Agency Building and Regional Transformation during the Sanrizuka Struggle

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The Sanrizuka Struggle has been unfolding for years, over the planning, construction, operation, and expansion of Narita Airport. Regardless of the academic discipline, no substantial research was conducted on the Struggle when the movement emerged. Full-fledged academic investigations began only in the 1980s, and a number of areas remain unexplored.

A review of past research yields that multiple references to the Sanrizuka Struggle can be confirmed in texts in the field of history studies in recent overviews that pertain to the post-war period of Japanese history. In these, the Struggle has been positioned as a representative example of resident movements that have challenged various social inconsistencies at the time of rapid economic growth, and as an instance of the confluence of resident and student movements. In recent years, research initiatives that discuss the historical changes in the movement have also been published. These focus on the associations between local residents and supporters of the resistance. However, research that relates the rise and fall of the movement with the transformations observed in the political and economic structure of the region within which the movement developed is insufficient. There is thus a need for scholarly investigation that clarifies the adjacency relation between an understanding of the structure of the local community and the historical transition of the protest movement.

In this paper, therefore, the authors traced the evolution of the Sanrizuka Struggle after collating and evaluating existing studies and available research data. The assessment was effected from two perspectives: the changes that became visible in the structure of the local community because of the expansion of the airport opposition movement; and the transformations that occurred in the structure of the local community as the development of the airport progressed. In the late 1960s, when the protest movement transformed into a competent activist faction, there were repeated clashes over the construction of the airport. During the same period, the opposition won a large number of assembly seats in the regions where the movement was expanding, and varied means of protest were attempted, including the participation of residents who had gained some experience in the political action of protest during the peasant movement that happened before the drive to oppose the airport began. However, since the late 1970s, along with advancements in the development
of the airport complex, a progressive transformation of the airport castle town has taken place owing to subsidies and increased tax revenues. Protests conducted through the intervention of institutional resources such as the fielding of candidates in local parliamentary elections also tend to face difficulties in the present socio-economic context. After summarizing the historical changes in the movement on the grounding of the transformation of the political and economic structure of the local community, future research must still contend with the issue of elucidating the process of eliciting the participation of citizens in the movement: Why would such a large number of supporters join such a drive? What mobilization structure made the large-scale public protest possible despite the absence of any direct sharing of stakes related to the airport construction?

Key words: social movements, Narita Airport, the Sanrizuka Struggle, regional transformation