LEX LOCALIS-JOURNAL OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
ISSN:1581-5374 E-ISSN:1855-363X
VOL. 23, NO. S5(2025)

WHISPERS OF REBELLION: OKINAWAN AESTHETIC DEFIANCE AGAINST PSEUDO-UNIVERSALISM

Zhengtang Dai[1]

[1]Portsmouth Abbey School, United States of America

[1]apollasus@gmail.com

Abstract:
This paper examines how pseudo-universalism—where the cultural norms of dominant groups are presented as universally valid—operates as an insidious force that marginalizes and erases minority identities, using Okinawa as a central case study. In the historical context of the Ryukyu Kingdom's annexation by Japan, the imposition of "modern" Japanese cultural, linguistic, and religious frameworks systematically suppressed Okinawan traditions and language, relegating them to a status deemed primitive or backward. Yet, against this background of forced assimilation, Okinawans resisted in subtle yet profound ways. By exploring how educators quietly preserved local history in classrooms, spiritual leaders (yuta) maintained indigenous cosmologies, and literary works by authors like Medoruma Shun and MabuniChōshin asserted cultural memory and defiance, this paper reveals the enduring power of aesthetic expression and intellectual subtlety in challenging hegemonic norms. Through the analysis of literature, education, and spiritual practices, it becomes evident that the resilience of Okinawan identity is sustained by narratives that refuse to disappear. Ultimately, this study illuminates how minority communities can transform sites of cultural erasure into arenas of creative resistance, ensuring their voices endure and shape their futures in the face of homogenizing pressures.

Keywords: Pseudo-universalism, Okinawa, cultural identity, literary resistance, forced assimilation, Ryukyu Kingdom, linguistic suppression, indigenous spirituality, Medoruma Shun, Mabuni Chōshin

Introduction

Universalism, that lofty ideal which promises to unite diverse cultures beneath the banner of shared human values, has long dazzled the intellectual mind. It champions the ideal of transcending borders, of dissolving the boundaries that divide us, and of fostering a communion built upon mutual understanding and solidarity. Yet, beneath this shimmering veil, a more insidious force often lurks. When the particularities of a dominant culture are paraded as universally applicable truths, there emerges a phenomenon both subtle and treacherous: ***pseudo-universalism***. It is a masquerade, one that quietly erodes the rights of minority groups, while at the same time stripping cultural diversity of its vibrant hues, bleaching it in the whitewash of hegemonic conformity.

This process of cultural erasure finds its most precise expression in moments of historical transformation. Consider the spring of 1879, when the distinctive red tiles of Shuri Castle gleamed under the sun as Japanese officials arrived to dissolve a kingdom. In the name of modernization, the Meiji government began reshaping Okinawan identity with a simple, devastating message: to be modern was to be Japanese, and to be Japanese meant erasing what made Okinawa distinct. Here, pseudo-universalism's double movement not only elevated particular cultural forms to universal status, it also simultaneously degraded local traditions to the status of primitive relics.

Yet within this landscape of enforced assimilation, resistance emerged through unexpected channels. Contemporary Okinawan literature stands as a persistent defiance against these homogenizing pressures, demonstrating how aesthetic expression becomes a crucial site of

cultural survival. This paper seeks to unravel the complex ways in which literature and aesthetics serve as acts of rebellion against this suffocating force. Through the alchemy of creative expression, marginalized voices could challenge the dominant narratives, asserting their cultural identities and daring to present perspectives that resist conformity.

Sojourning in the literary landscapes crafted by Medoruma Shun in "***Hope***" and MabuniChōshin in "***White Ryukyuan Tombs***,"we find narratives that bear witness to the aesthetic strategies employed to fend off the creeping encroachments of pseudo-universalist ideology. By navigating the works of authors from divergent corners of society, this paper unveils the pervasive reach of pseudo-universalism and underscores the unifying power of literature to confront and unravel the oppressive structures of conformity.

Pseudo-Universalism: Vandalism of Okinawan Identity

"Their complaint is not with universalism at all. What they truly object to—and who would not?—is Eurocentric hegemony posing as universalism" (Appiah, 1993, p. 58). Kwame Anthony Appiah's sharp observation penetrates the heart of a deeply rooted historical issue: the co-optation of universal values by dominant cultures to propagate their own worldviews. Appiah critiques the phenomenon where powerful societies present their specific cultural norms—shaped by their unique histories and values—as if they were universal principles applicable to all humanity. This strategy serves to legitimize their dominance while marginalizing other cultures. While Appiah discusses Eurocentric hegemony, the concept of pseudo-universalism extends beyond European colonialism. It encapsulates any scenario where a dominant power imposes its particular cultural norms as universal standards, thereby marginalizing and erasing the identities of subordinate groups.

In the case of Japan during the Meiji era (1868–1912), the government embarked on a rapid modernization and westernization campaign to strengthen the nation and prevent colonization by Western powers. In doing so, Japan adopted certain Western ideals of nationhood, progress, and civilization but reframed them within its own cultural context. This process led Japan to assert its own cultural norms as universal, particularly in territories like Okinawa, which had distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical identities. The Japanese government positioned its language, customs, and social structures as the epitome of modernity, expecting all regions under its control to conform. Japan, much like European powers arrogated to themselves the "authority" to define the boundaries of "humanity" itself.

The systematic suppression of the Okinawan language, Uchinaaguchi, stands as a glaring example of the deleterious effects of pseudo-universalism in Okinawa. Prior to the annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879, Uchinaaguchi and other Ryukyuan languages were woven into the very fabric of Okinawan culture, serving as conduits for unique expressions, oral traditions, and a sense of identity that stood apart from that of mainland Japan. However, in the wake of the annexation, the Japanese government embarked upon a concerted effort to enforce linguistic assimilation, wielding it as a tool to forge a unified national identity. In a move that can only be described as a deliberate attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Uchinaaguchi, the language was relegated to the status of a mere dialect of Japanese, willfully ignoring its distinct grammatical structure and vocabulary. This calculated reclassification served to reinforce the notion that Uchinaaguchi was somehow inferior or incomplete when compared to the Japanese language.

The consequences of this linguistic suppression extended far beyond the realm of mere categorization. In schools, the use of Uchinaaguchi was met with harsh and often demeaning punishments, such as the use of hōgenfuda (dialect tags) – placards that were hung around the

necks of students caught speaking their native tongue (Heinrich, 2004). This practice, which can only be described as a form of public shaming, served to instill a deep sense of humiliation and shame in those who dared to express themselves in their own language. The education system, which should have been a bastion of enlightenment and growth, was instead transformed into an instrument of linguistic imperialism, one in which the speaking of standard Japanese was held up as the gold standard of modernity, progress, and social advancement, while Uchinaaguchi was cast aside as a relic of a backward and obsolete past.

The ripple effects of this linguistic suppression extended far beyond the classroom, permeating every aspect of Okinawan society. It disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions that were deeply embedded in the language, leading to a gradual erosion of cultural practices and oral histories. As Inoue (2007) astutely observes, this process was part and parcel of a broader strategy to "define clearly marked territory as a modern nation-state" (p. 56), one in which linguistic uniformity was conflated with national unity. By elevating standard Japanese to the status of the language of modernity and progress, the government effectively invalidated Uchinaaguchi, displacing local traditions and ways of being in favor of the norms and values of the dominant culture.

The insidious nature of pseudo-universalism extends beyond the realm of language, permeating the very core of Okinawan identity and fostering a deep-seated sense of internalized inferiority among its marginalized populations. Traditional customs, such as hajichi (women's hand tattoos) and indigenous religious practices, found themselves in the crosshairs of the Japanese authorities, who were quick to label them as barbaric and antithetical to the grand project of modernization (Smits, 1999). Hajichi, a rite of passage for Okinawan women that served as a symbol of marital status, social standing, and protection from evil spirits, was reduced to little more than an unsightly and unhygienic blemish on the face of the modern nation, unworthy of preservation or respect.

In a similar vein, the rich tapestry of indigenous religious practices, with their emphasis on ancestor worship and the veneration of nature spirits, was dismissed as little more than a collection of irrational superstitions, unfit for a society that sought to align itself with the dictates of progress and enlightenment. The Japanese government saw fit to promote Shintoism as the official state religion, a move that effectively marginalized Okinawan spiritual beliefs and relegated them to the dustbin of history (Kerr, 2000). Those Okinawans who dared to cling to their traditional practices found themselves faced with a stark choice: abandon their beliefs and conform to the dominant norms or risk social stigma and ostracization. This stigmatization was further reinforced through a web of laws and social policies that actively discouraged traditional ceremonies and festivals, sending a clear message that Okinawan culture was inferior and unwelcoming in the new social order.

The end result of this campaign of cultural suppression, as Inoue (2007) so poignantly describes, was a perverse "assimilation-cum-discrimination" (p. 56) dynamic, in which Okinawans were simultaneously encouraged to adopt Japanese customs in order to be accepted, while also being subjected to discrimination and prejudice on account of their origins. Faced with this impossible choice, many Okinawans felt compelled to gradually abandon their cultural practices, not out of a genuine desire to assimilate, but rather as a means of avoiding the pain and humiliation of discrimination. This abandonment, however, came at a terrible cost, as it represented a profound internalization of the belief that their own culture was somehow inferior or unworthy, a tragic

testament to the ways in which pseudo-universalism not only suppresses cultural diversity but also erodes the very self-worth and dignity of the people within those cultures.

The ultimate irony of pseudo-universalism lies in its false promise of inclusion, a cruel deception that offers marginalized cultures a tantalizing glimpse of acceptance while demanding nothing less than total cultural erasure in return. It suggests, with a sly and insidious wink, that the path to full humanity lies in the wholesale adoption of the dominant culture's values and practices, as if the rich tapestry of human diversity could be so easily reduced to a single, monolithic ideal. For the Okinawan people, this Faustian bargain must have seemed like a tempting offer, a chance to finally take their place at the table of modernity and progress. Yet, as they soon discovered, the price of admission was far higher than they could have ever imagined. Even those Okinawans who fully embraced the assimilationist project, who contorted themselves into the mold of the perfect Japanese subject, found that they were still regarded as outsiders by mainland Japanese society, forever tainted by lingering prejudices and historical stigmas. In the end, they were not truly integrated but merely assimilated forced to surrender the very aspects of identity that made them unique and vibrant in exchange for a hollow simulacrum of belonging.

The tragic case of ŌtaChōfu, an Okinawan intellectual who advocated for complete assimilation, serves as a poignant illustration of the depths of self-negation that pseudo-universalism demands. In a statement that would be almost comical if it weren't so deeply disturbing, Ōta famously declared that Okinawans should "even sneeze the way people in other prefectures do" (Inoue, 2007, p. 57), as if the very essence of Okinawan identity could be boiled down to a particular way of expelling mucus. This hyperbolic assertion underscores the extent to which Okinawans felt compelled to abandon their cultural heritage in the desperate pursuit of acceptance, a pursuit that was ultimately doomed to failure. Ōta's stance reflects the internalized pressures of pseudo-universalism, a pernicious force that compels the colonized to adopt the colonizer's values to the point of self-negation, only to find that true inclusion remains forever out of reach. In this twisted logic, the only way for Okinawans to become fully human was to erase the very things that made them human in the first place, a tragic irony that speaks to the fundamental violence of the pseudo-universalist project.

The Quiet Rebellion: Education, Literature, Core of Okinawan Identity

The systematic erosion of Okinawan cultural identity, driven by the forces of Japanese pseudo-universalism, created a landscape where language, traditions, and spirituality were suppressed in the name of modernization and national unity. Okinawafound itself absorbed into an imperial project that sought to remake it in the image of the Japanese state. Nevertheless, as the island's unique identity was pushed to the margins, it did not vanish. Instead, it adapted, persisted, and eventually rebelled. This rebellion was not always loud or overt; rather, it manifested in the everyday lives of Okinawans—through the preservation of local customs, the resurgence of spiritual practices, and the quiet acts of cultural defiance that resisted the state's homogenizing agenda. In the face of cultural erasure, Okinawans found new ways to assert their identity, subtly reclaiming their heritage even as the forces of assimilation pressed against them. It is in this complex interplay between erasure and resistance that Okinawan rebellion takes root, a rebellion that is as much about survival as it is about the refusal to be forgotten.

Matthew Allen's ***Identity and Resistance in Okinawa*** (Allen, M., 2002)paints a picture of Okinawan defiance that is not found in grand political gestures or loud proclamations of rebellion, but in the delicate persistence of local traditionswhispered in classrooms. In Kumejima, educators artfully balance the official narratives imposed by Monbusho—the Japanese Ministry

of Education—with local history and culture, quietly undermining the state's efforts to standardize identity. In classrooms, one finds the gentle insertion of Okinawan stories and language, "hybridized" with the national curriculum (Figal, 2004, p. 201). Thisis the subtlest and the most potentform of defiance: to continue to tell your story, even when the official narrative has no room for you.

They do not openly challenge the curriculum; they do not refuse to teach the emperor's version of Japanese history. Instead, they infuse that history with something of their own—an additional layer that speaks to Okinawa's past, its culture, its unresolved tensions. The tension between local and national narratives becomes the stage on which Okinawan identity is quietly, almost invisibly asserted. It is in this balancing act, this silent assertion, that we see a remarkable form of intellectual and cultural resilience. To teach children about the Ryūkyū Kingdom, to tell them that their ancestors were not merely backward subjects waiting to be rescued by the Japanese state, is to remind them that their identity is worth preserving, even in a world that insists on its irrelevance.This is the ultimate irony of pseudo-universalism: it seeks to erase by imposing a single narrative, yet it unintentionally generates the need for the erased to speak louder, even if only in whispers. Okinawa's story refuses to be silenced, finding its way into the margins of textbooks, into the moments between lessons, into the side-glances shared by students and teachers who know the weight of what is not said. It is in these margins, these unspoken acknowledgments, where Okinawan identity survives.

Furthermore, this resistance does not end with education. Yuta, who is the Okinawan shamans who continue to guide their communities despite the pressures of modernity. The yuta embody a world where modernity and tradition are not at odds but in conversation. The yuta, with their ancient rituals and spiritual guidance, stand as a living testament to a worldview that predates the Japanese empire and resists the binary logic of progress versus tradition. They remind us that even as Okinawa is pulled into the orbit of the Japanese state, its spiritual life remains stubbornly intact, rooted in the island's ancient cosmologies. The figure of the yuta is emblematic of Okinawa's refusal to be fully assimilated. The state's insistence on "modernizing" Okinawa has not erased the island's spiritual core; it has, in fact, strengthened it. By continuing to seek guidance from yuta, Okinawans are asserting that their way of knowing, their way of being in the world, is not inferior to the systems imposed upon them. This is resistance in its most elemental form—not through confrontation but through persistence.

As the quiet defiance within Okinawan classrooms demonstrates, education serves as a powerful tool for preserving cultural identity in the face of assimilation. However, the rebellion does not end within the walls of schools. Literature, too, becomes a battlefield where the past, present, and future of Okinawa are contested. Just as teachers subtly weave Okinawan history into their lessons, writers craft narratives that challenge the forces of erasure, transforming stories and poems, into weapons of resistance. Through the power of words, literature preserves what the dominant culture seeks to suppress, carrying forward a rebellion that resonates far beyond the page.

In ***White Ryukyuan Tombs***, MabuniChōshin employs the sparse yet poignant imagery of the tombs to carve out an unflinching statement on the power of cultural memory and its place in resisting erasure. The poem's brevity is deceptive. Beneath its few lines lies a profound reflection on the ongoing struggle between tradition and the forces that seek to assimilate and dilute Okinawan identity. Through this reflection, literature becomes a sanctuary where the past is protected from the encroaching tides of modernity and cultural homogenization.

The tombs, described as "houses where we say farewell and houses where we drink sake" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 225), embody the duality of grief and celebration, sorrow and continuity. Literature here rebels not through the overt act of protest, but through the quiet assertion of a cultural practice that resists vanishing into oblivion. These tombs, though monuments to death, are also sites of life. The sake, symbol of celebration and tradition, represents the endurance of rituals that defy the passage of time. Chōshin turns the very image of finality—the tomb—into something living, breathing, and inherently defiant. The poet's subtle use of this duality reflects the broader struggle of Okinawan culture: the refusal to be merely historical or dead, even when under pressure to conform or be erased.

The second line, "These eyes of mine, full of worry and sadness, see white Ryukyuan tombs as white faces in profile" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 225), transforms the tombs into something deeply personal, into ghostly reflections of the Ryukyuan people themselves. It is not just the dead that are remembered here, but the living whose cultural identity has been fractured, perhaps irrevocably. The white tombs, standing starkly against the landscape, become both witness and victim. Their profiles, turned in some unspoken sadness, are emblems of a people whose distinctiveness has been threatened by decades of forced assimilation. In this way, the tombs represent more the death itself; they are a metaphor for the Ryukyuan people, frozen between their past and a future that continually demands they relinquish their identity.Chōshin's genius lies in this transformation—where a physical structure becomes a living metaphor. His use of literary imagery as rebellion is nuancedand powerful. These white tombs, unyielding in their presence, serve as a reminder that even as Okinawa is modernized, militarized, and coerced into conformity, its cultural markers remain. They stand as proof of survival, proof of a history that refuses to be erased.

The final lines of the poem, "With feet used to walking the beach / how painful is it to pass down Ginza's boulevards" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 225), are where Chōshin shifts from metaphor to stark reality. Here, the speaker reflects on the physical and emotional dissonance between the natural, untamed beaches of Okinawa and the polished, artificial boulevards of Ginza. The "pain" of walking down those boulevards speak to the alienation of the Ryukyuan people, now outsiders in their own land, made to conform to the rhythms of a world not their own. The feet, used to the soft, familiar sands of the island, now tread painfully on foreign ground—symbolizing the forced assimilation of Okinawan culture into the dominant Japanese mainstream. This line evokes a powerful sense of loss, not just of a place, but of a way of life, a connection to the land and the ancestors that modernity seeks to sever.Yet even in this pain, there is rebellion. The act of feeling pain is, in itself, a rejection of that which causes it. Chōshin's speaker is not numb to the forces of assimilation; he feels their weight, their suffocating presence, and it is this feeling that becomes an act of defiance. He recognizes the displacement, the loss, and in doing so, resists it. The rebellion in ***White Ryukyuan Tombs*** is not one of arms or protests, but of memory and feeling. It is the refusal to forget, the refusal to become fully subsumed into the machinery of modernity.

Chōshin's poem asserts the importance of place, tradition, and memory in a world that seeks to erase all three. Hence, the white tombs are not just symbols of death—they are symbols of survival, of a culture that, though it may be pressured and transformed, remains resilient. Literature, in this context, becomes the space where that resilience is not only remembered but made tangible. The power of Chōshin's work lies in its ability to transform the tombs from mere structures into living, breathing entities that carry the weight of history and the burden of

survival.In ***White Ryukyuan Tombs***, the rebellion is quiet, yet it echoes loudly through the imagery of the tombs, the transformation of the landscape, and the painful awareness of displacement. The tombs, like the poem itself, refuse to disappear. They demand to be seen, to be recognized, and to be remembered. And in that demand, in that insistence on memory and place, lies the true power of literary rebellion.

MedorumaShun's***Hope*** offers a chilling, confrontational narrative that strips away any veneer of Okinawa as a "peace-loving, healing island" and lays bare the complex tensions beneath its surface. The story harnesses the visceral power of violence and despair to expose the futility of peaceful resistance, shifting the narrative of Okinawan passivity into one of radical action. Through this, Shun employs literature as a form of rebellion—not merely against the American military occupation, but against the imposed identity of Okinawa as a pacified and subordinate territory within the geopolitical theater of U.S. and Japanese control.

From the very outset, the imagery Medoruma chooses is designed to unsettle. The story begins with the discovery of the strangled body of an American soldier's child—a grotesque symbol of the resentment brewing in Okinawa. The protagonist's indifference to the murder, and his mockery of the "pompous pronouncements" of U.S. and Japanese officials condemning the crime, reflects a deep disillusionment with the authorities who dominate the island. As he eats curried rice while watching the news report, the narrator dismisses the outrage of the officials as hollow, stating, "There was no way their pompous pronouncements could hide their exhaustion and bewilderment. That Okinawans—so docile, so meek—could use such tactics was something the bastards had never even imagined" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 23).

This line is critical in understanding how Medoruma uses literature as a subversive tool. By giving voice to the narrator's bitter reflection on the stereotypical image of Okinawans, Medoruma confronts the dominant narrative that has long portrayed Okinawans as submissive, compliant, and peace-loving. Here, literature becomes an active force that challenges these reductive stereotypes. The narrator's cynicism toward peaceful protests is clear: "Okinawans were, after all, a people who followed their leaders and, at most, held 'antiwar' or 'antibase' rallies with polite protest marches" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 23). This scornful reflection captures the impotence of traditional forms of protest, emphasizing the inadequacy of peaceful resistance in the face of a power structure that systematically ignores the voices of the marginalized. Through this, ***Hope*** questions the ethics of rebellion itself. When traditional modes of protest have been exhausted, when rallies of 80,000 people—such as the one following the rape of a twelve-year-old girl by American soldiers—achieve "absolutely nothing," is violence then the only remaining option? The protagonist's murder of the child, horrifying as it is, becomes a symbolic rebellion against a system that has left Okinawa with no other means to assert its identity or sovereignty. He reflects on the failure of that earlier rally: "Now it seemed so long ago. I had finally done what I'd thought about doing that day as I'd stood on the edge of the crowd" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 24). This final, devastating act is a rebellion against the impotent rage and the futile protests of a people who have seen no real change in their condition.

Medoruma's protagonist feels no remorse for his actions, stating that he had "done what was natural and necessary for this island" (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 24). The word "necessary" is crucial here; it signals that the protagonist's act of violence is not borne out of madness or cruelty, but out of a belief that drastic measures are required to bring about any real awareness or change. This reflects the broader theme of Medoruma's literary rebellion: the idea that

sometimes literature must confront the most unsettling and uncomfortable truths in order to force a re-examination of deeply entrenched power dynamics. By giving voice to such violent anger, Medoruma confronts the reader with the consequences of systemic oppression—consequences that are too often ignored or sanitized by the dominant powers.

The power of literature in ***Hope*** lies in its ability to shock and unsettle. Medoruma does not offer easy answers or moral certainties. Instead, he forces the reader to confront the darker realities of Okinawa's colonial experience and the inevitable consequences of sustained powerlessness. The murder of the child becomes a symbol of the profound alienation and rage that has been simmering beneath the surface of Okinawan society. Through this act of rebellion, Medoruma dismantles the myth of Okinawan docility and challenges the reader to consider the limits of peaceful protest in the face of overwhelming oppression.

Medoruma's narrative is also filled with layers of symbolism. The imagery of the crescent moon, described as hovering "like the fang of a poisonous habu snake," evokes the latent danger and hostility simmering beneath Okinawa's surface (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 23). This image of the moon-as-snake reflects the island's venomous response to its treatment by both the U.S. and Japanese governments. The island's beauty and its reputation as a "healing island" are contrasted against the venomous anger and resentment that have built up over years of subjugation. The protagonist's final act, setting himself on fire and becoming a "smoking black lump," is the culmination of this venom, a final rejection of the passive identity imposed upon Okinawa (Bhowmik &Rabson, 2016, p. 24). This self-immolation is both a literal and symbolic burning away of the imposed narratives, an act of purification through destruction. ***Hope***symbolizes the rebellion against the broader forces of cultural erasure and imposed passivity. The story confronts the reader with the question of what happens when peaceful resistance is no longer enough—when an entire population is pushed to the point where violence seems like the only option left. Through its unsettling narrative and its refusal to offer easy answers, ***Hope*** uses the power of literature to expose the complex, often violent undercurrents of Okinawan resistance and identity. Medoruma forces us to recognize that, sometimes, the quietest places harbor the most dangerous storms.

Conclusion

At last, we come to the quiet, inexorable truth beneath this exploration. The force of pseudo-universalism, wrapped in the soothing guise of progress and unity, moves through cultures like a slow eroding tide, wearing away the uniqueness of identities until all that remains is a flattened landscape of conformity. The annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom and Japan's relentless project to assimilate Okinawa into its imperial fold are emblematic of this quiet violence—a calculated stripping away of language, tradition, and selfhood in the name of modernization. Yet, as this paper has traced through the veins of Okinawan resistance, the island has refused to be entirely submerged by this tide.

Resistance in Okinawa took the form of subtle defiance embedded within the fabric of daily life. In classrooms across the island, educators engage in quiet rebellion by infusing the mandated curriculum with local history, language, and cultural practices. Despite pressures to conform to national standards, these teachers nurture a sense of Okinawan identity among their students, ensuring that the stories and traditions of their ancestors are not lost to the homogenizing forces of pseudo-universalism. Parallel to the defiance found in education is the spiritual resilience embodied by the yuta, Okinawan shamans who continue to practice ancient rituals and maintain

a deep connection to the spiritual heritage of the island. The yuta serve as custodians of indigenous beliefs, offering guidance and healing that are rooted in a worldview distinct from the dominant culture. By sustaining these practices, the yuta preserve essential aspects of Okinawan identity and directly challenge the narrative that modernization necessitates the abandonment of traditional beliefs.

It is in literature, in the subtle, fierce act of writing, that some of the most powerful rebellions take root. Through the spare, unyielding imagery of MabuniChōshin's***White Ryukyuan Tombs***, the past is kept alive—not embalmed, but breathing, haunting, defiant. The tombs stand not as mere memorials to what has been lost but as symbols of endurance, of a culture that, even in death, refuses to disappear. They echo the silent rebellions in classrooms and the spiritual steadfastness of the yuta, collectively reinforcing the island's resistance to cultural erasure.MedorumaShun's***Hope***—so visceral, so unnerving—rips away the veneer of politeness that has long masked Okinawa's struggles. Through depictions of violence and despair, Medoruma forces us to confront the buried anger of a people who, denied agency through peaceful means, find rebellion in the most desperate of acts. The symbolic acts in ***Hope*** represent more than individual revolt—they are collective screams, rejections of the imposed narratives that have long painted Okinawa as docile, compliant, peace-loving.

Literature breathes life into memories and brings the silenced back into the world, reminding us that even the most oppressed identities carry the power to assert themselves, to rise from the margins and defy erasure. Alongside the quiet rebellions in education and spirituality, literary works become vessels of cultural preservation and defiance. In the harmonious interplay of teaching, spiritual practice, and artistic expression, Okinawa's identity persists.And in that persistence lies the deepest triumph of all: the unbreakable spirit of a people who, though bent, never fully surrender to the forces that seek to diminish them. It is through these quiet yet unrelenting acts of defiance—in classrooms where history is reclaimed, in rituals where spirits are honored, in stories where voices ring true—that Okinawa not only survives but also shapes its own future. Literature, education, and spirituality altogether form a trilogy; it proves Okinawans themselves having forces capable of reshaping the narrative, ensuring that the unique identity of Okinawa endures despite the tides of pseudo-universalism.

Reference:

1. Allen, M. (2002). *Identity and Resistance in Okinawa*. Rowman & Littlefield.
2. Appiah, K. A. (1993). *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press.
3. Bhowmik, D. L., &Rabson, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa*. University of Hawai'i Press.
4. Figal, G. (2004). *Between War and Tropics: Heritage Tourism in Postwar Okinawa*. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, *30*(1), 201-227.
5. Heinrich, P. (2004). *Language Planning and Language Ideology in the Ryūkyū Islands. Language Policy*, 3(2), 153–179.
6. Inoue, M. (2007). *Okinawa and the U.S. Military: Identity Making in the Age of Globalization*. Columbia University Press.
7. Kerr, G. H. (2000). *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*. Tuttle Publishing.
8. Smits, G. (1999). *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics*. University of Hawai'i Press.