Forty-Seven Years of Discourse: An Analysis of Japanese Journal Articles about Shimao Toshio’s Concept of Yaponeshia

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Abstract

This article analyses the discourse around Shimao Toshio’s concept of Yaponeshia, which addresses Okinawa’s relationship to mainland Japan. This concept, first outlined in Shimao's essay “Yaponeshia no nekko” (The Roots of Yaponeshia) (1961), provides a whole new perspective from which this relationship can be viewed. To gain an understanding of the discourse which subsequently has evolved among Japanese scholars and critics, journal articles published between 1970 and 2017 will be analysed using Siegfried Jäger’s method of critical discourse analysis. The analysis will show that Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea has been (re-)interpreted by many academics and critics who expanded it with their own theories. The discourse about the “southern islands” (nantō) and the “reversion” of Okinawa to Japan play a major role in how Okinawa, as shown in the Yaponeshia concept, is portrayed: on the one hand, the culture of Okinawa is seen as a previous stage of the culture of mainland Japan; on the other hand, however, the culture of Okinawa is described as being different from that of Japan and as something that has to be protected from being assimilated by the main islands. By addressing different perspectives on Okinawan culture, over the past decades the Yaponeshia concept has slowly developed into a kind of cultural theory that also finds its way into other academic fields.

Keywords: Okinawa, Japan, identity, culture, Yaponeshia, Shimao Toshio

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Introduction

The prevalent discourse on Japanese culture is one of homogeneity, the so-called *nihonjin-ron* 日本人論 (literally, “discourse on the Japanese”). According to it, all Japanese share the same characteristics and the same heritage—an indefinite “Japoneseness” (Sugimoto 1999: 82). Historically speaking, however, different ethnicities have been integrated into the state of Japan: the *yamato* 大和 from the centre—who are at the core of the *nihonjin-ron*—became dominant, and other people like the *ezo* 蝦夷 or Ainu from the northern island Hokkaidō, and the people from the Ryūkyū Islands (today Okinawa prefecture), were assimilated by the *yamato* over time, officially becoming part of the Japanese nation state in the late nineteenth century. What today is Okinawa prefecture initially used to be an independent kingdom called Ryūkyū from the fifteenth until the late nineteenth century, with its own culture, traditions, and language with many different dialects which are unintelligible to speakers of standard Japanese. Especially mainland Japan’s ambition to assimilate and “Japanise” Okinawan culture to fit it into its own self-image of a homogeneous country led to conflicting views on Okinawa’s cultural identity, which has since been a widely discussed topic, not only in the field of Okinawa studies but also outside the academic world.

One example is the author Shimao Toshio 島尾敏雄 (1917–1986) who wrote many essays on the Ryūkyū Islands, theorising about their culture and relationship to mainland Japan. According to Shimao, the Japanese isles are part of a larger cultural sphere within the Pacific Ocean which he named “Yaponeshia.” The term was coined in his first essay on this topic, “Yaponeshia no nekko” ヤポネシアの根っこ (The Roots of Yaponeshia) (1961), first published in the monthly report of *Sekai kyōyō zenshū* 世界教養全集 21 (Heibonsha, issue 15), which was about four pages long. Shimao states that Amami, one of the island groups that used to belong to the Ryūkyū Kingdom but was turned into a part of the Satsuma domain (today Kagoshima prefecture) in 1609, represents the ‘roots’ of Japanese culture, meaning its cultural diversity (Shimao 2007; Hirose 2005: 2). Therefore, the author concludes, Okinawa and Japan share a cultural connection even though customs, traditions, and the way of living may differ. In his later essays, Shimao concentrates on the aspect of cultural diversity, thus making it possible to break out of the prevalent discourse of homogeneity (Gabriel 1999a: 164; 1999b: 51). On the other hand, however, Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea can be seen as “another *nihon-ron*” (Takasaka 2004), as it attempts to define unique traits of Japan’s (cultural) identity. At the same time, some authors link Shimao’s concept

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1 There are different transcription of the term ヤポネシア, like “Japanesia” and “Yaponesia.” I am using the modified Hepburn transcription to stay as close to the Japanese term as possible.
to the southern island discourse (*nantō-ron* 南島論), which refers to essentialist notions similar to those the *nihonjin-ron* operates with. Hence, the Yaponseshia discourse operates with two conflicting interpretations (Gabriel 1999a: 183).

Shimao’s ideas about Yaponseshia became the foundation of a new discourse on Okinawan and Japanese cultures as well as their relationship. This concept is not a scientific theory and therefore it is “not accepted in the academic world” according to Hokama Shūzen (2002: 45). It has not yet been established in western academia as an object of research except for a few theses and book chapters, like the works of literary scholar Philip Gabriel (e.g., 1999a; 1999b). However, as it became clear during my research, it has been discussed by Japanese researchers from a variety of different academic fields (literary studies, anthropology, sociology, etc.). In addition, the Yaponseshia idea seems to have influenced several prominent persons who played a major part in shaping other approaches in the discourse on Okinawan identity. Nevertheless, the Yaponseshia discourse has not yet been sufficiently and systematically analysed. This article thus aims to find out how Shimao’s Yaponseshia concept was received, discussed, and further developed by Japanese intellectuals, who, as a result, created an entire discourse around it. The main questions guiding my analysis are the following: What role does Okinawa play in this concept? How is Okinawa’s relationship to mainland Japan portrayed? Which (historical) aspects of this relationship are being considered? How are “Japan” and “Okinawa” defined in the respective publications, and does this definition differ from current ones? How could a non-scientific idea like the one sketched by Shimao gain popularity among researchers from different academic fields? Has this idea already developed into a “quasi-scientific” concept? And finally: Does this concept counter the prevalent *nihonjin* discourse—or is it actually part of it? To answer these questions, I used Siegfried Jäger’s (2015) method of critical discourse analysis on fifty-one Japanese journal articles that were published between 1970 and 2017 using Higuchi Kōichi’s open-source text mining programme KH-Coder. This method combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, making it possible to analyse the discourse on Yaponseshia on different levels.

After a brief introduction to the historical cornerstones in the relationship between Okinawa and Japan, which are relevant to this study because the publications analysed do refer to them, I will continue with the first part of the analysis which will be a systematic review of the current state of research on the concept of Yaponseshia in order to understand all its facets and development over time. After an introduction to the method used in the second part of my research, I will present the results of the discourse analysis I could obtain by using KH-Coder. The conclusion then provides a full summary of the results of this research and their discussion.
References to Okinawa’s and Japan’s historical connection can be found in many Yamashita texts. Therefore, it is essential to have an understanding of the most important events in history that formed their relationship as it is today.

As mentioned before, Ryūkyū used to be an independent kingdom until the nineteenth century. In 1609, the Satsuma clan (located in southern Kyūshū) conquered the Amami islands and Shuri, the capital of the Ryūkyū Kingdom on Okinawa. In order not to alert China, the Ryūkyūan king stayed on the throne but had to abide by Satsuma’s rules (Kerr 2000: 158–165; Akamine 2017: 63–64; Taira 1997: 151). Since then, Ryūkyū had to pay tribute to China and Japan—an arrangement called “dual subordination” by some scholars (Taira 1997: 151; cf. Akamine 2017: 82). In the years to follow, Ryūkyū’s economic status plummeted due to Satsuma’s exploitation of resources, and in the nineteenth century contact to outsiders (e.g., Americans and Europeans) was strictly monitored (Taira 1997: 152; Akamine 2017: 67).

In 1879, Japan made Ryūkyū a prefecture by forcing its king to abdicate his throne and renamed it “Okinawa.” During the modernisation process in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Japan’s interest in Okinawa dwindled. As a result, Okinawa’s infrastructure became neglected. In addition, the Ryūkyūan culture and language were perceived as foreign and crude by the mainland Japanese, and Okinawa’s population was thus considered primitive and second-class (Kerr 2000: 393–394; Heinrich 2004: 162). In the late nineteenth century Japan introduced new assimilation policies, like obligatory Japanese language classes in schools to “Japanise” Okinawa’s culture and traditions and to culturally integrate it into the Japanese state (cf. Kerr 2000: chapter 10; Heinrich 2004).

During the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 the Japanese “sacrificed” Okinawa to keep the Allied Forces away from the mainland as long as possible. Thousands of Okinawan civilians were killed, not only by enemy soldiers but also by members of the Japanese military, since many Japanese still regarded Okinawans as foreign and suspected them to not be loyal to the tennō (Arasaki 2001: 101–102).

After Japan lost the Battle of Okinawa and, ultimately, World War II, it “sacrificed” Okinawa again by giving it into the hands of American occupation—a condition that lasted until 1972. These twenty-seven years took their toll not only on the environment but also on the inhabitants of the Okinawan islands: military test flights were the cause of noise and air pollution, and many accidents and criminal offences committed by American soldiers negatively affected Okinawan civilians (Hook, Mason, and O’Shea 2015: 169–170). Since Okinawa’s situation only seemed to worsen under American administration, a movement formed in 1951, pleading for a reversion to Japan. However, as many Okinawans opposed the reversion, the so-called anti-reversion movement emerged. Some members of the anti-reversion movement, like Arakawa Akira and Okamoto Keitoku, did not want Okinawa to be reverted back to Japan but were
not necessarily fond of American administration either. Instead, they made it their primary goal to preserve Okinawa’s unique cultural identity (cf. Komatsu 2008). In 1972, Okinawa was “given back” to Japan, ending the American occupation.

Nevertheless, cultural differences between Japan and Okinawa were still apparent and many Okinawans tried to hold on to their cultural heritage resulting in a paradox representation of Okinawa as “the other within”—another version of Japan within Japan, while (cultural and societal) differences “have been reinterpreted within a more localized context of inequality” (Siddle 2003: 136). In the 1990s, again, two groups among the Okinawan population supporting different views emerged: one side perceived Okinawa as a victim of Japanese aggression, whereas the conservative side supported the Japanese central government in Tōkyō and advocated the idea that Okinawa is and always was a part of Japan (Vogt 2004: 261). Both parties instrumentalised different understandings of Okinawan cultural identity for political purposes, like trying to change the situation about the stationing of American soldiers on Okinawa (Vogt 2004). Although the conservative side seems to have “won” this battle over political dominance, this dispute further fuelled the debate on Okinawa’s cultural identity. At the same time, an “Okinawa boom” occurred in mainland Japan, and idealised images of Okinawa became promoted in its course (Petrucci and Miyahira 2014: 262; Hein 2010: 180).

Shimao Toshio wrote many essays on the southern islands. His Yaponesha essays can be defined as a sub-group; here, he specifically uses the word “Yaponesha” and discusses the concept behind it. These texts were written against the backdrop of the developments of Japan’s post-war period between the 1960s and 1970s. Born in Tōhoku, the north-western region on Japan’s main island of Honshū, he was stationed on Amami-Ōshima during World War II. In his early fictional literature, he processed his wartime traumata. The later Yaponesha essays represent his thoughts and ideas on the differences and similarities between Okinawa’s and Japan’s culture which he developed by referring to the abovementioned historical relationship (cf. Gabriel 1999a). Shimao wrote in a suggestive manner which also led to very different interpretations of his Yaponesha texts, as will be outlined below (cf. Gabriel 1999a: 141, 183). Further (secondary) publications on his idea of Yaponesha were strongly influenced by the ongoing discourse about Okinawa’s identity, especially the anti-reversion debate and its quasi-pendant: the more conservative discourse on the southern islands (nantō-ron).

**What is “Yaponesha”?**

Shimao’s ideas on the Ryūkyū Islands and Yaponesha are in part abstract and vague, leaving much room for interpretation (cf. Nakazato 2002: 303). As a result, the Ya-
poneshia idea took course in different directions, and different authors arrived at contradicting definitions as to how to see Japanese and Okinawan cultures. Therefore, it is important to summarise these interpretations to understand the full scope of the discourse. For that matter, in the first part of this research all fifty-one articles, as well as additional resources like other articles, books, and websites on Shimao’s views on the southern islands were examined, and their contents were systematically categorised.

According to Hirose Shin’ya, Shimao wrote 189 texts about the southern islands (Hirose 2005: 5). However, without having read all of them, it is difficult to assess how many are specifically about his Yponeshia concept. “Yponeshia no nekko” is his first essay in which he gave his thoughts and ideas a concrete form. The word Yponeshia is a combination of the components “yapo-” for “Japan” and “-nesia,” alluding to the names of other island groups in the Pacific Ocean, such as Micronesia and Polynesia. According to Shimao, Japan is historically and culturally more closely connected to the Pacific Islands than to the Asian mainland (Gabriel 1999b: 56; Breaden 2003: 2; Hirose 2005: 3). In this sense, Yponeshia represents one cultural sphere within the Pacific. Therefore, the term is meant to emphasise Japan’s geographical nature as a group of islands, and at the same time distance Japan from the Asian mainland (China). Also, it expresses a shift of focus away from the main islands towards Japan’s periphery, and therefore, can be seen as an attempt to decentralise “Japan.” In such a manner, it becomes possible to refer to Japan as a solely geographical space without implying the Japanese nation state. According to the literary scholar Takasaka Kaoru, Shimao puts Japan into a new perspective by re-evaluating it from the viewpoint of Amami and Okinawa prefectures, which Shimao declared the “roots” of Ryūkyū and Japan’s heterogeneity (Takasaka 2004: 19). Consequently, with his idea of Yponeshia, Shimao points out the diversity of the Japanese culture and counters the prevalent idea of a homogenous nation as portrayed by the nihonjin-ron.

In short, as critic Nakazato Isao (1998: 221) already summarised in a similar manner, the Yponeshia idea seems to serve three main purposes: a) define Japan in a solely geographical manner and emphasise its place as a pacific island, while simultaneously distancing it from the Asian mainland, b) de-centre and relativise the Japanese mainland, and c) consider cultural similarities and differences (heterogeneity) within Japan by focusing on the periphery.

After having published his first essay on Yponeshia in 1961, Shimao wrote many other texts on this idea, gradually changing his general focus over the decades. In several publications from the 1960s, he emphasised the idea of underlying cultural similarities that connect all Japanese islands. By the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s he began to highlight cultural differences and the heterogeneity of Japanese culture (Gabriel 1999a: 164, 183; 1999b: 56–57).
Yaponeshia and the Southern Island Discourse (nantō-ron) 南島論

One discourse that seems to have had considerable influence on Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea was that of the southern islands (nantō 南島). Nantō directly translates as “southern islands”—generally meaning islands south of Japan—in this case referring to the Ryūkyū-Islands. According to social scientist Tanaka Yasuhiro (2009: 28–29), all texts about the southern islands share the idea that an ancient, lost version of Japanese culture can be found in Okinawa.

There is some disagreement on whether Shimao’s texts on the southern islands should be classified as nantō-ron. Some authors call them nantō-ron or nantō essays (essays on the southern islands) in general, without any connection to the broader essentialist southern island discourse, as the Japanese suffix -ron 論 can also just mean “essays.” Other authors, like Ōshiro Tatsuhiro, separate Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea from the nantō-ron (Sekine 1987: 44).

Nevertheless, it is evident that aspects of the nantō-ron can indeed be found in Shimao’s Yaponeshia texts (cf. Suzuki 1999: 116; Breaden 2003: 3–4; Ishida 1991: 131). One indication is the recurring idea that Okinawa possesses some kind of healing power, in this case probably meaning the power to break out of modern (mainland) Japan’s strict social and cultural norms (Hirose 2005: 2). In addition, many authors criticise Shimao as well as other nantō-ron authors for writing from the perspective of an outsider to the southern islands. In other words, Shimao speaks for the southern islands even though he himself was born in Tōhoku on the Japanese mainland (Suzuki 1999: 116; Tanaka 1998: 211–212). Another idea the nantō-texts and Shimao’s essays on Yaponeshia have in common is that of Okinawan culture representing a former stage of Japanese mainland culture. According to this argument, Ryūkyū and Japan share the same cultural origins. With the beginning of the Yayoi era on the Japanese mainland, which was nevertheless introduced from the Asian mainland, Japanese culture started to develop whereas Okinawa (allegedly) stayed in this original cultural form, thus preserving the once shared “roots.” Following this line of thought, an ancient form of Japanese culture can be found on Okinawa, making it a key element in attempts by modern scholars to discover the roots of Japanese culture (or “Japoneseness”) untouched by Yayoi (Chinese) influence. Some of the most famous representatives of this view are Yanagita Kunio and Yoshimoto Takaaki, both often cited within the Yaponeshia discourse.

This notion poses different problems. Firstly, understanding Okinawan culture as a previous form of Japanese culture ignores the fact that Okinawa used to be a kingdom in its own right, having been annexed and subsequently treated as a quasi-colony by Japan. Secondly, this type of thinking can be and has been interpreted as an ideology strengthening already existing power relations clearly depicting mainland Japan as (culturally) superior. This supposed superiority is, among other things, established
through the notion that Okinawan culture is a previous, and thus crude and underdeveloped (less modern) form of Japanese culture (Hamagawa 2008: 13; Tanaka 2009: 31; Torigoe 2016: 489–490; Sensui 2000: 185). Shimao himself does not seem to explicitly approve of this idea, but some of his assumptions—like Okinawa representing a “hint” (tegakari 手がかり) to Japanese cultural diversity, being “another face of Japan”—can be interpreted in that way (Shimao 2007: 92).

Nevertheless, there are also differences between the Yaponeshia discourse and the southern island discourse. As mentioned above, folklorists, who are considered the main agents of the southern island discourse, tend to ignore the colonial aspects of the Okinawa-Japan relationship. They support the idea of a universal history, Okinawan culture only representing a certain stage in it—different from but still of the same origin as Japanese mainland culture. Consequently, they also reinforce the common notion of cultural homogeneity as advocated by nihonjin-ron authors. These folklorists also interpret the idea of Yaponeshia in this way, integrating it into their southern island discourse. Contrarily, some authors argue that the Yaponeshia discourse also allows a multilinear interpretation of history, as opposed to a universal one, by expressing the view that the Ryūkyū Islands and Japan have experienced different historical (and cultural) developments. Such an approach in turn acknowledges Japan’s role as a colonial power on the Ryūkyū Islands (Sensui 2000: 183–184).

**Yaponeshia within the Context of the Anti-Reversion Discourse (hanfukki-ron) 反復帰論**

Although Shimao wrote his first essay on Yaponeshia in 1961, it only became popular in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, when Okinawa’s reversion to Japan was heatedly debated. According to Fukushima Jun’ichirō, the anti-reversion discourse of famous activists like Okamoto Keitoku, Arakawa Akira, and Kawamitsu Shin’ichi was influenced by the Yaponeshia idea. Shimao’s main objective—to break with the dominant centralised conception of Japan by focusing on Okinawa’s different culture—fit well with their agenda and they used his ideas to strengthen their position (cf. Fukushima 2009a: 728; 2009b: 60; Breaden 2003: 13).

Nevertheless, Okamoto saw Shimao’s essays primarily as literary products without any political agenda per se (Breaden 2003: 9). Yaponeshia therefore only presents, according to Nakazato, a motif, or, as Higashi Takuma discussed it, a starting point (kikkake きっかけ) from which the boundaries of the Japanese nation may be re-evaluated and re-interpreted. These aspects can be taken as an argument against a simple “return to the (alleged) Japanese motherland” (cf. Nakazato 1998; Higashi 1998).

Arakawa Akira combined the Yaponeshia idea with his decidedly anti-nationalist views. According to him, the state acts as an invisible force controlling its subjects,
bending them to its will. A reversion to Japan under a centralised Japanese government would therefore only harm Okinawa. Still, he did not advocate an independent Okinawa since that would only result in the emergence of another “mini-Japan” which would be based on the same nationalist principles he sought to overcome (Komatsu 2008: 65). Considering this, it is no surprise that Arakawa was fond of the Yaponeshia idea, as Shimao was also against the strict boundaries of the state, but not for Okinawan independence.

Kawamitsu goes as far as to apply the idea of Yaponeshia to Asia as a whole. In his view, Yaponeshia can be used to create a global perspective in which Okinawa represents a key element to connect Japan and other Asian regions. For that purpose, however, simply putting Japan into perspective is not enough; an entirely new culture needs to be formed (Komatsu 2009: 52).

The biggest similarity between the idea of Yaponeshia and the anti-reversion discourse, especially as Arakawa represented it, is the intention to overcome the boundaries of the nation-state (“kokka o koeru kyōtsū no shisō” 国家を超える共通の思想; Asato 2006: 129). Some anti-reversion activists meant that in the literal sense—i.e., to leave the Japanese nation-state and become independent—whereas agents within the Yaponeshia discourse usually take this line of thought more metaphorically. In this sense, overcoming the state means breaking out of the prevalent discourse that propagates a homogeneous Japanese culture which is encouraged by the central government. Especially the latter seems to be the case with authors writing about the Yaponeshia idea, since the Ryūkyū Islands are always seen as a part of Yaponeshia = Japan, as Shimao described it (Ōshiro 1977: 300).

**Criticism and Positive Responses to Yaponeshia**

As claimed by Fukushima, Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea became subject to critique especially in the 1990s (Fukushima 2009b: 61). Since the idea overlaps with the southern island discourse, it also shares the same points of criticism. In addition to declaring it as having been Japanese in its very origin, Okinawa is often exoticised by highlighting its being closely in touch with nature, its friendliness and “softness,” thus pressing it into the role of the “female,” whereas Japan is conceptualised as the “masculine” counterpart (Higashi 1998: 201–205 quoted in Breaden 2003: 10–11; Suzuki 1999: 113). Okinawa here is portrayed as a primitive version of Japan (Breaden 2003: 11; Takahashi 2015: 124). Also, stressing Okinawa’s alleged “healing power” that enables Japan to break out of its triste and stiff cultural norms, turns it into a tool in creating an alternative Japanese identity (cf. Ishida 1991: 135). Therefore, this utopian version of Okinawa shows clear signs of orientalism. Shimao seems to reassess this exotic image only in his later works.
Another aspect associated with orientalism is the tendency to write from the point of view of an outsider. Shimao was not Okinawan but born in Tōhoku, therefore writing about and for a people he himself was not part of. On this, and by referring to Higashi Takuma, Barnaby Breaden states the following:

[…] Shimao initially characterises the Japanesian [sic] South from the point of view of an ‘outsider’ from the North: one who ‘goes to meet’, not one who is met. […] ‘Shimao could never quite free himself from the dichotomy of Yamato Japan as male=culture opposed to Amami and Okinawa as female=nature’ (Higashi 1998: 201–205 quoted in Breaden 2003: 10–11).

This kind of orientalist thinking would not allow to deconstruct the image of Okinawa as exotic and primitive but rather uphold it, strengthening the dominant hierarchical position of mainland Japan over Okinawa (Hamagawa 2008: 18). In addition, Okinawa is usually seen as an integral part of Japan within the Yaponeshia discourse, which also implies that Japan’s claim on Okinawa is seen as legitimate. In this sense, the nantō discourse can also be seen as an ideology, used to—remembering Karl Marx—control subjects and culture and uphold economical systems. The nantō-ron can therefore be used as an ideological tool to assimilate Okinawa into Japan (Tanaka 1998: 212). The fact that some interpretations of the Yaponeshia idea share similarities with the nantō-ron also supports the approach to interpret Yaponeshia as being part of the nantō ideology.

In some instances, the Yaponeshia idea is criticised as being either too “inclusive” or too “exclusive.” Some authors share the opinion that with the connection Shimao draws between Okinawa and Tōhoku, the Yaponeshia idea becomes too inclusive, as it closely connects Okinawa to the Japanese mainland—according to these authors, however, the Yaponeshia idea should focus on Okinawa alone. Contrarily, only focusing on Okinawa is sometimes seen as too exclusive—the representatives of this point of view state that the Yaponeshia idea can and should also include the entire Pacific Region and be open to a more global perspective (Gabriel 1999a: 184; 1999b: 58).

Yet, one should consider that Shimao wrote about his Yaponeshia idea in the form of a literary essay. He did not elaborate it as a theoretical concept and also did not claim any theoretical authority. Moreover, the further discussions by so many different authors with their own respective interpretations of Yaponeshia lead to a discourse not consistent nor logical (Suzuki 1997: 46; Hokama 2002: 45). Most authors, like Okamoto, take it as an opportunity and a starting point in order to discuss the Okinawan and Japanese cultures from a new perspective as proposed by the Yaponeshia idea.

Still, Shimao’s ideas were well received in general and “[t]he impact of the idea of Yaponesia on Arakawa and other young Okinawan people was extraordinary” (Takahashi 2015: 125). Taking Japan’s island-esque nature into account, Yaponeshia provides a new perspective, from which the Japanese and Okinawan cultures can be
viewed outside the dominant conception of one homogeneous (mainland) Japanese culture (Gabriel 1999a: 164). Some authors, like Takasaka, also think that Yaponeshia actually has a political potential as it contradicts dominant political ideologies. The main point here is that it does not imagine “Japan” as one homogeneous nation ruled by the central government in Tōkyō, but that it rather turns the attention towards Japan’s periphery. He concludes that (re-)discovering Japan’s heterogeneous nature is the main focus of Yaponeshia, meaning it deals with Japanese identity by creating Okinawa as “the other within,” which is different but still Japanese, and that, therefore, the concept presents “another nihon-ron”—albeit one that now negates the discourse on homogeneity (Takasaka 2004). These different opinions exemplify how important it is to consider the respective author’s background (folklorists, anti-reversion activists, etc.), as this greatly influences their interpretation of Yaponeshia.

Methodology

The focus of this article is the discourse around Shimao Toshio’s Yaponeshia concept in Japanese journal articles. For that matter, Siegfried Jäger’s Kritische Diskursanalyse: Eine Einführung [Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction] (2015) was used to analyse fifty-one Japanese journal articles about the idea of Yaponeshia.

Jäger based his methodological approach to discourse analysis on Michel Foucault’s definition of discourse and power relations (Jäger 2015: 17–18). He suggests a mixture of quantitative and qualitative elements on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level to gain a picture as complete as possible. For that reason, the researcher must also have a broad understanding of the historical and political events, social situation, form of rule, and other factors that may have had an influence on the respective discourse. In the case of my research, this was achieved by getting insight into the (historical and cultural) relationship between Okinawa and mainland Japan as summarised above. In addition, the motives and political orientation of the discourse’s agents should be taken into account when interpreting the respective texts.

Jäger divides his method into three basic steps. First comes the so-called structural analysis which makes up the quantitative part. Here, the researcher looks for frequent statements, words or phrases, also mapping in which order and combinations they

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2 Many articles in this corpus can be considered academic publications, but since Japanese scientific conventions differ from Western ones, the distinction between scholarship and essayist writing is not always clear. A significant number of articles do not include citations or other references according to (Western) scientific standards, but rather thoughts, theories, and ideas about Yaponeshia. These were included in the corpus as well, as it was the aim of this study to analyse journal articles regardless of their (non-)academic nature (cf. Jäger 2015: 80).

3 For further reading, see Foucault 1993 and 1994.
appear. Second, the qualitative part, or fine analysis, consists of a detailed examination of fewer selected representative texts and focuses on linguistic features. In the third step, quantitative and qualitative findings are combined and discussed against the backdrop of the discursive context (Jäger 2015).

Since the open-source software KH-Coder was used for my research, all three steps of Jäger’s Critical Discourse Analysis were carried out simultaneously, analysing the entire corpus on a quantitative and qualitative level at the same time. This text-mining programme was developed by the sociologist Higuchi Kōichi and can identify different parts of speech using the morphological sequencer Chasen. Doing so, a multitude of different analyses can be carried out, like those of word clusters, frequencies, and hierarchical clusters. Networks and correlations for instance can also be visualised via diagrams and tables. In addition, codes can be written using, among other things, logic operators (AND, OR, NOT, etc.) to identify specific parts of speech, phrases, or word combinations which can be marked either on sentence or paragraph level. These codes can also be used for further analyses of, for example, co-occurrence networks (Higuchi 2016: 13–20). The search option also makes it possible to identify relevant paragraphs or sentences of the respective texts. Specific features of KH-Coder can therefore be used to analyse a large amount of data in detail, also making a fine analysis of the entire corpus possible.

As a guiding principle, Jäger suggests that the researcher should keep in mind a catalogue of questions while analysing the discourse. Based on these questions (cf. Jäger 2015: 96–109), the analysis presented here refers to the following aspects: agents participating in the discourse, topics discussed within the Yaponeshia discourse, linguistic features, and changes within the discourse over time.

Corpus

After extensive research in different databanks and libraries, such as the National Diet Library in Tōkyō, all accessible journal articles on Yaponeshia were categorised according to their relevance. Category A (“A-text”) included all articles that were exclusively about Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea, whereas texts that only mentioned Yaponeshia in a sub-chapter or paragraph were considered part of category B (“B-text”). Since only thirty-five articles were classified as A-texts, the sixteen B-texts were included in the sample as well, as even small references can give an idea about what aspects of Yaponeshia are considered important and what not. Whereas all A-texts were included as a whole (except for their bibliographical references), only relevant paragraphs of B-texts were copied to the KH-Coder source file in order not to corrupt full text analysis.

These fifty-one articles were digitised and converted to OCR using Adobe Acrobat Pro DC (Version 2019.021.20058) or Abby Fine Reader Professional (Version
12.0.101.483), so they could be transferred to a UTF-8 coded text file which was then uploaded into KH-Coder. Since many articles were only poorly readable due to age or bad print/scan quality, some texts could not properly be converted to OCR. This produced mistakes, such as wrong or not readable characters or passages, as well as entire articles that then had to be corrected manually. Although there is no guarantee that all wrong characters were found and corrected, the large amount of data should make small mistakes insignificant.

Analysis

The fifty-one Japanese articles were published in different journals between 1970 and 2017. Most of these are literature or literary criticism journals, like *Nihon Bunka 日本文化*, *Kokugo to kokugo bungaku 国語と国語文学*, and *Eureka ユリイカ*. The second most represented category are university journals (figure 1). The rest includes journals specialised in “regional matters” and “culture” or cover “general matters”; the sample even includes one B-text from a journal on architecture (*KENCHIKU SHICHŌ 建築思潮*). Especially B-texts are found in journals outside the literary genre, only discussing the Yaponeshia idea briefly.

![Figure 1: Number of articles sorted by year and genre of the journal.](image)

Although the anti-reversion discourse had significant impact on the Yaponeshia discourse and vice versa, only two articles that address this topic were published in the early 1970s, one of them written by Shimao himself. One reason could be that anti-reversion activists tended to merely incorporate Shimao’s ideas into their own (anti-reversion) discourse, thus making the Yaponeshia idea stand out less as a separate theory. Other explanations could be that they did not refer to it because they have
not read or considered it for their own purpose, or that they published such texts in a
format other than the journal articles under consideration in this study. The 1980s also
show a significant gap in relevant publications, indicating that it took some time for
the Yaponeshia idea to spread and become known to a wider audience.

As can be seen in figure 1, most of the relevant articles were published between
the late 1990s and 2010. This could be due to political issues and the Okinawa boom
of the 1990s, which sparked interest in Okinawa on the Japanese mainland (see section
“Historical and discursive background”). Moreover, both the Okinawan authors
Matayoshi Eiki and Medoruma Shun won the Akutagawa literature price in the 1990s
that turned the attention of literary scholars again to the Ryūkyū Islands. The emerging
prominence of the idea of Yaponeshia in Japan in the 1990s may have led to an in-
crease of articles in non-literary journals and, consequently, publications categorised
as B-texts in this analysis since 2000. However, most articles are published in literary
journals, which clearly shows that Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea is still primarily seen as
a literary product. Nevertheless, the publications in university journals over the last
two decades also indicate an increasing academic interest in this topic.

Agents Within the Discourse

The authors of the articles about Yaponeshia I have analysed are individual agents
participating in the Yaponeshia discourse. They interpret the idea according to their
own worldview and respective field of expertise and thus have a determining influ-
ence on the discursive development. Most of them are male researchers from different
academic fields, covering Literary Studies, Historical Science, Geography, and Oki-
nawa/Ryūkyū Studies, as well as Sociology, Anthropology, and even Architecture.
This variety shows that Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea sparked interest outside the literary
field as well. Some agents, like Arase Yutaka, Yamaguchi Masao, and Komatsu Hi-
roshi, focus their research, for example, on the Tennō-system and Tennō ideologies,
right of speech, assimilation policies, or nationalism. As a result, this part of the Ya-
poneshia discourse steers away from the conservative, southern island discourse point
of view. Shimao himself also published in journals, which is why one of his articles
(1970) is included in the corpus.

Apart from researchers, the Yaponeshia idea also caught the attention of music
critic Higashi Takuma, literary critic Tsuda Takashi, and writers Ōshiro Tatsuhiro and
Shimota Seiji, showing that Shimao’s idea also spread outside the academic field.
Key Subjects Addressed in the Yaponeshia Discourse

One of the most important features of KH-Coder is called “co-occurrence network.” This feature generates a network of the words (or codes) that frequently occur together, making visible different topics addressed in the discourse. The network results on word level, together with the information given in the section “What is ‘Yaponeshia’?”, were then used to generate codes inductively and deductively to further differentiate between the word clusters and get an overview of content (figure 2). The outcome was interpreted with the help of other programme features (e.g., frequency lists, similarity matrix, crosstab) and the detailed analysis of selected text passages.

As seen in figure 2, words referring to Okinawa and words referring to Japan both occur frequently within the corpus. One of Shimao’s goals was to break out of prevalent conceptions of Japanese culture by focusing on Okinawa. For that matter, Okinawa needed to be considered a part of Japan, but something other and exotic within. This image is strengthened by the almost equally frequent use of both the terms “Okinawa” and “mainland Japan,” which leaves the impression of them being juxtaposed in opposition. As a result, instead of creating a new heterogeneous interpretation of Japanese culture, the dichotomy of “normal/familiar” (= mainland Japan) and “exotic/abnormal” (= Okinawa) comes to attention, underlining Okinawa’s (assumed) differences compared to the mainland.

Figure 2: Co-occurrence network with a Jaccard coefficient >0.01 of the most frequent codes. Larger circles indicate a higher frequency. This figure shows only the minimum spanning tree.
Another important line of argument within the Yaponeshia discourse seems to refer to history. Almost fourteen per cent of all paragraphs mention aspects related to the history of Japan or Okinawa at least once (even if it is just the word “historical”). This code is directly connected to the code for mainland Japan (see figure 2), indicating that the focus lies on the mainland. Further analysis shows that these passages or sentences more often than not contain very general references. Further discussions on specific events in history are lacking, and in the information given the mainland’s perspective clearly dominates. Some of the more general references are used to simply point out the differences in historico-cultural developments between mainland Japan and the Ryūkyū Islands (cf. Arase 1972; Yamaguchi 1977). Moreover, specific events, like the Satsuma invasion and Okinawa’s quasi-colonial past, are mentioned in some articles. For example, Morimoto Shin’ichirō even points out Okinawa’s dual subordination (Nagashima 2007b: 72; Morimoto 2005: 55). Therefore, it can be concluded that some authors do critically reflect on Okinawa’s and Japan’s past. This indicates a more differentiated and liberal approach within the Yaponeshia discourse than the connection to the nantō-rōn would suggest.

Topics about homogenisation and relativisation, or “putting things into perspective,” are also related more to the Japanese mainland than Okinawa. This is not surprising considering that Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea opposes the discourse on Japanese cultural homogeneity. This clearly shows that a significant part of the Yaponeshia discourse predominantly seems to deal with mainland Japan, even though Shimao rather wanted to turn the focus on Okinawa. As a close analysis of certain text passages shows, this kind of relativisation of Japan is often related to a feeling of “strangeness” towards Okinawa’s “otherness” (using words like iwakan違和感 and kotonaru異なる with regard to Okinawan culture). Putting Japanese culture into perspective and subsequently re-evaluating mainland Japan, its culture and Okinawa’s position within act as a means to break with this feeling of “strangeness” and the homogenisation of the rest of Japan. Accordingly, Okinawa can also be seen as a “tool” to discuss Japanese (cultural) identity, which, again, has been criticised (see section “Criticism and Positive Responses to Yaponeshia”).

Similar in frequency to the topic “history,” words occur related to culture and lifestyle, which are directly (but weakly) connected to “Okinawa.” Given that the Yaponeshia idea is primarily about culture, I further divided this line of discourse into two sub-groups: one being concerned with Okinawan culture and one about mainland Japanese culture—both occur with about equal frequency. This again shows that the discussion about Japanese (mainland) culture is about as important as the discussion about Okinawan culture.

However, about eight per cent of the twenty per cent of the paragraphs that mention culture or lifestyle in any way do not specifically address either Okinawa or mainland Japan. This shows that “culture” in general seems to be an important topic within the
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Moreover, it often co-occurs with words indicating “otherness,” meaning some kind of strangeness or alienness with which mainland Japanese face Okinawan culture. Some authors also mention discrimination against Okinawans based on this feeling of otherness and (still existing) post-colonial structures (e.g., Arase 1972; Kawashima 1995; Hanada 1997; Uemura 2001). As it stands, the relationship between the Okinawan and Japanese cultures is seen as problematic or as a topic that is in dire need of further discussion, meaning the authors are dissatisfied with the current situation. However, other topics are seen as problematic as well, like politics and the nation state.

Politics and the state form another cluster as seen in figure 2. This makes up an important part of the discourse insofar as it contains the topics “reversion,” “independence,” and “oppression.” This cluster is not directly connected to the idea of Yaponesia but is instead linked to it through what I call in this article “experts” who are referred to in the articles. This shows that those people who are often cited within the corpus (and thus are deemed experts) are also closely associated with political topics, but the Yaponesia idea itself is not linked to such issues directly. However, some of the cited “experts,” like Okamoto and Arakawa, seem to have introduced the political anti-reversion topic to the Yaponesia discourse. In twelve per cent of all paragraphs in thirty-nine of fifty-one articles occur words referring to politics or the state, which is a noteworthy amount. Sometimes, only the adjective “political” or the question whether the idea of Yaponesia can be seen as political or not are mentioned. However, this in itself subtly puts the Yaponesia idea into a political context, making the political dimension of the concept an important topic of discussion within the entire discourse. In addition, Fukushima Jun’ichirō wrote two texts discussing Arakawa Akira’s, Okamoto Keitoku’s, and Kawamitsu Shin’ichi’s anti-reversion positions and the influence Shimao’s Yaponesia idea had on them (Fukushima 2009a; 2009b), clearly connecting the Yaponesia idea with political issues.

Aside from the anti-reversion line of discourse, the nantō-ron also forms another cluster. As is the case with the topic “politics and state,” arguments in the nantō-ron fashion are not tied to the topic of Yaponesia directly (see figure 2). The code for nantō-ron correlates with the code for Shimao, which does not necessarily connect Shimao to the nantō-discourse, as some authors categorised Shimao’s essays as “nantō essay” 南島エッセイ (essays on the southern islands) in general without any connection to the southern island discourse (as the suffix -ron can also just refer to a compilation of essays on a specific topic). The three other topics connected to “nantō-

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4 The names of the persons included in this category are often mentioned, cited, and/or referred to in some other way (at least five times), meaning the respective authors ascribe to them a certain authority to “speak” within the discourse. Therefore, I summarised these names under the code “experts.”
ron” that my first general analysis of the corpus has yielded (“healing power,” “outsider perspective,” and “Japan of the past”) still clearly have something to do with the southern island discourse. Importantly, these articles criticise that texts in the fashion of the nantō-ron take a look at Okinawa only from an outside (mainland Japanese) perspective. Suzuki Naoko writes that talking about the “other” actually brands the “other” as such, thus strengthening a hierarchical relationship between the “self” and the “other” that clearly puts the latter at a disadvantage (Suzuki 1997: 42). Discussing Okinawan culture as “other” is therefore always problematic—which applies to the nantō-ron as well as the Yaponeshia idea, respectively. In general, however, it can be concluded that the southern island discourse is criticised by Yaponeshia authors as the codes associated with the nantō-ron mostly appear in a critical context.

As mentioned above, the word “ideology” is also associated with the southern island discourse and, subsequently, with terms like “doctrine” or “principle” (shugi 主義), and “assimilation” (dōka 同化). Especially “ideology” is noteworthy in this context. It can have multiple meanings, ranging from a set of beliefs or principles to a tool used to control subjects and uphold the economic system, according to Karl Marx. In the Japanese language and depending on the context, the suffix -shisō 思想 can be used to refer to specific ideological concepts like “ideology of nationalism” (kokka shugi shisō 国家主義思想) or “anti-reversion ideology” (hanfukki shisō 反復帰思想). As mentioned before, this word connects to different nantō-ron or anti-reversion “experts” who advocate certain principles they also incorporate into their interpretation of Yaponeshia. As seen in the similarity matrix, the codes “experts,” “politics-state,” and “reversion” show some of the highest overlaps with “ideology.” The term shisō is also often suffixed to the term Yaponeshia. The Japanese word shisō can just very generally mean “idea,” but could still be used to emphasise the Yaponeshia idea as an ideological concept. A more thorough text analysis finally yielded that the Yaponeshia idea can be seen as a kind of ideological worldview (Weltanschauung), but not necessarily a political ideology. For example, Ōshiro Tatsuhiro (1977: 300) purposely switched from “yaponeshia ron” to “yaponeshia shisō” as he compared the ideological contents of the idea with the anti-reversion ideology (hanfukki shisō). Hamagawa Hitoshi even wrote an entire article about Yaponeshia as an ideology (Ideorogī tōshite no yaponeshia-ron - shiron イデオロギーとしてのヤポネシア論一試論; “Yaponeshia as an Ideology: An Essay”; 2008). However, instead of shisō, he used the term ideorogī イデオロギー based on the English word, avoiding potential misunderstandings regarding the meaning of shisō.

A more detailed analysis shows that another small cluster concerning the topic “war” exists. It is connected to the code for Okinawa, which in turn connects to Shimao Toshio. Only five per cent of all paragraphs deal with this general topic (which includes any words related to war and warfare), indicating that it is one of the less important ones within this discourse. Since most terms related to the Pacific War co-occur with words referring to personal experience (the overlap on sentence and
paragraph level is over 0.25), it is reasonable that this small cluster deals with Shimao’s wartime experience on Amami-Ōshima. In addition, only 1.33% of all analysed paragraphs mention “war” without “Shimao.” Looking at some text passages in greater detail, it becomes clear that Shimao’s biography does indeed play a substantial part in interpreting his Yoneshia idea. However, this is not surprising given that biographical interpretations of texts are quite common in Japanese literary research.

**Notable Linguistic Features**

Since different names for the Ryūkyū Islands are in use, it is important to look at how they are referred to by the authors of the articles. Some very concretely write about “Okinawa” and “Amami.” In other texts of the corpus, the broader terms “southern islands,” “Ryūkyū,” and “Ryūkyū arc” (Ryūkyū-ko 琉球弧) are used, all carrying different implications. Komatsu Hiroshi (2009: 55) alternates between using either “Ryūkyū / Okinawa” as a kind of fixed set, or just one of the two components. This shows that the two terms are not seen as direct synonyms. However, most Yoneshia authors use the term “Ryūkyū arc,” which is a geographical term that includes the islands of Okinawa and Amami (both being parts of different prefectures today). Shimao himself too often uses the name “Ryūkyū-ko,” as he finds that other names carry too many political implications (Ishida 1991: 133). This might have just been picked up by other authors. The term “Ryūkyū” alone refers to the Ryūkyū Kingdom and emphasises its distinct history and cultural identity as opposed to mainland Japan. It thus carries a multitude of symbolic meanings—because, if Ryūkyū is seen as a separate entity rather than a part of Japan, this could be used as a starting point to questions its “reversion” to Japan in 1972 and strengthen the claim to restoring its independence. The name “Okinawa” was created by the Japanese central government when it fully incorporated the islands into their newly founded modern nation-state, therefore symbolising Japan’s dominance. Some authors therefore deliberately differentiate between “Ryūkyū” (meaning and symbolising an independent kingdom) and “Okinawa” (having become part of modern and contemporary Japan). For example, Hiyane Kaoru et al. (1987: 21) mention the future of the “Ryūkyū arc” after “Okinawa” will have been “given back” to Japan—and Sekine Kenji (1987: 46) cites Okamoto Keitoku, who stated that “[…] Okinawa’s distinctive cultural situation needs to be viewed from the perspective of the Ryūkyū arc […]” Here, Okinawa is seen as a part of the larger Ryūkyū arc, which hereby represents its own cultural and geographical sphere apart from mainland Japan. In comparison, the term “southern islands” needs a geographical point of reference. In this case, this point of reference is the Japanese

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5 The more frequent two variables appear together, in this case either in one sentence or one paragraph, the closer the value comes to 1.
mainland (nantō meaning islands south of Japan), which of course emphasises the Ryūkyū Islands’ connection to Japan (Breaden 2003: 3). Surprisingly, however, this name is not primarily used in connection to the southern island discourse. Instead, it seems to be mostly used as a synonym for “Ryūkyū arc”—and might be seen as a way to simultaneously refer to Okinawa prefecture and Amami. Nevertheless, “southern islands” does carry a specific connotation, just as the terms “Okinawa” and “Ryūkyū” do. However, authors still use the established term “Okinawa” the most, as it is the official name of the prefecture and its main island.

Another aspect to consider is the use of quotation marks. The word Yaponeshia occurs in 15.5% of all sentences, and in 5.5% of all instances it is written in quotation marks. More often than not, the authors put the word “yaponeshia” in single quotation marks, which emphasises the conception that it is not an established and predefined term. An analysis of the development of the discourse between 1970 and 2017 also shows that the term Yaponeshia tended to be put in quotation marks especially in the 1980s, when the idea was still not well known, which supports the hypothesis that the term Yaponeshia began to be understood as an established term over time. Discursive changes over time will be further discussed in the following section.

In order to analyse the degree of certainty with which authors talk about the Yaponeshia idea, I used codes that mark specific words like “think” (“idea/thought”) on the one hand,6 and words like “know” and “show” (“concept/theory”) on the other hand. Of course, the distinction between verbs indicating just an idea and verbs indicating a concept from which knowledge can be derived is not easy to make, but the attempt can still help to indicate to a certain degree whether Yaponeshia is seen as just an intuitive idea or rather a logically argued concept.

The in-depth analysis shows that the key term “Yaponeshia” overlaps greatly with the code “concept/theory” (0.320). However, this overlap mostly comes about due to the Japanese suffix “-ron” which is frequently attached to “Yaponeshia” in the articles. This suffix is often used to refer to discourses (like nantō-ron, nihonjin-ron, etc.). Considering that other discourses like the southern island discourse correlate more strongly with words from the category “concept/theory,” one may argue that these discourses transport something one can categorise as “knowledge” (a constructed “truth” according to Michel Foucault; Kajetzke and Käsler 2008: 34–35). Therefore, naming Yaponeshia a discourse (yaponeshia-ron ヤポネシア論) instead of just an idea (e.g., yaponeshia-hassō) would mean that it is seen as something with a certain “truth” to it. However, the suffix -ron can also be translated as “essay.” For instance, many of Shimao’s texts on the southern islands are called nantō-ron (essays on the

6 The categories were based on “weaker” words (think, opinion, idea, etc.), which may be used to describe ideas and thoughts that are not seen as existing or established “knowledge,” and “stronger” words (know, explain, concept, etc.) that may indicate a certain degree of credible “knowledge” that can be relied on.
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southern islands) without necessarily being linked to the essentialist southern island discourse. Looking at the correlation between the codes “Yaponesia” and “concept/theory” without the suffix -ron, the co-occurrence is much smaller (~0.13) and about the same as the co-occurrence between “Yaponesia” and “idea/thought” (~0.14).

Looking at the code “idea/thought” closely, one can see that they occur in about eight per cent more sentences than “concept/theory” (without the suffix -ron), regardless of the word Yaponesia. Therefore, personal ideas and thoughts of the respective authors still seem to make up an important part of the discourse. This code frequently appears with the mention of Okinawa, Amami, or Ryūkyū. Accordingly, Okinawan culture and its relationship to mainland Japan seem to be a part of the discourse that heavily rely on personal opinions and ideas.

Considering the aforementioned “experts,” they seem to be cited with more certainty. This means their arguments/ideas are seen as “truthful” enough to be taken as facts, whereas the authors’ own ideas and thoughts are always marked as such. “Experts” are mentioned in about twenty-four per cent of all paragraphs, which is a significant portion of the corpus. Some articles deal explicitly with certain persons and their opinions, therefore mentioning their names quite often. These people obviously are considered important in connection to the Yaponesia idea, and their names also often occur in other articles. This shows that the discussion of opinions and ideas of other writers, critics, and academics make up an important part of the discourse. These “experts” are given a certain authority to speak within and for the Yaponesia idea, consequently “making” them “experts.” In addition, citing numerous sources and discussing different theories is an important part of scientific research. By citing these “experts,” the Yaponesia discourse therefore gains more weight and credibility as a quasi-scientific concept/theory. Moreover, the fact that a considerable number of authors already can be cited about Shimao’s Yaponesia idea (and not just his literature in general) shows that it is already considered more than just a literary product. Some of the most frequently mentioned names are Okamoto Keitoku, Tanigawa Ken’ichi, Arakawa Akira, and Yanagita Kunio. Except Yanagita, all of them are associated with the anti-reversion discourse, which strengthens the anti-reversion position within the Yaponesia discourse as well.

In general, the corpus analysed here consists of journal articles that mostly conform to the usual style of scientific writing, meaning that they contain citations and neutral speech. In addition, authors sometimes need to explain certain points in greater detail using phrases like “which means” and “in other words” in combination with “Yaponesia,” as the Yaponesia idea is fairly abstract and complex. Beyond that, these Yaponesia related texts use many successive arguments. In some cases, they presuppose a certain historical and discursive knowledge much like other research in a specific field. Altogether, this constructs some kind of a scientific framework, which helps in theorising the Yaponesia idea.
Changes Over Time

Fifty-eight years passed between the time Shimao’s first Yaponeshia essay was published. Over these years the Yaponeshia discourse changed not only in the frequency of publications but also in the topics discussed.

Analysis shows that the early articles from the 1970s were especially focused on Okinawan culture and lifestyle (about thirty-five per cent of paragraphs). In these publications, the authors’ own ideas and thoughts about these topics play an important role, as it is shown by the fact that the code “idea/thought” occurs almost twice as much as “concept/theory.” The Yaponeshia idea itself was not yet the only focus of these articles, as the term “Yaponeshia” only occurred about half as often as in the following decade. The code “concept/thought” occurs more often in the course of time, supporting the hypothesis that the Yaponeshia idea became more elaborate and complex over time, changing mere ideas and thoughts into something more palpable and citeable. In the early years, however, the Yaponeshia texts were seen as an inspiration, a chance to view the Ryūkyū Islands from a new perspective and to address current problems between Okinawa and mainland Japan.

Whereas the term yaponeshia-ron ヤポネシア論 was only scarcely used in articles published in the 1970s, it was already frequently used in the 1980s. Although only three articles were published during that time, the word “Yaponeshia” occurs in about sixty per cent of all paragraphs. At the same time, more and more “experts” are mentioned, most of all because the article of Hiyane et al. (1987) is a transcript of a discussion between some of these “experts.” Nevertheless, “experts” like Tanigawa Ken’ichi, Yanagita Kunio, and Yoshimoto Takaaki are often cited or referred to—all supporting the notion that Okinawa represents a former stage of Japanese culture as proposed by the nantō-ron. The southern island discourse seems to suddenly intersect with the Yaponeshia discourse in the 1980s but was not yet as heavily criticised as in the 1990s. With the southern island discourse also came the question whether the Yaponeshia idea had an ideological component or not—a topic that comes and goes within the discourse. Therefore, the entire focus shifts away from the discussion of a re-evaluation of the Okinawan and Japanese cultures; instead, Shimao’s Yaponeshia idea itself—which is more and more seen as something tangible—and its connection to other theories and discourses seems to be placed at the centre.

The number of articles has risen significantly since the 1990s, maybe partly due to the Okinawa boom, the fiftieth anniversary of Shimao’s first Yaponeshia publication, or several other publications outside journals. As a result, the topic of Okinawan (cultural) identity comes to a peak, and the topic of the oppression of Okinawa by the central government in Tōkyō comes into focus. Nevertheless, political topics like the reversion of Okinawa to Japan do not become the centre of the discussions before 2000. Compared to the preceding decades, the name “southern islands” becomes more popular than “Ryūkyū,” which may also be a remnant of the influence of the southern
island discourse that can be seen since the 1980s; yet, it may just be seen as a means to refer to the Ryūkyū Islands avoiding any political implications.

Most articles (twenty-three) of the corpus analysed here were written between 2000 and 2009. In comparison to the previous decade, Okinawa’s independence became again a significant, albeit not overall dominant part of the discussion. Topics like “reversion,” “politics,” and “oppression” appear in about six to seven per cent of all paragraphs of the entire corpus. From this it can be concluded that political contents came to a peak between 2000 and 2009, leaving the impression that the political and (anti-)reversion part of the Yaponeshia discourse slowly ousted the southern island discourse, especially considering the rising criticism regarding orientalism. Mainland Japanese policies regarding Okinawa seem to be a rising topic without the authors particularly addressing wishes for independence, since the reversion itself is generally treated as a historical fact. The 2000s also show a peak regarding Okinawa’s “otherness.” Okinawa’s image as “the other within” had been more or less established since the 1990s, which seems to continue after 2000.

After the peak of publications about Yaponeshia in the 2000s, there were only four articles published between 2010 and 2017. Three of them were considered B-texts in the present study; only one was relevant regarding changes within the discourse. In this text, Ishikawa (2017) writes about different people’s conceptions of the Yaponeshia idea and Shimao’s southern islands literature in general, whereas the topics “Okinawan identity” and “independence” faded into the background. The other three articles seem to focus on Shimao as a writer and Yaponeshia as one of his literary products, meaning that Yaponeshia as a theory used to discuss Okinawan culture and politics became less important. Also, criticism on the Yaponeshia idea and the nantō-ron was mentioned, indicating a more critical approach, based on already existing research.

**Conclusion**

Shimao Toshio’s ambiguous way of writing and the many different interpretations and ideas by other authors who followed gave birth to a discourse not easy to penetrate. As the authors of articles about Yaponeshia presume certain knowledge on the side of the reader (e.g., about the historical relationship between Okinawa and Japan, and other discourses like the anti-reversion discourse, nantō-ron, and the discourse on the—cultural—identity of Okinawa), it is hard for “outsiders” to the field to quickly get a grasp of the Yaponeshia discourse. These journal articles are obviously written for a very specific audience already familiar with the broader debate regarding Okinawa’s “identity.”

The lines of discourse that intersect with the Yaponeshia idea offer two significant interpretations of what Yaponeshia actually is: (1) The view that Yaponeshia means
a shared cultural heritage, constructing Okinawan culture as a previous version of Japanese civilisation, is proposed by authors of the nantō-ron; here, Yponeshia is used to find clues to (mainland) Japan’s identity. (2) Yponeshia can also be understood as a means to focus on Okinawa’s cultural uniqueness, putting the perception of Japanese culture as homogeneous to a test in order to create a counter-discourse to the cornerstone of the nihonjin-ron. Whereas the nantō-ron interpretation is seen as a means to strengthen Japan’s claim over Okinawa, the second interpretation was influenced by anti-reversionists and representatives of a more critical discourse on Okinawan identity. (In some cases, it was also used to advocate independence for Okinawa.) Both points of view, however, seem to miss Shimao’s initial hope to create a heterogeneous and unified Japan free of cultural discrimination. Shimao himself addressed many controversial aspects of Japan’s and Okinawa’s cultural identity (Shimao 2007).

Having been developed from different angles, both interpretations could base their arguments on specific aspects of Shimao’s Yponeshia idea, strengthening their own cause, respectively (Nakazato 2002: 303). Nevertheless, these two interpretations only make up two extreme lines of the Yponeshia discourse as a whole. Other authors try to critically discuss Shimao’s Yponeshia idea against different backgrounds—not only the anti-reversion and nantō discourse, but also the question about, for example, its political nature and practical use in changing the perception of Japanese/Okinawan culture.

Some authors also comment on the political dimensions of Shimao’s Yponeshia concept (Komatsu 2009; Ishikawa 2017). Shimao himself seems to have refrained from using the term Yponeshia in later years because of “suspicion of those who would appropriate Yponeshia [sic] for immediate political ends” (Gabriel 1999a: 183), therefore distancing himself from the political use of his ideas. However, because of the connection representatives of the anti-reversion discourse drew to the Yponeshia discourse, the question of its political nature was unavoidable. Although some authors conclude that Yponeshia presents a non-political (as opposed to an anti-political) concept, the discussion that subsequently unfolded connects the Yponeshia idea with political topics, which therefore make up a significant part of the discourse—articles theorising about the connection to or absence of state theory (Hiyane et al. 1987) are but one example. As a result, the Yponeshia idea actually seems strongly associated with political topics, making it quite controversial (cf. Ishikawa 2017).

Depending on the respective interpretation, the Yponeshia idea can be used to project different images of Okinawan identity and its relationship to mainland Japan (e.g., Okinawa being unique and independent versus a crude, ancient version of Japan). Whereas Okinawa is still often seen as the victim of mainland Japan’s central government’s agenda, the Japanese mainland seems to usually play the role of the conqueror. Japan is openly accused of assimilating Okinawan culture, destroying its uniqueness in the anti-reversion interpretation, whereas its nature as a dominant colonial power depicted in the nantō-ron interpretation is covert and only revealed when unravelling
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the underlying orientalistic features of the discourse by an in-depth analysis. Therefore, again depending on the interpretation, the Yaponesia discourse seems to have produced two different “kinds of knowledge” regarding mainland Japan and Okinawa so far.

Taking into account Shimao’s wish for a heterogeneous Japan but not Okinawan independence, the Yaponesia idea has the potential to be both at the same time: a counter discourse to the nihonjin-ron or another nihonjin-ron highlighting Japan’s homogeneity. On the one hand, one part of the discourse stands for actively protecting Okinawa’s and Japan’s cultural diversity, therefore negating homogeneity which is the central idea of the prevalent nihonjin-ron. On the other hand, the nantō-ron interpretation deals—on an essentialist level—primarily with Japanese identity, constructing Okinawa as “the other within”—different but still Japanese and a clue to Japanese identity, which can be seen as just “another nihon-ron” (Takasaka 2004; Hisamoto 1977). This assumption is confirmed by the fact that the Japanese mainland seems to be just as important a part of the discourse as the Ryūkyū Islands, and that the question of Okinawa’s identity is inextricably connected to the question of Japanese identity.

As has become clear, the Yaponesia idea addresses many controversial topics regarding Okinawan cultural identity, even though it was only mapped out in a compilation of literary essays without any claim to scientific proof. This article has shown that the authors of the articles analysed are aware of that and also predominantly publish their texts in literary journals, discussing Shimao’s other literary texts in connection to his biography and war traumata as well. However, researchers from different academic fields have come to develop more complex theories and ideas about Yaponesia. Through citing other authors and basing arguments on already existing research, one could argue that the idea by now has gained a certain degree of “scientific credibility.” In addition, Yaponesia has already been discussed at symposia and workshops by “experts” on the discourse around Okinawan identity, as can be seen in Hiyane et al.’s (1987) transcript. All these activities have slowly transformed Shimao’s initial ideas into a conceptual framework, which gives room to worldviews or ideologies based on the Yaponesia idea that can be used to interpret the relationship between Okinawa and Japan in different ways. The fact that even researchers outside literary studies mention the Yaponesia idea as an example for a concept on Japanese and Okinawan cultural identity or to support their arguments, shows that it is increasingly seen as a tangible concept. Going one step further, the Yaponesia concept is on the way to become a kind of cultural theory being developed in order to better understand Japanese culture (and Okinawa’s part therein). The main purpose of this concept is to allow a worldview where cultural heterogeneity in Japan is the norm. Nevertheless, the Yaponesia idea still seems far from replacing the prevalent notion of a homogeneous Japanese culture.
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7 Since I used academic literature as my primary source, some articles are listed twice, once as a secondary and once as a primary source.
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