

Department of East Asian Studies Japanese Studies

## **Shurijō in 2022** The Politics of Cultural Heritage on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Okinawa's Reversion

A hybrid *u:japan lecture* by Tze M. Loo



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Fifty years after Okinawa's reversion to Japan, the presence of U.S. military bases in the islands remains a source of deep friction between the prefecture and the central government in Tokyo.



**Tze M. Loo** is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Richmond and is the author of *Heritage Politics: Shuri Castle and Okinawa's Incorporation into Modern Japan, 1879-2000* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014). Her current book project examines the transformations to Okinawa's ritual landscapes that accompanied Okinawa's incorporation into the modern Japanese nation state.

Okinawans' repeated opposition to base construction at Henoko and Tokyo's insistence on the base's completion despite that popular opposition has come to encapsulate and symbolize that friction. The fact that construction crawls forward despite Okinawa's attempts to stop it lays bare the profound asymmetry of power that endures between periphery and center. Thursday 2022-11-10 18<sup>30</sup>~20<sup>00</sup>

In contrast to the prefecture's limited range of options in the base issue, this talk considers Okinawa's deployment of its cultural heritage as a sphere of action from which a different picture of the prefecture emerges. Specifically, it shows how current plans to rebuild Shurijō – castle of the Ryukyuan court and putative symbol of Okinawan culture – following a devastating fire in 2019 suggest that the prefecture is strategically fashioning a more assertive self that gives it an ability to bend mainland agendas to better suit its

purposes. This assertiveness impacts the castle's rebuilding project, but also has the potential to contribute to the current prefectural leadership's willingness to take a stronger position vis-à-vis Tokyo to safeguard Okinawa's interests.

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