

Exploring the Possibility of Sparking a Movement Involving all Inhabitants of Okinawa at the time of the Reversion: Objectives Behind the Struggle for Resource Development on Senkaku Islands

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This paper examines the events that unfolded at the time of the Reversion of Okinawa, a social movement that began in the 1960s, which was concerned with resource development on Senkaku Islands. In recent years, researchers like Shimabukuro (2010) and Toriyama (2009) have argued that the basic economic development policy of Okinawa was determined by the political interests of the Japanese government and USCAR. Few studies examine the events surrounding the Reversion of Okinawa from this perspective. This paper argues the importance of struggle in the context of the political and economic development of Okinawa through its integration with Japan.

Two significant movements in Okinawa history post WWII, the Land Struggle of the 1950s and the Return Movement of the 1960s, were a part of what was referred to as “Shimagurumi” Struggles, or struggles involving all inhabitants of the Okinawan islands. One feature of these struggles is that both conservatives and progressives tried to reach a common understanding or point of agreement, which did not happen before the Reversion of Okinawa owing to fierce opposition on the part of the conservatives (Sakurazawa 2009, 2010). However, at this point, there appeared to be signs of development of a collective movement involving all Okinawan inhabitants, a movement aimed at initiating resource development on Senkaku Islands. The objective was to develop these islands for the Okinawan people’s benefit and to ensure Okinawa’s autonomy and independence. Although in the “Shimagurumi” Struggles the people were united for political reasons, the struggle for resource development on Senkaku Islands involved economic interests. Ultimately, this struggle came to no avail, because the issue was trivialized to developers’ interest as a result of Okinawa seeking autonomy and independence only at the economic level.

This paper therefore focuses on revealing the process behind this struggle, relying mainly on local newspapers and official documents of the Ryukyu Government and USCAR for data. An in depth analysis of the abovementioned process around the time of the Reversion can offer meaningful insights into the social movement and political issues that arose after the 1995 Futenma issue.