

Forty Years of Okinawa Viewed from Public Opinion Surveys

Kei KONO

(Summary)

NHK has been conducting numerous public opinion surveys of Okinawa residents since two years before the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan. The following is the essence of Okinawans' attitudes that were extracted from the set of those over-forty-year surveys, which shows that issues related to "U.S. military bases" and to "security" weigh heavily upon the residents of Okinawa.

1. "Defeat in war" and "reversion to Japan" are historic events deeply graven in the memory of Okinawans
2. "Higher priority to nature preservation than to development" and "needs for the continuation of Okinawa promotion measures" are long-sustained feelings of many Okinawans.
3. Residents' attitudes that are changing in a same direction in the long term include the reaction to the fact that "U.S. bases are still kept in Okinawa," to which "it is necessary" and "it is inevitable" have increased while "it is unnecessary" and "it is dangerous" have decreased. As to "whether the Self Defense Force stationed in Okinawa is necessary for Japan's security," there was also an increase in "necessary" and "inevitable" and a decrease in "unnecessary" and "dangerous."
4. Based on the common questions used in the 2012 surveys of Okinawa residents and the whole nation, multivariate analyses were conducted. As a result, a negative/positive axis was extracted regarding the present security status and issues. Looking at the axial location, Okinawa residents resulted in "negative" and the whole nation in "positive," which reveals that Okinawa and the whole nation are polarized regarding the attitude to security issues. Such difference between Okinawa and the whole nation is particularly prominent among the elderly, which may be influenced by whether they have experienced two historic events, the Battle of Okinawa and U.S. occupation, first hand.
5. Those who think "mainlanders 'do not understand' the feelings of Okinawans" drastically increased from 57% (2002) to 71% (2012). To explore the background, we examined the survey results of both years using multivariate analysis. Both for the 2002 and the 2012 surveys, a question regarding "the recognition of whether the reduction of U.S. bases in Okinawa is progressing or not" had an impact on the "do not understand/understand" responses. In 2012, "how they evaluate the agreement with the United States on the Futenma airbase relocation within the Okinawa" was also influential.