 1: Folktales overview

Title	Code
The Origin of Silkworms	FT1
The February Wind	FT2
Uchibaga and Benkei*	FT3
<i>Doru nu me ya kate nu me</i> (The Eyes of the Night are the Eyes of the Stone Fence)	FT4
The Invention of the Barrel	FT5
The Fox Prank	FT6
<i>Kabitenumai</i> (An Undeserved Reward)	FT7
Washing the Bones of a Hawke	FT8
Pinch Yourself to Feel Somebody Else’s Pain	FT9
The tale of <i>Agamaruichi</i>	FT10
The Uruku Stone	FT11
Tidorai and Hitamai	FT12
The 3 rd of March	FT13
The Tale of the <i>Maannin</i> (Higawa Tangeriene)	FT14
The Tale of Gadanuhiya (or Why People Bring Offerings to Trees)	FT15
Do not Share Everything with Your Partner Even if You Have 7 Children Together	FT16
Kanimachidaya	FT17
The Shiti Festival	FT18
The Myth of <i>Tuuburi</i>	FT19

The Shadow-less Man (or the Origin of the Celebrations of the Night of the 15th)	FT20
The Invention of the Fishing Net	FT21
The Three Memories	FT22
The Ghost Cat*	FT23
‘Haste Makes Waste’	FT24
The Origin of Buddhist Mortuary Tablets	FT25
The Talking Cow	FT26
The Spirit Who Raised a Child	FT27
Naaganshi	FT28
The Couple from Heaven	FT29
<i>Uya nu kutu kita ya minu tii muirun</i> (If you are kind to your parents, you can even grow a missing hand).	FT30
The <i>nichinanachi</i> Child	FT31
The Origin of the <i>Paduya</i>	FT32
Why on the 20 th Day the Moon Raises Early	FT33
The Tale of Ishigandō	FT34
The Origin of Kasahandi	FT35
The Tale of Dindagi	FT36
The Tale of Nniurushi	FT37
The Tale of Batanamachi	FT38
The Foundation of Sonai Village	FT39
The Tomb of the Headless Man	FT40

1. The Origin of Silkworms

There was once a young girl who was very fond of her horse, so fond of it that the two of them started behaving like a couple. When her parents became aware of this behavior, they found it very odd, but
3 no matter how harshly they scolded their daughter, she would not listen. The rumor of the girl’s relationship to the horse spread, causing great trouble to the family and leading the parents to decide that the only solution was to kill the horse. They brought the horse into to the mountains, killed it,
6 and skinned it. They then proceeded to bury the horse’s bones and flesh into a hole on the spot, while its skin was carried back home and hung on a mulberry tree to dry. The girl, who was not aware of

what had happened, started looking for her horse desperately: she questioned neighbors and passersby
9 and, eventually, she became totally absorbed in the search. When she finally found the spot where
the horse had been killed, she started to cry but [after she had come back home] the skin of the horse
fell down from the tree on which it was hanging onto the crying girl, killing her. After a few days,
12 the body of the girl began to rot, and worms started growing on it. The worms climbed up the tree,
where they ate the leaves and became silkworms. To this day, people say that silkworms originated
out of people.

2. The February Wind

Once upon a time there was a woman who, after losing her husband at an early age, put all her efforts
in raising her two children, a boy and a girl, and making sure that they found a good wife and a good
3 husband, respectively. This desire made her work hard and endure a life of misery. Her constant
prayers were finally answered, and both her children got married. However, right when the mother
had started to think that she could enjoy her old age in peace, she contracted a disease and became
6 blind, so that she had to rely on her daughter in law for everything. While living together, the feelings
of the daughter in law towards the mother changed but, since the latter was unaware of it, she
continued to eat the food that her daughter in law prepared. The mother found the food to be delicious
9 and, for this reason, she spared some for her daughter to eat when she came over. When the daughter
arrived, the mother brought out the food she had set aside and offered it to her. To the daughter's
amazement, the food was made out of cooked worms.
12 Some days passed and, after a while, the mother called her son and his wife over. She told them that,
on an island in the north, a treasure was buried, and suggested that if anything was to happen to her,
they could go and get it. Hearing this, the couple, who was very avaricious, immediately prepared a
15 ship and set off to the northern island in February, as the mother had suggested. However, while they
were still travelling, the mother, waiving a fan in the direction of the northern island, cursed them so
that their boat ran into a huge typhoon and sunk. To this day, when February comes, people say that
18 the *kajimayaa* wind has started to blow.

4. *Duru nu mi ya kati nu mi* (The Eyes of the Night are the Eyes of the Stone Fence)

It is said that when it's dark at night and one starts talking about something secret thinking that there
is nobody out there who can hear, the secret will be discovered, as if there was someone looking from
3 inside the stone fence⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ Traditional houses in the Ryukyus are surrounded by stonewalls with the purpose of warding off evil.

One night, a wife confessed to her husband that the reason why they had money and could live without worries was because she had a lucky birth mark on her genitals. What the couple did not know, however, is that outside their house there was a man peaking in and eavesdropping what they were saying. The following morning, they received the visit of a mysterious man who told them that he wanted back a considerable sum of money he had lent to the parents of the couple. When asked for proofs that what he claimed was true, the man mentioned the wife's birthmark, thereby convincing the couple. Since the couple did not have the amount of money requested by the man, he offered them an alternative: they would have to prepare an abundant *kaisekizen*⁹⁹ for him instead. After giving them these instructions, the man left, saying he would pay them another visit the next day. The couple agreed and started planning. At night, they set off with nets toward the far-out coast to get some fish for the *sashimi* and, on the way, they heard voices coming from the woods. The voices were talking about the appointment at the couple's house the next day. Since it is impossible to find people in the woods so late at night, the couple concluded it must be foxes, and that the mysterious man must have been a fox, too. Once back home, they started elaborating a plan to defeat the foxes and, to this end, they gathered all the cats in the village.

The next day, the man arrived at the couple's house first, followed by other numerous guests. As expected, the guests sat right on the cracks between the *tatami*, in order to conceal their fox tails and maintain a human appearance. This was enough for the couple to confirm that they were foxes. They released the cats, which started fighting with the foxes and killed them. The only one left alive was a single eyed fox who, crying, asked to be spared because it was pregnant. The couple pitied it and saved its life. All the foxes on the island were exterminated, and only the single eyed fox survived, its offspring continuing to thrive on the island.

5. The Invention of the Barrel

As the bamboo hoop and the wooden staves of a barrel form one unity, in the same way the hearts of two lovers beat as one.

Once upon a time there were a man and a woman who loved each other deeply. Their parents, however, opposed their marriage. Not being able to convince them, the couple decided to commit suicide so as to be united in paradise. The parents, however, blind to the couple's love, resolved to bury their bodies in two separate places far apart, one in the west and the other in the east of their village. During the celebration of the funeral, the villagers plant bamboo on the man's grave, and a tree on the woman's. Time passes and, to everybody's amazement, the two plants start growing in each other's direction,

⁹⁹ An elaborate meal made up by various small dishes all served at the same time on a dinner tray.

9 becoming entangled as one. This event convinces the parents of the couple that love is stronger than
death: they regret having separated them and decide to unite their bodies in one grave. The bamboo
and the tree are cut down to make the barrel that will host the remains of the couple in the grave. To
12 this day, people say that that's the reason why barrels were created.

6. The Fox Prank

There was once a good boy from the village of Tumai¹⁰⁰. One day, on his way home after having
worked all day in the fields, he was so exhausted that he dozed off while walking and found himself
3 approaching the Taburumitu¹⁰¹ river. Once close to the river, he saw from afar a group of beautiful
girls happily chatting near the water, some swimming and some doing the laundry. The sight made
him forget about the long day of work, and he quickly walked towards them. Once on the riverbank,
6 he saw a beautiful girl who was looking at the ground, without saying a word. He wanted to talk to
the girl and hurried up after her, but he could reach her. He kept following her but, after turning at a
corner, he lost sight of her. While looking for the girl, he ended up on a lateral street, where he came
9 across a splendid house in which, judging by the sound, someone seemed to be playing the sanshin
and drums. Thinking the girl could be in the house, he peaked in from a hole in the shutters, but he
could not see anything. Instead, he could only smell horses excrements. Not being able to stand the
12 smell, the young boy put his mouth to the hole in the shutter and exhales. At this point, he got kicked
hard, tumbled down and lost consciousness. When he came to himself again, the splendid house had
disappeared and been replaced by a filthy stable. The hole in the shutter he had breathed through is
15 in fact a horse's butthole.

7. *Kabitenumai* (An Undeserved Reward)

In Yonaguni, people say that those who receive an undeserved reward are similar to the protagonists
of the *Kabitenumai* story.

3 There were once two boys, one rich and one poor. One day, the father of the rich boy forbade his son
from seeing his poor friend. The rich boy then came up with a story to persuade his father. He told
him that his friend possessed an amazing sense of smell, and that he was able to smell anything from
6 a distance. The father decided to put the poor boy's ability to a test, which the latter promptly passed,
having been informed about it by his rich friend. Amazed, the father started to believe in the boy's
powers, and the rumor of his refined sense of smells spread, reaching the court of the emperor in

¹⁰⁰ The village of Sonai.

¹⁰¹ 田原川. Located in the north of the island, this river flows south of Sonai village.

9 China¹⁰². At the time, the emperor was suffering from a severe illness, and nobody seemed to be able
to find a cure. The emperor had in fact been cursed, and the only way to save him was to break the
spell. Having heard about the prodigious Yonaguni boy, the emperor sent his men to Yonaguni to get
12 him, hoping that he could find out who had casted the spell. The news reached the two boys in
Yonaguni, who understood they were in trouble and started to make a plan. In the end, they are able
to fool everyone, find out who cursed the emperor, and receive a huge, even if not deserved, reward.

8. Washing the Bones of a Hawk

during fall and winter, migrating birds heading south stop to rest on Yonaguni. People believe that
they are travelling towards a southern island to wash the bones of an ancestor. This myth relates how
3 this ancestor ended up on the southern island.

Once upon a time there was a man in Higawa who had magical powers. His friends envied him for
his powers and so one day, after having invited him to go fishing with them out on the ocean, they
6 abandoned him on an island far off in the south. Not knowing what had happened, his wife started
looking for him throughout all Yonaguni, but without success. The man owned a dog and a hawk: the
dog would look for the man on the island, while the hawk would fly over it and look for him from
9 above. One day, the hawk discovers the southern island on which his owner had been abandoned.
The man tells the hawk what has happened and asks him to report to his wife. Ever since that day, the
hawk starts flying back and forth between Yonaguni and the southern island to bring him messages
12 and food. Unfortunately, on one of his journeys, the hawk gets caught in a storm and dies after
reaching the coast of the southern island. The man mourns the loss of the bird and buries it on the
island. After that, he manages to go back to Yonaguni on the back of a shark which he had tried to
15 fish. Happy to be back to his wife and kids, him and his family never ate shark again.

9. Pinch Yourself to Feel Somebody Else's Pain

Once upon a time there was a cook who worked on a boat. He worked hard and everybody liked him.
The cook would always prepare the rice for the next day beforehand. However, recently there had
3 been someone eating all the rice, so that there would be none left, and costumers started getting angry
at the cook. He decided that he would catch thief, and, to this end, he spent the whole night on the
boat. In the middle of the night, the cook heard the noise of pots and pans coming from the kitchen,
6 went inside and found a fox in the rice pot, eating at its heart content. Moving fast, the cook covered
the pot with its lid, trapped the fox inside, and wanted to throw it off board. Scared, the fox began to

¹⁰² *Tō no kuni* 唐の国, lit. “the land of the Tang”. In Dunan, China is referred to as *Tu nu chima*, “the island of Tu”.

scream: “I beg you to spare my life! I will do anything you want!” The cook answered that he wanted
9 to be rich, and the fox said that it can make it happen. Having said so, the two developed a plan. The
fox turned into human form and, together with the cook, they entered the house of a rich man to steal
from his safe. Right when the cook was about to open the safe, the fox started to scream: “Thief!
12 Thief!”. The owner of the house woke up and started looking here and there for the thief, but he could
not find the two. The cook got very angry because they had almost been discovered. “I wanted you
to feel the same fear I felt when you were about to throw me offboard,” said the fox. And this is how
15 the saying “pinch yourself to feel somebody else’s pain” originated.

10. The Tale of Agamaruichi

To the south of Aragabana¹⁰³, on Yonaguni, there is a little bay. In this bay, on the water’s edge, there
is a black stone known as Agamaruichi¹⁰⁴. The Agamaruichi has the shape of an egg and the waters
3 that surround it on all sides are shallow. Fifty meters ahead, however, the Pacific Ocean is already
very deep. With the high tide, a lot of fishes enter into the shallow area around the Agamaruichi [and
are trapped there when the tide recedes], making the stone a great fishing spot.
6 Once upon the time, there was a man who had made the stone his fishing spot and would catch a great
number of fish every day. He would never give up his spot, which made it impossible for other people
to fish there, since only one person could fit on the stone. Other people who wanted to fish there then
9 decided to buy the stone. One of them suggested to trade the stone for a red-haired cow he owned and
that is what they did. After the trade, they were finally able to happily sit on the stone and fish. Since
then, the stone begun to be called Agamaruichi.

11. The Uruku Stone

At the foot of Kuburadagi¹⁰⁵, to the south, there is a large paddy field called Mantaburu¹⁰⁶. In the
western part of the field, there is a big flat rock, inclined towards the south. This is called Uruku rock.

¹⁰³ 新川鼻. Located on the southern coastline of the island right beneath mount Urabu, Aragabana is a 80-meters-high cliff projected out into the Pacific Ocean and constitutes the southernmost tip of Yonaguni. Right beneath it, at the bottom of the ocean, lie the so-called underwater ruins.

¹⁰⁴ 赤丸石, lit. “round red stone”. The name does not describe the appearance of the rock (which might be round but is said to be black rather than red). Instead, the stone takes the name of the particular type of cow that is offered in exchange for the stone later in the story, called *agamaru* in Dunan.

¹⁰⁵ 久部良岳. A 181 meters high hill in Kubura.

¹⁰⁶ 満田原.

3 Uruku, the protagonist of the tale, is from the village of Uruku¹⁰⁷ on the main island of Okinawa and for this reason people call him Uruku. This Uruku was well versed in magic. One day, Uruku summoned many young boys and asked them to clear the little bamboo forest in Unnaru¹⁰⁸. He then
6 proposed to organize a fight on that very spot: if there was someone stronger than him who could beat him, Uruku vowed to become this man's servant forever. An extraordinarily strong man named Kawahira from the village of Shimanaka¹⁰⁹ who owns a lot of land in the area of Mantabaru,
9 volunteers to fight against Uruku, beats him and becomes Kawahira's servant.
Kawahira orders Uruku to cultivate the rice field at Mantaburu. However, Uruku uses magic to force the other farmers on the field to do his job, while he sits on a big old stone all day, watching them
12 work and enjoying himself. One day, Uruku tells the other farmers to bring him a cow and then performs an incredible trick that leaves everybody speechless: he enters into the cow's butt, moves all the way across its stomach, and comes out from the mouth. Kawahira, who does not trust Uruku,
15 decides to spy him from the top of a hill while he performs his trick, and understands that it is not real magic, he is just fooling everyone: he is not passing through the cow, he is just crawling underneath it while holding on to its fur. When confronted with this discovery, Uruku challenges
18 Kawahira: if he really manages to go through the cow, he will not have to be Kawahira's servant any longer. Kawahira agrees and prepares a cow. When Uruku starts crawling, Kawahira hits the cow with a stick on the back and Uruku falls on the ground. After this, Uruku disappears, and nobody has
21 ever seen him since. After this events, the stone on which Uruku used to sit was named the Uruku stone, and the name has been handed down to this very day.

12. Tidorai and Haitamai

This tale is more of a brief essay on customs associated to travelling in the past. Back in the day, it could take more than a month to travel from Ishigaki to Yonaguni, and many people lost their life
3 during these trips. For this reason, before leaving Yonaguni, people would drink a farewell sake together. Furthermore, on Yonaguni there are many places to pray for the safety of people travelling

¹⁰⁷ 小禄.

¹⁰⁸ 'Bamboo' in Dunan.

¹⁰⁹ 嶋中. The area located to the south-east of present-day Sonai. In the past, Shimanaka (Nmanaga in Dunan) was the center of life on Yonaguni and comprised the three villages of Sanai, Naunni and Araga. Sanai Isoba, the legendary heroine who is said to have ruled in Yonaguni around 1500, also lived in Nmanaga. Today, only the ruins of the villages are left, but the festival that originated in this area (*nmanaga machiri*) continues to be celebrated on the 19th day of the Chinese lunar calendar to pray for the island's development and for a good harvest (Ikema 1998: 361).

by sea, as well as many prayers and folksongs about journeys. If one member was out on a journey,
6 the family would pray every day for him or her to arrive safely at destination, and to come back to
Yonaguni. The family would pray from the day of departure until the return of the ship at Haiita (the
current Sakihara marine transportation).

9 After saying goodbye to the departing ship, in the evening people would go to Tidorai. In Tidorai you
had to choose one of the four houses: Ganaha, Kaneshiro, Kubura and Nakakuroshima. While the
family who lived there was still awake, they hid in the doorway with their children on their backs and
12 listened carefully. According to the conversation being held inside the house, which could be either
a good omen or an ill omen, it is said that the fate of the trip could be predicted. For example, if
people talked about adverse events such as breaking a bowl or the bottom of a tray, you could
15 conclude that some accident would happen during the journey. It is said that by cutting several times
in the air with the scissors carried with them, it was possible to avert the danger.

13. The 3rd of March

During the celebrations held on March 3rd, girls go down to the beach, collect mussels, eat mochi,
and wash themselves in seawater. It is believed that, by doing so, they will avert bad luck. This tale
3 relates the origin of such a belief.

Once upon a time there was a hardworking girl, appreciated by everyone in the village. One day,
without knowing how, the girl became pregnant. Not knowing what to do, she went for advice to an
6 old lady living next to her. She told the old lady that a good-looking boy had been coming to her room
every night, spending the whole night there, and then leaving in the morning without a word. This
had been going on for a while and then she found out she was pregnant. After listening to the story,
9 the old lady suggested to thread a needle with a canapé thread, put the needle in the boy's hair when
he was about to leave in the morning, and then follow the thread to see where the boy had been going.
The girl did as she was told and, following the thread, ended up at the entrance of a cave. Looking
12 inside, however, she did not spot a human figure, but a big snake. The snake was talking to another
snake, reveling that he had made the girl pregnant with its baby and that the baby would be born
during the celebrations of the 3rd of March. The girl, who had heard this, waited until the 3rd of march,
15 and went down to the beach. While on the seashore with her feet into the water, the baby slipped out
of her in the form of a sea snake and disappeared into the ocean. It is for this reason that, on the 3rd
of March, women perform rites to avert bad luck, such as bathing in seawater.

14. The Tale of the *Maannin* (Higawa Tangerine)

This story explains why there are tangerines in Higawa.

Once upon a time, on the eastern shore of the village of Higawa, to the south of the Ubudaishi¹¹⁰
3 mountain, a Chinese ship got shipwrecked. The inhabitants of the village of Higawa who had seen
the accident happening, picked up the survivors and took care of them. In particular, one man showed
the survivors to his house and hosted them there. They became like family and, to thank him for his
6 hospitality, the Chinese survivors gave him tangerine seeds. The man planted the seeds in his garden,
the plants grew and spread all over Higawa.

15. The Tale of Gadanuhiya (or Why People Bring Offerings to Trees)

Once upon a time there were two friend who lived next to each other. The older one, named
Gadanuhiya, was not married, while the younger one had an incredibly beautiful wife. The two were
3 really good friends, but there was also a strong rivalry between them. Furthermore, Gadanuhiya was
an extremely ambitious person and really envious of his friend's beautiful wife. On the day of the
March festival, Gadanuhiya invited his friend to go to a cliff with him and have a drink. The two went
6 there and each of them brought along something to drink. However, while the younger friend had
brought alcohol, Gadanuhiya had filled his bottle with water. The younger friend quickly became
drunk. At that point, Gadanuhiya challenged his friend to a fight. The younger friend, who by then
9 was blind drunk, understood immediately that he stood no chance. Knowing that it was too late for
him, he only wished to send his beloved wife one last message and said : "When my wife will feel
worried and uneasy while weaving, rain shall start to fall. Please remember that the rain are my tears".
12 After this, the fight begun, the younger friend was thrown off the cliff and died.

Since her husband had not returned home, the wife asked Gadanuhiya about him, but the latter told
her that he had left before him and had not seen him since. Having lost all hope, the wife organized
15 the husband's funeral. In the months that followed, Gadanuhiya grew closer and closer to his friend's
wife. One day, while she was weaving and feeling sad, rain started to fall. Gadanuhiya, who happened
to be there, revealed to her that her husband had been talking about something like that [and this is
18 when she understood that her husband had been killed]. After that, Gadanuhiya asked the woman to
forget about his husband and to marry him instead. Th woman agreed and the two moved in together,
but all the while she was secretly making plans to avenge her husband's death.

21 One day, the woman told Gadanuhiya that it was time to replace the pillar that stood at the center of
the house [which represented her late husband]. The two then went out to the mountains to get a new
tree. Once there, the woman asked Gadanuhiya to wrap his arms around a tree that was exactly the
24 perfect size for the hands of the man to overlap on the back of the trunk. Then, using a hammer, she

¹¹⁰ A small mountain south of mount Urabu.

nailed his hands onto the tree. The woman then told him: “You have now become the spirit of the tree, and you will eat the offerings that people bring to the tree”. This way, she was finally able to defeat
27 her husband’s enemy.

Ever since then, after building a house or a tomb, a ceremony is held during which people bring offering to the trees.

16. Do not Share Everything with Your Partner Even if You Have 7 Children Together

There was once a very happy couple. The husband was a fisher and, after catching a large number of fish near the rocky shore, he would prepare it using a sharp knife and become totally absorbed in this
3 activity. His dog would always sit next to him, waiting for food. On that particular day, however, the neighbors’ kid came to watch, too, and stood next to the man without him noticing. Totally absorbed in his task, the man waved its knife to the side, accidentally killing the kid. In order to hide the
6 accident, the man killed his dog, dug a hole and buried the kid first and the dog on top of him, in order to hide the body. Once back home, he told his wife that he had killed the dog by mistake, but he did not mention the kid. The neighbors started looking for their child, but they could not find him, and
9 the mystery of his disappearance remained unsolved. Years went by and the man, trusting his wife, revealed that he had killed the child. [Since the wife was of the opinion that] bad behavior always gets discovered easy, discord broke out between this peaceful couple, and the murder of the child was
12 discovered.

17. Kanimachidaya

In Sanninudai¹¹¹, on the southern shore of the island, there is a place called Kanimachidaya. It is a cave that can only be entered from a hole in the top. Since the entrance is covered by plants, it is
3 impossible to spot it. A man called Kanimachi had made this place his home. He was a thief who used to frighten the people of the village. The cave is named after him.

Once upon a time there was a man called Kanimachi who was a thief and excelled in martial arts.
6 Originally, however, he was not a thief. He was just a lazy person who used to bully the other people using his great strength, deceive girls, and do all sorts of bad things. When other people tried to scold him, he would become violent and continue as always, crating great problems to the village. The other
9 inhabitants of the village started to avoid him and to treat him as an outcast, until he did not even have a place to live anymore. One day, while walking along the shore, he found the entrance of a cave

¹¹¹ A place located along the shore south of Agarizaki cape. In this spot, years of erosion have molded the shore into a particular shape.

and thought that, since nobody knew of its existence, he could make it his home and make a living
12 by stealing. At last, his laziness had made him into an evil person, and he left the village.

After his departure, the people of the village started to feel even more uneasy. Kanimachi would put
his hair up in a chignon, wear a nice kimono, and looking like a real Adonis, go down to the village
15 and steal all kinds of things that he needed in order to live. Since the situation was becoming worse
and worse, after consultation the people of the village decided to hunt Kanimachi down. The whole
village set out after him until they discovered the entrance to the cave where Kanimachi was living.
18 However, getting in proved very difficult and they were not able to enter. After returning to the village,
they discussed ways how to capture him. Someone even suggested to throw dry grass and wood into
the cave and set fire to it, but someone else was of the opinion that it is inhuman to burn a person
21 alive. They could not find a solution. At one point, a young man stepped forward. His name was
Kuranami Tarō and he volunteered to climb down into Kanimachi's cave and engage him in a fight.
While the two were fighting, the others would climb down too and capture him. They set out for the
24 cave early at dawn and Kuranami Tarō started climbing down the rope. Kanimachi, however, was not
sleeping. He had the light on and was wearing a bun. When he noticed that someone was climbing
down, he let his air down and thrust his ornamental hairpin at Kuranami Tarō [as a weapon]. The
27 two started fighting, at which point the other men began descending into the cave. Kuranami was
eventually able to bring down his opponent and kill him. Everybody praised his bravery. However,
his crime was like a curse for his family, and it is said that his descendants all died out.
30 In light of these events, the cave was named after Kanimachi and, still to this day, if you lie around
and are lazy, people say you become like Kanimachi.

18. The Shiti Festival

The day of the Shiti festival is said to be the worst day of the entire year. On this creepy day, ghosts
and spirits come out and roam around the village. During the festival, when the night comes, people
3 go around the village performing the lion dance to the sound of drums and the gong in order to send
away all evils to the far-off island of Andu¹¹². Families cook meet for their children and eat big meals
and everybody prays to ward off spirit possessions.

6 Once upon the time there were a woman and her daughter. They were poor but the woman loved her
daughter very much and she made a living by weaving. Since they were poor, they could only afford
to eat meat on special occasions, and the daughter would always wait impatiently for these days to
9 come.

¹¹² For Yonaguni people, an earthly paradise, a utopia.

Finally, September came, and with it came the day of the Shiti festival. The mother took a break from weaving and went out to buy pork for her beloved daughter for the occasion. Once back home, she showed the meat to her daughter, told her that she would cook it later and asked her to go out and play in the meantime. Then she hung the meat to the main beam of the house and went back to her weaving. The daughter, however, could not stop thinking about the meat and was very impatient, even if her mother had asked her to wait. While she was staring at the meat with a resentful look, suddenly the blood that was slowly dropping from it started accumulating on the fringes of the meat. The daughter, who could not control her desire, started drinking the blood. Amazed, the mother stopped weaving and hit her daughter with the loom reed [in order to make her stop]. At that point, the girl began to cry and turned into a mouse, ran up to the ceiling and disappeared. Shocked, the mother lost consciousness. When she came to, there was still no trace of her beloved daughter, and she never came back.

Ever since, it is said that if you hit a person with the loom reed the consequences will be very serious.

19. The Myth of *Tuuburi*

In Dunan, *tuuburi* means ‘to (mysteriously) fly around in the sky’.

In the past, travelling by sea was a very serious matter. The trip had to be planned very carefully, one had to wait for an entire year for the right time to come and pick the most favorable wind.

A long time ago, a ship that had set sail from the port of Nanta¹¹³ lost all directions. It flew up in the sky and begun circling over Yonaguni some ten times, without being able to settle for any direction. While the ship was flying in the sky above Ishiyara mountain, Dugurudagi¹¹⁴, and the region between Tatagan¹¹⁵ and Nurugan¹¹⁶, [the crew?] spot a tall palm tree to the east of Ishiyara mountain. At that point, transported by the favorable wind that the gods had made to blow from the direction of the monkey, the ship was able to come close to the palm tree. When it was close enough, the crew stuck a long sword they had prepared into the palm and [used it as a lever to] set the boat on the right course. After that, the gods protected the ship, and it was able to arrive safely to Ishigaki. After that it was decided that the wind that blows on the line connecting Dugurudagi and Ishiyara mountain, namely

¹¹³ A port located in the north of Sonai village.

¹¹⁴ These two place names do not appear as entries in Ikema’s dictionary. However, they are both mentioned in the chapter on the Duguru *utaki* (located south of Yonaguni airfield) in *Yonaguni-chō no bunkazai to minwashū* (p. 16). It is said that the wild blowing from the direction of these two places is a favorable one.

¹¹⁵ 立田神. A plateau south of the current airfield, in the north-east of the island.

¹¹⁶ A port south of Irizaki cape that was used during winter instead of that of Nanta.

the wind blowing from the direction of the monkey, is the most propitious wind for travelling to the island of Ishigaki.

20. The Shadow-less Man (or the Origin of the Celebrations of the Night of the 15th)

On the evening of the 15th a man and his family were in the garden, enjoying the sight of the bright moon. At one point, the man noticed that his figure did not cast a shadow in the moonlight. Puzzled, he went to the old lady living next to him for help. The lady suggested that he should kill the one thing that was most important to him. For the man, who was a farmer, his horse was the most precious thing he had. However, he had no other options and decided to kill the horse. After asking for its forgiveness, he fired a first arrow at the animal. Surprisingly, the horse stopped the arrow by holding it in its mouth and gave out a very telling neigh that sounded like a laugh. At that point, the man fired another arrow which ripped into a large wooden chest that was in the room on the back of the house. Blood started flowing out of the chest and when the man opened it, he found another man inside whom he had never seen. He had killed him with the arrow. The man then called his wife who could not help it but confess that the man who had accidentally been killed was a lover of hers. They would meet in secret after her husband left the house. After these events, the man was able to cast his shadow again, just like everyone else.

This is the reason why, on the night of the 15th, man prepare offerings and check whether their figure still casts a shadow.

21. The Invention of the Fishing Net

Once upon a time there was a boy who lived with his parents. Even after turning twenty, The boy was not able to walk and had to crawl like a crab. After giving it some thought, his parents decided to bring him to the mountains with the intent of abandoning him there. On the way there, they encountered a big tangerine tree, and interpreting it as a good omen, they decided to leave their son right underneath the tree. The couple explained to their son that he would from then on have to make it on his own, feeding off of the tangerines. Having realized that he was now alone, the boy started crying. After a few days spent looking at the tree, the boy saw a spider constructing its net on it. He carefully observed the spider working, amazed by its abilities. While he was watching, small insects would get trapped in the net, and the spider ate them promptly. At that moment, the boy had an idea. He gathered all his strength and was able to stand up and walk. He walked all the way down the mountain until he arrived at a village on the coast. There, he understood that the sea was full of fishes. Making good use of what he had learned while observing the spider, he built a fishing net using vines he found in the mountains. With this net he was able to catch many fishes and distributed them around

the village. The inhabitants of the village were enthusiastic and welcomed the by in their community.
15 He was so beloved that he became the chief of the village. To this day it is said that this is how the fishing net was invented, and also the saying “if you love your children, make sure they travel”.

22. The Three Memories

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl who lived with her family. When it became time for her to marry, her family put up a poster announcing that they were looking for a husband for their
3 daughter. The poster said that only men who knew what the three memories were could apply.
One day, a man on a horse on his way to a different village met a farmer who was ploughing the land and ordered him to count how many times his hoe would hit the ground before he came back.
6 However, the farmer did not count. Instead, when the man on the horse came back and repeated his question, he replied with another question: “have you counted your horse’s seps?”. “Very sharp”, thought the man on the horse, “this man might know what the three memories are”. The man on the
9 horse decided to ask the farmer for help, but the latter replied: “It is unlikely that a poor farmer like me knows something that people like you don’t”. However, after having given it some thought, the farmer came up with the three memories: the sky and the earth are the first memory; the sea and the
12 mountain are the second; and the third is the distance between my house and your house. Now knowing what the three memories were, the man on the horse ran to the girl’s house and recited the memories. The family of the girl approved of him and the two could get married.

24. ‘Haste Makes Waste’

There was once a happy couple. The two could not have children and matters of succession would always cause trouble. Dissatisfied with her life, the woman found a lover and started meeting him
3 behind her husband’s back. Her lover was the head of the richest family in the village, and the woman had fallen in love with his money. When the husband found out about his wife’s affair, he was burning with rage. However, [as the saying goes] ‘haste makes waste’. For this reason, after catching them in
6 the act, the husband came up with a plan. He left the house pretending that he was going to work in the fields. Thinking that she was alone, the wife immediately let her lover inside the house. However, her husband was just hiding outside the house. After he had made sure that his wife really had an
9 affair, he went back in, pretending not to have seen anything. When the wife heard that her husband was back, she panicked and hid her lover inside a pot for fermenting sake (*murunkami*). Having seen that, the husband suppressed his rage and called the wife over. He told her that the richest man of the
12 village had asked him to sell him his *marunkami* for a high price, so he had stopped working in the fields and had returned home. The couple agreed that they should sell the pot and make a lot of money.

They carried the heavy pot all the way to this rich man house. At that point, the husband left saying
15 he had to go to the bathroom. The lover, who was hiding inside the pot, took the occasion to jump
out of it and save his life. Then he collected all the money he had in his house and bought the
marunkami. If the husband had acted impulsively, he would have suffered a great loss. Instead [he
18 waited] and became the richest man in the village.

25. The Origin of Buddhist Mortuary Tablets

Once upon a time there were a mother and his son living together. The father of the family had died
at an early age and, ever since then, the mother put all her efforts into raising her child. He was the
3 apple of her eye. However, all these attentions ended up spoiling the boy. He would torment his
mother every day and, in the end, she grew frightened of her own son.

One day, the boy left the house to go working in the fields, but he forgot his lunch at home. Since her
6 son was so hard to please when it came to meals, the mother started worrying that he would take this
as an occasion to torment her further and left the house to bring the lunch to her son. When she had
come close to the river bank, she spotted her son angrily walking back home. Her heart nearly stopped
9 for the surprise and, unconsciously, she jumped into the river, attempting suicide. The son
immediately jumped into the river to help his mother but, no matter how hard he looked for her, he
could not find her. Instead, he found himself holding something in his hand and when he pulled it out
12 of the water to look at it, he found out it was a piece of a wooden board. The boy felt sorry for having
disrespected his mother, but at this point there was nothing he could do. He took the piece of wood
he had found in the water at home with him and he started worshipping it as if it were his mother.
15 When he tried to file it down, blood started dripping from it. The boy had no doubt: that piece of
wood was definitely his mother. He accurately refined it and molded it into a tablet and worshipped
it. This is how Buddhist mortuary tablets came about.

26. The Talking Cow

There was once a very rich family which owned land and cattle. They lived in luxury but did not pay
much attention to their animals, which had by then become very skinny. One day, a young man was
3 walking towards the mountains when he saw a very malnourished cow on the roadside. Crying, the
cow begun to talk with the boy, begging him for water. The cow was hungry, and its legs were tangled
up in the rope with which it was tied to a pole. Feeling sorry for the poor animal, the young man
6 disentangled its legs and led it to a place where it could drink some water. The cow was very grateful
to the boy for saving its life and told him to ask for anything he wanted. The boy, who was poor, told
the cow that he would have liked to become rich. At that point, the cow suggested that the boy should

9 make a bet with the cow's owner and so he did. He went to the cow's owner and told him that one of
his cows could talk. The owner did not believe him, at which point the boy said: "If I am right, you
will have to give me everything you own. If I am wrong and the cow cannot talk, you can take my
12 head". The two of them walk to the spot where the cow was waiting. Once there, the owner asked his
cow to talk. The animal lowered its head but did not say a word. "Cow!" said the boy "I did as you
told me and made a bet with your owner. Were you trying to fool me?". At that point, the cow
15 answered: "Even if I have not been treated well, I can't disobey my owner". Those words came from
the cows mouth and the boy won the bet. The owner gave him all his belongings and in an instant, he
went from being poor to being rich.

27. The Spirit Who Raised a Child

Once upon a time there was a young married woman who lived with her husband and family. One
day she became seriously ill and died without giving birth to the child she was carrying. Her family
3 celebrated her funeral.

Next to the house where she had lived there was a shop, and every evening, at dusk, a young woman
with a *furoshiki* tied on her head used to go there to buy sweets. On the first days the owner did not
6 find this noteworthy, but time passed, and the woman continued to show up and buy the usual sweets.
Finding it strange, the owner of the shop decided to wait for her to return again and, once she finished
buying her sweets, he made up his mind to secretly follow her. The woman left the village and went
9 to the cemetery. While hiding, the owner of the shop saw the woman enter the tomb of his young,
deceased neighbor and from the same tomb he heard the lament of a newborn baby. Shocked by what
had happened, he decided to run back to the village. The owner then went to the house of the deceased
12 and in the presence of all the family members asked the husband: "Was your wife pregnant when she
died?" he replied: "Yes, she was expecting a baby ... but despite this we were forced to celebrate the
funeral ... what is the reason for this question?". "Your wife's ghost buys sweets at my shop every
15 day. At first, I thought it was a person still alive, but the bills I receive from her turn into ashes after
a while. So I decided to follow her and saw her enter your wife's grave. The lament of a newborn also
came from the same tomb. All this surprised me, and I rushed here ". All the members of the family
18 were amazed and said to themselves: "So, although she is dead and no longer belongs to this world,
she still gave birth to her baby and is taking care of him!". Finally, they decided to offer the child a
banknote as a donation as well. They burned it and in this way the funeral services were celebrated
21 for him too.

28. Naaganshi

Yonaguni is a small island surrounded by coral reefs. In many points, its coastline consists of steep rocky walls. Even when there is little wind, the sea is stormy, and its waves crash against the rocky cliffs. To the east of the island, where the currents of the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea intertwine, there is a place in which waves are always forming, even when the rest of the sea is calm. This place is called Naaganshi.

A long time ago, a pregnant woman, holding her belly with one hand and a woven bamboo basket with the other, walked towards the fields of Nukunuki¹¹⁷ to get food for the following day. The fields of Nukunuki are located beyond the hills that cross the island from east to west and to reach them one has to walk uphill along the steep path of Ubudamiti¹¹⁸. The woman, stopping from time to time to catch her breath, climbed the steep path and finally reached the fields. She filled the basket with potatoes and then started heading back, passing through Ubudamiti again. On the way back, she stopped at the top of the path to rest a little and looked straight ahead in the direction of the ocean. In the distance, she saw the profile of an island that she had never seen before. The island seemed to be moving towards Yonaguni. While she was looking, the island got closer and closer, carried by the sea. Amazed, the woman started to shout: “That island is moving!”. However, right at that moment, the island began to sink until it was completely invisible. The people of the village, who had heard the woman shouting, waited for her at the end of the path and asked her to show them the island, but only waves remained where the island had once been. From that day, in the event of a misfortune or an accident, pregnant women are forbidden to be the first to intrude or let the news slip. However, rumor has it among Yonaguni fishermen that one can hear hens clucking when fishing in the vicinity of Naaganshi.

29. The Couple from Heaven

It is said that the faith of couples is already decided since the moment people are born.

Once upon a time there was a boy who was not convinced about this saying. For this reason, he decided to visit an old lady who was well known for being very wise and ask her about it. “It’s really true!” said the old lady. “If you don’t believe it, test it out yourself”. She then instructed the boy to go to the lavatory in the middle of the night on the 15th and look down in the latrine hole. When the water in the hole reflected the moonlight, he would be able to see the reflection of his future wife in it. The boy got very curious, and, on the night of the 15th, he went to the lavatory and looked down

¹¹⁷ The fields east of Tindahana. The latter is a 100 meters high flat rock located south of the village of Sonai. It hosts a monument dedicated to Sanai Isoba.

¹¹⁸ A path that leads from the fields east of Tindahanata to Shimanaka.

the hole. Down there he really saw the reflection of a pretty young girl. The boy couldn't believe it.
9 All of a sudden, he heard some faint voice. The voice was saying that he ought better to go to the next
village and check out what was happening there. The boy wondered whether it had all been a dream
and when he came to himself, he ran back into the house (in the past, lavatories used to be outside of
12 houses). The boy told everything that had happened to the old lady, who, after giving it some thought,
replied that he should wait until the child born on that very day grew up. But the boy was not convinced
and replied that that was a silly thing to do. Ten years went by, and, during that time, the boy got
15 married two times, but both marriages ended. The third time, he got married to the girl who was born
on the night of the 15th, ten years before. Despite the age difference, they managed to live happily
together.

30. *Uya nu kutu kita ya minu tii muirun* (If you are kind to your parents, you can even grow a missing hand).

Once upon a time there was a married couple who had a daughter. The three of them lived happily
together, but one day the mother became sick and suddenly died. The father, thinking that he would
3 not be able to raise a child alone, was left with no choice but to marry again. After the stepmother
joined family, their life changed completely: the father did everything his new wife said, and he
stopped caring about his daughter altogether. He did not even celebrate the funeral of his former wife.
6 One day, the daughter, who was really sad for having lost her mother, decided to celebrate her funeral
in secret. She waited until her father and stepmother went to the fields to work as they usually did.
When she was finally alone, she cooked rice and prepared *onigiri* and, before her parents came back,
9 she hurried to her mother's grave also carrying flowers and incense and celebrated her funeral. Crying
desperately, she told her mother how bad her life had become without her. When she finally calmed
down, she hurried back home before her father and stepmother came back from the fields. When the
12 two came back home, the stepmother found some rice in the pot and understood that the girl had been
cooking rice while they were away. She immediately told her husband: "we cannot let her live, she
will put our family into economic difficulties", and the two decided to have her killed. They brought
15 the daughter to the house of a murderer and told him to conclude the job on that very day, then they
returned home. Once they were alone, the murderer asked the girl what was it that she had done. She
explained him that she had done nothing bad and told him the whole story. "Even if you did not do
18 anything bad" said the murderer, "your parents asked me to kill you, so I have to do something about
it. However, since you have such a good heart, I will not kill you. I will only cut off one of your hands
and then I'll let you go wherever you want". They did as the man had proposed and her life was
21 speared.

After leaving the murderer's house, the girl started wandering around and she got hungry. At one point she saw the garden of a house which was full of tangerine trees. She had climbed up the tree and started to eat its fruits when the owner of the house found her. Worried that he would get mad at her, the girl tried to explain what had happened to her, but the owner of the house was extremely nice and, instead of getting angry, he invited the girl to come inside. Once inside, the girl told him her whole story, and the man invited her to live with his family in that house. She was so happy that she began to cry.

The couple who adopted her had another son, and him and the girl became very close. Eventually, they fell in love and got engaged. However, the boy's parents did not want him to marry a girl without a hand and therefore opposed their marriage. "That girl is carrying my child" explained the boy, "if I cannot marry her, I won't marry at all". Hearing that, the parents could not do anything but agree. Their son and the girl got married and lived a happy life together.

One day, the young husband suddenly had to leave on a journey. Before his departure, he assured his wife that he would come back, and asked her not to leave the house at any cost. Some time went by, and a letter from him addressed to the girl arrived, but the mother of the boy got her hands on it first. The letter said that he would come back soon. The mother, however, rewrote the letter and gave this second version to the girl: "I cannot leave with a girl without a hand, and I left on a journey just to send you away. Please leave the house immediately, I will not return until you are gone". Desperate about the fact that her husband's feelings had changed, the girl told the boy's parents about the letter. The two replied that they had received the same message and asked her to leave their house so that their son could come back. The girl packed her things, put her baby on her back, and left the house.

After having walked around for a while, she got very thirsty and decided to walk to the river to drink some water. Once there, she bent down to drink and the baby she was carrying on her back slipped into the water. Scared, she extended her arm forward to catch the baby and when she got hold of him, she noticed that she was holding him not with one but with two hands. For an instant, the ghost of her mother appeared to her, and the girl understood that her late mother had always protected her from heaven and made her hand grow back.

After this, the girl started walking around again until the night came, and she realized she had nowhere to sleep. At one point, she saw an old man in the distance and approached him to ask for shelter. The man not only agreed to have her sleep in his house, but also told her that, since him and his wife did not have children and lived alone, she could stay as long as she wanted. The girl thanked him for their kindness and moved in with the couple.

In the meantime, the husband had come back from his journey and found out that his wife and child had left the house. He immediately started looking for them and ended up at a house deep in the

mountains. There, he saw an old lady looking after a child who was playing nearby and, close to them,
57 a woman that looked very similar to his wife but had both hands. When the child saw the man, he
immediately run to him and hugged him: there was no doubt, those were really his wife and child.
Their family was finally reunited and the three returned home together.
60 When the husband's parents saw that the girl's arm had grown back, they were really glad and the
mother said that, if you respect and honor your parents, you can even grow a missing hand. They
started living all together again and became the happiest family on the island.

31. The *Nichinanachi* Child

Once upon a time there was a very hard-working young man. He worked every day in the field and
lived all by himself. One day, upon coming back from work late as always, he found that the lights
3 were on in his house, and both the garden and the house itself were spotless clean. What is more,
there was a beautiful woman waiting for him in the doorway. Surprised, the young man asked her
who she was. "I was sent from heaven to be your wife as a reward for your hard work", said the
6 woman. The man was beyond happy that he had gotten a wife, and the two lived happily together.
One day, on the night of the 15th, the man went out in the garden to look at the stars while his wife
was cooking. There usually were seven stars in the sky, but the man noticed that one had disappeared,
9 and the stars were now six. Thinking that that was very strange, he called his wife over and started
telling her about it. "Please don't say anything", the wife replied. The man did not listen to her and,
ever after she repeated her request, he went on to tell her about how the stars had gone from seven
12 to six. "Since you did not listen to me and talked anyways, I cannot remain here any longer. The truth
is that I am the star that is missing. However, no one would ever believe this, starting with you. I have
to go back, but I am carrying your child. I will give birth to the child once I am back in the sky, so
15 please look up at the stars". After that, the man returned to living his lonely life. At night, when he
looked at the sky, the seventh star was back in its place and, right next to it, was a smaller star. That's
why one can see a smaller star next to the second star (counting from the top) of the Big Dipper.

32. The Origin of the *Paduya*

Once upon a time there was a very poor man. When the day of the festival came, he had no choice
but to sell his poor child for money. However, as days went by, he could not help but keep thinking
3 about his child. He wore the *onbuhimo* that is used to carry children on their parents' back (*kumya* in
Dunan) and was walking around crying when he turned into a bird. To this very day, when the night
comes, it is said that the bird sends out its cry. The *paduya* bird has a white patch on its back that looks
6 as if it was carrying a *onbuhimo*.

33. Why on the 20th the Moon Raises Early

Once upon a time there was a very stubborn and mean step mother. One day, she put wheat into a mortar and asked her sept daughter to polish it. The girl tried as hard as she could, but the barn would
3 not come off. It gradually became dark, and the girl got sad and started to cry. Her tears fell into the mortar and, once the wheat was soaked in them, she finally managed to polish them. The moon [who was observing the girl] thought it would be good to illuminate this poor girl and decided to rise early.
6 The mean step mother had not told her daughter that the wheat needs to be moist when one polishes it.

34. The Tale of Ishigandō

Once upon a time, on the hill of Bushikichidi¹¹⁹ in Kuuda, there was a big stone. One day, the stone broke perfectly in half and a person was born from it. This boy grew up to become a handsome young
3 man. His body was different from that of ordinary people: he possessed the strength of a hundred men and was able to run a thousand *ri* in one day.

It was a very hot day and the man, thirsty, went to the spring and stuck his head in it to drink. However,
6 the water reflected the head of a horse. Surprised, the man turned around, but there was only him at the spring. He tried to look down at the water again and, just like before, he saw the reflection of the horse. While he was still looking at the water thinking that that was very strange, a bug flew on his
9 face. When he hit his face to catch the bug, the horse head in the reflection got hit too. Only then did the startled man realize that it was his face, and from that day on he began to worry that his face looked very similar to that of a horse. When he went to the village, nobody would be willing to meet
12 him and all people kept away from him so that it became impossible for him to live on the island, and he decided to go to China.

Right at that time, there was a war going on in China. The emperor of China, acknowledging the
15 man's strength, gave him the title of Ishigandō¹²⁰, made him his general and had him conquer the whole empire.

¹¹⁹ Ikema's dictionary contains no reference with regard to a hill in Kuuda, an area located south of Shimanaka (see map 1: 25). However, the entry for "Bushiki" describes it as a farmland in the east of Shimanaka and as the biggest settlement at the time of Sanai Isoba. "Chidi" means hill in Dunan.

¹²⁰ 石敢當. Pronounced *shigandang* in Chinese, the word designates the stone tablets placed at three-way streets intersections to ward off evil spirits.

This story, and the man's extraordinary strength, became well known in Yonaguni and people started
18 building stone monuments to Ishigandō in the places where various roads intersect in residential areas,
in order to protect their houses. In Yonaguni, the name of this man is Ichiara.

35. The Origin of Kasahandi

In Ubudibaru¹²¹ (Ndan¹²²), there is a place called Kasahandi¹²³. Its name means that one has to take
the *kasa*¹²⁴ off when crossing this spot. In the past, the Aji¹²⁵ of Dunanbaru¹²⁶ commanded that a big
3 stone be kicked off the Haimutu¹²⁷ cliff: the place where the stone landed would become his tomb.
The stone ended up in the middle of the Ubudibaru fields and remains there to this day. However,
this is not the place where the Aji's tomb is located. Instead, the area became known as Kasahandi,
6 because one has to take off the *kasa* there, to show respect to the Dunanbaru Aji.

36. The Tale of Dindagi

To the north-east of Ubudibaru¹²⁸, there is a plateau that goes by the name of Annichi¹²⁹. It is said
that in the past there was a very beautiful mountain in this place [called Dindagi¹³⁰]. One day, a
3 traveler stopped by in Yonaguni and became very fond of the mountain. He desired the mountain so
much that he asked that it be given to him. The people of Yonaguni replied without giving it much
thought: "If you manage to carry the mountain with you, we will give it up". The traveler then picked
6 up a piece of ground from the mountain and, carrying it with him, returned to where he came from.
At that point, something very odd happened. The mountain gradually crumbled until only its base

¹²¹ The area north of mount Urabu.

¹²² 帆安. See map 1: 34.

¹²³ A rice field located north of the entrance of the current Ayami Habiru Hall, a small museum dedicated to Yonaguni giant moth.

¹²⁴ A conical hat used in East-Asia.

¹²⁵ 按司. The word designates a title and rank of nobility in the Ryukyu Kingdom.

¹²⁶ Appears as "Dunanbara" in Ikema's dictionary and is the name of one of Yonaguni families. The Dunanbaru Aji was the brother of Sanai Isoba, who is said to have ruled over the settlement of Dunanbaru.

¹²⁷ The shore west of Tungan (頓岩 or 立神石). The latter is a tall rock standing in the ocean some meters off the coast, in front of Sanninudai. It is considered to be sacred by Yonaguni inhabitants.

¹²⁸ No reference found.

¹²⁹ No reference found.

¹³⁰ The place name appearing in the title does not come up again during the story. I assume it is the name of the mountain that once stood on the Annichi plateau.

was left, forming the plateau that is still visible today. From these events originated the saying “You
9 should never take what people say lightly”.

37. The Tale of Nniurushi

In the past, a man named Danoma Kana (Yaeyama Kana) lived a clandestine life in the mountains of
Yonaguni. He had come over from the island of Ishigaki to avoid paying the poll tax. A government
3 official named Yokome Inoka, who was after Kana, tied a cow to a rope and entered the depths of
Mount Ubundu¹³¹ to look for him. When he got to the mountain near the mouth of the Araga¹³² river,
on the southern shore of the island, he found that someone had started constructing a dugout canoe
6 there. Seeing that, he thought that the man he was after must be planning to leave the island. He
attached the canoe to the cow to carry it back with him, but while he was on his way, Kana saw him
from the top of the mountain. “Who is trying to steal my boat?” shouted Kana. “I need this boat, so
9 give it to me. In turn, I will bring you clothes and food” said Inoka and took the boat with him. On
the following day, he came back with food and clothes. The two became friends and hung out together.
Time went by and Kana eventually changed his conduct, and gradually came down from the mountain
12 [into the village]. Ever since then, that place [in the mountains] is called Nninurushi, which means to
launch a ship.

38. The Tale of Batanamachi

In a place called Batanamachi, in Shitaburu¹³³, Nichindan¹³⁴, there was once an amazing spring that
provided water to the paddy fields in the Barumi¹³⁵ area. From that same spring, an incredibly strong
3 warrior was born. Actually, only his head had come out of the spring, and people were impatiently
waiting for the rest of his body to come out too. The government officials of Yamato, who had
witnessed this, understood that if they had allowed for the warrior to be born, then they would never
6 have been able to rule over the island. For this reason, they told the people of Yonaguni that, in order
to make the warrior come out of the spring quickly and strong, they had to throw seven red cows and
seven red cats in it. When the people of Yonaguni did as they were told, the warrior in the spring said
9 “You have been deceived! If only I had one arm out... but since that is not the case, there is nothing

¹³¹ No reference found.

¹³² 新川. A small river that flows down from the southern side of mount Urabu and enters the sea west of Aragabana.

¹³³ A place located at the foot of a hill west of Barumi (see note 31).

¹³⁴ 北帆安. See map 1: 43.

¹³⁵ 割目. A basin located south-west of Agarizaki cape.

I can do” and he retreated into the spring. Right at the same time, the water stopped gushing from it, too. It is said that, since then, that same water flows to Midintuu¹³⁶ and comes out there.

39. The Foundation of Sonai Village

A long time ago, the two villages of Dunanbaru¹³⁷ and Dadiku¹³⁸ were merged into the village of Uranu. The Uranu village thrived, and only great men were born there. When the officials of Yamato
3 saw this, they were very frightened, and thought that if they did not intervene, they would not be able
to rule over Yonaguni. For this reason, they moved the village to the present-day Sonai village, a
place of feng shui [a place which, according to Chinese geomancy, was in an inauspicious position],
6 where no great men could be born.

40. The Tomb of the Headless Man

In the past, five of the seven children of the Anishika decided to move permanently to China, in the
region of Fuzhou. A long time went by and one day, a Chinese ship arrived at Nantahama beach on
3 Yonaguni carrying the descendants of the Anihika family who had travelled to the island to visit the
graves of their ancestors. All the passengers of the ship were put in quarantine, as rules at the time
dictated, and anybody who tried to escape would be beheaded. However, when night came, the son
6 of the Anishika descendants escaped from the beach and run into two young boys named Takashima
and Maesoko. Since he had broken the rules, Takashima captured the boy. On the other hand,
Maesoko tried to calm his friend down telling him that, since nobody else had seen the boy, they
9 could as well keep his crime to themselves and let him go. Takashima did not listen to him; he turned
the fugitive boy in to the guards and he was sentenced to death. At this point the father of the boy
decided to intervene. He asked the guards to let him be the one who executed the boy and to be
12 allowed to keep his head. The guards agreed and the man beheaded his son. He then returned to China
with his head, but his body was buried on Yonaguni. To this day, the place where he was buried is
called the tomb of the headless man.

¹³⁶ Name of the northern part of the Sanninudai shore. Fresh water flows out from it into the sea.

¹³⁷ The old settlement of Dunanbaru (or Dunanbara) was located between two- and five-kilometers south-east of present-day Soani village.

¹³⁸ No reference found.

4. The Space of Yonaguni through the Lens of Folktales

4.1. Overview of Place Names

Table 2 offers an overview of all the place names that appear throughout the stories summarized in the previous section. In the first column, place names are presented according to the following conventions: (1) When a place name appears in Chinese characters in the original text, the Dunan reading is given if available, followed by the corresponding Chinese characters without brackets (e.g.: Taburumitu 田原川); (2) When a place name is written using Japanese hiragana or katakana scripts in the original text, it is listed in the table either without any Chinese character, or followed by the symbol ‘>’ and the corresponding Chinese characters found in secondary sources (e.g.: Dugurudagi > 所岳); (3) Places that have both Dunan and Japanese names are inserted in the table in the language in which they appear in the text, followed by the other language inside parenthesis (e.g.: Tumai (Japanese: Sonai 祖納)); (4) Dunan names are transcribed following the language phonetical system, hence using only the vowels a, i, and u; (5) Japanese names are followed by the corresponding Chinese characters in brackets (e.g.: Higawa (北側)).

The second column classifies the type of place the name refers to (e.g.: mountain, field, etc.). The third column shows the code associated to the folktale(s) in which a given place name appears, followed by the line number. The third, fourth, and fifth columns provide the references for the secondary literature consulted. The dictionary used are the *Yonaguni kotoba jiten* (Dictionary of Yonaguni Language)¹³⁹ and the *Dunanmunui jiten* (Dictionary of Dunan)¹⁴⁰. The ‘*Bunkazai* reference’ column lists the page numbers on which a given place appears in the section dedicated to Yonaguni places in *Yonaguni-chō no bunkazai to minwashū* (Yonaguni town cultural assets and folk tales collection)¹⁴¹. Finally, the last column gives the position of a given place on the two maps presented

¹³⁹ IKEMA Nae, *Yonaguni kotoba jiten* (Dictionary of Yonaguni Language), privately published, 1998.

池間苗、『与那国ことば辞典』、自費出版、1998年。

¹⁴⁰ YONAGUNI Dialect Dictionary Editorial Board *hen*, *Dunanmunui jiten* (Dictionary of Dunan), Yonaguni, Yonaguni Townhall, 2019.

与那国方言辞典編集委員会編、『どうなんむぬい辞典』、与那国町、与那国役場、2019年。

¹⁴¹ YONAGUNI Town Cultural Assets Research Committee *hen*, *Yonaguni-chō no bunkazai to minwashū* (Yonaguni town cultural assets and folk tales collection), Yonaguni, Yonaguni Town Education Board, 1979.

below, taken respectively from *Dunanmunui jiten* (Map 1) and *Yonaguni-chō no bunkazai to minwashū* (Map 2).

The information about each place retrieved from the abovementioned sources that are essential to understanding the stories are incorporated into the summaries section in the form of footnotes. However, as can be seen in the table below, it was not always possible to find detailed information on all the places mentioned in the stories. In the texts themselves, some place names are followed by the word *chimei* 地名, ‘place name’, in brackets. This is the case for Unnaru (FT11: 6), Nukunuki and Ubudamiti (FT28: 6,8) and Kuuda (FT34: 1). Furthermore, in the case of Haiita (FT12: 7), the author of the version of the folktale contained in this collection goes as far as to relate the place to the present-day landmark of *Sakihara kaiun* 崎原海運 (Sakihara marine transportation, now *Sakihara shōten* 崎原商店), in Sonai (a strategy that is very frequently used in Ikema Nae’s dictionary, too). These textual strategies signal that even most people in Yonaguni are not familiar with these names any longer. Gaining a thorough understanding of placenames would require extensive fieldwork.

Table 2: Place names

Place name	Category	Folktale	Dictionary reference	<i>Bunkazai</i> reference	Maps
Tumai (Japanese: Sonai 祖納)	Village	FT6: 1; FT39	Ikema: 211	/	Map 1: 29 Map 2: green
Taburumitu 田原川	River	FT6: 2	Ikema: 156	p.14	Map 1: 30 (田原) Map 2: 13 (田原川洗濯場一带)
Tō no kuni (唐の国) / Tō (唐)	Place outside Yonaguni	FT7: 9; FT14: 3; FT34: 11	Ikema: 195	/	/

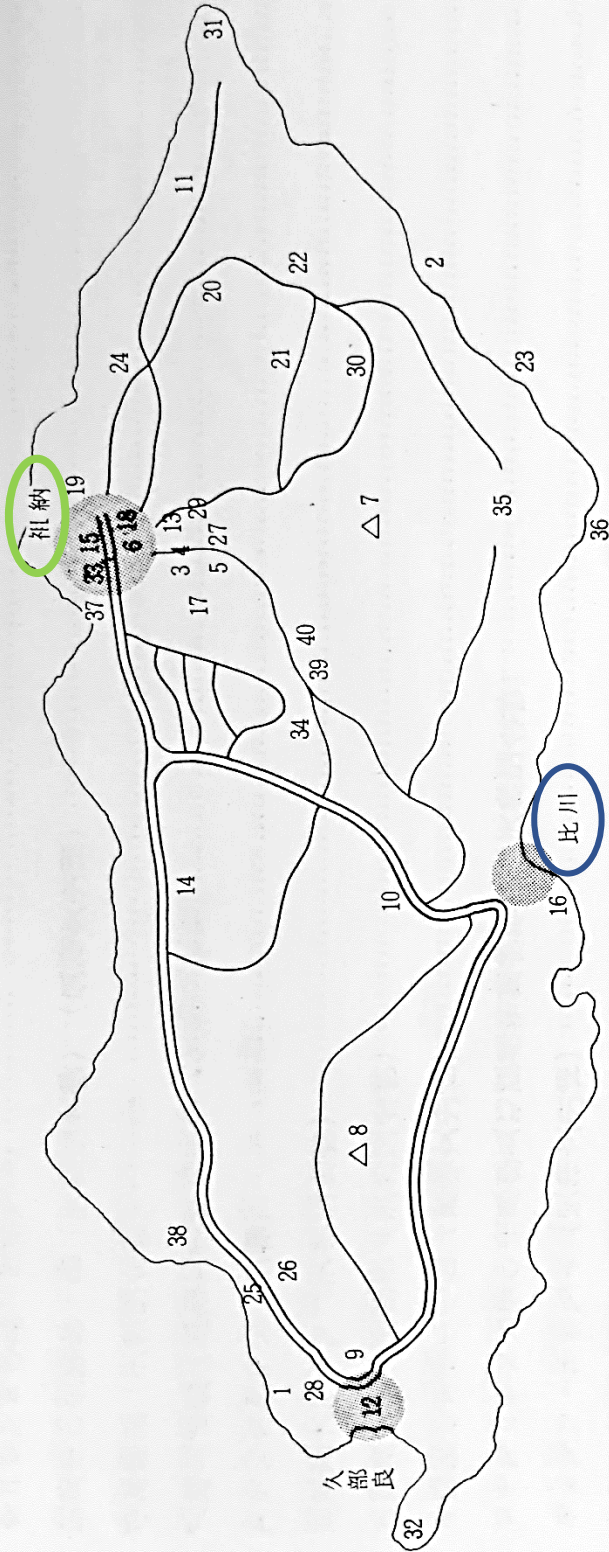
与那国町文化財調査委員会編、『与那国町の文化財と民話集』、与那国町、与那国町教育委員会、1979年。

Higawa (北川) (Dunan: Ndi or Hinai)	Village	FT8: 5; FT14	Ikema: 352	/	Map 1: 12 Map 2: blue
Agamaruichi 赤丸石	Stone	FT10	/	/	/
Aragabana 新川鼻	Cliff	FT10: 1	Ikema: 19	p.40	Map 2: 36
Urukuichi	Stone	FT11	/	/	/
Kuburadagi 久部良岳	Mountain	FT11: 1	Ikema: 102	/	/
Mantabaru (also Mantaburu) 満田原	Fields	FT11: 1	Ikema: 312	/	Map 1: 3
Uruku 小禄	Place outside Yonaguni	FT11: 3	/	/	/
Unnaru	Forest	FT11: 6	/	/	/
Shimanaka (嶋中) (Dunan: Nmanaga)	Village	FT11: 8	Ikema: 361 (ンマナガ マチリ)	p.30	Map 1: 23 Map 2: 27
Ishigaki (石垣)	Place outside Yonaguni	FT12: 2; FT37: 2	/	/	/
Haiita	/	FT12: 7	/	/	/
Tidorai	/	FT12: 9	/	/	/
Ubudashi	Mountain	FT14: 2	Ikema: 51	/	/
Sanninudai	Shore	FT17: 1	Ikema: 121	p. 2	Map 2: 2
Kanimachidaya	Cave	FT17	Ikema: 75	/	/

Andu nu chima	Place outside Yonaguni	FT18: 4	Ikema: 23	/	/
Nantanaga > 波多港	Port	FT19: 4	Ikema: 231	/	/
Ishiyarayama	Mountain	FT19: 6	/	Mentioned on p. 16	/
Dugurudagi > 所岳	Mountain	FT19: 6	/	p. 16	Map 2: 14 (トウグ ルお嶽)
Tatagan (also Tatangan) > 立田神	Plateau	FT19: 7	Ikema: 149	/	Map 1: 7
Nurugan (also Nurungan)	Port	FT19: 7	Ikema: 245	/	/
Naaganshi	Off shore spot	FT28	Ikema: 225	/	/
Nukunuki > 野底原	Field	FT28: 6	Ikema: 240	/	Map 1: 27 Map 2: 3 (ティン ダバナ)
Ubudamiti	Path	FT28: 8	Ikema: 52	/	/
Kuuda 久座	Mountain area	FT34: 1	Ikema: 65	/	Map 1: 25
Bushikichidi	Hill	FT34: 1	Ikema: 287 (Bushiki)	/	/
Kasahandi	Field	FT35	Ikema: 67	/	/
Ndan 帆安	Fields	FT35: 1	Ikema: 350	p. 24	Map 1: 34
Ubudibaru	Fields	FT35: 1; FT36: 1	/	/	/

Haimutu	Shore	FT35: 3	Ikema: 250	/	/
Dindagi	Mountain	FT36	/	/	/
Annichi	Plateau	FT36: 1	/	/	/
Nniurushi	Spot on the shore	FT37	/	/	/
Ubundu	Mountain	FT37: 4	/	/	/
Araga > 新川	River	FT37: 4	Ikema: 19 (アラガ)	/	/
Batanamachi	Spring	FT38	/	/	/
Nichindan 北帆安	Fields	FT38: 1	Ikema: 235	/	Map 1: 43
Shitaburu	Fields	FT38: 1	Ikema: 125	/	/
Barumi (also Barimi) 割目	Fields	FT38: 2	Ikema: 267	/	/
Midintuu	Spring	FT38: 11	Ikema: 319	/	/
Dunanbaru	Village	FT39: 1	Ikema: 206	p. 29	Map 2: 30
Dadiku	Village	FT39: 1	/	Mentioned on p. 23	/
Uranu 浦野	Village	FT39: 1	/	p. 27	Map 1: 37 Map 2: 24 (ウラノお嶽)
Fuzhou region in China (支那の福州地)	Place outside Yonaguni	FT40: 1	/	/	/

与那国町文化財分布



- 1 久部良バリ
- 2 サンニヌ合
- 3 ティンダバナ
- 4 いぬがん
- 5 サンアイイソバ生居地
- 6 ていだんどうぐる
- 7 うらぶ岳
- 8 久部良岳
- 9 久部良ミット
- 10 西真嘉大デイゴ
- 11 ダテイグチデイ
- 12 久部良お嶽
- 13 田原川洗濯場
- 14 トウグルお嶽
- 15 ウニウブスの墓
- 16 シンデイお嶽
- 17 おやばるお嶽
- 18 ウラ祭り邑根
- 19 ムトカハマイの墓
- 20 シンダンお嶽
- 21 シンダン祭り邑根
- 22 ミドデイ山
- 23 トンガン
- 24 ウラノお嶽
- 25 北アデイガラ
- 26 南アデイガラ
- 27 島仲遺跡
- 28 久部良邑根
- 29 スックお嶽
- 30 ドナンバル遺跡
- 31 東崎
- 32 西崎
- 33 とやまお嶽
- 34 トング田
- 35 アンガイミドチ一帯
- 36 アラガバナ一帯
- 37 ティお嶽
- 38 デイテイグお嶽
- 39 ナウンニお嶽
- 40 アラガお嶽

Figure 3: Map 2

4.2. Space in the Folktales

In trying to formulate a synthesis of the various elements that come together to define a particular place, John Agnew suggested that they can ultimately be grouped in three different categories: location, locale, and sense of place¹⁴². In this section, I will loosely draw on Agnew's tripartition to organize the discussion of recurrent spatial themes that emerge in Yonaguni folktales. In the following, these three labels will be understood as follows. Location refers to the absolute position of the place within a conventional spatial framework, such as that constructed by coordinates of latitude and longitude. It can also refer to a relative position, identified for example by a place's distance from another location, or through the use of cardinal points. Locale refers not only to the physical manifestation of a place, but also to particular practices, social relations, and events that unfold in that place, thereby constructing it as different from other places. Whereas these two definitions do not diverge too much from Agnew's, I reinterpret his last category "sense of place" (which, to him, refers to the subjective meaning that people attach to places and to the emotional attachment that they feel towards them) as 'making sense of place(s)'. With the latter label I will refer to the more abstract concepts that constitute the building blocks of geographical imaginations within folktales. I interpret this tripartition not as a rigid scheme that univocally defines what space is, but as a useful tool to discern and analyze a variety of elements that come together in a place.

Orientation System and Use of Place Names

The location component of place provides the answer to the question 'where?'. In the folktales presented above, this question is answered through the combined use of the place names presented in table 2, together with cardinal points and directions. In other words, these two features constitute the base of the orientation system used within the folktales. The setting is clearly delineated at the beginning of the story (usually in the first line) by introducing a specific place name that identifies a natural landmark such as a cliff, a mountain, or a field, often followed by a cardinal direction (FT10). In various cases, this mechanism is used repeatedly, creating a chain of spatial references with the purpose of zooming in on a very circumscribed point (FT11). The places identified using this orientation system, be it a rock (FT10; FT11), a cave (FT17), or a spot off shore (FT28: 3-4), often become the center of the tale itself, rather than simply being deployed as the setting of an important event (as instead happens in FT14, FT34). The stories that have a particular place as their protagonist can relate about the origin of its name (FT10; FT11; FT35; FT37) or about how the place itself came

¹⁴² CRESSWELL, "Place", cit., p. 5; citing John AGNEW, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*, Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1987.

about. The genesis of places can be man-made (FT39) or happen under extraordinary circumstances, such as the theft of a mountain (FT36), the mysterious disappearance of a spring (FT38) or of an island offshore (FT28: 16). The place names that serve as an initial point of reference (place name 1) to then locate a second place which becomes the center of the story (place name 2), however, often remain undescribed. It can therefore be assumed that the place names falling into the first category formed part of a conventional spatial framework, the knowledge of which was shared among the original audience of the folktales. Directions derived from the Chinese calendar are also used in one story to describe the trajectory of a favorable wind (FT19: 3), whereas the Chinese principle of *feng shui* is employed to locate auspicious or inauspicious places (FT39: 5).

As argued in the previous chapter, also in the context of folktales the use of place names necessarily goes beyond defining the exact location of a place. Place names themselves can already contain the synthesis of an event that happened in the place they refer to (FT10; FT17; FT35; FT37), or a hint to the behavior that it is appropriate to adopt in that specific place (FT35). Place names can also be used to describe characters by introducing the place from where they come, either on Yonaguni (FT2: 1; FT11: 9) or elsewhere (FT11: 4; FT37: 2). In the tale of the Uruku Stone (FT11), in particular, the name of a village on the main island of Okinawa, Uruku, becomes the name by which the people of Yonaguni address the character coming from there, thereby clearly distinguishing him as someone coming from the outside. Following the opposite mechanism, places can also take the name of the person who inhabited or made use of them (FT11; FT17). In this sense, place names are not only part of a conventional spatial framework used to orient oneself but also actively participate in the construction of the places they refer to.

Not all tales clearly define the location of the places they talk about. When this is the case, stories are simply located in *aru tokoro* ある所, ‘somewhere’. Time, too, is never specific and always referred to using formulas such as *mukashi mukashi* 昔々, ‘once upon a time’, or simply *mukashi* 昔, ‘in the past’. However, even in the stories that fall into this category, spatial features are present, used, and thereby constructed with layers of meaning. I shall turn to analyzing them in the next paragraph.

The Material Setting of Life on Yonaguni

The locale dimension of place is twofold: on the one hand, it describes the material and visual form that a given place takes (e.g., mountains, rivers, buildings, streets, squares, etc.); On the other hand, it assumes that this material dimension of place does not bare meaning per se, but only emerges as meaningful when it becomes the setting in which life unfolds. What makes the locale of a place is

then a combination of material forms and social relations, practices, and events: this combination is unique and sets each place apart from others. The locale component of places in Yonaguni folktales often takes the visual material form of natural features of the island, and only in few cases of man-made constructions such as houses or villages. By analyzing the situations in which these physical components of space recur, in the following paragraph I will try to illuminate the other feature of locale: the social relations, practices, and events that unfold in these material settings. I will also consider places outside of Yonaguni, as they too are the material setting of practices which contribute to the construction of Yonaguni space.

Natural features

Mountains appear frequently in Yonaguni folktales. Of the place names presented in table 2, six designate mountains or mountain areas. At the same time, the trope of mountains occurs frequently even if not associated with specific place names. In this latter case, events unfold in *okuyama* 奥山 ‘the mountain recess’, *yama no okubukai* 山の奥深い ‘the innermost part of the mountains’, *miyama* 深山 or *yamafukai* 山深い ‘deep in the mountains’. The lure of secrecy evoked by the use of these words is reinforced by the actions that characters set off to carry out in the mountains, which involve killing and death (FT1: 5), revenge (FT15: 24-29), and the abandoning a disabled boy (FT21: 2). Mountains can also be the hiding place of outlaws trying to avoid government officials (FT37: 1-2). The space of mountains thus emerges from the tales as a marginal dimension set apart from life in the village, where deplorable actions that contradict social rules by causing damage to another person are carried out in secret, and where people who do not conform to social standards ought to be. In the latter case, ‘coming down from the mountains’ is possible if a radical change occurs and the deviant behavior is corrected (FT21:10-11; FT37: 11-12). Similar connotations are attached to caves (FT17: 9-13), where a man who disrespects social norms is forced into a life of crime and is eventually killed by the people of his own village.

Rivers and springs, too, are prominent features of the locale component of the space of Yonaguni. Two main rivers are cited directly: the Taburumitu river (FT6: 2) and the Araga river (FT37: 4). In the past rivers, and especially the Taburumitu, were used by the inhabitants of Yonaguni to launder their clothes and as a source of drinking water¹⁴³. Through the folktales the river also emerges as a recreational space, where people, in particular women, chat, play, and swim, while also doing their

¹⁴³ YONAGUNI Town Cultural Assets Research Committee *hen, Yonaguni-chō no bunkazai...*, cit., p. 14.

chores (FT6: 3-4), and as a location where to rest (FT30: 45-46 ; FT34: 5). In this sense, the space of the river is in sharp contrast with that of the fields, where men and boys (at times also couples as in FT30: 8) spend the majority of their time working (FT6: 1; FT11: 11-12, FT24: 7; FT25: 5; FT31:1). Field and rivers are therefore clearly distinguished not only in terms of practices but are also gendered spaces, the two being almost exclusively the realm of men and women respectively. However, the most recurrent characteristic of rivers in the stories is that of being linked to magical or miraculous events: among the girls playing at the river, one is a fox in disguise, playing a prank on a boy (FT6); the spirit of a woman who commits suicide in the river enters a wooden tablet that her son finds in the water while trying to save her (FT25: 11-16); a girl grows a missing arm back when she reaches out for her baby who is about to fall into the river (FT30: 48); a dead mother appears to her daughter right on the riverbank (FT30: 49). The same kind of extraordinary events happen at springs, too (FT38: 2-3). The river is therefore imagined as a space where the realm of real and that of the mystical intertwine and interact.

Some folktales contain references to the island's shore and the surrounding ocean. In these stories, the shallow waters close to the shore can be a source of food but not the principal one, as mussels are collected there as part of a broader ritual (FT13: 1) and *sashimi* is prepared only to treat guests on special occasions (FT4: 13). Where the activity of fishing is concerned, men often collect fish directly from the shore¹⁴⁴ (FT10: 4-5; FT16: 2; FT21: 13-14) instead of venturing out into the open ocean (this only happens once through the folktales, in FT8, and it is presented more as a recreational activity than as work, and also has a different purpose than to catch fishes). The latter is in fact considered dangerous and difficult to navigate¹⁴⁵. The space of the shore is also constructed as somehow separate from that of the island itself. People arriving from outside are allowed to land on the shore of Yonaguni, but their actual arrival on the island is subordinated to a period of quarantine to be completed on the beach (FT40: 4-5). The shore is also the place where evils are expelled out of a woman's body and sent back into the ocean (FT13: 15-16), so that she can go back to living a normal life. The shore is thus a liminal space (separate from the ocean but also from the island), a

¹⁴⁴ According to Arne Rokkum (2021), for most of their history people in Yonaguni identified themselves as “people of the land rather than the sea”, their activity on the shore being more similar to “harvesting the reef” than to fishing proper. In fact, during low tides, people in Yonaguni used to walk out on the exposed coral reef and use bamboo harpoons with iron tips to catch the fish that had been trapped into small ponds by the receding tide. He also reports that fishing was considered a pastime, and that the large majority of time was devoted to cultivating rice or sugarcane.

¹⁴⁵ Arne Rokkum (2021) links Yonaguni inhabitants' reserve towards the sea to the combined effect of religion, according to which deceased people enter the realm of the *nira*, located into the sea, and of pirate attacks, due to which entire villages had to be relocated far from the shore.

space of transition and re-regulation, where foreign bodies are expelled or kept in check to determine their eligibility to enter the island itself.

The shore also connects Yonaguni to the ocean. The defining practice that, within the folktales, construct the space of the ocean is that of travelling. Travelling by ocean is dangerous, as there is the risk of encountering typhoons (FT2: 17) or of getting caught up in unfavorable winds and losing control of the ship (FT19: 4). For this reason, on the island there are spiritual sites to pray for the safety of travelers (FT12: 4). Safety, however, is not achieved when the ship arrives at destination: people who embarked on a journey are only safe once they have come back to Yonaguni (FT12: 6). Rituals are also performed in the attempt of predicting the outcome of the journey and controlling the danger that the ocean represents (FT12: 13). Oceanic travels can also be managed indirectly through the control of the wind (FT2: 15-18).

House

In various folktales, the events recounted play inside or close to houses. Through these events, the space of the house is not imagined as safe and tranquil. On the contrary, the privacy of houses is often violated by intruders listening from outside (FT4: 6) or by mysterious creatures in disguise (FT13: 6-7), and there can even be thefts (FT9: 11). The safety of the house is precarious and has to be preserved by introducing structural protective elements such as a stone fence (FT4) or a *shigandang* (FT34: 18-19), in particular to ward off evil spirits. The relations among family members that develop inside the house, too, are far from idyllic. Widowed women raise their children alone confronting great hardships (FT2: 3; FT18: 7; FT25: 2), to then at times be treaded poorly by the children once they have grown up (as in the case of FT2 and FT25). On the contrary, widowed men remarry, but stepmothers are mean and treat children unfairly, disrupting former family dynamics (FT30; FT33). After marriage, the wife typically moves in the same house with the husband and his parents, but relationships between parents and daughters in law are troubled and the house can become the set of conflicts (FT2:6-11; FT30:36-44). Adultery relationships, too, take place within the house (FT20:12; FT24: 7-8): wives have secret lovers and husbands do not trust them, to the point of ritually checking whether or not they are being cheated on (FT20: 14-15). While the family dynamics presented in the folktales construct the house as a space of conflict and relational insecurity, the relations that the member of a household entertain with outsiders are positive and houses are always open to welcome strangers who happen to find themselves in difficulties (FT4: 5; FT24: 28&53). Finally, some houses in Yonaguni are symbolic and spiritual spaces¹⁴⁶, the conversations held therein hinting at either good

¹⁴⁶ For details on the house-system in Yonaguni, see Rokkum 2021.

or bad upcoming events (FT12:10), or can contain symbolic elements, such as a pillar representing the head of the household (FT15: 23-24).

Places outside Yonaguni

Some folktales also relate of places located outside of Yonaguni to which the island bears some relationship. These places can be divided into two categories: real and fantastic. Starting with the former, references to China appear in four different stories (FT7; FT14; FT34; FT40), either designated as *Tō* 唐 ‘Tang dynasty’ (FT14), *Tō no kuni* 唐の国 ‘The land of the Tang’ (FT7; FT34), or *Shina no fukushūchi* 支那の福州地 ‘the region of Fukushū (Fuzhou) in China’ (FT40). Yonaguni and China are linked by a reciprocal flow of information from Yonaguni to China (FT7: 9) and vice versa (FT34: 17), by Chinese navigation knowledge which includes notions on how to get to Yonaguni and back (FT7: 9), by unforeseen events such as a shipwreck¹⁴⁷ which result in the acquisition of new knowledge on the side of Yonaguni (FT14: 6), and by people migrating from Yonaguni to China (FT30: 13; FT40: 1). In the latter case, the migrants can come back to Yonaguni, but they will be seen and treated as foreigners (see FT40). Practices are transferred from China to Yonaguni, too (FT34: 18-19). Yonaguni has connections to other Ryukyuan islands as well. In particular, there are people from other islands living on Yonaguni: one from the village of Uruku on the main island of Okinawa (FT11: 4), and one from the island of Ishigaki (FT37: 2). Both characters are clearly marked as different from *dunantu* (Yonaguni locals). This difference is connotated negatively, as the former character uses his magical powers to make up for his laziness, while the latter is a criminal who escaped his home island in order not to pay taxes. Despite being the closest place to Yonaguni among those mentioned, the island of Ishigaki is also brought up in stories that relate about the difficulties and dangers of leaving Yonaguni and travelling by sea (FT12: 2; FT19: 11). Finally, Yamato (Japan) is present in two stories and always plays an antagonistic role to Yonaguni, trying to deprive the island and its inhabitants of their independence (FT38: 4; FT39: 3).

¹⁴⁷ There is historical evidence of shipwrecks on Yonaguni. The most famous happened in 1477, when a group of fishermen from Jeju Island ended up in Yonaguni after their ship got caught up in a storm. These fishermen spent half a year on Yonaguni, and, upon their return, a report was compiled with the information they had collected. This report is the first historical document mentioning Yonaguni Island (Heinrich 2021).

With the exception of China, outside interlocutors are not seen positively and contacts with them are either difficult for logistical reasons or result in negative outcomes for Yonaguni¹⁴⁸.

The space outside Yonaguni is also filled with imaginary places, all of which take the form of islands (FT2: 13; FT8: 6; FT18: 4). On the one hand, these islands are idealized as locations where great treasures can be found (FT2: 13) or as earthly paradises (FT18: 4), but these can never be reached by humans. On the other hand, islands outside of Yonaguni are also imagined as places of exile, on which it is very difficult to survive and almost impossible to return. For this reason, unwanted people or unwanted beings are sent there to rid the space of Yonaguni of their presence (FT8: 5-6; FT18: 4). These islands are identified by their relative position to Yonaguni, either north or south. Both directions, however, seem to connote danger: the boat travelling to the northern island is cursed and sinks in a typhoon (FT2: 16-17) and the bird flying to the southern island dies in a typhoon, too (FT8: 12-13). Both in the case of real outside places and in that of imagined ones, Yonaguni always serves as the point of reference in relation to which other places assume certain characteristics.

The Idea of Yonaguni

In the previous paragraph we have seen how, in the folktales, Yonaguni is made up by different places that are set apart from each other not only by their diverse physical manifestation, but also by the practices, social relations, and events that unfold there. To put it differently, we have explored the locale dimension of space in Yonaguni by analyzing the events and practices happening in places that share the same physical manifestation (mountains, rivers, etc.). In this paragraph, I draw on the characteristics of locale that have emerged above to move onto a more abstract level of analysis and identify general categories that seem to regulate the imagining of the space of Yonaguni within the world of folktales. These categories are the building blocks of folkloric geographical imaginations, the tools for ‘*making sense of place(s)*’. The latter label captures my re-interpretation of Agnew’s last layer of place (“sense of place”) that I will cover in this paragraph. In other words, this paragraph tries to provide an answer to the following questions: what factors participate in the construction of geographical imaginations about Yonaguni within the folktales? Which is the idea of Yonaguni that the folktales construct?

¹⁴⁸ Arne Rokkum (2021) reports on the isolation of Yonaguni even after its incorporation into the Ryukyu Kingdom. Unannounced and non-authorized visits on the island were looked at with suspicion and foresters were considered a danger.

Social differences

In the folktales, social differences have spatial manifestations and therefore organize the space of Yonaguni. The first social difference that emerges as meaningful in shaping the geographical imagination of folktales is gender. Women and men occupy different spaces in the stories: the fields are for the most part the realm of men (FT6: 1; FT11: 11-12, FT24: 7; FT25: 5; FT31:1), and only exceptionally female figures visit them alone (FT28: 7). Instead, women seem to have an almost exclusive relation with locations close to the water, be it in the form of a river (FT6: 4) or the shore (FT13: 1). ‘Class’ differences, too, are manifested in space. The society of Yonaguni emerges from the folktales as stratified: there are wealthy and non-wealthy people, and the two are supposed to be divided within the community (FT7: 3). Rich people own land and cattle and do not have to work (FT11: 8; FT26: 1), while others work the land for them (FT11: 9). Poor people aim at becoming wealthy, but this can usually only happen through the use of magic (FT26) or by cheating (FT24). Class differences can manifest spatially also in the appearance of houses and through the activities that are carried out inside them (FT6: 9-10). The possession of magical powers also contributes to the stratification of society, distinguishing some individuals from others. This type of difference, too, is manifested spatially: people with magical powers are either outsiders (FT11) or, even if they initially live among others, they are not accepted and therefore forcefully moved outside of the island (FT8: 6). Social exclusion manifests spatially as well and the individuals whose behavior is not acceptable by community standards have to relocate outside of the village (FT17). In the folktales space is thus imagined as the physical manifestation of existing social differences and, in turn, contributes with its materiality to solidifying them.

Reality and magic

Throughout the folktales, reality and magical events repeatedly intertwine. These constant interactions are another important element in the shaping of the geographical imagination of folktales. The overlaps between the real and the mystic happen at either specific places, as seen before in the case of rivers (FT6; FT25; FT30), or, and more often, at specific times: at night, people receive visits by or run into magical creatures (FT4: 1, 14-16; FT13: 7), evils come out and have to be contrasted (FT18: 2), and strange magical phenomena occur (FT20: 1-2). Similar events occur on the 15th day of the month, which comes up repeatedly in the stories in relation to mysterious happenings (FT20; FT29:7; FT31: 7). Another occasion of encounter between magic and reality is represented by the interactions between animals and humans: the latter can magically turn into animals either as a form of punishment (FT18: 19) or out of suffering (FT32: 4), while animals can transform into humans and back in order to deceive the former (FT6; FT9: 10; FT13: 12; FT26). Similarly, the link between

people and natural elements is often of a magical kind: the plants planted on the lovers' tombs start growing toward each other becoming entangled (FT5: 8), the tears of a deceased husband become rain (FT15: 11-12), the spirit of the trees to which people now bring offering was originally a man (FT15: 28), the piece of wood that a boy finds in the river where his mother committed suicide starts bleeding when scratched (FT25: 15), stars can become humans (FT31: 13), and the moon can help people with its light (FT33: 5). Furthermore, at times natural phenomena can be controlled by humans through magic (FT2: 15-16). By means of the folktales, the space of Yonaguni is therefore imagined as consisting of two different but connected dimensions: the space of the real and the space of the mystic. These two spaces not only interact with each other, but in their interaction also allow for the coming together of animals, humans, and nature, which can all move across these two spaces.

Margins and center

In the folktales, Yonaguni is imagined as a world in its own. As such, the island does not emerge as a compact and uniform entity, but its space is characterized by the presence of centers and margins. The world of Yonaguni presented by the folktales can be seen as organized in concentric circles: the outer-most layer is represented by places outside the confines of the island, such as China, the island of Ishigaki, or Japan (e.g., FT7; FT11; FT38). The actual location of these places is blurry, and they are only relevant insofar they come in contact with Yonaguni itself. The middle layer is represented by those places on the island where, as seen in the locale section, social order is suspended, such as mountains and caves (e.g., FT15; FT17). In this second layer, disorder is the rule and people residing there are considered as much extraneous and 'other' as those coming from outside. The center of the island is represented by places where daily life unfolds, such as villages, houses, and fields. However, even the innermost part of this concentric progression can be infiltrated by otherness (e.g., FT4; FT9; FT13). In sum, what is 'other' to Yonaguni does not only reside on the outer side of the island's shore but is present inside Yonaguni and contributes to organizing its space into center and margins.

In this chapter, I have explored the geographical imagination of Yonaguni as constructed through the collection of folktales presented in Chapter 3. In the analysis, I have departed from overt characteristics of space (place names, directions, and the visual, material form of space) and focused on the events, practices, and social relations taking place there in order to proceed to more general assumptions about how space is constructed and perceived. In the next chapter, I will turn to the second source selected for the study of geographical imaginations: Yonaguni's Vision of Autonomy.

5. The Space of Yonaguni through the Lens of the Vision

This chapter centers around a document published by the Yonaguni townhall in March 2005 and named “Yonaguni, Vision of Autonomy” (*Yonaguni · Jiritsu he no bijon* 与那国・自立へのビジョン)¹⁴⁹. Its subtitle reads: “Autonomy, self-government, symbiosis. Yonaguni: the border island linked to Asia” (*Jiritsu · jichi · kyōsei ~Ajia to musubu kokkyō no shima Yonaguni* 自立・自治・共生 ~アジアと結ぶ国境の島 YONAGUNI). As it will be argued in this chapter, the Vision of Autonomy can be interpreted as an attempt to re-imagine the spatiality of Yonaguni Island as a way to confront a moment of crisis and stir a new course. In the following paragraphs, I will first outline the geopolitical timeline of Yonaguni in order to highlight the various configurations of which the island has historically been part. Only rarely were these configurations advantageous for Yonaguni itself. I will then introduce the text of the Vision, its main purposes, and the context in which it emerged, before presenting the structure of the document. Of the latter, I will then report in their entirety the following three sections: (1) the ‘Declaration of Autonomy’ and Self-government that opens the document; (2) the ‘Fundamental Assumptions’ made at the time of formulating the vision; (3) the presentation of the ‘New Yonaguni’ as envisioned by the Vision. These sections are particularly interesting for the purpose of a study that, rather than focusing on the actual feasibility of the proposed actions, is interested in the discursive construction of geographical imaginations. In fact, the above-mentioned sections openly address the spatial attributes of remoteness and isolation usually associated with Yonaguni to reframe them with the purpose of generating a new idea of island. In this sense, they represent an instance of explicit geographical imagination.

5.1. Yonaguni Geopolitical Timeline

Yonaguni’s geopolitical positioning has repeatedly shifted throughout the island’s history, and its status often remained ambiguous. In this paragraph, I will outline the changes that Yonaguni has

¹⁴⁹ COUNCIL for the Formulation and Promotion of Yonaguni Vision of Autonomy *hen, Yonaguni, jiritsu e no bijon – Jiritsu, jichi, kyōsei – Ajia o musubu kokkyō no shima Yonaguni* (Yonaguni, Vision of Autonomy – Autonomy, self-government, symbiosis – Yonaguni, the border island that links to Asia), Yonaguni, Yonaguni City Hall, 2005.

与那国・自立へのビジョン策定推進協議会編、『与那国・自立へのビジョン～自立・自治・共生～アジアと結ぶ国境の島 YONAGUNI』、与那国町、与那国町役場、2005年。

undergone with regard to its relations with the rest of Japan and with neighboring countries in order to contextualize the re-centering attempt proposed in the Vision.

The first historical document that mentions Yonaguni dates back to 1477 and is a report compiled based on the information gathered by a group of fishermen from Jeju Island (now part of Korea) who were shipwrecked on Yonaguni shore. The report did not contain any reference to a ruling class or tax collection system and is considered today as a source that provides evidence for the fact that Yonaguni was still independent during the 15th century¹⁵⁰. Later sources describe this period of independence as prosperous for Yonaguni inhabitants, whose main occupation was wet rice farming, a cultivation sustained by the availability of ample farmland and the vicinity to Taiwan's high mountain peaks which could grant the island regular rainfalls¹⁵¹. Yonaguni's independence ended in 1522, when the island came under the control of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The latter was later invaded and conquered by the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma domain of Yamato (Japan) in 1609 and turned into a puppet kingdom meant only to secure the continuation of commercial relations with China to the benefit of Japan. The end of independence coincided with the beginning of economic hardships for Yonaguni. In fact, both the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Satsuma domain set off to collect taxes on Yonaguni and a demanding poll tax system was introduced in 1637. These taxes were not collected locally but by officials coming from the island of Ishigaki, meaning that, ever since then, Yonaguni came under the control of outsiders¹⁵².

When, in 1879, the Ryukyu Kingdom, and therefore Yonaguni, was incorporated into the Meiji state, it was not yet clear what the position of the Ryukyu Islands within Japan should be and whether their inhabitants should be considered part of the Japanese nation. Moreover, the Meiji government first introduced a policy called 'Preservation of old costumes' (*kyūkan onzon seisaku* 旧慣温存政策), which was meant to win over the ruling class of the former Ryukyu Kingdom by keeping their privileges intact. Under this policy, which was in place from 1879 to 1903, poll taxes continued to be collected on Yonaguni and other islands even after they had become part of a modern state. Furthermore, as early as 1879, Japan had already started negotiations with China and was ready to give up the Miyako and Yaeyama islands (of which Yonaguni is part) in return for the status of 'most favored nation'. In response to this request, China proposed the following solution: Japan would keep the northern part of the Ryukyus, the main island of Okinawa would constitute a revived Ryukyu

¹⁵⁰ Patrick HEINRICH, "Rice Island...", cit., non-paginated.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Kingdom, and the southern part of the archipelago would be given to China¹⁵³. In both cases, Yonaguni would become part of China. A first settlement was drafted but never signed or implemented: negotiations definitively failed in 1890 and China had to recognize Japanese sovereignty over the Ryukyus after its defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War. Both the abovementioned initiatives of the Meiji government reflected the uncertainty of Japan as to whether (and to what extent) the Ryukyus should become part of the Japanese state and show how the fate of Yonaguni was always caught up in between bigger powers: the Ryukyu Kingdom, Yamato, and China.

These ambiguities were formally and only partially resolved with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution which firmly located the Ryukyus and Yonaguni within the *naichi* 内地 ‘inner territories’, thereby recognizing them as Japan proper, rather than as a colony¹⁵⁴. In practice, however, during the heights of Japanese imperialism, ambiguity was the characterizing attribute of Yonaguni position. In fact, Yonaguni inhabitants, as well as those of other Ryukyuan islands, were culturally, financially, and politically marginalized within the Japanese national space and discriminated against by mainland Japanese settlers in colonial territories such as Taiwan; at the same time, some of them were able to profit from Japanese imperialism by pursuing higher education and careers in colonial Taiwan¹⁵⁵. In other words, Yonaguni occupied a liminal position between metropolis and colony, colonizer and colonized. When it came to military decisions, however, Yonaguni islanders were clearly Japanese. With the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the subsequent mobilization of all Japanese nationals, ‘Imperial Subject education’ (*kōminka kyōiku* 皇民化教育) started to be implemented on Yonaguni¹⁵⁶. Later, when the Pacific War broke out in 1941, a military observation post was set up on Mount Urabu and soldiers were deployed on Yonaguni¹⁵⁷. The island also suffered several Allied Forces bombings during the final stretch of the war.

The early post-war years were a time of unexpected autonomy for Yonaguni, whose path had for centuries been determined by other political entities. The power vacuum of the post-war period allowed Yonaguni to achieve economic prosperity through the flourishing of a black market, where everyday products were imported illegally from Taiwan to Yonaguni, and from there exported to

¹⁵³ Gavan McCORMACK, “Yonaguni: Dilemmas...”, cit., non-paginated.

¹⁵⁴ Patrick HEINRICH, “Rice Island...”, cit., non-paginated.

¹⁵⁵ MATSUDA Hiroko, *Liminality of the Japanese Empire. Border Crossing from Okinawa to Colonial Taiwan*, Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2020, p. 151.

¹⁵⁶ For more details on the history of education in modern Okinawa Prefecture, see Kondo (2006).

¹⁵⁷ Patrick HEINRICH, “Rice Island...”, cit., non-paginated.

Okinawa and other parts of South East Asia¹⁵⁸. On this occasion, Yonaguni geographical position (far from the central government in Tokyo and close to Taiwan), turned out to be an asset for the island, locating it at the center of international trading routes. However, the position of Yonaguni was to change yet again with the San Francisco Treaty of 1951, which determined that the Ryukyu Islands would be placed under US military control. Since no US military was dispatched to Yonaguni¹⁵⁹, the occupation was not much felt on the island, but for the fact that in 1952 the US decided to put an end to the black market and with it to Yonaguni short-lived economic prosperity and growth.

During the years of US military occupation, Yonaguni industries and facilities underwent a process of modernization and living conditions on the island improved dramatically, despite the steady demographic decline¹⁶⁰. At the same time however, the American occupation prevented the Ryukyus from taking part in the Japanese post-war economic miracle¹⁶¹. As a consequence, after Yonaguni was returned to Japan together with the Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama islands in 1972, its political and economic marginalization vis à vis Japan continued and Yonaguni went back to being ‘the westernmost island of Japan’. As a territory under US control during Cold War confrontations first, and as part of Japan after reversion, Yonaguni was cut off from exchanges with its closest neighbors, while at the same time remaining very far from both the prefectural capital Naha and from Tokyo. Furthermore, the legacy of the San Francisco Treaty of 1951 which, on top of receding the Ryukyu Islands from Japan and shifting them under US military control, also granted America the right to maintain bases on Japanese territory, together with the conditions for the reversion of Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama set in 1972, resulted in the concentration of US military bases on the island of Okinawa¹⁶². This configuration, and the vicinity to China, have caused the region to become a hotspot

¹⁵⁸ MIYARA Saku, *Kokkyō no shima Yonagunijima shi: sono kindai wo horu* (Ethnography of a border island: investigating Yonaguni modernity), Naha, Akebono, 2008, pp. 185-196

宮良作、『国境の島与那国島誌：その近代を掘る』、那覇、あけぼの出版、2008年、185-196。

¹⁵⁹ Gavan McCORMACK, “Yonaguni: Dilemmas...”, cit., non-paginated.

¹⁶⁰ TERUYA Manabu, *Okinawa shichōson no karute – Okinawa hontō nanbu, Miyako, Yaeyama, ritō-hen*, (Records of Okinawa Prefecture municipalities – Southern Okinawa Main Island, Miyako Yaeyama and remote islands edition), Urasoe, Nirai Ltd. & Kanai Research Institute, 2006, p. 63.

照屋学、『沖縄市町村のカルテ～沖縄本島南部・宮古・八重山・離島偏～』、浦添市、有限会社ニライ・カナイ研究所、2006年、63。

¹⁶¹ Patrick HEINRICH, “Rice Island...”, cit., non-paginated.

¹⁶² Gavan McCORMACK, “The End of the Postwar? The Abe Government, Okinawa, and Yonaguni Island”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 49, 3, 2014.

of international tensions, a condition that, as it will be outlined further below, bears consequences on Yonaguni, too. Before this happened, however, the normalization of Japan-China relations in 1972, the end of the Cold War in the late '80s and early '90s, and the tendency to internationalization that characterized the late '90s and early 2000s, allowed Yonaguni to catch a glimpse of an alternative path and lead to the formulation of the Vision¹⁶³.

This section showed how, ever since its incorporation into the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1522, the perspective adopted to look at Yonaguni and to administer it was always an external perspective that did not take into consideration Yonaguni's particular characteristics, and this in turn was problematic for the island. Very often, these external perspectives had their center in a place geographically distant from Yonaguni (either Naha, the island of Kyushu, or Tokyo). This resulted in the long-standing ideological association of Yonaguni to the spatial and negatively connotated conditions of isolation and remoteness.

Isolation and remoteness are not facts but ideas and, as such, they are open to critical investigation. In other words, we can study this attributes as a manifestation of ideology. Ideology is the process by which a relation is established between two otherwise unrelated phenomena. In the case of Yonaguni, ideology creates a connection according to which the geographical position of the island necessarily equates isolation, and, based on this assumption, rationalizes its current problems such as depopulation and underdevelopment. If the ideological link is interrupted, however, contradictions emerge. Gavan McCormack poignantly highlights these contradictions: "Despite its location at the heart of the world's most dynamically developing region, and despite mounting pressure upon it, Yonaguni became an ever more peripheral and neglected part of Japan"¹⁶⁴. Only very rarely in the historical course outlined above was this ideology partially, and involuntarily, suspended due to historical contingencies (e.g., the early post-war power vacuum). On the contrary, the Vision can be seen as an active attempt to develop a 'counter-ideology' that establishes Yonaguni as its own point of reference and considers its position as a resource rather than a limitation.

¹⁶³ Already before the formulation of the Vision, Yonaguni had an established partnership with the county of Hualian in Taiwan since 1982, which was later expanded to include the adjacent counties of Yilan and Daito. In 1999, the mayor of Yonaguni, together with those of two other Ryukyu islands, signed an agreement with their Taiwan counterparts to promote border exchange through the establishment of regular flights and the promotion of cross-border relation in the field of tourism, education, and trade (see McCormack 2020).

¹⁶⁴ Gavan McCORMACK, "Yonaguni: Dilemmas...", cit., non-paginated.

5.2. Yonaguni in the New Millennium: The Formulation of the Vision

At the time of publishing the Vision of Autonomy, Yonaguni municipality was facing increasingly harsh conditions due to the process of fiscal decentralization carried out by the neoliberalist government of Koizumi (2001-2006) in the form of the so-called ‘Trinity Reform Package’ (*san’i ittai kaikaku* 三位一体改革), created in 2003. This reform resulted in more responsibilities given to local governments while, at the same time, curtailing the grants and subsidies that could be allocated to local administrations. In so doing, the reform package widened economic disparities between wealthier and poorer municipalities. Within this process of decentralization, in the municipality of Yonaguni branch offices of national justice and immigration were abolished and the local weather observation station was closed¹⁶⁵. Recognizing that services in the public sector are difficult to shift to the private sector in terms of profitability, Yonaguni had to find a way to continue to guarantee these services for the island’s residents. The first solution proposed was to merge Yonaguni with neighboring islands in order to create a bigger and more economically sustainable administration. However, in a referendum held in 2004, Yonaguni inhabitants decided against this option¹⁶⁶. In this context, the Vision was an attempt to lay down a different path for the future of the island.

The initiative of Yonaguni had an important precedent. Okinawa Prefecture, too, had previously tried to draft its own path to development by engaging with neighboring states in East-Asia across state borders. The inspiration that guided this initiative was the premodern Ryukyu Kingdom, which, as outlined in Chapter 2, had thrived on its privileged position as “the cornerstone of Asia”, mediating commercial exchanges between Ming China and other East-Asian and Southeast-Asian polities¹⁶⁷. The attempt of Okinawa took the form of the ‘Cosmopolitan City’, or ‘International City’ (*kokusai toshi* 国際都市) project proposed by Governor Ota Masahide in 1996. The aim of the project was to turn the geographical position of Okinawa, usually described as ‘remote’ and seen as an obstacle, into an asset through the “adoption of a frame of regional inter-connectedness”¹⁶⁸. However, this project was never implemented due to the central government’s reluctance to give Okinawa the autonomy needed to take initiatives towards this direction. Furthermore, the realization of the project also

¹⁶⁵ Gavan McCORMACK. “Yonaguni/Dunan Island”, in Patrick Heinrich (Ed.), *Liminal Island: Essays on Yonaguni*, Macerata, Quodlibet Skinnerboox, 2021, non-paginated.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Gavan McCORMACK, “Yonaguni: Dilemmas...”, cit., non-paginated.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

depended on the approval of its policy counterpart, named ‘Action Program’, which included the demilitarization of Okinawa¹⁶⁹ and was thus extremely unlikely to pass.

The Vision of Yonaguni saw the decentralization process of the early 2000s as an opportunity to create a new administrative and economic model through which Yonaguni could achieve autonomy, re-center and revitalize its community. From an administrative point of view, this was to be achieved through an organizational and legal reform of the functions of the local ‘community centers’ (*kominkan* 公民館)¹⁷⁰, which would overtake some of the functions that were usually covered by central government bodies. Economically, the path towards autonomy laid down by the Vision, which was to take the form of an ‘independent network-type economy’ (*jiritsu nettowāku-gata keizai* 自立ネットワーク型経済), centered on a combination of three elements: (1) a sustainable and environment friendly use of local natural and cultural resources and promotion of local industries; (2) the development of forms of tourism that could be complementary to local industries; (3) a loosening of border restrictions and other kinds of regulations that had historically constrained Yonaguni and forced it into a dependent economic position¹⁷¹. The Vision thus tried to combine island autonomy and regional cooperation across borders, while Yonaguni would remain part of the Japanese state. In other words, the decentering that was taking place in Japan at a national level was seen by the promoters of the Vision as an occasion to re-center Yonaguni itself, whose fate had always been determined by external powers, and to restore its agency in the larger international context. In the next paragraph, I will introduce the content of the Vision in more detail, and I will report the parts that will be analyzed in their entirety.

5.3. Content of the Vision

The Vision of Autonomy is articulated in various parts. It opens with the ‘Declaration of Autonomy and Self-Government’ (*Jiritsu · jichi sengen* 自立 · 自治宣言) of Yonaguni, a program in six points in which the fundamental values or guiding principles (*shishin* 指針) that underlay the formulation of the Vision are presented. The first point identifies Yonaguni residents as the main actors in island revitalization and development and states that, in order to further develop Yonaguni into an

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ COUNCIL for the Formulation and Promotion of Yonaguni Vision of Autonomy *hen, Yonaguni, jiritsu...*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

autonomous and self-governed island, all community efforts should come together around the principles that follow. Most of these are presented in the form of vows (*chikai* 誓い):

2. We offer our sincere gratitude to our ancestors who have protected the rich nature and way of life of *Dunanchima* [Yonaguni Island] and built their own distinctive culture, and we vow that each and every one of us will inherit the wisdom and spirit of autonomy and self-government fostered by our history.
3. No matter how difficult it might be, we vow to stand together [here the Dunan word *marunna*¹⁷² is used] as *Dunantu* [Yonaguni inhabitants] rooted in *Dunanchima* to create a safe and secure island and realize a rich life worth living, and to pass this on to the next generation.
4. Despite being an isolated border island (*kokkyō chi'iki no kotō* 国境地域の孤島), in order to overcome the problems caused by isolation (*shimachabi* 離島苦, literally 'remote island pain') we aim to improve basic services such as healthcare, welfare and education on the island, and to lay down the basis for the development of a telecommunication network, such as by installing an optical cable indispensable for the promotion of local industries.
5. We vow to further promote friendship and exchanges with neighboring East-Asian regions (on the model of our longstanding relations with the county of Hualien in Taiwan), as well as to lay a path for mutual development, and to realize a special interregional exchange zone (*chi'ikikan kōryū tokubetsu ku* 地域間交流特別区) that can set a model for an international society.
6. On the basis of a proper acknowledgment of the crucial role of Yonaguni in maintaining peace in East-Asia, and while continuing to live peaceful lives as citizens of Japan, we vow to protect this border island (*kokkyō no shimamori toshite ikiru* 国境の島守として生きる) and contribute to the preservation of a peaceful border and of friendly relations with neighboring countries.

The Declaration is followed by the list of 'Fundamental Assumptions' (*kihon ninshiki* 基本認識) that led to the formulation of the Vision of Autonomy. These Assumptions outline the current situation of Yonaguni at the time of the Vision, its problems as well as its possibilities.

¹⁷² The word *marunna* literally designates a straw rope used to tie bundles together. However, the word can also be used metaphorically to refer to a group of people standing together as one to achieve something (see Ikema 1998: 311).

1. While making the best use of the unique assets (*shisan* 資産) of Yonaguni handed down to us by our ancestors (natural, historical, cultural, and human assets) as important resources towards the realization of the autonomy of the island and a new feature, the Vision aims at creating a new island to pass on to the new generation.
2. In response to the process of administrative and financial decentralization as initiated by the Trinity Reform among others, it is necessary to newly establish autonomy for residents and to create a vibrant island.
3. The increasingly accelerated global trend of dissolution of borders (*bōdāresu-ka* ボーダーレス化)/globalization and the deregulation occurring worldwide is a great opportunity to move from a ‘remote frontier island’ (*henkyō no shima* 辺境の島)¹⁷³ to an ‘international exchange island’ (*kōryū no shima* 交流の島), and from a ‘dependent economy and society’ (*sonzai-gata keizai shakai* 依存型経済社会) to an ‘independent network-type economy and society’.
4. Without even considering the example of the Takeshima Islands¹⁷⁴ and the southern Kuril Islands (*hoppōyontō* 北方四 in Japanese)¹⁷⁵, it is clear that having national citizens residing and conducting their lives on a border island is extremely important to preserve the national territory and to peacefully protect our country’s land, territorial waters, and economic zones. The inhabitants of Yonaguni play such a role.
5. For many years, the island has been suffering due to its geographical characteristics. Although the situation has been easing in recent years, geographical disadvantages still exist in various aspects such as healthcare, education, prices, and convenience of living.
6. In order for Yonaguni Island residents to achieve safety and security and realize a sustainable community suitable for Japanese citizens, institutional measures by the government are strongly needed based on the unique characteristics of Yonaguni.
7. The awareness, participation and cooperation of individual residents are indispensable in promoting and realizing the vision of autonomy.

¹⁷³ The word *henkyō* designates a region far from the center.

¹⁷⁴ The Takeshima Islands (named Dokdo Islands in Korean) are a group of islets located in the Sea of Japan. Today, South Korea holds control of the islands, but Japan has repeatedly contested its sovereignty over them, and the islands are also claimed by North Korea.

¹⁷⁵ After World War II, the Kuril Islands, located between Hokkaido and the Kamchatka Peninsula, were occupied by Russia and have been held by the latter ever since, despite several attempts on Japanese side to have them returned.

8. Yonaguni is not only popular among people of the local community and island inhabitants, but it has many fans both inside and outside the prefecture. This is Yonaguni unique asset, and it is a valuable resource for regional revitalization. Creating a network that links these human resources can promote the realization of a vision of independence.

The Fundamental Assumptions thus identify three key points: (1) external processes (decentralization at the national level and dissolution of borders at the international level) that do not depend on Yonaguni but that can have a positive impact on the island (point 2 and 3); (2) internal characteristics of Yonaguni (inherited assets, strategic role, and popularity) that can become important resources if properly recognized and valued (points 1, 4, and 8); (3) current limitations (point 5) that can nonetheless be addressed through government intervention (point 6) and by residents actions at a local level (point 7).

These two introductory sections in the Vision are followed by four chapters which make up the main body of the document. Chapter 1, titled ‘Vision and Strategies’ (*bijon to senryaku* ビジョンと戦略), is articulated in three sub-chapters, the first of which represents the very core of the Vision of Autonomy. It outlines in eight points what the ‘New Yonaguni’ that the Vision aims at creating will look like in the future. Each point articulates one of several characteristics that the new Yonaguni will have and ends with a slogan-like phrase that describes the new island synthetically (e.g., ‘Island of...’). According to this section, the post-Vision Yonaguni will be:

1. A ‘self-governed and self-organized island’ (*jichi to jiritsu no shima* 自治と自律の島) filled with *yuimaaru*¹⁷⁶ spirit, where we decide on our issues autonomously, realize autonomously the things that we are able to realize, and help each other.
2. An ‘island of exchange’ (*kōryū no shima* 交流の島), where people can freely come and go not only across prefectures, but also from other countries such as Taiwan, China, South-East-Asia.
3. An ‘economically independent island’ (*jiritsukeizai no shima* 自立経済の島), on which companies established by *Dunantu* themselves play an active role, and companies that utilize local resources are promoted. This will be realized through the establishment of a “Yonaguni brand” for tourism, healthy food, medical herbs, and other special products.

¹⁷⁶ In Uchinaaguchi, the language of southcentral Okinawa Island, *yuimaaru* means ‘to help each other out’.

4. An ‘environment-friendly island’ (*kankyō kyōsei no shima* 環境共生の島) that protects its rich ecosystem and beautiful nature, including precious animals and plants, in order to pass it on to the next generation.
5. A ‘technological island’ (*IT katsuyō no shima* IT 活用の島) on which, through the installation of optical cables, large-capacity internet will reach all local communities and households, reducing geographical disadvantages such as those in the fields of medical care, education, and consumer life.
6. An ‘island of serenity’ (*anshin no shima* 安心の島) where islanders can earn stable income and have low costs of living.
7. An ‘island of healing’ (*iyashi no shima* 癒しの島) where people can enjoy a spiritually rich *slow life* surrounded by a thriving natural environment, traditions, and culture.
8. An ‘island of longevity that treasures children’ (*chōju to kodakara no shima* 長寿と子宝の島) where both children and elders can live in tranquility.

The second sub-chapter in chapter 1 defines the scope of the core concepts of autonomy, self-government, and symbiosis that appear in the title of the document. In particular, it specifies that the concept of ‘autonomy’ does not only have economic implications, but also refers to the autonomy of all individuals and their right to decide for themselves (*jiritsu* 自律). Similarly, the term ‘Self-government’ incorporates both the concept of local self-government (*chihō jichi* 地方自治) and of a form of self-government that is centered on residents (*jūmin jichi* 住民自治). Finally, the term ‘symbiosis’ includes a multiplicity of actors and contexts and refers to the peaceful coexistence and to the pursuit of mutual prosperity between people and nature, between the inhabitants of Yonaguni, and between Yonaguni and Taiwan, China, and other countries in South-East Asia.

Based on the principles outlined above, the third sub-chapter, titled ‘Fundamental Strategies’ (*kihon senryaku* 基本戦略), proposes a summary of the strategies to be adopted to realize the Vision. Each strategy is further broken down into concrete actions, which are then elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. The first strategy consists in the realization of a model of self-government, island revitalization, and town development that is centered on local residents (*jūmin shutai* 住民主体). The actions associated with this strategy position it in the context of existing frameworks at a national or

prefectural level. These are respectively the Basic Ordinance for Self-Government (*jichi kihon jōrei* 自治基本条例) and the Churashima Project (*churashima jigyō* 美ら島事業). The first, also called ‘the Constitution of local governments’, is an ordinance that stipulates the basic rules for the functioning of local governments and the rights of local residents. The Churashima Project, on the other hand, is beneficial to the development of local industries and it promotes the hiring of foreign technical staff for Okinawan companies. The second Basic Strategy departs from the perspective that ‘the main characteristic of Yonaguni’, that is, being a border territory (a condition that has been seen as disadvantageous to the development of the region except for the period after the war) can become a resource when placed in the context of the increasing internationalization of other regions in Asia. From this point of view, the second strategy aims at revitalizing the territory and developing human resources through border exchanges. The associated actions are to implement a Yonaguni ‘special zone’ (*tokku* 特区) and to promote free movement from and to Yonaguni (*jiyū ōrai* 自由往来). The third Basic Strategy again identifies the condition of *shimachabi* (i.e., the emotional problems deriving from remoteness) as the major issue for Yonaguni. Despite recognizing that progress has been made, the Vision states that there remain many issues left to address when it comes to land preservation and the development of settlement conditions, including the need of developing the information and communication infrastructure. The third basic strategy, therefore, identifies technological and communication infrastructure development as a means to improve settlement conditions and aims at strengthening policy support for land preservation. The associated action is the installation of an optical cable.

Chapter 2 goes into more detail with regard to the concrete initiatives that can immediately be taken on the island to pursue the objectives of the Vision. These initiatives are grouped into five different ‘fields’ (*bunya* 分野): (1) Residents’ self-government; (2) Industry and exchanges; (3) Safety and security; (4) Environment; (5) Education. The sixth section of this chapter is dedicated to delineating a plan for the establishment of a ‘Yonaguni Special Zone’, an initiative aimed at overcoming national regulations that constitute an obstacle to the realization of the Vision. The seventh and last section lists eleven projects that can immediately be initiated on Yonaguni. Chapter 3 schematically presents the structure of a ‘network’ meant to connect all individuals and organizations at a prefectural and national level that have an interest in Yonaguni and could therefore contribute to the realization of the Vision. Finally, Chapter 4 provides more details on the integration of the actions proposed by the Vision into the existing frameworks of the Churashima Project and the Okinawa Prefecture Special Program for Remote Island Revitalization (*ritō kassei-ka tokubetsu jigyō* 離島活性化特別事業).

5.4. Space in the Vision

In paragraph 5.1. we have seen how the spatiality of Yonaguni has almost without exception constituted a problem for the island. Yonaguni is either too small for achieving sustainable development and good life conditions, or too remote. Without being addressed, these conditions leave only two options open for Yonaguni: to depend entirely on others, or to remain an economically depressed and depopulated place. However, singling out these two spatial characteristics (smallness and remoteness) is a selective process that, out of the multiple possibilities of space, underlines two specific ones and makes them the sole defining attributes of Yonaguni. The Vision recognizes this process of selection and turns it on its head: instead of selecting and highlighting spatial qualities that would be detrimental to Yonaguni's future, it puts space in the service of its ideas and goals: revitalizing Yonaguni as a place where to live a beneficial and meaningful life. In other words, the Vision recognizes that the way space is imagined bears consequences on everyday life on the island, and it endeavors to draw upon a different selection and to thereby construct a positive geographical imagination in which space does not constitute an obstacle but a resource.

Space as Resource

The first and most overt layer of space that is addressed in the Vision is represented by its material manifestation. However, the latter is not addressed through the identification of concrete places identifiable on a map, but through the use of more abstract and general concepts such as 'nature/natural', 'environment', and 'landscape'. The natural features of the island are mentioned among the material assets at the disposal of Yonaguni in the 'Fundamental Assumptions' (point 1) and are later identified as local resources, and their use by local industries is promoted ('New Yonaguni', point 3). Furthermore, the natural environment of Yonaguni is set to have a central role in the Yonaguni of the future, which will be an environment-friendly island ('New Yonaguni', point 4). The importance of the environment is further underlined in the section that defines the terms contained in the title of the document, which explicitly remarks that the word 'symbiosis' designates the condition of peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity between people and nature. The peculiar environment of the island has a dedicated sub-chapter in the second chapter of the Vision ('Environment'), which lists 14 different initiatives for its preservation and utilization. Nature features prominently also in the second sub-chapter ('Industry and exchanges'), where it is mentioned with regard to its potential for the promotion of tourism and for the establishment of a 'Yonaguni brand' of products. The environment of Yonaguni that the Vision addresses, however, is not only made up by natural features; the document also mentions in this section man-made construction such as the

traditional red-tile roofs of Yonaguni houses, and the ‘underwater ruins’ (*kaitei iseki* 海底遺跡) located near the coast of Yonaguni, identifying the ‘landscape’ (*keikan* 景觀) of the island as an ‘important local resource’. In all the above-mentioned sections, the Vision selectively singles out the material dimension of the space of Yonaguni, which is usually overlooked in bigger-scale accounts of Yonaguni due to the island’s small dimensions, and instead presents it as rich and valuable, turning it into a resource to be preserved and utilized to the benefit of Yonaguni itself.

In the vision, Yonaguni islanders (*Dunantu*) are central, both with regard to implementing the actions required for realizing the Vision and as the main beneficiaries of the new Yonaguni that this initiative aims at creating. Their agency is repeatedly underlined in the introductory sections of the document (‘Guiding Principles’ and ‘Fundamental Assumptions’) and in the ‘New Yonaguni’ manifesto, where the people of Yonaguni are identified as ‘human assets’ (*jinteki shisan* 人的資産) and bound together by the *maarunna* and *yuimaaru* spirit. This community of *Dunantu* on which the vision relies is imagined and cemented by making use of space: *Dunantu* are rooted on *Dunanchima* (‘Guiding Principles’, point 2), which is in turn made to equate distinctive culture, history, and values (most importantly, autonomy). The insularity of Yonaguni thus emerges as a resource that, rather than isolating, can bring people who inhabit it together in the pursuit of a common objective. The possibility to imagine themselves as a community based on a bounded space also allows Yonaguni islanders to underline the important role that they play at a national level as peaceful ‘border keepers’ (‘Guiding Principles’, point 6; ‘Fundamental Assumptions’, point 4) and to reclaim autonomy and the right to decide for themselves (‘New Yonaguni’, point 1). Being constrained inside a limited space is reframed positively as a resource for community building.

The Vision does not overlook but explicitly calls to attention the ‘geographical disadvantages’ that Yonaguni has to confront, namely being an ‘isolated border territory’ (‘General Principles’ point 4) or a ‘remote frontier island’ (‘Basic Assumptions’, point 3). However, it does so while recognizing that there have been times, such as the early post-war years, when these characteristics of Yonaguni did not constitute a problem. In addressing this situation, the Vision interrupts the ideological link between the island geographical position and the conditions of isolations and remoteness by shifting the problem from the island itself to the presence of borders. Isolation is not intrinsic in Yonaguni; on the contrary, it is the presence of a border that cuts Yonaguni off from its closest neighbors which constructs the island as isolated. By shifting the origin of the problem from Yonaguni to national borders, the Vision frees Yonaguni ideologically from the necessity of these geographical disadvantages and opens up new ways of addressing them: Yonaguni can profit from the global trend

of borders dissolution ('Basic Assumptions', point 3) and create a 'special zone' that favors the movement of people across borders. Through this initiative, Yonaguni can be transformed from a remote island into an 'island of exchange' ('New Yonaguni', point 2), setting an example for the realization of an international society ('Guiding Principles', point 5). While the absence of borders during the post-war period was involuntary caused by a momentaneous power vacuum, the Vision explicitly and voluntarily aims at an easing of border restriction. This would radically change the way of imagining Yonaguni from the isolated westernmost point of Japan to an integral part of the East-Asian region.

However, the purported remoteness of Yonaguni does not only depend on the presence of a national border running between the island, Taiwan, and other East-Asian countries. Yonaguni is considered remote also because of the great distances that separate it from the Japanese mainland. As seen throughout the history of Yonaguni, these objective distances have caused Yonaguni to be for the most part excluded from the developments that occurred on the mainland and that are usually associated with 'progress'. In its formulation, the Vision addresses this second type of remoteness, too, this time not by shifting the origin of the problem, but by transforming the connotations of remoteness from negative to positive. According to the perspective of the Vision, the consequences of the distance of Yonaguni from more 'dynamic' parts of Japan are not framed in a discourse of backwardness; instead, this same distance is reframed positively as characteristics that can potentially make Yonaguni an 'island of healing' and an 'island of longevity' where people can live a quiet and spiritually rich slow life ('New Yonaguni', point 7 and point 8). Selecting and emphasizing the spatial attributes of connectedness and proximity to East-Asia on the one hand and attaching new connotations to Yonaguni's remoteness from mainland Japan on the other are the fundamental contributions of the Vision to the formulation of a positive geographical imagination.

Transforming the Idea of Yonaguni

The creation of the new geographical imagination proposed by the vision is based on a fundamental spatial idea: Yonaguni is not the periphery of other regions but constitutes its own center and, from this central position, it can connect to neighboring regions and polities. Adopting this perspective allows the creators of the Vision to make choices not based on expectations or discourses of what Yonaguni should be, but on what it is for the people who inhabit the island. In other words, the fundamental condition that has to be satisfied in order for the Vision to work is a change of frame: the outside perspective on Yonaguni has to be abandoned, and a new one clearly centered on the island has to be adopted instead. The new idea of a centered Yonaguni makes it possible to identify

solutions compatible with its geographical position, climate, resources, culture, and history, and to draw on different spatial characteristics to mold a new geographical imagination favorable to their realization. Differently from the folktales analyzed in the previous chapter, which from the start assume Yonaguni as the sole point of reference and therefore contain no meta-discourse on space, the Vision has to explicitly address the island's positioning in the pursuit of its own goals. This and other differences between the different modalities in which the folktales and the Vision construct their own geographical imagination of Yonaguni will be addressed in the conclusions.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to investigate geographical imaginations, i.e., ways of imagining, viewing, and representing space, as they have emerged on the island of Yonaguni, in order to uncover alternatives to the currently widespread narrative centered on the idea of Yonaguni as a ‘remote island’. In pursuing this aim, the study departed from the basic assumption that space is not only a material, objective, and necessary fact, but it is also a malleable entity that can be imagined in multiple and often contrasting ways. From this assumption follows that space can be addressed, constructed, and modified not only materially but also discursively through different kinds of narratives. This study chose to address questions of space on Yonaguni from the perspective of narratives by analyzing two different textual sources: a collection of folktales compiled on the island in 1978 and the *Vision of Autonomy* published by the townhall of Yonaguni in 2005. These two sources share certain similarities that allow for a contrastive analysis. Most importantly, both are texts that emanated from Yonaguni and have been created by its inhabitants, differentiating them from other available texts on the island, which are a meta-narrative on its history, culture, geography, etc. However, most insights into the emergence and contents of geographical imaginations are gained from juxtaposing the two texts in order to highlight their differences. These differences emerge with regard to two different aspects of the texts: the mode of construction of geographical imaginations, and the actual contents of the imaginations they construct.

As seen in the introduction, geographical imaginations can be of two main kinds: implicit and explicit. For the purpose of this study, ‘implicit geographical imaginations’ were defined as those perceptions of space that are mediated through practices and therefore not explicitly formulated or addressed. The label ‘explicit geographical imaginations’, on the other hand, identifies ideas about space that emerge from an explicit engagement with space itself, with the purpose of representing, understanding, or ordering it. This is the first aspect that sets the two analyzed sources apart: while the *Vision* *explicitly* aims at fostering a new idea of Yonaguni for the benefit of the island, the folktales *implicitly* create a geographical imagination by fictionally reproducing events, practices, and social relations that take place on it. In the texts, this difference manifests through the presence and absence of spatial meta-language, respectively. The *Vision* explicitly addresses the ‘environment’ and ‘landscape’ of Yonaguni, as well as its ‘geographical disadvantages’ and its ‘remote’ and ‘border’ position, essentially telling its readers how they should think about Yonaguni as a space. By contrast, the folktales do not articulate an explicit reflection on the characteristics of space. This first contrast required different approaches for the analysis of the two sources: while it was possible to directly address the characteristics of the geographical imagination proposed by the *Vision*, the analysis of

folktales had to proceed in different stages, from the most overt features of space (place names, orientation system, material manifestation of places) to the implicit meaning attributed to the latter and the mechanisms that contribute to generating this meaning.

These differences between the two texts bring us back to the first research question that the present study addresses, namely which factors contribute to the formation of geographical imaginations. We can now conclude that these differ greatly depending on whether the formulation of the geographical imagination is implicit or explicit. In the latter case, which applies to the Vision, the emergence of the geographical imagination is sustained and propelled by the presence of another, opposite imagination, the effects of which the Vision aims at countering or undoing. In other words, the ‘antagonistic’ imagination of Yonaguni as a remote island directly triggers the elaboration and determines the characteristics of the geographical imagination of the Vision by opposition. This necessity of countering the former imagination is in turn determined by economic, cultural, and historical factors. On the other hand, the folktales are implicit because they assume Yonaguni as the sole point of reference from the start and therefore have no reason for explicitly reframing the idea of the island. In the folktales, the concepts of ‘remoteness’ and ‘isolation’ do not feature prominently and the geographical position of Yonaguni is not presented as marked. On the contrary, it is Yonaguni that serves as a point of reference for positioning places outside of it. The geographical imagination of the folktales is not directly influenced by external factors; instead, as seen at the end of Chapter 4, it emerges as a ‘side effect’ of the unfolding of daily life on Yonaguni itself.

Apart from their structure and mode of construction of geographical imaginations (explicit and implicit), the two sources differ also with regard to the characteristics of the geographical imaginations they construct and the spatial features they draw upon to construct them. The second research question asked at the beginning of this study was formulated as follows: what features of the space of Yonaguni Island emerge as meaningful in the construction of geographical imaginations? In this respect, the folktales rely heavily on the use of concrete elements present on the island of Yonaguni, namely natural features (such as mountains, caves, rivers, the shore, and the sea), human constructions (especially the space of the house), and both real and imagined places located outside of the island. They also make extensive use of placenames and cardinal directions, which combined together give rise to the orientation system on which the folktales rely to precisely locate the stories they narrate. To put it differently, the geographical imagination of folktales is focused primarily on what I have referred to as the ‘location’ and ‘locale’ dimensions of space. On the contrary, the sections of the Vision analyzed in this study do not draw so much on concrete and identifiable portions of space as on abstract concepts or qualities that can be attributed to it, highlighting those that can

become a resource for the island: the ‘nature’, ‘environment’, and ‘landscape’ of Yonaguni, Yonaguni’s insularity, Yonaguni’s connectedness and proximity to East-Asia, and the positive sides of Yonaguni’s distance from mainland Japan.

The last research question introduced at the beginning of the present study asked whether the geographical imaginations emerging from the folktales and the Vision shared any similarity with the more academically structured ones presented in Chapter 2 under the labels of ‘Space’, ‘Place’, and ‘Landscape’. To answer this question, too, it is necessary to differentiate between two different layers: the layer of the text (i.e., the way in which geographical imaginations are formulated) and the layer of its content. With regard to the former, both texts can be seen as an example of ‘Place-making activities’ that endow a portion of Space with meaning, thereby turning it into a meaningful Place (see page 9). At the same time, the texts can be also seen as ‘textual images’ that frame and capture a specific configuration of Landscape, and as ‘representational practices’ that shape Landscape itself (see page 12). At the level of content, the Yonaguni created by the geographical imagination proposed by the folktales, which fictionally reproduce events, practices, and social relations that take place on the island, could be interpreted through a variety of lenses: through the idea of Place as a portion of space that has been made meaningful by the act of inhabiting it; through the idea of Space as both a product of social relations and as a means for solidifying and reproducing them; through the idea of Landscape as a material ‘thing’ constituted in practice and part of a wider material culture. However, all of these instances of geographical imaginations transcend the realm of representations. In order to thoroughly investigate them based on the case study of Yonaguni, it would be necessary to set texts aside and, as Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum put it, adopt an approach that moves “from representations to the materially grounded messiness of everyday life and the minutiae of material practices that constitute it”¹⁷⁷. In other words, representing space through texts is only one way of constructing and imagining it. Concentrating only on this aspect constitutes the limitation of the present study. A possibility for future studies seeking to understand how the space of Yonaguni is envisioned and perceived would be to depart from texts and engage with the materiality of Yonaguni and the use its inhabitants make of it.

¹⁷⁷ Christopher TILLEY and Kate CAMERON-DAUM, *An Anthropology of Landscape ...*, cit. p. 5.

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