

Vocational school and University

Grand Prize

“Let’s think about the future of Okinawa”

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Have you ever heard of the word "IR"? It is the acronym for "Integrated Resort" where it combines casino, convention rooms, weddings, amusements, shopping, restaurants, entertainments and hotels as a complex facility. There has been consideration to establish a casino entertainment in Okinawa before and this scheme is also included in the “IR”.

Although we had a painful experience sixty-seven years ago, Okinawa has achieved a remarkable development after the World War II and it is the fortieth anniversary of reversion of Okinawa to Japan this year. However, Okinawa is still heavily dependent on U.S. military bases and the economic dependency is the current issues in the post-reversion of Okinawa. In fact, the unemployment rate in Okinawa is consistently recording the worst figure in Japan and the economic standard has also been below the national average. Thus, "construction of an independent economy" is the main subject for Okinawa Prefecture. In that case, what should we do towards "construction of an independent economy" for Okinawa? There are three factors regarding Okinawa’s economy, i.e. U.S. military bases, tourism and public works, and especially, “tourism” is the most significant key to develop Okinawa in the future.

In terms of the current circumstances of tourism in Okinawa, it aims to attract ten millions tourists to Okinawa at the present whereas it has suffered to get the number of tourists and there were only about five and a half million last year because of the effect of the earthquake of the northeastern Japan. Furthermore, although the number of repeat visitors accounted for around eighty percent of all, there were only five percent visitors from abroad so that there are a range of problems attracting new tourists, expanding the name recognition and increasing individual consumption. Due to the reason, the governments in Okinawa have introduced the “IR” as the method of solving the issues and achieving “a world-class tourist destination”.

I have been to the Casinos in IR facilities of Jeju Island of Korea and Macau during my university life. Both the facilities showed me the cases of success and failure. Jeju Island is located at the south in the Korean mainland and looks a simple island like Okinawa. There are many casinos in the island whereas the facilities of casinos seem to be using the fame for the island towards overseas and the running of casinos has also become more difficult. In fact, the casinos in Jeju Island were deserted and quiet and the local students also think that the casino facilities are not good for them. On the other hand, Macau has succeeded in attracting tourists through the casinos. Eighty percent in tax revenues of Macau come from the casinos and the tax revenues are plowed back into residents in the form of improving security, the fees for medical treatment and education. In 2005, the thirty places such as spaces and historical sites were placed on the World Heritage List. Therefore, Macau has received a great deal of benefits through running of casinos.

Through both cases of success and failure, I debated on the subject whether we need casinos in Okinawa with my classmates and each of us has different views from each other concerning the matter. In my point of view, there may be a high risk to establish casinos in Okinawa by concerning the case of Jeju Island of Korea so that I could not decide whether it is good or not for Okinawa. However, it would be said that the school trip ended without any results worth mentioning but it was meaningful. Obviously, I have realized that I do not know much about the issues of Okinawa

and the issues surrounding the opening up of an IR and the suitability. The trip to the casinos made me realize that there is plenty of research and development needed concerning casinos and IR in Okinawa.

I love Okinawa and I will never change my feeling in the future. Not only me, but also locals in Okinawa may have the same feeling as me because our local patriotism is particularly stronger than any other prefectures. I have also realized that we need to take positive action and should not only pay attention to good aspects but also to bad aspects to improve Okinawa and which way we should choose to develop Okinawa rather than thinking about Okinawa passively.

Furthermore, I can see some issues clearly through the research about the concepts of Okinawa Prefecture. However, I am still not sure about the clearness of the figures that have been published by the government of Okinawa, such as the construction costs, the number of visitors and the economic ramification. In view of the fact that there may be the risk to introduce IR such as the issues of public security, we need to give special consideration to that. It could be a common reaction as local residents of Okinawa to expect that IR brings an economic ripple effect to Okinawa certainly over the risks for concern. My points of view as one of the students in Okinawa are that I want the government of Okinawa to present the clear plans, such as the managers who have a great experience and knowledge to establish IR are required to assign to the IR facilities, and also want government to give us, who are the support and driving force of future Okinawa, some opportunities to know about the plans they have. However, this issue is not only the government in Okinawa and the participants in the tourism industry, but also young people who are supporting of the future Okinawa need to take the lead in thinking about the future of Okinawa. This is the important mission for us to understand the specific improvement plans and examine strictly.

Through this essay, I would like to mention to all the readers that I want you to become the people who think deeply about the future of Okinawa, especially, the youth who will lead the next generation required to act as pioneers in thinking about the future of Okinawa. This is the points for consideration that the young generations of Okinawa are unconcerned about. If the individuals' awareness towards the tourism industry has changed, Okinawa would develop even more in the future. Let's start making an effort "to know".