

Evaluating Environmental Preservation Framing on Okinawa under US Military Occupation: A Social Movement Case Study on the Kunigami Ibudake Struggle

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From the sociological perspective, this paper critically examines a framing of the environmental preservation movement on Okinawa Island, resulting from US military occupation (1945–1972) and the anti-US military struggle within Kunigami village. The village is located on the northernmost part of Okinawa Island and covered by bountiful forests; however, because it has become one of the more depopulated areas on Okinawa Island, I am using it as my case study. After World War II, Okinawa was under the US Military occupation. In 1957, the Northern Training Area (NTA) was established and continues to be used as a jungle warfare-training zone for US Marines. Some military training, particularly in the 1960s, even mobilized soldiers out of the base area and displaced many local people. The local people who remain have faced continuous military demands and additional base constructions, resulting in successive anti-military movements from the 1970s to the present.

The Kunigami Ibudake Struggle was a pioneering resistance movement by the local residents that lasted from December 1970 to March 1971. During this period, Okinawan people vehemently opposed US acts of militarism such as Anti-Vietnam War Movements, Koza Incident, Zengunro Strikes (Labor Union of US Military Base on Okinawa), and Red Hat Problems. The local people contested the military's presence because of the possibility of forest resource destruction, and, as a result, their livelihoods, which are primarily based on the forest industry. At the same time, forests inside the NTA, where the local residents remain, have been adequately managed and protected. Thus, people insisted on their right to protect all forestry (and their livelihoods) on the island. Despite residents' opposition, US Marines continued to build new bases in this area. The local people, therefore, opposed the construction by staging direct actions of resistance.

This paper also analyzes the various responses of the US Marines and United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) to the Ibudake Struggle by using official archives and regional histories in order to examine their political positions. By doing so, I aim to clarify how the success of villagers' direct actions and successive environmental preservation movements have been interpreted by US military forces and USCAR.