Exploration of the Southern Islands

On April 18, 1893, Sasamori Gisuke (1845–1915), a samurai who had lately returned from the Kuril Islands, where he had spent three painful months "roving over hill and dale, miserably fed and clothed, and suffering many privations,"[1] was summoned by the minister of home affairs, Inoue Kaoru (1835–1915), who wished to discuss Sasamori's report on conditions in the north. During the course of their conversation the subject turned to the Ryūkyū Islands, at the very opposite end of Japan. Worry over Japan's defenses to the north had prompted Sasamori, a fervent patriot, to see for himself the actual state of affairs. His concern over the Ryūkyūs was aroused for similar reasons. Inoue, however, was more interested in discovering what might be done to increase sugar production in Okinawa, and thereby reduce Japan's dependence on imported sugar. He asked Sasamori if he would be willing to go there and make an investigation.

Sasamori was certainly an unlikely person to send to Okinawa in the summer. He came from Hirosaki in the north of Japan, was unaccustomed to heat, and knew nothing about sugar. (At the opening of his diary Sasamori confesses that he did not know whether sugar

grew on trees or was a kind of plant.)[2] However, a rich industrialist named Kimbara Meizen (1832–1923), who had been impressed by Sasamori's report on Chishima, urged him to study conditions in Okinawa in the same spirit, sure that it would be of benefit to the nation, at least indirectly. Kimbara was the backer of Sasamori's travels in the Ryūkyū Islands.

Sasamori was pleased to be entrusted with this mission. He had long been convinced that the indifference to the Ryūkyūs displayed by the Japanese government had resulted in a threat to Japanese security. However, when he said goodbye to his family and friends before leaving Hirosaki he was anything but cheerful. He could not help worrying about the two dangers lying ahead of him on the journey—poisonous snakes and disease, especially malaria and filariasis. He tells us (with surprising frankness for a samurai) in the first entry of the diary,

> At the time of my departure I had already prepared myself to die, and even though I forced a look of manly cheerfulness on the outside, in fact tears of blood welled up in my breast at the thought that this was at once a separation for life and a separation by death. When I think back on my feelings at the time, I see that the dejection in my heart was a kind of hallucination, grief and joy sweeping over me by turns in the same room with my family and friends. Reader, I ask you to forgive the above state of mind.[3]

The last sentence tells us that Sasamori expected that the diary would be published and read. This undoubtedly inhibited his expression at times; conversely, the rare occasions when he openly voiced his emotions were given special intensity because of his normal reluctance to indulge in personal comment. Before publishing the diary, Sasamori went through the manuscript, cutting passages that seemed excessively critical of the political situation in the Ryūkyūs and suppressing the names of some officials whom he had described with harshness, but his observations are presented honestly, and there is no mistaking his shock over the misery in which many of the people of Okinawa lived.

From the beginning of his stay in Okinawa he was confronted with a contradiction between what he wanted to believe and his actual experiences. It was absolutely essential for him to believe that the people of the southern islands were Japanese; otherwise, he would have to recognize the claim of China to the islands or else the legitimacy of the kings of the Ryūkyūs. For this reason he refused ever to use the words *naichijin*—people from the Inner Country, a commonly used term for the four main islands of Japan. He explained, "People call all the other prefectures except for Okinawa *naichi*. But Okinawa is not a foreign country. I consider it inappropriate for this reason to make a distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' in the case of the Ryūkyū Islands, and I shall use the term 'the other prefectures' for what other people call *naichi*."[4] But having made this resolution, which he never broke, he was compelled again and again to admit that the people of the southern islands were unlike the rest of the Japanese in crucial respects.

The first major difference was that of language. Sasamori, as a native of Hirosaki, undoubtedly knew from personal experience how difficult it was for outsiders to understand the dialect spoken in that part of Japan. When it came to the language of Okinawa, he insisted that it too was just a dialect of Japanese, but he was obliged to admit that he could understand almost nothing. From the day of his arrival in Naha, the capital of Okinawa, he was faced with this problem: "When I landed there was a crowd of several hundred women gathered on the dock. Old and young alike were struggling to get to the front, pushing and shoving back and forth. Some held a bottle in one hand, others carried on their head a small parcel wrapped in cloth. The strangeness of their appearance and the noise they made defies description. Nothing they said was intelligible. I could barely make out that they wanted so many *kan* or so many hundred *mon* for something."[5]

The next day Sasamori felt even more exasperated over not understanding the language. He wrote in his diary, "Today I lost my way again and again. I kept asking people I met, but I couldn't understand a word they said. There was nothing I could do about it."[6] Even a month later, he still could not understand anything, and he had to rely on an interpreter. He worried that his ignorance of the Ryūkyū language might offend (or amuse) people.[7] When Sasamori later visited the outer islands he made the dismaying discovery that each one had a different, mutually unintelligible dialect.[8]

The languages spoken in the Ryūkyū Islands are as different from standard Japanese as French is from Italian, but Sasamori was indignant when he heard Japanese say that "the physique and language of the inhabitants of the islands show the influence of the western lands;[9] it makes me more and more suspicious of such people."[10] He pointed out that the language spoken in Okinawa contains various words that had become archaic in Japanese, such as *kozo* for "last year," or *miki* for sake, and gave other examples of place-names and personal names that retained old Japanese forms. His most earnest wish was to prove that, despite the apparent differences, the Okinawan language is actually pure Japanese.[11]

Sasamori was determined from the beginning of his stay in Okinawa to accommodate himself to the local way of life. Despite his resolution, however, he could not help being affected by the heat. He recalled:

> Last year I spent the summer in Hokkaidō and Chishima. That is how it happened that I wore all summer the clothes I would wear in winter in *naichi*.[12] I didn't wear summer clothes—whether lined or unlined—even once. But when someone who has never been exposed to the blazing, year-long heat of summer in the tropics suddenly arrives there, it needs hardly be said what a physical shock he receives. That explains why, ever since I arrived in Naha, my head has been heavy all day long, and feels the way it did in old days in the

> fief when I used to wear a helmet. I developed a fever, and my body ached so much I could not stand.[13]

There was nothing Sasamori could do about the heat, and he does not mention it again, though it remained blazing hot during his entire five months in Okinawa. When he traveled, he wore Okinawan dress, to the surprise of people he met.

"When I was given a formal welcome by the officials, I did not wear either a *haori* or a *hakama.*[14] I seem to have astonished everybody by wearing underwear of unlined banana-hemp cloth,[15] a white obi, drawers and leggings, and straw sandals."[16]

When he and some local people set out on a tour of inspection of Kunigami, at the northern end of the island of Okinawa, the others all carried Japanese-style lunch boxes, but Sasamori followed local customs: "I was the only one to have rice balls wrapped in banana leaves. When the others saw me open the leaves they couldn't help but laugh. I suppose this was because they thought that, since I had come on a special mission from Tokyo, I would carry a lunch box in the style of an official stationed in Okinawa, but instead (to their astonishment) I carried exactly the same kind of lunch as a woodcutter or country bumpkin."[17]

For all his desire to prove that Okinawan customs were basically the same as Japanese, Sasamori did not pretend that this was true of Okinawan food. The most elaborate Okinawan meal he describes was at a restaurant to which he was invited by the governor. His account does not make the place seem very attractive:

"The eaves were three or four feet lower than the fence. This made the room dark even at midday, and the heat was extreme. One room served both as a banquet hall and a place to sleep. There was nothing special about the interior decorations, but the place was indescribably cramped. There is not much difference between this place and a prison cell. The natives consider this to be a high-class place to buy pleasure."[18]

Sasamori admired the young geishas and liked their songs, even though he could not understand the words. Unfortunately, an ailment kept him from doing justice to the dinner, but he describes it with respect: "After tea and cakes they spread out delicacies from the mountains and the sea. The main dish is pork . . . I am told that they can make dozens of wonderful dishes, all from pork . . . I imagine that even Western people, for whom meat is the principal item of the diet, would have to yield to them in their skill of preparing pork."[19]

Sasamori visted an abbatoir in which pigs were slaughtered with such efficiency that "meat-eating foreigners who had a look at the plant were astonished by the skill."[20] He heard a rumor that in the Kōka era (1844–48) a Frenchman had visited Okinawa and taught the people the art of slaughtering pigs.

However much Sasamori admired the dexterity of the Okinawan butchers, he still seems to have missed Japanese cuisine. He described a meal he prepared for himself while on the island of Iriomote: "I took out some of the rice I had brought with me and boiled it. I bought an egg and put it in the rice bowl, and poured onto it a little of the soy sauce I had brought along. This was my evening meal. There were no pickles and no miso. And, of course, no soup. There is really a poor man's journey."[21]

Despite Sasamori's insistence that the Okinawans and the Japanese were of the same race and culture, he kept being made aware of dissimilarities. The extent of Chinese influence in Okinawa seems to have surprised him. When he visited Shuri Castle he could not help but recognize that the buildings were modeled on Chinese rather than Japanese examples.[22] There were Confucian temples with statues of Confucius, and the Confucian classics were the basis of what education existed in Okinawa. It may seem strange that a samurai whose own education had consisted largely of learning to read and write *kambun* should have been surprised by similar traditions in Okinawa, but he could not detect the kind of process of naturalization of the Chinese classics that had occurred in Japan. Confucian culture in Okinawa seemed to involve a worship of China itself, and the old documents of the Ryūkyū kingdom were dated with Chinese rather than Japanese reign-names.

Some Japanese, worried over this situation, advocated destroying the Confucian statues and temples, in the belief that as long as they were tolerated, it would be impossible to rid the Okinawan people of their worship of China. Sasamori was shocked by this proposal:

"Ah, they said the Confucian temples should be destroyed and the statues broken, but that the people should not be deprived of their Japanese spirit. I never would have expected there to be such heedless advocates of enlightenment. Their stupidity was really to be pitied, but how could so deplorable a development be permitted? Fortunately, there were intelligent people at the time and they did not allow the temples to be destroyed. This is truly a matter of rejoicing for the nation."[23]

He urged instead that the Confucian temples in Okinawa be cleaned and restored. His respect for Confucius was too great to permit vandalism. Chinese influence in Okinawa was not restricted to the Confucian temples. Sasamori noticed that at the crossroads in every village there were stone monuments inscribed with the names of a Chinese hero who was believed to ward off harm, and that people pasted on their doors slips of red paper with the names of gods who protected the house.[24] They also followed the Chinese practice of burning paper in a special stone structure. He wrote, "If the villagers have old paper they bring it here and burn it inside. They never use old paper for toilet paper, like people from the other prefectures. This may be because they venerate written words as gods and feel they must repay the gods' favors. The veneration of writing must be accounted a good custom."[25]

Some prominent Okinawans who found China more congenial than Japan had traveled to China to ask for help in restoring the old order.[26] The Chinese, for their part, refused to admit that the Ryūkyū Islands were Japanese territory until they were defeated in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95; but there was little they could do to end the Japanese occupation. Members of the old aristocracy in particular made appeals to the Chinese for their protection, but Sasamori was sure that such appeals could have not the slightest effect.[27]

Shō Tai, the last king of the Ryūkyū Islands, after reigning thirty-one years was compelled by the Japanese authorities in 1879 to move to Tokyo and to give up his throne in return for being made a marquis. The king himself was naturally resentful over being deposed, and the people of Okinawa—not only the nobility but also many commoners—opposed the Japanese action. Sasamori, though certainly no partisan of the king, felt obliged to record instances of the worshipful respect still accorded to Shō Tai and his family. For example, on June 19 Prince Kitashirakawa (1847–1895), a representative of the Japanese government, paid a state visit to Okinawa. He called on Shō Tai (who had been allowed by the Japanese to return to Okinawa in 1884) to present his compliments. He also offered his respects at the royal tombs. Despite these conciliatory gestures, not one member of the six or seven major noble families accepted Prince Kitashirakawa's invitation to a banquet held a few days later. When the prince was to tour the island, the officials at the prefectural office asked permission to use Shō Tai's palanquin, only to be informed that there was no such thing; but when the prince was about to leave the island, word came that the palanquin existed after all, and it was brought to him. Sasamori, who refused to call the ex-king anything but Mr. Shō, commented, "A complete contradiction! What discourtesy!"[28]

He then described the reception given by the people of Okinawa to Prince Kitashirakawa:

> When the prince toured the various sites, the streets of Naha were full of spectators. The police inspector and the entire constabulary turned out, and they informed the people on the

> proper way to show their respect, but some obstinate Okinawans resisted the police. However, if anyone of Mr. Shō's family should go by, they bow down to the ground to express their respect. That is why nobody from the other prefectures who happens to be here can control his anger over their disrespect. Ah, these two or three incidents tell us more than enough about how the people of Shuri and Naha feel about us.[29]

Sasamori noted with indignation, "One thing that attracted attention on this occasion was that even though Mr. Shō and his family had rickshaws at their disposal, they went in palanquins, differing in no particle from the coming and going of a daimyo's retinue in the old days. Moreover, the Okinawans showed this procession the profoundest marks of respect, far more than toward the prince."[30]

Later, when he went to Shuri, he noticed, "In front of every house along the road from Naha they had spread mats, and men and women sat formally in rows. I asked the reason, and I was told, 'Today, at the invitation of the governor, Shō Ten [Shō Tai's son] and his family are to pass. Everybody has turned out to pay their respects.'"[31] Their attitude recalls Narushima Ryūhoku's description of how the people of Florence displayed greater respect for the deposed grand duke than for the new king of Italy.

The Japanese considered various solutions to the problem of what to do about this potential source of disorder and perhaps even rebellion. Some favored "showing the virtue of conciliation in order to induce them to support the main tenets."[32] Others insisted that the only safe course was to move Shō Tai and his whole family to Tokyo. The problem was not restricted to the disposition of the Shō family, but involved the attitude of many Okinawans that the Japanese were intruders. Sasamori reported that there was not a single instance of an Okinawan marrying a person from "the other prefectures," nor was there a single person from "the other prefectures" who had taken up permanent residence in Okinawa.[33] In contrast, "Even though people from Europe and America belong to a different race, they often become naturalized in our country and marry Japanese."[34] He came to the sad conclusion: "The natives' feeling is one of strong attachment to the restoration of the old régime, and for this reason their attitude has not been satisfactory to this day."[35]

Sasamori was absolutely certain it was better for the Okinawans to be under the enlightened rule of the Meiji government than under the former system, when they had their own king but paid tribute to both the lords of Satsuma and the emperor of China. However, he had the integrity to listen to contrary opinions and to quote them in his diary. For example, he met on Amami Ōshima a man of some importance who told him, "The old régime resembled despotism, but because it looked after the islanders with kindness, as if they all really belonged to one family, conditions were not as confused as they are now. When backward islanders acquire a superficial modernism or, in extreme cases, hope for the implementation of a system of towns and villages, the results are actually far less satisfactory than under the old régime."[36]

Sasamori refused to assent to the paternalism implicit in this attitude. He desperately wanted to believe that the people of the southern islands were Japanese and, as subjects of the emperor, should enjoy the same privileges as any other Japanese. His survey of life in the islands came as a shock to someone with these convictions. Even before he left Hirosaki he had known of the health problems, but he was not prepared for the dreadful reality. The first and most terrible shock came on June 19, 1893, when he was making a survey of the Kunigami region of Okinawa. He noticed a few small huts that had been built in an otherwise deserted area and, wondering who lived there, asked the policeman who accompanied him. The latter replied, "Lepers." Sasamori said he would like to have a look, but the others with him tried to dissuade him, saying, "The smell is something terrible. Don't try to get any closer."

Sasamori relates in his diary,

> I answered them, "They may be lepers, but they are still children of His Majesty, the emperor. Even if nobody else wants to join me, I definitely want to see them." I scrambled up a rocky height and reached the huts. They were hovels, not four feet high, and about twelve feet on all sides. Hay was spread on the earthen floor. I saw a woman about twenty and a girl about seven. Their entire bodies were rotting, and I could smell them from some distance, even before I reached their hut. One look was enough to make my hair stand on end.[37]

Nothing Sasamori saw later on was quite as horrifying as this experience, but when he left the main island of Okinawa in order to inspect the outer islands, people warned him, "It's the time of year when sickness is prevalent on the outer islands. Do take care of yourself."[38] But even before he encountered sickness, he was confronted by poverty of a degree he had never known before. He wrote about one hamlet on the island of Ishigaki,

> I arrived at the Nagura guardhouse. No sign of anyone. The guardhouse was in a state of extreme dilapidation, in miserable condition as one could tell at a glance; it was like an abandoned old shrine in some remote village in the other prefectures. There were six houses in the whole village, with a population of ten men and six women . . . The state of dilapidation of the six houses was far worse than that of the guardhouse, in a condition one could never see in the other prefectures . . . Ah, if the Ryūkyūs were a possession of China I could look on such conditions with indifference, but when I thought that these were subjects of the Japanese Empire, His Majesty's children, as a sentient being the sight made me want to cry out in lamentation, and even that would not be enough.[39]

Even in the most wretched village, where the inhabitants seemed to possess absolutely nothing, the tax collectors were merciless, and the officials, members of the old samurai class, were lazy and corrupt, utterly indifferent to the misery around them.

Wherever Sasamori traveled in the outer islands, he encountered disease. Malaria seems to have been the most prevalent, but he generally lumped together all tropical diseases as *fūdobyō* (endemic diseases), and it is hard to be sure exactly which disease he meant. No medicine was available to cope with the symptoms of malaria. Sasamori wrote in indignation,

> Quinine is the principal medicine used in treating this disease, and it is the accepted opinion among doctors that the patient must not neglect to take it every day. I hope that in the future trial plantings of the trees will be made, and the results examined. However, as is the way in backward regions, it is difficult to get anything accomplished. The village officials say such things as, "What does the trial planting of trees have to do with me, an official?" and show even less interest in considering this than the ordinary citizen. Is this not the height of the deplorable?[40]

Sasamori carried with him a supply of quinine that he gave to malaria patients he encountered. In every instance the quinine proved to be effective, but there was no other medical assistance available. When he went to the island of Iriomote, he asked if there were any doctors, and was told that until two years before there had been a hospital in one village, but that it had been closed. He wrote in his diary, "Ever since then, there has been an itinerant doctor, but he made a tour here only once, last August, and this year he has not come even once. This is an area of disease without a hospital, without a doctor. I have visited the fourteen villages on the island of Iriomote, a disease area where there are 1,214 people, and on behalf of the people of this contagion ward, I protest to the world."[41]

In Sasamori's original manuscript the last phrase was, "I protest to the empire of Japan."[42]

Sasamori had come close to admitting that even under enlightened Japanese rule (as opposed to the feudalistic rule of the Ryūkyū kings), some Japanese subjects were treated far worse than others. Disease, uncontrolled by medicine, had drastically reduced the population of many of the southern islands. He discovered on consulting old records of Komi village on Iriomote that in 1753 the population had been 767 persons, and the village itself had been considered to be "a prosperous place that typifies the entire island of Iriomote."[43] Now the population was 142 persons, and "when I walked through the village and examined the remains of the houses that used to be here, there were more than eighty. What man, regardless of whether he is wise or foolish, as long as he has blood in his veins, could fail to feel compassion for this heartrending situation?"[44]

In the village Sasamori met the mayor. Here is his description of the man: "A corpulent man who appeared in formal costume. He wore a wide Chinese brocade sash over a banana-hemp kimono, and a *haori* over it. His appearance at first glance seemed no inferior to that of a high-ranked official, and I was told that he was a leading official on the island."[45]

The man spoke Japanese. (Sasamori, unwilling to suggest that the language of *all* Okinawans was not Japanese, adopted the local usage and said the man spoke "Yamato language."[46]) Sasamori asked if there were any people suffering from endemic diseases. He continued,

> As usual, the answer was no. When I had strolled through the village a little while before I had seen several sick people, and I pursued the matter, at which he merely bowed his head. I couldn't stand the mystery, and I suggested we start talking with our brushes.[47] [I wrote,] "Year after year the population decreases and the tax burden gets heavier and heavier. You should really feel compassion for the people's suffering. What do the senior people of this place plan to do in the future to relieve the distress?" Answer: "I am someone who uses his salary to support his family. I don't know what would be good to do in order to prevent the population from decreasing and I don't know any way to relieve poverty. It was simply because of seniority that I was assigned to this place."

At this point Sasamori exploded with wrath: "If I were to try to read what is in his mind, it would be that it is quite sufficient as long as the samurai class can keep the commoners under control and support their own families. It is all too evident that they judge that the life-and-death sufferings of the commoners are no concern of theirs."[48]

The situation with respect to education in the southern islands was almost as bad as the health problem. There was supposed to be a Confucian school in Komi village, but "the fact is that there are now no teachers and no pupils and the school has ceased to exist."[49] No schooling was available for the children of the more than seven hundred people who lived in the area. Sasamori saw before the village office on the island of Ishigaki a sign openly stating that there were no schools.[50] Even in districts of Okinawa where schools existed, only a small proportion of the children of school age attended. For example, in one village in the Nakagami district of Okinawa there were 75 boys and 6 girls attending school out of over 1,600 children of school age.[51] In the Kunigami district there were two schools with four teachers, but only 61 pupils (52 boys and 9 girls) out of 1,178 children.[52] On the island of Miyako he was told by a teacher that the school had been temporarily closed because of some local disturbance. Sasamori was enraged:

"To prevent pupils from attending school because the parents are dissatisfied with the government is to treat their own children with contempt. Their stupidity is pitiable."[53]

Although education was by no means widespread in the Ryūkyū Islands, some Japanese were reluctant to admit that educating the children in the region was of any value unless it inculcated the principle of devotion to the Japanese state. They said, "'What is the meaning of education anyway if it does not preach loyalty and patriotism? What is the purpose of education? If one doesn't teach the way of loyalty and patriotism, and one still wishes to lead children on the path to the good, how is this to be achieved?'"[54]

Sasamori did not agree. He feared that if an unquestioning adherence to the principle of loyalty and patriotism became the central feature of education in the Ryūkyū Islands, it might easily lead to a revival of allegiance to the Ryūkyū royal family and to China. This was what he feared most of all; his interest in the southern islands stemmed originally from his concern over the defenses of Japan, and if the people of the islands were alienated by inept propaganda, this would be a disaster for Japan. He therefore insisted, in good Confucian terms, that children at school be taught the philosophic meaning of loyalty and patriotism so that there would be no danger of misunderstanding the terms or using them with reference to the wrong ruler and the wrong country. "Moreover, if one does not teach this because one fears the consequences, how does it differ from prohibiting the use of fire because one fears a conflagration? Who would not laugh at such stupidity?"[55]

The situation in the Ryūkyū Islands, as Sasamori clearly revealed, was desperate. Disease was rampant. Taxes were ruthlessly collected even from those least able to pay. Most children were denied an education. In many villages the population was dwindling and in some there were no children. The local officials were corrupt and indifferent to the suffering of the people. Japanese rule of the islands had obviously not brought about prosperity.

Sasamori stubbornly refused to admit that, apart from a few dissimilarities, the Japanese and the Okinawans might be different peoples. He frequently alluded to the legend that Minamoto Tametomo (1139–1177) had escaped from Izu and made his way to Okinawa, where he founded a dynasty of kings. He was also inclined to believe that after the Battle of Dannoura, at which the Taira forces were decisively defeated, some Taira warriors had fled to Ishigaki. He related, "I went to the hamlet of Karahama. I saw signposts marked 'Yamato graves' and 'Yashima graves.'[56] I got down off my horse and went into the woods. Some ten paces into the woods there was a cave containing human bones. I lit the incense I had brought with me and offered a prayer for their souls."[57] Sasamori was assured that these were the bones of Taira warriors, but (as a Confucianist who believed in "investigating things and refining one's knowledge"), he announced his intention of taking one skull back to Tokyo and having it examined by experts there. "If they should decide that these are actually Taira remains, I intend to build a shrine and to worship them." Sasamori referred to the skull several times later in the diary and, true to his word, after carrying the skull with him throughout his second circuit of the islands, he took it to Tokyo where he turned it over to an expert.[58]

Regardless of whether or not some inhabitants of the Ryūkyū Islands were descendants of Minamoto Tametomo or of the Taira warriors, there was undoubtedly a mutual feeling of alienation between the local people and "the people of other prefectures." The Japanese frequently accused the Okinawans of being ungrateful. For example, in a village where there were no doctors, the local policeman often doubled as a physician, but if the sick person recovered, he never thanked the policeman. One such policeman asked Sasamori, "Is it because they think it is only natural for a policeman to cure people? Or is it because they are cold-hearted? I have treated I don't know how many people, but it hasn't done the least bit of good."[59]

Sasamori quoted someone who had told him, "The history books always say that their ways are simple and honest and so on, but they don't deny that these people have a tendency to be cold-hearted."[60] Sasamori's informant further related that every year no fewer than one hundred people traveled from the main islands to the Ryūkyūs. During the ten years between 1879 and 1889 well over a thousand people had come to the islands, but not one had remained. The man went on, "It is not only that the customs and the language are different, but [those from elsewhere] cannot help disliking their unfeelingness. Unless by chance there are feelings of mutual affection, it is like living temporarily in a foreign country. They consider us to be foreigners, and because most natives share this feeling, there is a tendency for us, too, to think of them as foreigners."[61]

Even if men from the other prefectures took native women as their wives or mistresses, they never took them back to the "other prefectures" when they returned. Perhaps this was because the women insisted on remaining behind. "I have the impression that the wives are determined not to leave the island and go to Japan, a foreign country, even if it means separating from their husbands and children."[62] Or perhaps, as the case of Minamoto Tametomo (who tried unsuccessfully to take his Okinawan bride with him back to Japan only to be prevented by the turbulent seas) suggests, "Ever since that day, going to Honshū has been for women something forbidden by the gods of the sea."[63] More likely, the men were embarrassed to show their "foreign" brides to their families at home. But, regardless of the cause, it was evident to Sasamori's informant that lasting marriages between Japanese and Okinawans were impossible. One can imagine how disappointed Sasamori was by this disagreeable conclusion.

It is noteworthy that virtually every person with whom Sasamori talked while he was in the southern islands was (to judge from the names) from "the other prefectures." The village officials were Okinawans, but every official of consequence was from *naichi*, as were all the policemen and almost every prosperous merchant. Sasamori took this as a matter of course and never commented on it. Instead, he vented his indignation on the only natives of the region with whom he had dealings, the local officials. When he called at some village office, there was usually nobody there.[64] Even when he did succeed in meeting an official, the man's irresponsibility generally infuriated Sasamori, as in the following instance:

"When I asked the village official if there was any endemic disease [malaria], as usual he answered that there wasn't any. When I made an actual inspection, I discovered that one man, two women, and one child were actually suffering from this sickness. When I gave them some quinine pills I had brought with me, they joined their hands in prayer and thanks for my kindness. I was so enraged that when I left the village I swore at the official. He bowed to the ground before me and did not say one word."[65]

Perhaps the situation was not really the fault of the officials, who were badly paid and had to fend for themselves and their families, as Sasamori recognized.[66] The same held true of the doctors, whose failure to visit the outer islands had so incensed Sasamori. When Sasamori asked a doctor why he let months go by without visiting some islands, the doctor cited the miserable fees that were paid for visits to the epidemic areas. "How many people do you suppose there are who, in order to earn ten yen a month, will brave ten thousand miles of angry waves and go into a disease-ridden desert?"[67] Doctors were not immune to malaria, and they often ran out of quinine. They had to pay for the quinine they administered to the patients, but often the patients could not reimburse them. The villagers, afraid that the doctor would demand payment, often hid sick persons when he visited and they actually hated it when he came.[68]

Clearly, the responsibility rested with the government in Tokyo, but Sasamori was too loyal a samurai to consider the political implications of the disastrous situation in the Ryūkyū Islands. Undoubtedly he was much relieved to depart.

Sasamori several times compared the Okinawans with the Ainu. He believed that the agricultural techniques of the Ainu were superior,[69] but on the whole he thought that the Okinawans were more advanced, even though the fertility of their soil had made them lazy:

"Although one may attribute it to the inveterate habits of the people, it is the natural fertility of the land that makes them easygoing and lazy, reluctant to exert themselves even if this means contenting themselves with coarse food and badly made clothes. As a place of corrupt public morals, they are beyond comparison with anywhere in the other prefectures."[70]

This view, recorded in his diary shortly before he left the southern islands, suggests disenchantment with a place he wanted desperately to like, and his comparison of the Okinawans to the Ainu suggests, despite his denials, that some doubt lingered in Sasamori as to whether or not the Okinawans should really be considered Japanese.

Before Sasamori left Hirosaki to go south, he had worried about the poisonous snakes in Okinawa. He mentions only casually in his diary that he killed four deadly snakes on his travels.[71] On another occasion, while in a dark toilet, "Something cold licked my behind. For a moment I was panic-stricken, imagining that I was being attacked by a poisonous snake. Ah, I thought, what a shame to die before I can accomplish my plans! I really felt bitter toward heaven. I threw away my umbrella and let the rain fall over my whole body. Then I thought about it calmly, and tried rubbing the place, and I realized that I hadn't been bitten by a poisonous snake! I had been assaulted by a pig! My joy can be imagined."[72] Sasamori (like Takezoe and Matsuura before him) had been licked by a hungry but not frightening animal. It must have made him painfully aware just how far from "the other prefectures" he was.

Notes

1. Azuma Yoshimochi, *Nantō Tanken*, I, p. 7.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8. The entry is dated May 10, 1893. That evening Sasamori left for Aomori, the first stage of his journey.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 17. One *kan* was 960 *mon*, a copper coin (with a square hole). This currency was superseded in 1872 by the sen and yen, but the old manner of referring to money apparently persisted in Okinawa.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 176. He gave the breakdown of the languages spoken on Miyako Island as: 45 percent Miyako dialect; 20 percent Japanese; 25 percent Okinawan; 8 percent Yaeyama dialect; and 2 percent Chinese.
9. The word *seido* designates any country to the west of Japan. It probably refers to China here.
10. Azuma, *Nantō Tanken*, II, p. 80.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
12. Although Sasamori objected to the use of *naichi* when making a distinction between Okinawa and the rest of Japan, he used it to distinguish Hokkaidō and the northern territories from the islands of Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū.
13. Azuma, *Nantō Tanken*, I, p. 45.
14. Parts of traditional formal wear. The *haori* is a cloak, and the *hakama* is a kind of divided skirt. This would have been the costume expected of Sasamori as a visitor sent by the government.
15. Cloth woven of fiber from the banana plant (*bashōfu*); also known as abaca cloth. The typical textile of Okinawa.
16. Azuma, *Nantō Tanken*, I, p. 70. The frontispiece of Azuma's book is a picture of Sasamori, apparently showing him as he looked in Okinawa. In addition to some of the items of clothing mentioned, a fan (*uchiwa*) is suspended around his neck. He carries in his left hand a large black umbrella, and in his right what seems to be a towel, probably to wipe off sweat.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
18. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 120–21.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
20. *Ibid.*, I, p. 137.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
27. *Ibid.*, II, p. 200.