

# Barren Senkaku Nationalism and China-Japan Conflict 不毛な尖閣ナショナリズムと日中の葛藤

Wani Yukio

## Barren Senkaku Nationalism and China-Japan Conflict

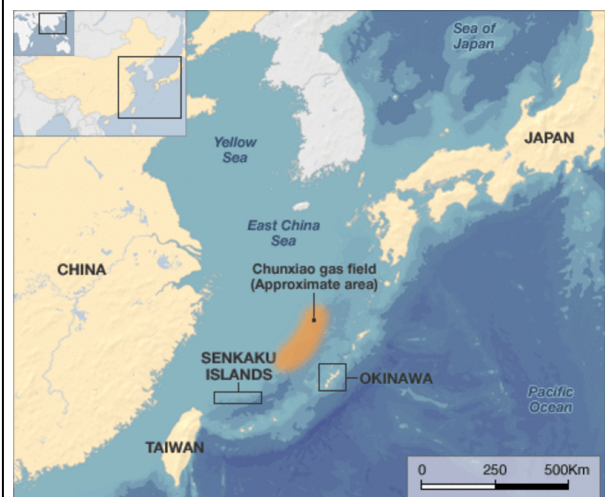
Wani Yukio

Translated by John Junkerman

On April 17, 2012, the day that Tokyo Mayor Ishihara Shintarô went public with his plan for the metropolis to purchase the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, the government of Yilan County in Taiwan responded, "The only way to carry out a sale of the Diaoyu Islands is through an official open, competitive bidding process."



### Senkaku Islands



### Map of China, Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, Senkakus

This response was based on the fact that in Taiwan, the Diaoyu Islands fall under the jurisdiction of the township of Toucheng in Yilan County, and on January 29, 2004 the county completed land registration for the

islands, based on satellite photographs. It is noteworthy that this took place during the pro-independence administration of President Chen Shui-bian. *Shukan Kinyobi* has obtained copies of the land registry documents.

The registry divides the island among 74 parcels of land, all of which are listed as the property of the Republic of China. As of January 2012, the appraised value of the land was 190 New Taiwan dollars (about US\$6) per square meter.

In Taiwan and elsewhere in the Chinese sphere, the movement to regain sovereignty over the islands is known as the Bao-Diao [Defend the Diaoyu Islands] Movement. It has a very different status from the nationalist groups and right-wing politicians that wave the flag on the issue in Japan. Before introducing the background of this movement, I'd like to outline the history of the disputed islands.

### The History of the "Ownerless Islands"

There once was a shipping route that connected Nagoya and Osaka, via Naha, Miyako, and Ishigaki, with the ports of Keelung and Kaohsiung in Taiwan, but service was discontinued in June 2008. The travel writer Kishimoto Yoko begins her *Binetsu no Shima: Taiwan* (Taiwan: Feverish Island) with an account of her voyage on this route.

Among the passengers were Taiwanese merchants who were transporting goods on the ship. They would go ashore when the ship stopped at Miyako or Ishigaki, and conduct business fluently with merchants on the islands. As the ship moved along on its voyage, the language shifted from Japanese to Okinawan, then to the Sakishima Okinawan dialect, and finally to Chinese in Taiwan, and Kishimoto was amazed to see how the merchants and the various islanders were able to convey their intentions to each other.

Along with the formation of modern societies,

land and sea territories, and exclusive economic zones became fixed, but as before, natural human relationships were maintained by people whose lives cross over the borders of those territories.

The first person to settle Uotsuri Island, the largest of the five islands, was not from Okinawa; he was Koga Tatsushiro from Fukuoka. In 1895, after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War was assured, the Japanese government passed a cabinet resolution to annex the Senkaku Islands. Koga was given a lease to the islands and sent workers from Okinawa to operate a bonito processing plant and to gather albatross feathers. At its peak, there were more than 200 people working on the island, though it is not known how they managed to live in this isolated place with no gas or electricity and limited supplies of water

Koga is said to have paid property tax on the islands, but the only record that has been found is a land registration from 1932 that remained in a log of closed registrations in the Ishigaki office of the Naha Regional Legal Affairs Bureau. There was no building registration for the bonito processing plant that once stood on Uotsuri. Koga Zenji had taken over the operation from his father, but with the escalation of the war in China, he withdrew. The Senkaku Islands became uninhabited once again.

After the war, with Okinawa under US military administration, Kuba and Taisho islands were used as targets for bombing practice, but the US military did not take any measures against the fishing boats from neighboring countries that frequented the waters around the islets. Fishing boats from Taiwan were especially numerous. Taiwanese fishermen would land on Uotsuri Island during stormy weather and wait for the seas to subside. It is reported that the island was lined with shacks built by Taiwanese fishermen.

### The Bao-Diao Movement

The history of the Bao-Diao Movement can be traced to 1970. As the reversion of Okinawa approached, increasing the possibility that control over the Senkaku Islands would be returned to Okinawa, Taiwanese students in the United States began to speak out. A rally was held at Princeton University on November 17, 1970 to demand that the Diaoyu Islands be returned to Taiwan. The previous year, Taiwanese authorities had declared sovereignty over natural resources in the continental shelf beyond the limits of the country's coastal territorial waters.

David Ko, later chairman of the Hong Kong-based Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands, was then a foreign student in Australia, and he was invited to join the movement. There were many students from Taiwan and Hong Kong at his university, though there were none from mainland China at that time. A Taiwanese student who transferred from a university in the US brought word of the Bao-Diao Movement. Many of the Taiwanese students in the US and Australia were children of Guomindang soldiers who went into exile in Taiwan after 1947, and they had very strong Chinese nationalist consciousness. "They would talk fervently about how it was the responsibility of Taiwan to recover the Diaoyu Islands," David Ko recalls.



**Uotsuri island**

On January 29, 1971, as the Okinawa reversion

agreement entered its final countdown, two thousand foreign students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere surrounded United Nations headquarters in New York, demanding the "defense of the Diaoyu Islands."

ROC President Ma Ying-jeou, who was then a graduate student at Harvard, was caught up in the movement. Ma was studying for a doctorate in law and later wrote a thesis, arguing that the Diaoyu Islands belong to the Republic of China (published in English in 1980 as *Trouble Over Oily Waters: Legal Problems of Seabed Boundaries and Foreign Investments in the East China Sea*, and in 1982 in a revised Chinese edition).

However, when the People's Republic of China was admitted to the UN in October 1971, the Republic of China lost its UN representation, and foreign students from Taiwan stepped back from the Bao-Diao Movement. With the reversion of Okinawa in May 1972, the Senkaku Islands came under Japan's jurisdiction. People in Hong Kong anticipated that the Diaoyu Islands would be returned to China under the China-Japan Joint Declaration in September of that year, but these hopes did not materialize. David Ko notes with regret, "Even though China defeated Japan's war of aggression, the US unilaterally turned over administration of the Diaoyu Islands to the losing side."

Meanwhile, Koga Zenji negotiated the sale of Uotsuri and other islands to the Kurihara family in 1978. Around the same time, Nihon Seishinsha (Japanese Youth Federation), a nationalist organization affiliated with the major yakuza group Sumiyoshi-kai, made a number of landings on the Senkaku islands. The group erected a lighthouse on Uotsuri Island that year. It returned in 1996 to make repairs to the lighthouse, and another lighthouse was erected on Kita Kojima.

People in Hong Kong were most sensitive to these developments. Beginning in 1992, accounts of clashes between Taiwanese and



Japanese fishing boats in the area around the islands were reported with great frequency. “Taiwanese fishermen were repeatedly barred unilaterally, but the Chinese government did absolutely nothing,” David Ko remarks indignantly.

In 1996, a year before Hong Kong reverted to China, Foreign Minister Ikeda Yukihiko made a stop in Hong Kong when reports of the landing by Japanese nationalists were still fresh. He refused to hold a press conference at the airport, but commented to a *Ming Pao* reporter, “The Senkaku Islands are an integral part of our national territory.” His remark inflamed the Bao-Daio Movement (see *Shukan Kinyobi*, September 27, 1996).

In September of that year, an activist from Hong Kong drowned while attempting to land on the islands, and the movement reached its high-water mark, with tens of thousands participating in anti-Japanese demonstrations. On October 7, four Hong Kong legislators dodged Japan Coast Guard vessels and managed to land on Uotsuri Island. Returning to Hong Kong, the four were greeted as heroes. This marked the culmination of the second Bao-Daio Movement.

In this fashion, the Bao-Diao Movement in the Chinese sphere has risen and fallen, to rise again, in response to developments of recent history. One wonders how clearly the ruling Democratic Party of Japan understands this background and prevailing conditions.



**Chinese demonstrators on September 18, 2010 at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing**

### The Kurihara Family Bears a Heavy Debt

Let us turn our attention from the Chinese sphere to the domestic Japanese scene. As mentioned, Koga sold Uotsuri and other islands to the Kurihara family, but there are many aspects of the sale price and process that remain unclear. Since Ishihara’s announcement in April, Kurihara Kunioki’s younger brother, Hiroyuki, has appeared occasionally in the media, but there has been no reporting on his links to nationalist groups. Further, in reporting on the Kurihara family, one gets glimpses of the backstory that has led to the present talk of selling the islands.

Kurihara Kunioki’s estate in Saitama Prefecture is in a residential district near the Omiya Koen Station on the Tobu Noda train line. Adjacent to the Hishiya Kaikan that Kurihara operates, it is surrounded by dense woods and earthen walls. The property is 40 meters wide where it faces the road, and looking from the parking lot next door, it is close to 100 meters deep. The registered size of the property is 3,685 square meters. The nearly 4-meter high wall that surrounds the estate is topped with barbed wire to prevent intruders, and four surveillance cameras can be observed. The main residence is a ferroconcrete building, four stories above ground and one below, with a floor space of 2,468 square meters, as imposing as a

gymnasium.

When I rang the buzzer and explained the reason for my visit, the house staff told me through the intercom that Kunioki was out and told me to leave my business card in the mailbox.

Kunioki worked as a driver for Sugahara Tsusai, a businessman who was widely known as a fixer. Tokyo Mayor Ishihara is said to be a disciple of Sugahara. Uotsuri, Kita Kojima, Minami Kojima, and Kuba islands were all transferred from Koga Zenji to Kunioki through the 1978 sale of the property; the title to Kuba is in the family name, while Kunioki is listed as owner of the remaining three islands. We have previously reported here that these three islands are income-generating properties that have earned over ¥260 million in rent from the national government since 2002.



**A Japanese demonstrator in a December 2010 Tokyo demonstration**

But the Kurihara family agreed to enter negotiations over the sale of these cash-cow properties because of the serious state of affairs in the family's finances. As of April of this year, megabanks and other financial institutions held over ¥2.5 billion in mortgages on the estate and Hishiya Kaikan. The financial troubles began back in 1979. The borrowing

then was a modest ¥20 million from a regional bank, but this was followed by a loan ¥270 million from a trust bank in 1985. The debt ballooned in a series of transactions that followed, with the cast of mortgage holders changing over time. According to the property registration for Kurihara Kunioki and his Hishiya Kaikan, the debt had reached a ceiling of more than ¥2.5 billion as of April 25.

### **Kenshokai and the End of a Honeymoon**

The Hishiya Kaikan that Kunioki operated was a fairly well known wedding hall, located near the famous Hikawa Shrine in Omiya. However, as traditional-style weddings fell out of favor and the wedding hall began to show signs of age, it saw a steady downturn in business. Then in 1999, an agreement was reached with a religious organization, Kenshokai, which changed the name of the hall to Youth Hall and began to use it as a religious facility in December of that year. At the same time, Kenshokai built a new headquarters on land that Kurihara owned nearby, and the area became something of a temple town for Kenshokai (see *Kensho Shimbun*, November 5, 1999).

Kenshokai is an organization of Nichiren Shoshu believers that competes with Soka Gakkai. It originated as Tokyo Myoshinko. Recognized as a religious organization in 1975, it later changed its formal name to Fuji Taiseikiji Kenshokai. It has been battling Soka Gakkai for members for many years, and its aggressive methods of confining minors to indoctrinate them have resulted in a number of arrests. It has used its organ, the *Kensho Shimbun*, to mount negative campaigns against China, and extended its reach to Taiwan and Okinawa over the years.

When Kenshokai moved its headquarters from Nerima Ward in Tokyo to Omiya, it explained that Omiya had firmer ground and believers would thus be protected from major earthquakes, but the availability of a good deal

of land via the Kurihara family was thought to be a major factor in the decision.

However, the relationship between the two parties was not a smooth one. In January 2007, Kenshokai evacuated the Youth Hall (Hishiya Kaikan), reneging on a major portion of the reported 20-year lease. It announced that a new Youth Hall would be built in the vicinity. The organization explained that the Hishiya Kaikan appeared to be sturdy, but that there were problems with its earthquake resistance (*Kensho Shimbun*, February 5, 2007). Kenshokai had seemed to be a blue-chip patron for the Kurihara family, but it fell short of covering Hishiya Kaikan's debt, which only continued to snowball.

After Ishihara's announcement of the plan to purchase the Senkaku Islands, large contributions have continued to flow into the Tokyo metropolitan offices. If the plan is carried out, it could mean salvation to the Kurihara family with their heavy burden of debt.

**Wani Yukio** is a journalist. This article appeared in *Shukan Kinyobi* on May 25, 2012.

## COLUMN: What's Problematic in Prime Minister Noda's Statement on the Senkaku Islands?

**Magosaki Ukeru**

Jiji Press reported, "Prime Minister Noda held discussions in Beijing with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, and conveyed the Japanese government's position that the Senkaku Islands are an integral part of Japan's territory; in response, the Chinese side argued that it has sovereignty. Premier Wen said that Japan should respect China's core interests and major concerns."

What is problematic about the Japanese statement? That Japan considers the Senkaku Islands "an integral part of Japan's territory." Japan's position has been that the Senkaku Islands are "an integral part of Japan's territory, and there is no territorial issue," but this is not only not true, it is a very dangerous way of thinking.

Japan takes the position that "From 1885 on, surveys of the Senkaku Islands were made, and upon carefully determining that the islands were under the control of no country, they were incorporated into Okinawa Prefecture in 1895." Japan possessed the islands after 1895. In what sense can it be said that the islands are "an integral part of Japan's territory"?

China takes the position that the Senkaku Islands were under its jurisdiction during the Ming and Qing dynasties. For example, after Hu Zongxian was appointed commander of coastal defenses against Japanese pirates in 1556, he included the Diaoyu Islands in maritime maps as part of the coastal defense zone of Fujian Province. In the 1992 Law on the People's Republic of China Territorial Waters and Their Vicinity, China clearly stated, "Taiwan and the attached islands, including the Diaoyu Islands, are islands belonging to the People's Republic of China."

From an international perspective, even Japan's ally, the US, has stated that it "does not take a position in favor of either Japan or China with regard to sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands."

What this means in terms of policy is that Japan should not "solemnly deal with this issue under domestic law," but instead must adopt a stance of finding ways to prevent a disputed territory from flaring up.

The present Japanese government denies this, but Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, as well as Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping and Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao

agreed on separate occasions to shelve the issue of the Senkaku Islands. These agreements in fact greatly favored Japan. First, they recognized Japanese jurisdiction, and secondly, they meant that the current state of affairs would not be changed through military force.

If both sides insist on their own positions and the matter is settled through military force, Japan will have no chance of prevailing. Leaving the issue on the shelf is in Japan's national interest. In the context of China's expansion of its military force, Japan is required to make a calm assessment of prevailing conditions.

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