



LDP Okinawa Chapter Revokes its Electoral Pledge – History Repeats Itself in Punishment Drama

Dec. 09, 2013

Spirit of Resistance and of Human Dignity Abandoned^[i]

Hiyane Teruo

Translated by Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu

The Okinawa Chapter of the LDP has revoked its pledge that Futenma Air Station should be transferred out of Okinawa and, following in the footsteps of the LDP National Diet members, has switched to approving the construction of the new [substitute] base at Henoko. In the history of Okinawan political thinking, what does this strange political drama in which they have been reduced by force to submit to proposals of the government and party HQ signify? We [Ryukyu shimpo] asked historian Hiyane Teruo to comment.

What does this posture of force – as the intimidation of Okinawa on the part of LDP Secretary-General Ishiba Shigeru must be seen - signify? What has become clear in this is the manifestation of mercilessness in insisting on Okinawan sacrifice and on compelling Okinawa to surrender. We in Okinawa face the worst and most authoritarian state of the post-war era. Even as the broad masses of ordinary people are raising their voices against the burden of the bases, LDP national Diet members revealed their *tenko*^[ii] (ideological conversion) and the revocation of their electoral pledge. The question posed in the utmost seriousness of this situation is: what should be the stance and the mission of politicians responsible for Okinawa?

Generally speaking, in whatever the society, there are certain supreme criteria of value that absolutely must not be abandoned. From the modern era, such have been especially required in the realm of politics. The *tenko* and revocation of their political pledge by the five national diet members trampled on the criteria of value that politicians should respect, which are justice, reliability, integrity, and dignity, shamelessly abandoning the ideals that politicians should uphold.

For the politician, a political pledge constitutes a solemn contract binding politicians and electors. It is nothing short of a lifeline. If this lifeline that links politicians and electors is trampled as it has been by the forceful intervention of central government and the opportunist compromise and sycophancy of the politicians, what sort of expectations can electors then have of politics? That is the question. The situation is this serious. This *tenko* or revocation of political pledges has to be denounced as the greatest shame on the post-reversion history of political thought and as a betrayal of the electors.

To this point I have been using the political science term “electors” and speaking in general terms about constitutional theory or principle in this situation.

A Contemporary Version of “Handover of Okinawa”

On this point, “elector” obviously refers to those Okinawans and Okinawan residents who have been betrayed by these Diet members. But look at the dreadfully sad appearance of the Okinawan national Diet members lined up before Secretary-General Ishiba in the photograph published in this paper on 26 November. Just one look at this photograph would suffice for us Okinawans to see Ishiba as the personification of Japanese state power. The image of our representatives in a posture of surrender, with blank stares on their faces, has been burned into our eyes.

It showed us vividly and in real time a replay of the drama of “Ryukyu Punishment” (*Ryukyu shobun*), the confrontation [in 1879] between the Meiji government’s Ryukyu Punishment official Matsuda Michiyuki (1839-1882), and the Ryukyu kingdom. This time it was not the handover of Shuri castle [as in 1879], but it was a handover of Okinawa, the prelude to a contemporary drama of state power, and a portent of the future.

And yet the Ryukyu kingdom did not surrender so abjectly to the Meiji government. The principled resistance of leading families and their elaborate pleas were something for the Ryukyu kingdom to be proud of. They were an expression of their autonomy.

Such historical background should have been remembered. Why was it that Okinawa’s elected representatives, bearing on their shoulders 68 years of the pain endured by the Okinawan people, could submit so easily to the Japanese government’s obstinacy, without resisting to the limit? Why did they not persist in the Okinawan objection, or reveal their negotiation with the government to the Okinawan people? The solemn mission and the true test of an Okinawan politician rests precisely in how she or he makes a hard decision in such a critical moment.

In other words, what was called for in this recent situation was a sense of the dignity of being a politician and of pride in being an Okinawan politician. Knowing

that their representatives have cast this aside, the people of Okinawa bear a great sense of loss in their spirit, with uncontrollable outrage welling up within them.

As is well known, Iha Fuyu [1876-1947]^[i] strove with all his might to root out “the slave mentality that is prepared to sacrifice the entire people without so much as a backwards glance,” bowing before “money or power just for one’s own survival.” Underpinning this call was his oft-repeated criticism of Okinawan sycophancy and toadyism. For that reason, he appealed passionately for reform, supporting the call for rebelliousness against Okinawa’s realities at the time and the call to individual conscience. This was the message left to later generations by Iha, a pioneer who led the way out of a history of discrimination and oppression.

Today, are we seriously facing up to this message? In considering the present situation, we cannot but extend our thought to the philosophical legacy of Iha.

The Japanese State in Transition

The Japanese state is now undergoing great change, as demonstrated by the enforced passage of the State Secrets Bill, and the move for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense and constitutional revision. The forceful policy towards Okinawa as shown in this case is designed to fit in with this change in the Japanese state and aims to crush any Okinawan protest.

The measures towards Okinawa adopted by Secretary-General Ishiba and other political heavyweights are designed to contain Okinawa by wiping away the allergy against the Japan-US alliance axis, and standardizing and assimilating Okinawa so that it is just like the rest of the country. If they can destroy the shoots of stubborn Okinawan resistance then the country will be at “peace.” It is precisely the direction signposted by Fujita Shozo (1927-2003) as a “comfortable totalitarianism,” oblivious of the pain of minorities or the weak.

Such is the plan behind the all-out assault on Okinawa by the Abe government. In this situation, we must stand by the spirit of resistance as represented by the statement of opinion [November 2013] by the Nago City mayor. I insist that this is not only the path towards overcoming Okinawa’s twin evils of sycophancy and toadyism towards power, but it is also the path towards Okinawa’s future.

This is a translation of “Jimin Kenren koyaku tekkai 自民県連公約撤回,” which appeared in the November 30 edition of Ryukyu Shimpo.

Hiyane Teruo, born in 1939, is Professor Emeritus of the University of the Ryukyus. His specialization is the history of political thought in modern Japan, and history of Okinawa-Asia relations. His numerous publications include 『近代日本と伊波普猷』 (Modern Japan and Iha Fuyu) and 『戦後沖縄の精神と思想』 (Spirit and Thought of Post-war Okinawa).

Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu are Japan Focus Coordinators, and co-authors of Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

[i] “Jimin kenren koyaku tekkai – niiju utsushi no shobun geki – teiko no seishin, songen o hoki,” *Ryukyu shimpo*, 1 December 2013.

[ii] *Tenko*: ideological conversion and reorientation, a term applied in particular to those Japanese communists and leftists in the 1930s who converted under Kempeitai interrogation to ultra-nationalism and emperor-worship.

[iii] Iha is generally regarded as the founder of modern Okinawa studies.

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related issues include:

Jon Mitchell, [Okinawa - The Pentagon's Toxic Junk Heap of the Pacific](#)

Sakurai Kunitoshi, [If the Law is Observed, There Can be No Reclamation: A Mayoral Opinion Endorsed by Citizens of Nago and Okinawans](#)

Gavan McCormack, [Introduction: The Continued Saga of the Henoko Base and Japan-US-Okinawa Relations](#)

Gavan McCormack, [Japan's Client State \(Zokkoku\) Problem](#)