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OKINAWA:  
Potential of Regional Governance in Japan  
during the Era of Globalization

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Potential of Regional Governments in Japan during the Era of Globalization  
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**OKINAWA:  
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**PROLOGUE**

The Ryukyu Islands stretch 1,000 kilometers between Kyushu, one of the Japanese main islands, and Taiwan. The population of the islands is one million and four hundred thousand. Okinawa is the prefectural name created by the Japanese Government, in addition to being the name of the largest island.

The Ryukyu Islands have a distinct historical background, and its identity is different from mainland Japan. In addition, it has experienced quite different political and administrative systems in the past.

The king of the Ryukyus was formally nominated by the Chinese emperor since the establishment of the kingdom, and the Kingdom of the Ryukyus remained until 1879 as a tributary state of China. After the annexation by Japan, Ryukyuan {or people of Okinawa Prefecture} never enjoyed the same level of civil rights as the rest of Japan until 1925.

In 1945, the Japanese government made Okinawa as a barricade for the Japanese mainland. Their purpose was to concentrate and keep American military power on the small island and postpone the mainland battle. After the war, the Japanese government agreed to transfer its governing rights of the Ryukyu Islands to the U.S.

Even after the reversion (re-annexation) of Okinawa to Japan, huge U.S. military bases remained in opposition of most Okinawan people's hopes. <sup>1</sup> The purpose of this essay is to clarify the governance of Okinawa in Japan after the Cold-War, the Era of Globalization.

## **1 RISING OF GLOBALIZATION**

### **1-1 Impact: End of the Cold War**

After the end of the Cold War, the term "Globalization," became the prime description for the status of the world and its international relations.

This word implies multiple definitions. "Prevailing or compelling American standards to world economy" may be the best known. Therefore, anti-globalism contains anti-American meanings. In this essay, I would not deny this definition, but would rather use "Globalizations'" wider implications.

The Soviet Union's corruption brought tremendous impact to world systems. As state economies disappeared, the market economy expanded its territories worldwide. With confrontation strategy eliminated, negotiation and discussion framework became the eminent phenomena of military affairs. Human rights has become the international consensus for international intervention.

Globalization implies not only the standardizations of the economic systems, but also the explosion of international exchange and transmission of PEOPLE,GOODS and MONEY, concluding a fusion of values and systems.

For this analysis, I would like to point out three dimensions of globalization. First, globalization of the economic system; second, globalization of military affairs; and last, globalization of human rights. In every phase, the U.S. superpower is the most influential, of course, but never can control the entire system.

Especially, in terms of human rights globalization, the U.S. has never contributed but on the contrary, has interrupted establishment of world human rights judicial systems. "Human Rights" is just an excuse for U.S. military activities.

Globalization has a manifest impact to the Japanese economic system and political system, as well. For adjusting to the world free market, most economic organizations, industries, and even government control systems had to be restructured. The less control there is to non governmental organizations (companies, NPOs, and local-regional governments etc.) the more direct and huge linkage between these organizations and the world. Voices for fundamental reform had become louder and louder in the 90's.

Globalization brought, on the one hand, continuous pressure and crisis for local budget cuts and decreases of fiscal support from the central government. On the other hand, there arose new hope for regional development policy which relies on interregional exchange of resources and products while lowering national border tensions.

Regional leaders of the Japanese periphery who demanded to keep the amount of central fiscal support, at the same time, had to consider new regional development strategies and seek more power for regional policy.

## **1-2 Globalization and Okinawan regional policy framework**

Governor Ota, of Okinawa was one of these at the beginning of his tenure in 1990. He confessed that he anticipated replacement of the U.S. military bases on Okinawa Island would necessarily take place in the near future. He had just begun to construct a template for this new strategy for future Okinawan development without military bases and special fiscal support from central government as the cost of maintaining these bases.

Therefore, he was completely shocked when he read an American government report which redefined the American military role in East Asia. This, Joseph Nye's report, 1995 clarified the U.S military presence in Okinawa as the most important factor for the security in the Asia-Pacific region and should keep the functions and personnel of the military in Okinawa.

In November, 1996, the Okinawa Prefectural Government issued "The Cosmopolitan City Formation Concept: Grand Design for a New Okinawa Aiming at the 21st Century." The first Chapter; I Basic Concepts of the Plan, begins with the

following paragraphs.

Now that the cold war is over, the world is moving toward creating a new global order which fits the structure of the post-cold war era.

Improvements on transportation and dramatic growth in information technology have brought new levels of activity in trade, investment, and information exchange. The world economy is growing toward globalization.

Today, the world faces a number of important issues in the structural change of international situations. These include global problems relating to environment, population, AIDS, increasing racial and regional conflicts, and the North-South problem in which the economic gaps between the leading nations and the developing countries are widening in serious proportions.

With its vast land and diversity in people, religion, and social systems, the Asian region is becoming a growing center for the global economy, and its prospects to achieve economic growth, which exceeds that of Japan in the near future, is high. Exchanges of people and commodities within Asia will soon account for most of the world's trade. As a result, we anticipate a rapid increase of exchange between Japan and the other Asian countries.

Therefore, it will become increasingly important for our prefecture to be in active involvement with other Asian countries, while observing developments in regional economic zones which cross national boundaries (e.g., the Greater South China Economic Zone) and effects of the forthcoming return of Hong Kong to China.<sup>2</sup>

This is the first general long-term development plan for Okinawa composed by the Okinawa Prefectural Government(OPG) since Okinawa's reversion (re-annexation) to Japan.

At the time of reversion, the Japanese Government declared the economic development of Okinawa to be the responsibility of the Tokyo Government and made a special regional branch for Okinawan development and its headquarters, Okinawa Development Agency(ODA), whose head was nominated by the Prime-Minister as a secretary of the state. Since then, ODA was the main responsible agency for a general

plan for Okinawan development. OPG could give advise and suggestions to ODA, but ODA could accept or reject any OPG proposals.

The Third Okinawa development general plan was launched to prepare for the first year of Ota's Governorship. He tried to put reductions of the U.S. military bases on Okinawa into the plan, but ODA rejected his demands. The reason was ODA had the responsibility for Okinawan economic developments and does not have any responsibility at all for military affairs and foreign affairs.

One of the most important aims of the Cosmopolitan City Concept was reduction of the U.S. military based on Okinawa as indicated in the following paragraphs.

The U.S. military bases have adverse effects on the community such as limiting social and economic activity by its restrictions on the use of sea and air space, causing noise pollution, and destroying the natural environment through military training exercises. Traffic problems and overcrowding in areas adjacent to the bases create poor residential conditions and create strains on the prefectural framework.

To remedy this situation, it is vital to promote planned and phased return of the land used by U.S. military bases, to establish an environment where the people of Okinawa can live with peace of mind, and to make drastic improvements on the structure of the prefectural framework.<sup>3</sup>

After the 1995 rape incident by the U.S. servicemen, an anti-base movement exploded in Okinawa. Ota restated his demands to the Tokyo Government. At this time, the Okinawan minister, the Director-General of ODA, was a member of the cabinet, but the lowest rank on the list of cabinet members, and had no power to coordinate ODA's Okinawa policy with the foreign ministry and the defense agency of Japan. The Tokyo Government was forced to make a new stronger post in the government, and created the Okinawan minister for portfolio management.

KAJIYAMA Seiroku, Chief Cabinet Secretary, No.2 position in the government, took over as the newly added ad-hoc Okinawan Minister. The minister of ODA and organization of ODA remained, but, after the creation of the new Okinawan post, policy leadership has moved dramatically to the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the new Okinawan

minister and his staff. Later, in January 2000, they absorbed all of the ODA and became permanent.

Okinawan demands are much clearer than the Tokyo Government's policy. Okinawa requires lower taxation and regulation for international trade and enterprise activities, fiscal support for construction of ports, enlargement of its airport and industrial parks, and reduction of the U.S. bases. For Okinawa, all of the above mentioned elements are necessary and crucial for Okinawan development in Asian economic integration and economic globalization.

Therefore, a new powerful Okinawan minister was welcomed when Tokyo seemed to respect Okinawan demands and the relationship between Okinawa and Tokyo was good. However, the Tokyo Government never mentioned anything about devolution of the power to Okinawa in accordance with national policy to Okinawan demands, rather they denied Okinawa's regional policy in favor of national policy. The most important national policy of Japan is "following the U.S."

Therefore when Governor Ota rejected Tokyo's new offer (maybe last offer from the point of view of Tokyo) for relocation of Futenma Air Station to the north-eastern rural coast of Nago City, a new system had changed to a powerful ruler of Okinawa which never permitted Okinawa's original idea of regional development policy.

## **2 EMERGENCE OF NEW GOVERNANCE IN OKINAWA**

### **2-1 From Ota to Inamine**

In the 90's, Democratic demands from the people became much larger. People utilized the referendum for big issues in many local communities in Japan. In September 1996, a referendum concerning Okinawa prefecture's U.S. bases reduction was held. And in December 1997, Nago City's referendum followed. Anti-base movements and civil groups campaign were prominent in both referendums.

Ota decided to accept the rejection of Tokyo's relocation proposal according to the referendum turnout which resulted in victory of the anti-base side. Governance of Okinawa seemed to be changed to more democratic. But, the Tokyo Government

never admitted this change and used its old style ruling power or even made it harder for overriding the decision of Ota. The Tokyo Government offered a new pork-barrel system named the Northern Area Development Policy Package; the contents were not clear at all, though.

Tokyo stopped all the development policy negotiation with the Okinawa Government after Ota's declaration of rejection and began to say "No Base, No Policy Package." It means if Nago would not accept the new air station, Tokyo would never give sufficient fiscal support. In the terrible long economic recession, the Nago City mayor accepted the relocation of the U.S. Marines' air station to the east coast of the city in January 1998.

The upper echelon of Okinawan business and industry felt a horrible threat of conflict between the Tokyo and Okinawa Government because of the deep dependency upon public works. They, at the first time in Okinawan modern political history, chose a candidate for the next governorship election from their own group members, a head of Okinawan economic society and also a president of the largest cement company.

Conservative candidate, Mr. Inamine promised Okinawan people a policy platform of 15 years usage limitation of the new air base in Nago in his campaign. And he won the election over Ota. Ota's first plan of a total economic free zone of all prefectural areas was to be reviewed as to be partial and only a small part of Okinawa Island under influence of business and industries which strongly opposed the opening of the market because of the weak confidence and competence in global markets.

Nago City mayor and Inamine added new demands, including the international financial tax free area in Nago, to Tokyo's new support plan for Okinawa. They started to develop two mutual contradictory policies at the same time. Number one was developing the free market oriented economy. Number two was helping the government supported businesses and industries

The approach of "One State, Two systems" became a sort of slogan to introduce Okinawa to a different political and economic control system for the first time under the Ota administration. Inamine and his supporters still insist upon the slogan but the meanings of the term now sounds just like tax-relaxation.

## **2-2 Globalization of the Japan-U.S. military alliance**

Chinese economic growth in these two decades are amazing. It has impacted the Okinawan original idea of regional development, although, the growth became a new threat for both the U.S. and the Japanese Governments in terms of national security.

Therefore, even though the cold war ended or because of the end of the cold war, Japan and the U.S., in wider terms, searched for a way of the tightening the alliance. Both country's experience and memory of war with China appeared to be raising the threat and distrust to this new power.

However, Okinawan people, as a five hundred years friendly nation, could not sympathize with their recognition of China's threat the same as Japanese mainlanders and the American nation. The Chinese threat was not reasonable enough to keep the huge U.S. bases on Okinawa eternally.

In addition to the policy to the new threat, old type confrontation policy to China, the American Government requires Japan to be a complementary power of American global militaristic hegemony which endorses the economic globalization.

A militaristic globalization which was tightly connected to economic globalization became the new trend in Okinawa and Japan. The Japanese Government was reluctant to adjust the latter globalization, and delayed the economic policy negotiation with the international organizations and the American Government. Instead of adjusting the Japanese economic globalization, they actively responded to the globalization of the Japan-U.S. security treaty.

As a result, 91% of voters' voices on the reduction of the U.S. bases in the referendum and a removal plan of the U.S. bases proposed by the Ota Government was neglected. Okinawa's dissatisfaction was severely increased.

In 1999, the Prime-Minister Obuchi decided three things which directly relate to Okinawa's problem. The first decision is that the G8 summit 2000 hosted by the Japanese Government would be held in Nago City, Okinawa. And the second is adoption of a report by the prime-minister's advice committee which included famous Okinawan scholars. The last is the revision of Local Government Law which include

the right of the people concerned to the land expropriated for the U.S. bases.

The G8 summit was held in Okinawa in July 2000. In March, four months before the summit, three Okinawan professors advocated a report named "Okinawa Initiative" at a conference held in Naha, sponsored by Tokyo's organization. Two of them were members or participants of Obuchi's advisory committee.

The report redefined the role of the U.S. bases on Okinawa under the militaristic globalization. It was "good" propaganda to Okinawan people for accepting the Japan-U.S. globalizing military alliance and importance of Okinawan bases for it. Of course, these are also the reasons why they held the summit meeting in Okinawa.

The last is the policy concerning both the redesigning Japanese local governance in general terms and strengthening the special power of the central government for militaristic purposes. This contained depriving the procedural commitment rights of the persons and local governments concerned in the case of land expropriation.

The U.S. bases on Okinawa were constructed under the U.S. rule after the Second World War. They ignored all the due process of law for small land owners, and just robbed farmers of fields and properties by the armed troops. All these are in contradiction of international laws.

After the reacquisition of governing rights of Okinawa, The Japanese Government had to legitimate this somehow, because the continuous free use of bases in Okinawa was an absolute condition of the transfer of Okinawa rule.

The pork-barrel policies for the followers and fiscal support cuts threat against the opposition is the standard policy framework of the Japanese Government. By this measure, many land owner accepted the contract of land lease offered by the Tokyo Government. However, there remained the land owners who never accepted the land lease contract.

In accordance with the Japanese Land Expropriation Law, if the land owner rejected the contract, the Mayor and Governor have to commit the procedure on behalf of land owners and Prefectural Land Expropriation Committee supposed to deliberate each expropriation case.

Before 1995, under strong pressure of the central government, governors signed the contract instead of land owners, there were no actual deliberations in the committee at all because of the pressure of central power. But, Ota did not sign and deliberation of the each expropriation case in the committee became actual.

This was the first procedure in Okinawan history that the committee accepted all the appeals and complaints of contract-refused land owners and their advocacy at the meeting, and accountability of the central government was so demanded in the proper procedure.

At the moment that new regional governance seemed to be established, the central government rejected all the explanations of the reasons for expropriation cases, and they prepared the revision of law concerned in this case and deprived procedural commitment rights of Mayors and Governors and the power of prefectural land expropriation committee and absorbed them.<sup>4</sup>

The old type of national interest (we may name it "state interest" here), state power and state government clashed with new and more democratic types of regional governance in Okinawa.

### **2-3 People's Security and Human Rights globalization**

The Tokyo Government thought The G8 Okinawa Summit 2000 held in Nago City would be the final trump card for appeasing and coaxing Okinawan people's increased discontent and distrust of Tokyo.<sup>5</sup> Eighty billion Yen in total had poured from the national budget for the summit. The large proportion of the money was spent in Okinawa.

Anti-base Okinawa civil groups organized many international conferences before and after the summit. During the summit meeting, thousands of foreign government officers and media staff and Japanese police officers occupied most of the flights to the tiny remote island of Okinawa and its hotel rooms. Without any strong support groups from off the island, 25,000 people succeeded to make a human chain surrounding Kadena Air Base of the U.S. Air Force, the largest base on Okinawa.

The civil groups made a series of the meetings, and declared the alternative security regime, "People's Security" in Asia. The following paragraphs are part of "The Declaration of Okinawa International Forum on Peoples Security Towards People's Security in the Asia Pacific Region"(July 2, 2000 Urasoe, Okinawa)

### **Militarized Security: A Source of Our Insecurity**

We have reached the conclusion that :

The U.S. military, whose presence in the region continues to be centered on the Japanese and South Korean territories and is supported by the ruling elite in many of our countries, has no intention of protecting the interests of the vast majority of the peoples of Asia and the Pacific. It serves to safeguard the interest of U.S. hegemony as the core of neo-liberal globalization which has been plundering our natural resources, destroying our environment, and exploiting the vast majority of our peoples, particularly women, children, farmers, workers, migrant workers, tribal communities and indigenous peoples. In other words, it has no other aim but to protect corporate profit and U.S. and allied economic interests. The expansion of U.S. military power in the region, in alliance with Japan, is a form of military globalization, shaping, protecting, and often enforcing political and economic globalization, and serves as a threat to, and not as a guarantee of, our security as peoples.

### **Our action toward people's security**

It is people's security that is subverted and undermined by corporate-led globalization, the acceleration of which is the agenda of the G-8 Summit in Nago. Ultimately, it is this process of destructive globalization that is guarded by the U.S. military presence. And ultimately, the struggle for equality, decent work and standards of living, gender equality, and ecological stability cannot be separated from the dismantling of oppressive military structures.

Acting together, we must:

- Come to terms with our own histories, with the complicity of our societies, and of our own selves, in the toleration or perpetuation of violence or violent structures, relations and values. We must endeavor to raise our mutual trust by being sensitive to the likelihood of this complicity permeating our mutual relationships.

- This is especially urgent in Japan, whose government and people still have to take responsibility for their imperial past including aggression, colonial domination and

accompanying atrocities such as military sexual slavery. Furthermore, they must assume responsibility for the impact of current Japanese economic domination and re-emerging militarism. This applies in different ways to the United States.

- Overcome through frank dialogue and interaction the people-to-people conflicts, hatreds, and suspicions of the past that have often been instigated by the war machinery itself and allow the U.S. military to pose as the "preserver of the peace" and prevent us from creating the regional structures to solve our problems among ourselves.

- Address the situation of conflicts in our own societies and work towards the building of mutual trust and respect amongst our communities, nations, and peoples. One community's security should never be another community's insecurity.

- Work towards a peaceful and de-militarized and nuclear-free Asia-Pacific region which promotes alternative ways of people-to-people and state-to-state cooperation and which is based on multilateral systems enhancing people's security.

- Take action so that people's security is pursued and created not only in the military, diplomatic, and political areas but also in the areas of everyday life, such as family, gender relations, social movement, and culture.<sup>6</sup>

Activities of a civil association, Indigenous People in the Ryukyus(IPR) is unique and important in terms of People's Security and globalization of human rights. They send their members to the human rights committees and conferences of the U.N. all most every year in these past five years.

They present the military depression and human rights offences in Okinawa from the point of view of international human rights laws. And, they collaborated to make a counter-report to the Japanese Government which has an influence to the discussion to the committees. In March 2001, a commission ordered the Japanese Governments, who had never admitted any human rights offences in Okinawa by their state security policies including the U.S. bases, to scrutinize and report Okinawan human rights affairs.

Furthermore they sent one of their members to the East Timor, Indonesia as an election watch volunteer. NGOs are the crucial actor for this kind of preventive security. And the role of NGOs in security is doubtlessly expanding.

These phenomena are the examples of reasons why the U.S. Government is oppose to ratification of most human rights laws and establishment of an International Criminal Court, which will be the global organization for criminal justice. There is a high possibility (maybe "risk" for the U.S.) of legal litigation concerning American military activities by the global institutions and laws which can not be controlled by America.

The civil activities recently observed in Okinawa are so-called anti-globalism in many contexts. Actually it is against an American led economic and militaristic globalization even though, it is globalized civil activities and still a dimension of globalization. I would rather globalization of Human Rights.

## CONCLUSION

Economic and military globalization dominated by America was the big trend in the 90's. The G8 Summit was planned to be held in Okinawa in order to define Okinawa as a keystone of this trend.

On the contrary, Anti-American-led-globalism also became globalized. Okinawan civil society became globalized too. A global civil society is rising. NGOs and global justice organizations developed the definition of human rights more fruitfully, adjusting diversity and universality.

Global human rights NGOs and organizations, used to be a closed Western rich people's volunteer circles, are opening their door to all the minority, indigenous and poorest people in the world. And their humanitarian activities became more and more important for world peace. The values of peace, liberty and human rights are prevailing all over the world.

Can American so-called "New War" reverse these trends backward in the name of holy war protecting civilization? Is a "Global Totalitarianism" led by the U.S. coming

next? Can the continuous war condition legitimate government's restrictions of human fundamental rights? I hope "NOT." I would rather like to believe humanity's development in history. In other words, development of more democratic governance is inevitable in the world.

Okinawan politics have to be analyzed in this global context. And changes of governance of Okinawa have to be reshaped, more by the Okinawan people, not by Tokyo. All of the old style government powers, revision of laws, media control, and pork-barrel, etc., were fully mobilized to sustain the support for the Tokyo Government's policy in these 5 years. However, policies and systems neglecting the desire for Okinawan democratic governance would inevitably fail. The development of more democratic governance is inevitable, even in this country.

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<sup>1</sup> Shimabukuro, Jun "Regionalism in Japan: Is it comparable to West European Experiences," *Journal of Island Studies*, World Association for Island Studies, Volume 2, No.1 Spring 1999, pp65-74.

<sup>2</sup> Okinawa Prefectural Government "The Cosmopolitan City Formation Concept: Grand Design for a New Okinawa Aiming at the 21st Century," November, 1996,.

OPG official web-site URL: <http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/96/kokusaitoshi/tosiindex.html>

<sup>3</sup> op.cit.

<sup>4</sup> Sasamoto-Collins, Hiromi and Shimabukuro, Jun "OKINAWA: State Power and Civil Resistance," *Bulletin of the College of Education*, University of the Ryukyus, No58, March, 2001, pp257-282.

<sup>5</sup> Gabe, Masaaki "Okinawa Summit No Solution" *Japan Quarterly*, January-March 2000, pp. 10-16.

<sup>6</sup> Okinawa International Forum "The Declaration of Okinawa International Forum on People's Security: Towards People's Security in the Asia Pacific Region" Urasoe, Okinawa July 2, 2000.

URL: <http://www.jca.ax.org/ppsg/Doc/urasoede.htm>