

**The Enduring Myth of an Okinawan Struggle: The History  
and Trajectory of a Diverse Community of Protest**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research. It contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any university.

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## ABSTRACT

The islands of Okinawa have a long history of people's protest. Much of this has been a manifestation in one way or another of Okinawa's enforced assimilation into Japan and their differential treatment thereafter. However, it is only in the contemporary period that we find interpretations among academic and popular writers of a collective political movement opposing marginalisation of, and discrimination against, Okinawans. This is most powerfully expressed in the idea of the three 'waves' of a post-war 'Okinawan struggle' against the US military bases. Yet, since Okinawa's annexation to Japan in 1879, differences have constantly existed among protest groups over the reasons for and the means by which to protest, and these have only intensified after the reversion to Japanese administration in 1972.

This dissertation examines the trajectory of Okinawan protest actors, focusing on the development and nature of internal differences, the origin and survival of the idea of a united 'Okinawan struggle', and the implications of these factors for political reform agendas in Okinawa. It explains the internal differences in organisation, strategies and collective identities among the groups in terms of three major priorities in their protest. There are those protesters principally preoccupied with opposing the US-Japan security treaty and for whom the preservation of pacifist clauses of the Constitution and the utilisation of formal legal and political processes are paramount as a *modus operandi*. There are also those primarily concerned to protect Okinawa's distinctive lifestyle and natural environment, as well as an assortment of feminist groups fundamentally opposed to the presence of US bases due to concerns about patriarchy and exploitation of women, fostered by militarism. In these last two perspectives, protest tends to be conducted much more via informal, network-oriented processes, and includes engagement with international civil society groups.

The increasing range of protest groups derived from the expansion of these last two perspectives — diversifying beyond the traditional workers' unions and

political parties — is consistent with the ‘new social movement’ theory. This theory’s emphasis on the importance of socio-economic change for the emergence of groups with post-materialist reform agendas and a stronger predisposition towards informal political processes resonates with the Okinawan experiences. However, the impact of this has been — especially after the reversion in 1972 — to hinder effective coalition building among the Okinawan protest groups and organisations, weakening their power to bring about political reforms, particularly towards the removal of the US military bases from the island.

Crucially, though, the idea of an ‘Okinawan struggle’ has endured in the community of protest throughout the post-war period. Ideas about marginalisation of, and discrimination against, Okinawans constitute a powerful myth of an ‘Okinawan struggle’, which has a long history of being redefined, used and exploited differently by a wide range of protest actors, adjusted to their particular and historically specific struggles. Indeed, in the event that the US military bases were withdrawn from Okinawa, the ability and appeal of the myth of an ‘Okinawan struggle’ would therefore not necessarily expire, even if it will increasingly be joined by other protest perspectives as a result of the flowering of new social movements.

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## **Note On Japanese Names and Spelling**

Japanese names are presented surname first and given name second, following the conventional Japanese fashion, except for the English-language quotations or otherwise ordered bibliographical references. Macrons are placed to indicate all long vowels, except in the case of well-known geographical names and publishers.

## Abbreviations

ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Union
G.R.I.	Government of Ryukyu Islands
OLDP	Okinawa Liberal Democratic Party
OPP	Okinawa People's Party
OSMP	Okinawa Socialist Masses Party
OSP	Okinawa Socialist Party
OTA	Okinawa Teachers' Association
SDF	Self Defence Forces
SCAP	Supreme Command for Allied Powers
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
USCAR	United States Civil Administration of the Ryūkyūs
WWII	World War II



## Glossary

<i>Ampo</i>	US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty
<i>Fukki</i>	Reversion
<i>Fukki-kyo</i>	Council for the Return of Okinawa to the Home Country
<i>Kankōrō</i>	Okinawa Public Office Workers' Unions Council
<i>Kenrōkyō</i>	Okinawa Prefectural Labour Union Committee
<i>Iken Kyōtō</i>	Okinawa Supporting Council for the Legal Actions against Unconstitutionality
<i>Jichirō</i>	All Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers' Union
<i>Kenrōkyō</i>	Okinawa Prefectural Labour Union Committee
<i>Minsei</i>	Democratic Youth League
<i>Okifuren</i>	League of Okinawan Women's Groups
<i>Rengō</i>	Japanese Trade Union Confederation
<i>Sōhyō</i>	General Council of Japanese Trade Unions
<i>Tochiren</i>	Okinawa Federation of Landowners of Land Used for Military Purposes

<i>Yamato</i>	Mainland Japan
<i>Zenchurō</i>	All Garrison Forces Labor Union Okinawa Division
<i>Zengakuren</i>	All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Government Association
<i>Zengunrō</i>	All Okinawan Military Workers' Union
<i>Zenkyōtō</i>	All-Japan Joint Struggle Committee
<i>Zen-Oki Rōren</i>	All Okinawan Labour Unions' Association

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