

The South Sea Islands and Japanese Mandatory Rule over Them



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Introduction

For about three decades, from 1914 to 1945, when it was defeated in the Pacific War, Japan ruled the former German Micronesia, which it then called *Nanyo Gunto* (the South Sea Islands) , and *Nanyo Cho* (the South Seas Agency), which was responsible for governing the islands, was located in the city of Koror in the Palau Islands.

The relationships between the South Sea Islands and Japan are a matter of consequence that is essential to understand the modern and contemporary history of Japan. In recent Japan, however, Palau has evoked an image of a resort in the South Pacific Ocean and a mecca for scuba diving tourism among some people, and it is safe to say that the ordinary Japanese no longer recall the name “South Sea Islands” and the history of Japanese rule over the islands. The reason is that the persons formerly concerned with the South Sea Islands who continued to live in postwar Japan as living witnesses are now a complete minority as they have become 80 or 90 or older. I have many opportunities to see young people aged around 20 and realize every day how living people’s ordinary sense of history changes with the passage of time. To young students, 70 to 80 years ago is a period when their grand-grandparents rather than their grandparents lived—a period that no longer carries any sense of reality and is mentioned only in history textbooks.

After all, it seems that unless they live together in a period, people cannot share the sensory

perception of the period. If so, the duty of researchers is to convey the historical facts and true circumstances that the Japanese should remember or know to the next generation as accurately as possible rather than make every effort to pass the past events, including even the real feelings and earnest wishes of people, from generation to generation.

Referring to general knowledge and commonly accepted theories of history, Prof. Fumiko Sugimoto remarked that one could not understand the essential meaning of theories of history put forward by advocates without questioning the social position held by the advocates when they were advanced as well as the political situation in which, and the audience to which, they were proposed¹. She also said that the indispensable step to learn from history was to go through these procedures when studying such a theory. In this article, I will also proceed with discussion with this view of history in mind.

1 The History of the South Sea Islands

(1) The Period of Spanish and German Rule

During the Age of Discovery, among the islands of Micronesia, the Mariana Islands first caught the attention of Westerners when they advanced into the Pacific. Records show that on March 6, 1521, Ferdinand Magellan became the first Westerner to encounter with and landed on Guam Island². Later, the Spaniards “discovered” the Yap, Palau, and Marshall Islands as well as Pohnpei Island in rapid succession. The Marianas, Carolines, and other islands were named after Mary Anne, Queen of Spain, and Charles II, King of Spain. Spain soon declared that all islands in this region were the territories of Spain, but except Guam, the largest of all, they were not particularly valuable, and the Spaniards did no more than gradually propagate Christianity.

Two centuries later, the period began in which the world’s imperialist powers competed to expand their territories. In 1885, Germany occupied the Jaluit Atoll in the Marshall Islands and claimed its territorial right to the islands. The Micronesian islands located further south of them were divided by the United Kingdom and Germany with the Gilbert Islands (current Republic of Kiribati) possessed by the former and Nauru, located close to the equator, by the latter. Flurried by these moves, Spain proclaimed to the international community again that the Marianas and the Carolines were Spanish dominions.

Sometime after that, in 1898, the Spanish-American War broke out. Defeated in the war, Spain lost Guam of the Marianas and the Philippine Islands. The United States did not seize the entire

¹ Fumiko Sugimoto, “Territorial Land/Sea, Island, and Ocean in History.” Quoted from the problem presentation paper presented by Fumiko Sugimoto, a professor of the University of Tokyo, at the *Territorial Land/Sea and Island* symposium held at the University of Tokyo Koshiba Hall on February 21, 2017.

² Translated by Minoru Chonan, *Magellan, the First Voyage around the World*—“First Voyage Around the World” by Antonio Pigafetta, “Moluccas Voyage Record” by Maximiliano Transilvano), Iwanami Bunko, March 2011.

Marianas and the Carolines probably because it determined that they were after all useless. But Germany, a late-comer to the imperialist table, which was left behind the battle for colonial acquisition, was trying to obtain the islands claimed by Spain. Having financially failed due to the defeat, Spain caught on to a German offer, immediately entered negotiations with Germany, and sold off both the Marianas and the Carolines for 25 million pesetas (approximately nine million Japanese yen)³. The selling price is equivalent to 330-380 billion yen if it is converted based on the present value of polished rice.

Thus, among the Micronesian islands, the Marianas (excluding Guam), Carolines, and Marshalls fell into German hands. The range of territories possessed by Germany at that time was equal to that of what the Japanese called *Nanyo Gunto* (the South Sea Islands). The German rule spanned 15 years, and 29 years if counted from the acquisition of the Marshalls. The period of German rule was short, but during this period, the Germans actively engaged themselves in the development of the islands. Examples included agricultural projects such as expanding the culture of local potatoes, planting coconut palms, and introducing domestic animals as well as the discovery and mining of bauxite deposits and rock phosphate. The construction by a German-Dutch telegraphic company of submarine cables to Guam, Shanghai, and Celebes with Yap as their hub warrants special mention. This was one of the reasons United States President Woodrow Wilson objected to the acquisition of the right of possession of Micronesia by Japan, but this happened years later. In any event, Germany developed these islands for the purpose of exploiting their natural resources in the South Seas rather than improving the living standards of local residents.

(2) The Realization of the Idea of Southern Expansion by Japan

On August 23, 1914, after World War I broke out in Europe, Japan, which had entered into the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, declared war against Germany, and in October, it dispatched naval forces to islands in the Pacific. Without any casualties, it seized German Micronesia where the defenses of islands were weak. This marked the beginning of Japanese rule over the South Sea Islands.

It was not that the interest of the Japanese in the South Seas suddenly grew at that time. The Japanese government, which had successfully achieved the Meiji Restoration, believed that one of Japan's greatest weaknesses was the surplus population, which far exceeded the volume of industries, as it strove to survive in the international battle among the Western powers. For this reason, since immediately after the establishment of the Meiji government, emigrating the surplus population to overseas countries had become an important issue to be addressed. In fact, in 1868, groups of 153 and 42 Japanese people migrated to Hawaii and Guam, respectively, though they were led by private initiatives. In 1885, government-led immigration began in accordance with the treaty between Japan and the Kingdom of Hawaii, and a total of some 29,000 people migrated to

³ *A General Survey of the South Sea Islands* by South Seas Agency, 1939 edition, p. 14.

Hawaii in six groups over the period of nine years⁴.

In the early Meiji period, Japan had a population of about 33 million. At that time, the Japanese government was of the opinion that the population was too large, hindering future economic development. Now, let us turn to the present state of affairs in Japan. It has a population of 127 million, but in recent Japan, pessimistic views have been trumpeted here and there as the Japanese were afraid that it might be difficult to expect economic development in the future because the population would dwindle and the economy will shrink in the years to come.

In any rate, the idea of seeking a new sphere of activity in the south gradually grew out of the pressure of population felt by the Meiji government in the international situation in which Western powers vied for more colonial territories. The South Seas promised a bright future for trade, industry, and immigration, and Japan should not lag behind Western powers in the competition over southern development. This way of thinking, or ideology, led to the so-called advocacy for southern expansion. The first prominent figure that should be cited as an advocate of this view is probably Shigetaka Shiga, a writer and geographer, who later became a member of House of Representatives. In 1886, he sailed with *Tsukuba*, a naval training ship, for ten months and visited the Carolines, Fiji, Samoa, Hawaii, and other islands, and in the following year, he published *Nanyo Jiji (South Sea affairs)*. This 200-page book in duodecimo was issued by Maruzen and highly acclaimed in the book review carried in the newspaper *Choya Shimibun*. The critic commented that the book not only introduced an unknown, fascinating place called *Nanyo* (the South Seas) but was also an excellent piece of work that discussed economy and history and could be enjoyed as poetry or fiction⁵.

- This was followed by a succession of discourses that emphasized the importance of southern expansion. The most prominent discourses quoted by Prof. Toru Yano for presentation include *Shin Nihon no Tonan no Yume (New Japan's Dream of Aspirations to the South Seas)* by Tadakaze (Teifu) Suganuma, *Nanyo Keiryaku Ron (On Governing the South Seas)* by Ukichi Taguchi (magazine treatise), *Daito Gappo Ron (Theory of the Union of the Great East)* by Tokichi Tarui, *Nanpo Keiei Ron (On the Management of the South)* by Yasoroku Soejima (lecture), and *Nangokuki (Chronicle of Southern Lands)* by Yosaburo Takekoshi⁶.

The above-listed works all advocated southern expansion in the form of discussion, but Takeaki Enomoto is well-known as a high-ranking government official who attempted to give concrete form to southern expansion policy. He argued on various occasions that the Japanese government should purchase Borneo and New Guinea Islands and send Japanese people to develop the islands. In 1891,

⁴ Toraji Irie, *History of Japanese Migration to Peru, Part I*, Immigration Issue Study Group, 1938, p. 15.

⁵ Naoya Shiga, *South Sea Affairs*, an appendix in the 3rd expanded edition, Maruzen Shosha Shoten, 1889, p. 1.

⁶ Toru Yano, *Historical Record of Voyage to the South*, Chuko Shinsho, 1975, p. 43.

when he became the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he studied the feasibility of the colonization plan for implementation by dispatching experts to the South Sea Islands, New Guinea, and the Malay Peninsula. These arguments for southern expansion, which were advanced by the public and private sectors during the Meiji period, took hold and were taken over by advocates in the Taisho period. It would be safe to assume that the occupation of Micronesia by the Japanese navy was part of Japan's national policy, which followed as an extension of this course of events.

2 The Occupation of the South Sea Islands and Mandatory Rule

(1) The Establishment of the South Seas Agency

After it occupied German Micronesia, the Japanese navy established the headquarters of provisional defense corps for the South Sea Islands in the Truk Islands (current Chuuk Islands). Two months later, it installed defense corps in Truk, Saipan, Palau, Ponape (current Pohnpei), and Jaluit, and in the following year, it did so in Yap. The task of each defense corps for the immediate future was to defend the area over which it had jurisdiction and investigate the condition of its society and residents, and this swift action indicated Japan's enthusiasm for governing these colonies. The reason the navy could advance into these islands so smoothly was, however, that by that time, not a few Japanese people had already been engaged in commercial activities with the islands as their bases⁷. In particular, many of the commercial rights had been left to Japanese merchants in the Marianas, Palaus, and Truks, and guided by these Japanese civilians, the navy was able to advance into the islands practically without resistance and confusion.

After it occupied the South Sea Islands, the Japanese government claimed its territorial rights to the islands in the world. In 1917, it obtained the approval of the United Kingdom, the partner of the bilateral alliance, first and then Russia and France, but U.S. President Wilson persisted in his objection to this occupation. This issue was discussed in the Paris Peace Conference, too, but was eventually solved by applying the mandate system of the League of Nations, which was officially founded in 1920 as part of the Treaty of Versailles.

Referring to this solution, Prof. Tadao Yanaihara stated, "As the result of a compromise between annexationism and non-annexationism, Japan was commissioned to exercise Class C mandates over the South Sea Islands. It is stipulated that the Class C mandate shall give a certain degree of guarantee for the interests of native people and that in addition to this requirement, the mandatory

⁷ In the late 1880s to 1890s, voyage to the South Sea Islands by the Japanese began to conduct trade with South Sea Island nations. When Koben Mori from Tosa (presently Kochi Prefecture), a famous Japanese who settled down in the Truk Islands in the early days, landed on the island soil in 1892, four to five Japanese had already settled there to do business. After that, settlements by the Japanese were also confirmed in the Palau and Ponape Islands. For these pre-Japanese rule movements by Japanese people, refer to literature including "Koben Mori, A South Seas Pioneer" by Takeshi Yokota, the *South Sea Islands* magazine, vol. 1, no. 10 (1935), and the *Overview of Occupied South Sea Islands*, Communications Ministry Communications Bureau (1916).

power shall administer mandated territories as part of its territories under its national laws. The mandated territory is not a simple territory of the mandatory but is closest in nature to the latter's territory. Politically, the mandate system represented one form of territorial re-division among imperialist powers, which is most easily seen in this case⁸."

Several restrictions such as the prohibition of construction of military facilities and provision of military training as well as the limitation of free trade were imposed on mandated territories. Mandatory powers were required to submit annual reports to confirm whether they administered education and public welfare to serve the interests of native people. The Japanese-language version of this annual report, which was entitled "*Nanyo Gunto Yoran (A General Survey of the South Sea Islands)*," was issued until 1943. Each edition of the duodecimo report with a little less than 300 pages largely consisted of 17 to 18 chapters, which covered a wide range of subjects such as administration, industry, finance, and public finance. All reports included detailed descriptions accompanied by statistical data.

That was why I liked to turn over the pages of these reports even when I did not need to make specific investigations. When I looked at the reason local people were detained at police stations, for example, the reports even told me that the number of those who drank alcohol, which was prohibited, became intoxicated, and were taken into police custody was much larger than that of those who committed theft. These data led me to various interesting discoveries as I imagined in various ways as to how the society of islands was in those days.

When it commissioned Japan to exercise mandates over the South Sea Islands, the League of Nations placed some restrictions on its mandatory rule over the islands. Therefore, some insist that the South Sea Islands were not colonies of Japan, but in order to say so positively, it is necessary to limit the definition of colonies significantly. Originally, colonies meant lands that an ethnic group migrated to, settled in, and developed as the British did in North America and Australia in olden times. When the era of imperialism began, they came to refer to foreign lands that Western powers acquired for exploitation and territorial expansion. In order to justify their possession under international laws, advanced nations devised various forms of government for dependencies they acquired in the battle among them, calling them "overseas territories," "subject provinces," or "protectorates," but there is no difference among all these forms of government in that one ethnic group wielded power to rule another. If so, as Prof. Yanaihara pointed out, the mandated territories in the South Seas represented one form of territorial re-division among imperialist powers, and the South Sea Islands were unmistakably colonies of Japan. Incidentally, one view is that Korea was not a colony of Japan because it was incorporated into Japan through the Japan-Korea Annexation,

⁸ Tadao Yanaihara, *The South Sea Islands Study* (partially replaced by contemporary sentences), Iwanami Shoten, 1935, p. 38.

but in the same context, I believe that Korea was a colony of Japan.

Colonization must not be uniformly understood as vicious based on the values of people today, however. Since the forms of nations, methods of international cooperation, views of human rights, and so forth undergo changes with the change of times, judging historical facts as good or bad according to the generally accepted ideas of international relations today itself is a gross mistake.

In any case, in December 1920, Japan was officially authorized to exercise mandates over the South Sea Islands. After that, it made preparations for civil administration at a quick pace, and in March 1922, it abolished the defense corps ordinance for the South Sea Islands and withdrew the naval forces from the islands. Moreover, in April, it established the South Seas Agency on the island of Koror in the Palau Islands and branch offices in Palau, Yap, Truk, Saipan, Ponape, and Jaluit (Marshall Islands) as the Agency's subsidiary organizations, thus putting a six-district government system in place.

(2) Formerly Called the “South Seas” and Now Called the “South Pacific”

Now, I would like to touch upon the term “South Seas,” which almost ceased to be used in postwar Japan. Literally, it meant southern seas as seen from Japan, but specifically, it evoked an image of islands in Southeast Asia and the Pacific rather than the seas there, and it can be said that it was a shortened version of the term “South Sea Islands.” The Japanese navy started to call Spanish and later German Micronesia the “South Sea Islands” and divided the South Seas into two areas for clarification, calling islands in Southeast Asia, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and their vicinities the “Front South Seas” and Micronesia the “Back South Seas.” But since the “front” and “back” did not sound nice, the navy renamed the two areas the “Outer South Seas” and the “Inner South Seas.” So, the South Sea Islands were called the “Inner South Seas.”

The term “South Seas” has a somewhat romantic, dreamy sound. At least, people who know the prewar period would feel so. Probably it corresponds to the contemporary term “South Pacific.” The term “South Pacific” also has an abstract image of being an exciting area that reminds one of a paradise rather than simply refers to a particular sea area. Especially, Westerners yearn for the South Pacific even today.

But after the 1990s, among the Pacific island countries, an atmosphere grew that encouraged them to stop collectively calling the islands in the Pacific the “South Pacific.” The reason for this was that three independent countries that were founded in Micronesia joined the region's international community. They repeatedly insisted that they were not a nation in the South Pacific because they were located in the middle of the northern hemisphere or the western part of the Pacific. After that, it became common to call the countries in this region the “Pacific Island Countries.”

Nonetheless, it is often found even today that tourist brochures in Japan introduce Palau and the

Marshall Islands as “Palau in the South Pacific” and the “South Sea country ‘Marshall Islands,’” respectively. It is fine to change the names of international organizations properly, and terms should be used correctly in academic discussions. But in ordinary conversations, it is not necessary to correct the usage of particular terms with geographical strictness, saying, for example, “That is not the South Pacific,” and it would not be bad to say the “South Seas.” Anyhow, they are located far south of Japan.

(3) Immigration of Japanese and Industrial Development

The Japanese rule over the South Sea Islands, which Japan acquired with great aspirations, continued for about 30 years until the Japanese withdrew after the defeat in the war. The last several years of the three decades were an extremely unhappy period for the Japanese who advanced into the islands and local residents who were involved in the development activities of the Japanese. During the period up to those several years, however, the Japanese colonial administration proceeded smoothly without the strong opposition or resistance of local residents. That was because the colonial government strove to improve the welfare of residents and maintain peace and public order, the requirements of the League of Nations mandates. It was the result of refraining from constructing military facilities and imposing military drills on residents and administering the islands as part of Japan’s territory under its national laws. But needless to say, this is the view of the Japanese who administered the colonies.

What, then, characterized the Japanese rule over the South Sea Islands? It is often said that Japan adopted the French-style assimilation policy rather than the British-style hub-based administration policy. But since the League of Nations authorized Japan to administer the islands as part of its territory under its national laws⁹, the advancement of Japanization was a natural progression.

The government first strove to secure southern resources by encouraging immigration to the South Sea Islands as it had wished since the Meiji period and focusing on industrial development in the region. In the Marianas centered on Saipan, sugar cane cultivation and sugar manufacturing developed. In the Palau Islands, in addition to fisheries and dried bonito production, rock phosphate and bauxite deposits were mined. Furthermore, the output of copra and fisheries grew in Truk and Ponape. In 1932, the South Sea Islands achieved completely balanced financing and no longer required subsidies from Japan. And the surplus continued to expand in subsequent years.

If so, Micronesian countries today should be able to explore possibilities of economic independence

⁹ The Covenant of the League of Nations Article 22-6: “There are territories, such as South-West Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands, which, owing to the sparseness of their population, or their small size, or their remoteness from the centres of civilisation, or their geographical contiguity to the territory of the Mandatory, and other circumstances, can be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population.”

if they refer to this experience of sound financing. People who argue for this idea sometimes appear around me and in Micronesia. But unfortunately, it is unreasonable to assume that the circumstances of colonies in those days are applicable to the Pacific Island Countries today. The fundamental economic conditions, including the market value of products and the existence or non-existence of particular markets, in those days are completely different from those at the present. In addition, the vitally important factor that must not be overlooked is who supported the economic activities.

The number of Japanese immigrants varied among the six districts in the South Sea Islands. The population of the region consisted of 50,174 local residents and 35,328 Japanese immigrants in 1934 and 51,089 local residents and 90,072 Japanese immigrants in 1942. The Saipan district, which saw the most invigorated economy in the region, had 48,923 Japanese immigrants, ten times as large as the number of local residents, which stood at 4,808 persons¹⁰. This figure means that the Japanese immigrants rather than the local residents supported the economic activities in the South Sea Islands.

Now, a look at the present circumstances indicates that none of the factors available in those days, including capital, technology, labor, resources that are valuable today, and markets that consume products, exists today. If so, even the wisest people could not reproduce the balanced financing achieved during the period of Japanese rule. In order to make the present situation better and create a comfortable future, it is important to learn from history and know the past. Many hints for creation, which are useful even for today's society, are hidden therein. In order to find such hints and use them to develop practicable ideas that are valuable today, one has to start by understanding that there are differences between the past and present conditions for prosperous economic activities. There lies the importance of history research as well as analysis and evaluation of past events.

3 Japanese Mandatory Rule over the South Sea Islands

(1) Rule over Residents Known as Assimilation Policy

As Japanese immigrants gradually became part of the society of the South Sea Islands, the Micronesians were put in an environment that they had not experienced during the period of German rule. The basic policy for resident administration held up by the South Seas Agency consisted of the assimilation policy aimed at Japanizing the islanders but did not include drafting residents to national projects and forcing Japanese culture on them. Here lay the reason the islanders could continue to lead their lives without being involved in Japanese immigrants to a certain extent even though they were under Japanese rule.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1935 and 1943 editions.

The Japanese colonial administration in the South Sea Islands did not meet with much opposition and resistance. I believe that the greatest reason for successful colonial administration lay in the adoption of the government system under which the government did not force anything hard on the local residents. This was the indirect government system characteristic of Japan, and its examples include the sovereign acts described below.

When it needed to deliver an administrative notice, the Japanese government made its content known to local residents through village heads and tribal chiefs who controlled the local communities. It incorporated in its government machinery the social leaders who already existed in the local communities. When crimes were committed, it avoided sending Japanese police officers to the scene of the crimes and let local police officers it hired as assistants investigate the crimes. In addition, local police officers were hired by choosing qualified persons from among tribal chiefs or their family lines. Tribal chiefs who stood at the top of the traditional, orderly structure of society took responsibility for maintaining peace and public order in the daily lives of villagers. This was the way of exercising power that was most comfortable for local residents¹¹.

In short, the Japanese government did not step directly into the traditional society made up of local residents and ruled it through existing leaders. There is no denying the fact that the traditional society in each island underwent major changes under the influences of Japanese people who found their way into it. But at least, the government did not administer the islands in a way that caused their traditional society to collapse. This was why the tribal chief system remained in the islands¹², and the community-based production system continued to survive without collapsing. Even by today's standards, these are worthy of favorable evaluation, but if so, it is hard for me to believe right away that the government of those days intentionally practiced such administration. The investigative report compiled by the navy on the society of islands immediately after it occupied them stated, however, that the most important point in achieving stable administration without meeting with the opposition of residents in the colonies was to respect and maintain the traditional systems, customs, and manners of local society¹³. From the viewpoint of proper administration, Rear Admiral Kichitaro Togo at the headquarters established at Truk Island in accordance with the provisional South Sea Islands defense corps order, which was promulgated immediately after the occupation, instructed the officers and soldiers of each defense corps not to regard native people

¹¹ *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1939 edition, pp. 86-88 and 92-95.

¹² *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1939 edition, pp. 86-88 and 92-95. In the Mariana Islands, which were greatly affected by Spanish rule, a traditional hierarchical system had deeply taken root at the start of Japanese rule. However, because contents of the system differed from island to island, each branch of South Seas Agency established a relationship with a local leader (tribal chief) according to each jurisdictional feature.

¹³ *South Sea Islands Occupational Background*, the 1st/2nd Southern Corps HQ, 1914. (Pacific Library of Japan Institute for Pacific Studies created this book by photocopying the HQ's 14 editions of original handwritten reports and binding them under the title.)

with contempt, considering them uncivilized and calling them “aborigines”¹⁴. A look at the subsequent history of administration by the South Seas Agency shows that the South Sea Islands were ruled in accordance with the policy of giving humanitarian consideration to local residents as conceived by senior naval officers in the early years of occupation. At least, this can be said about the period up to the second half of the 1930s when the footsteps of war started to grow.

I pointed out, however, that the Japanese government did not force many policies on the islanders because they were the colonized. I do not intend to insist that the islanders did not feel pressure or coercion in daily life at all. I would like to explain about this point so that the above argument does not invite a gross misunderstanding.

Since the colonial administration was an attempt to Japanize the colonies, the same laws as those of Japan were basically applied to the residents of the colonies. If so, the same level of duties as those for the Japanese were imposed on the Micronesians as the residents of a country ruled by law. The islanders who did not have experience in living in a modern state had to observe the laws and regulations that had not been enforced before as well as the rules of a different culture and society, and that alone would have put them under stress. It would have been no wonder if the legal obligations had made them feel inconvenience or coercion. If viewed in this light, it would be reasonable to assume that the Micronesians in those days would have felt that they were put under various kinds of pressure from the South Seas Agency as it governed the islands. And it was an undeniable fact that the society of the islands underwent transformation as it was greatly affected by the Japanese rule and the inflow of Japanese immigrants. The rulers would have considered this “civilizing the uncivilized.”

The South Seas Agency imposed three major duties on the residents of the South Sea Islands: the payment of poll taxes, the prohibition of drinking alcohol, and school education.

The poll tax regulations for the residents of the South Sea Islands provided that men aged 16 or older should pay a poll tax of ten yen or less per year in two installments¹⁵. The amount of poll tax for a given year was determined by the head of the South Seas Agency’s branch office with the permission of the Director-General of the Agency, but parents with many children as well as the elderly and disabled were exempted from paying the tax. In addition, people such as the residents of far-away islands without a monetary economy were permitted to pay in copra rather than in cash. In 1933, for example, records show that 10,015 men, about 60% of the total male population aged 16 or older, paid a total of 53,513 yen in poll tax. The amount of tax paid per person was around five yen, and this is equivalent to 10,000-15,000 yen if its present value is calculated using several conversion indicators. The daily wage paid to local residents who were employed by Japanese in the

¹⁴ Masao Ishigami, *Remember, the Japanese*, Otsuki Shoten, 1983, p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1934 edition, pp. 280-283.

early Showa period is estimated at around one yen and 20-40 sen, and therefore, the poll tax of five yen is equal to 4-5 days' wages. To tell the truth, I do not see how heavy a burden it was for local residents in those days to pay this amount, but given the age in which all residents were not covered by a monetary economy, the burden would not have been so light as imagined today. But 40% of taxpayers failed to pay the tax, and if this percentage is taken into consideration, the tax does not seem to have been collected so strictly. Due to the tax reforms of 1938, however, the poll tax was practically abolished because it was incorporated into the local income tax¹⁶.

The prohibition of drinking alcohol was one of the conditions of mandatory rule. Drinking alcohol was banned during the period of German rule, too, because the immunity of native people against alcohol was low and therefore drinking alcohol would cause social order to be destroyed. There seemed to be cases such as religious, traditional, and other rites in which the residents were specially permitted to drink alcohol, but drinking alcohol was limited to persons of high standing such as tribal chiefs and village heads. On the other hand, since alcohol was sold to Japanese at stores for consumption without any restrictions, it could be said that local residents were discriminated in this respect. Those who know the taste of alcohol cannot resist its lure—the reason there are only a few examples of successful prohibition laws in all ages and in all places. In the South Sea Islands as well, violations of the alcohol control regulations ranked first by a decisive lead among the crimes committed¹⁷.

It would be more appropriate to say that school education was a policy of encouragement rather than a duty or forceful imposition. Immediately after the occupation, the navy started to build islander elementary schools in the islands for the children of residents so that they could study Japanese, arithmetic, and singing. The islander elementary schools were soon renamed “islander schools,” and after the South Seas Agency was established, public schools with a three-year regular course and a two-year supplementary course were founded, and a total of 24 public schools were installed in the six districts. During the period of German rule, there was only one national school, which was located in Saipan. Since other educational activities consisted only of churches' volunteer work in which missionaries taught German letters to children who gathered, school education was the first experience for most of the Micronesians. At public schools, almost the same subjects as at Japanese elementary schools, including Japanese, arithmetic, science, social studies, singing, and ethics as well as manual arts, agriculture, and homemaking (for girls) in the supplementary course, were taught though there were differences in the level of teaching between Japan and Micronesia. This made Japanese the first common language spoken in a wide range of areas known as the “South Sea Islands.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1934 edition, p. 282 and 1939 edition, p. 302.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, South Seas Agency, 1939 edition, p. 111.

(2) Making Micronesians Become Subjects of the Emperor Meant Japanizing Them

School education in Japanese, the Imperial Rescript on Education, which was taught as part of the ethics class, and so forth are often negatively described as forcing *kominka* (making the colonized become subjects of the Emperor) education on them. Critics put attacks against the former militarist Japan into the term “kominka” used in postwar Japan, arguing that the *kominka* policy aimed at making the spirit of the Japanese Empire fully known to all the colonized by forcing Japanese culture on them as Japan pushed forward to complete the wartime organization. Specifically, they seem to refer to the daily use of Japanese, worship at shrines, the hoisting of the Rising-Sun flag, the singing of the national anthem of Japan, the change of family names, and so forth, all of which they argue were forced mainly on the Koreans, Taiwanese, and Okinawans. In this article, I do not intend to discuss the definition of the *kominka* policy and its appropriateness as well as the real circumstances under which these measures were forced. I should indicate, however, that at least, a similar policy was not implemented in the South Sea Islands because the circumstances of social development there were different from those in Korea and Taiwan.

As described above, however, Japan intended not to exploit the South Sea Islands but to make them part of its territories. Therefore, it was rather natural to use the same language and curriculum as in Japan when providing education. Under the Meiji Constitution, the Japanese were considered the subjects of the Emperor, and the national primary education provided in Japan in those days was all intended to make the Japanese become subjects of the Emperor. If so, in order to ensure correct understanding today, it would be better to say that the education in Micronesia was intended to Japanize the residents of the South Sea Islands instead of intentionally saying that it was intended to make them become subjects of the Emperor.

Nonetheless, Japan basically provided only primary education to the residents of the South Sea Islands. The South Sea Islands did not have the sufficient conditions that allow comparison with Taiwan and Korea, where students could learn together with Japanese ones and enter a higher-level school if they made good grades and even enlist in the army as a military cadet. In short, Japan did not treat the Micronesians and the Japanese equally even if it intended to Japanize the former. It did not grant Japanese nationality to the residents of the South Sea Islands over which it had Class C mandates even if it intended to govern them under its national laws. Government and army documents described the residents of the Carolines and the Marshalls, excluding those of the Marianas, as “uncivilized aborigines”¹⁸. During that time, even in the

¹⁸ In May 1921, Kunio Yanagita, who assumed the post of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission member, organized the five mandatory principles regarding the Class C Mandates in the Pacific: (1) not providing military education to aborigines, (2) setting up army/navy bases, (3) prohibiting aborigines from owning weapons, (4) not selling alcoholic drinks to aborigines, and (5) prohibiting trading aborigines, and pointed out that although (5) could be an important issue for western countries, this kind of issue did not exist in Japan in the first place. (Hitoshi Suzuki, *The Remains of Saipan Dreams*, Nippon Hyoron Sha, 1993, pp. 38-39.)

academic circles, it did not seem funny at all to present theses entitled “Policy for Aborigines in the South Sea Islands”¹⁹. These indicate the Japanese view of the South Seas in those days.

But as mentioned earlier, if, based on the values of people today, one considers this to be remarkable discrimination and interprets it as perverted contempt, one would make a gross mistake when understanding history. For example, Gosuke Yokota, who served as the second Director-General of the South Seas Agency, wrote that the duty of the Agency was to promote the welfare of islanders and that (omitted) he hoped that racial and ethnic discrimination would disappear as soon as possible so that the islanders would blend with the Japanese and become the fellow citizens of Japan²⁰. The preface for *Nanyo Gunto Kyoikushi (The History of Education in the South Sea Islands)* stated that education in Japan’s South Sea Islands was of extraordinary and tremendous significance in that it aimed at developing a second people who protected the lifeline of the Japanese Empire’s seas under the equator and governing the new islanders with clemency and instructing and training them so that they become the true subjects of the Emperor and that the results of the education should be eternally honored together with those of Japanese imperial rule over the islands²¹. This was the humanitarian mission that the Japanese boasted. In those days, such an understanding was fully in accord with international common sense. Indeed, the Japanese way of colonization gave much more consideration to the human rights of local residents compared to the numerous inhuman acts committed by advanced European nations in their colonies.

In any event, I believe that the local residents felt all the less forced to have an awareness of being a subject of the Emperor than the people in mainland Japan because the government did not treat the Japanese and the native people equally when it ruled the South Sea Islands. I also believe that as a result, such treatment ironically enabled the simultaneous implementation of two different government policies: respecting the local traditional society and allowing the two groups to coexist in the islands.

A typical example of the two different government policies was to build Shinto shrines and support Christian churches. During the period of Japanese rule, a total of 27 Shinto shrines were constructed in the entire region. Among them, the Nanyo Shrine, which was built in Palau, the seat of the South Seas Agency, was the most prestigious national shrine of major grade under the direct control of the government. Even local residents were required to worship when passing in front of its torii, and if they neglected to do so, they were sharply scolded by a police officer. This was because expressing veneration for shrines was considered proof of being a subject of the Emperor.

¹⁹ Toshio Ito, “Policy for Aborigines in the South Sea Islands,” *Legal/Economic Group Annals*, No. 7, Hokkaido University, 1939, pp. 123-158.

²⁰ Shizuo Matsuoka, *Ethnography of Micronesia*, Oka Shoin, July 1927, p. 2.

²¹ South Sea Islands Educational Group, ed., *The History of Education in the South Sea Islands*, South Sea Islands Educational Group, October 1938, preface.

In other words, Shintoism was the foundation of the Japanese people and was not viewed as a religion. Therefore, freedom of religious belief was given to all local residents.

Since the Spaniards and then Germans had propagated Christianity in the South Sea Islands during their rule and the religion had permeated almost the entire region, the South Seas Agency did not restrict the church activities of local residents. Rather, it adopted a policy of encouraging the religion. When, immediately after the decision on mandates under the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, a naval officer who visited Ponape gathered local residents and tribal chiefs and asked what they want most at that time, he was asked to send missionaries to the islands²². Following this entreaty, the government requested the United Church of Christ in Japan to form a group of missionaries for the South Seas and sent it to Truk and Ponape periodically, and this operation continued until the defeat of Japan. Missionaries sent from the United States and Germany were also actively engaged in missionary activities, and there were as many as 13 mission schools in the region when missionary work was most prosperous.

4. The Termination of Japanese Mandatory Rule over the South Sea Islands

(1) Withdrawal from the League of Nations

The Japanese rule over the South Sea Islands continued as described above but started to gradually undergo changes after Japan declared withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. The reason for Japan's withdrawal was that it was dissatisfied with the League of Nations' resolution that did not approve Manchukuo as an independent state. Even after it withdrew from the League of Nations, however, the Japanese mandatory rule continued at least on the surface as if nothing had happened, and the international community raised no particular objection to it. What did that mean?

In fact, immediately after it caused the Manchurian Incident, the Japanese army started to consider what would happen to the mandated territories if Japan withdrew from the League of Nations. And during the period from the declaration of withdrawal in 1933 and its effectuation in 1935, there were various heated discussions about Japan's relations with League of Nations mandates in domestic academic circles and among mass media. In relation to this issue, the government expressed its four official opinions about its intention of continuing mandatory rule even after its withdrawal from the League of Nations and the basis for doing so as follows²³:

²² *Ibid.*, Izumi Kobayashi, p. 56.

²³ Haruo Tohmatsu, "International Environment Surrounding Continued Mandates over South Sea Islands," *International Relations*, No. 122, The Japan Association of International Relations, 1999, p. 103. In addition, Tohmatsu published a number of international relations papers on Japanese accession to and withdrawal from the League of Nations and mandates, most of which were compiled and published as a book entitled *Japan and the League of Nations Mandate: International Politics over the South Seas Mandate 1914-1947* (The University of Nagoya Press, 2011).

- (1) Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations did not limit qualifications for tutelage to its member states and simply stated that the tutelage should be entrusted to appropriate advanced nations.
- (2) There was a precedent in which, in 1920, the League of Nations proposed a mandate over Armenia to the United States, a non-member state.
- (3) The mandate system was established, and territories to be mandated were distributed to mandatory powers, by the major allies (United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States), and the League of Nations only had a certain supervisory right over the system.
- (4) Therefore, the status of Japan as a mandatory power over mandated territories did not change despite its withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Regardless of these opinions of Japan's, not only the members of the Council of the League of Nations but also the United States, who did not join the League of Nations, considered in various ways whether the seceder should be deprived of its mandatory rights. But in the end, this issue did not develop into open international debates. The reason seemed to lie in the organizational contradiction and vulnerability of the League of Nations. A further inquiry into this matter might have revealed the deficiency and ambiguity of the mandate regulations, caused the effects of this issue to be felt in the U.K.'s and France's mandated territories as well, and even developed debates into ones that would shake the legal basis of mandates itself.

What, then, were the realities of mandatory rule by Japan? The South Sea Islands saw no disturbance or anti-government protest similar to ones seen in the territories over which France, South Africa, New Zealand, and other member states held mandates. By that time, no action had been taken to fortify the islands though there was a suspicion thereof. And compared to the period prior to the start of mandatory rule, social development was progressing steadily as was economic development. For this reason, there was no reason for depriving Japan of its qualifications for mandates other than using its withdrawal from the League of Nations for the basis for deprivation. After all, as it was unable to find the decisive basis for undermining Japan's argument for the legitimacy of its continued mandatory rule, the League of Nations neither took away the mandatory rights from Japan nor officially approved Japan's continued mandatory rule. It allowed Japan to continue its mandatory rule as if nothing had happened²⁴.

As described above, Japan escaped from the fear of being pressurized to return its mandatory rights, and as it had previously done so, it continued to submit an annual report to the League of Nations and send its delegate to the Permanent Mandates Commission as if nothing had happened. After it withdrew from the League of Nations, Japan became a non-member state which cooperated

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Haruo Tohmatsu, p. 111.

with the League of Nations as the United States did. The reason it could maintain such a position was that it was expected to return to the League of Nations as soon as possible. But after all, Japan continued mandatory rule without returning to the intergovernmental organization and eventually lost its status as a mandatory power due to the defeat in the war.

(2) Approaching Footsteps of War

Japan ruled the South Sea Islands as if it looked down from above but considered it its mission to educate the uncivilized and lead them to civilization. Since the start of occupation by the navy, on the other hand, the national policy had been to preserve the social systems, customs, and manners of native people as much as possible based on their traditions. This is quite different from the way the British or Spaniards, who regarded uncivilized colonies just as the target of exploitation, ruled them. Here lies the reason, in my opinion, not a few Micronesians look back to the period of Japanese rule with nostalgia in a sympathetic way even today.

But with the withdrawal from the League of Nations, this tolerant, soft Japanese administration policy started to gradually change. After the National Mobilization Law was invoked in 1938, the year after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the atmosphere underwent a complete change, and the local residents also began to experience difficulties. In Japan, the mood prevailed that urged people to involve themselves in the war under the slogans “Unite the whole nation,” “Be loyal and patriotic,” and “Persevere doggedly and show untiring patience.” The government exercised more strict control on the entire nation day after day. Such a disquieting atmosphere in Japan was brought into the South Sea Islands as it was.

Up to that time, under the terms and conditions of mandates, Japan had observed the forbidden clauses, including the construction of military bases, military drills for local residents, and forced labor, but around that time, the construction of airports for fighter planes and the dispatch of defense corps to various islands began gradually. Still, only thousands of garrison were dispatched in the entire region, and none of the islands was fortified for military purposes. At that time, the government already recognized that the footsteps of war were approaching steadily but seemed to predict that a battle would be fought at sea by deploying main battleships if Japan clashed with the United States. On the ground, meanwhile, the South Seas Agency and the army increasingly involved local residents in the preparations for war in a way that was different from the one seen before; for example, local residents were impressed into the construction of runways, and stricter drills were conducted to create a keener awareness of being a subject of the Emperor among them. Another symbol of these developments was the start of construction of the Nanyo Shrine as a national shrine of major grade in the same year that the National Mobilization Law came into force.

Thus, Japan plunged into a war against the United States with the Pacific as its arena of battle. In 1943 and thereafter, when the fighting became fierce, armed forces from mainland China were

thrown into the South Sea Islands one after another. And local residents came to experience various unusual situations as the Japanese army forced them on the residents. One islander said, “I was impressed into transporting military supplies and was hit hard if I was idle,” and another said, “I was forcefully relocated from where I lived and obliged to lead a hard life in the jungle.” Residents in Palau and Ponape said, “Tens of young men in the village were sent to the New Guinean front and killed in action,” or “We were robbed of farm potatoes and fruits.”

(3) How Was the Japanese Rule Evaluated?

In 1975, I visited Yap, Palau, and Saipan for the first time. All of the elderly people I met on the islands at that time had experienced the period of Japanese rule and talked about old stories in Japanese. At various places, I was asked, “How is His Majesty the Emperor?” And this was followed by a succession of words of praises for the period of Japanese rule. One old man said, “Japanese people were all polite and hard-working, having favorable effects on the islanders.” Another said, “At public school, we were able to learn various songs, and it was fun.” Still another said, “Government officials behaved high-handedly, but ordinary Japanese people worked with us and were friendly.”

Hearing these old stories made a Japanese young man like me feel extremely good. But on the other hand, their pro-Japanese remarks confused my view of the former South Sea Islands. One reason was that the term “colony” only evoked a bad image in people like me in those days who had received school education in the postwar period. Another was that the books²⁵ written by Japanese which I had read before I visited Micronesia were all filled with the testimony of Micronesian and other people, who talked about various examples of tyrannical rule by the South Seas Agency over local residents and the trampling of islands by the Japanese army. Was the imperialist power’s act of controlling small, weak nations and regions with overwhelming military power as well as suppressing local residents, exploiting local economies, and taking local cultures away not typical of colonial rule? Since that was what I thought of colonial rule, I remained somewhat unconvinced of and uncomfortable about the stories told by the islanders who thought of the period of Japanese rule with nostalgia in a friendly way.

That uncomfortable feeling of mine was swept away years after I visited Micronesia repeatedly. As my relationships with the islanders deepened, some of them started to talk about the bitter experience they had had during the period of Japanese rule. When I heard them do so, I became somewhat convinced, saying to myself, “That was what I had just expected!” If so, on the other hand, I wondered why they had made such favorable comments up to that time.

At first, when I started to visit the South Sea Islands frequently, the main objective was to survey changes in the political status of the islands after the mandatory rule ended. I did not have such

²⁵ Tatsuo Saito, *Micronesia*, Suzusawa Shoten, 1975.

keen interest in the period of mandatory rule. Therefore, I did not particularly ask islanders how the period of Japanese rule had been or whether they had suffered from the Japanese colonial administration. Instead, I just listened to what elderly islanders talked about voluntarily while chatting with them in Japanese. So, most of what I heard was certainly not answers to my leading questions. One of the reasons I was able to enjoy leisurely opportunities repeatedly was that the conversations with islanders were extremely enjoyable to a person like me in those days who lacked experience in and knowledge of the islands. Another was that I did not intend to write a report or dissertation on the period of Japanese rule by a certain deadline through interviews.

When one asks a person some questions, the person's answers often differ significantly depending on factors such as the language used, the way the questions are asked, and the person's relationships with the questioner. For example, if an islander is asked what trouble the people of the islands had during the period when the Japanese armed forces were stationed, he or she would cite many episodes of the misdeed committed by Japanese soldiers. If another is asked whether he or she has happy memories of the period of Japanese rule, conversations with him or her would develop into accounts of good deeds of Agency officials and other Japanese people. Nuance of stories would differ depending on whether the local language, Japanese, or English is used. The more friendly the interviewee is, the more inclined he or she would be to intentionally try meeting the questioner's expectations when he or she answers. The answer to a question does not always directly express what is in the answerer's mind. Here lies the importance and difficulty of field surveys, and it takes time to get the truth out of the people surveyed. It is all the more difficult to do so because questions are asked about the past events that occurred generations ago.

Conclusion—Mandatory Rule over the South Sea Islands as Seen from the Present Day

I should talk about "colonies" before I analyze the way Japan ruled the South Sea Islands. If one understands a colony as a form of rule that involves the exploitation of a small, weak country or ethnic group by a great power and the suppression of its people, such an understanding should be eliminated. A colony refers to a historical form of rule over a particular area, and it is not suitable to label the name of such a form of rule as good or bad. It is important to start by recognizing a colony simply as a historical form of rule.

Colonial rule is an outdated form of government that is not accepted in the international relations of today. But in the period during which a unified international structure of peace and order or system of international cooperation did not exist, colonial rule played a role in protecting small, weak countries or uncivilized areas from external attacks or unjustified intervention, thus maintaining international peace and order. Therefore, righteous colonial rule may be acceptable, and it does not matter if people welcome colonization. At least, the spirit of the mandate system

touted by the League of Nations exactly lay in the righteous colonial government system no matter what the true circumstances of international politics and the aspirations of individual nations were. Some people say that the South Sea Islands were not colonies but mandated territories of Japan probably because they want to wipe out the contemporary image of colonies being equal to a negative form of government. But if they consider colonies one historical form of government, they would not need to feel ashamed of having possessed colonies in those days. They must focus on how Japanese politicians administered the South Sea Islands in the name of colonial rule when assessing the colonial rule by Japan.

Prof. Yuichi Hosoya of Keio University wrote that in the respective colonies, history was engraved in the memory of people in various ways as different relationships, experiences, and recollections were established, gained, and formed, and that it is unreasonable to generalize all forms of colonial rule and discuss them as a single type of events²⁶. There are diverse examples of colonial administration, and this fact must be common knowledge when looking back on history.

In the following section, based on the understandings mentioned above, I will discuss how Japan ruled the South Sea Islands as I see it at the present. On the basis of the several facts described above, the conclusion of this article can be summarized into the three points listed below.

First, when the Japanese rule began, the stance of the Japanese government was to observe the purpose of Class C mandates held up by the League of Nations as the principle of administration for certain territories. This meant that the government, which gave top priority to developing the regional economy and improving the welfare of residents, did not subject the people it ruled to suppression and exploitation. But since the purpose of mandates was naturally defined by advanced nations at their eye level, the society of local residents underwent major transformation as the result of mandatory rule.

Secondly, as World War II broke out and progressed, specifically after the invocation of the National Mobilization Law in 1938, the government lost leeway to act in accord with the purpose of mandates and increased its arbitrary involvement in the lives of residents. As a result, the residents living in major islands were forced to live under the various restrictions similar to those experienced by the Japanese.

Thirdly, as the result of Japanese rule, Japanese as a common language and modern primary education spread in the region. Many second-generation Japanese-Micronesians were born between Japanese immigrants and local residents. On one hand, the subsistence economy and society of local residents were preserved, and on the other hand, a monetary economy and society were brought into existence in the islands.

In the light of the purpose of mandates over the South Sea Islands, the Japanese rule can be

²⁶ "Insights into the World," Yomiuri Shimbun morning edition, February 14, 2016.

evaluated as not being bad at all if examined based on the analysis and assessment specified above. But the Japanese rulers ended up involving the islanders in the war, and this was misgovernment. This should be described, however, not as the failure of mandatory rule but as a gross mistake in the administration of Japan as a state. Based on the foregoing, it is meaningless to ask a general question of whether the Japanese rule was good or bad for Micronesians today. Only by setting specific goals can a certain course of events be evaluated as good or bad. For this reason, I do not agree with either of the opinions deciding the Japanese rule over the South Sea Islands as good or bad.

I believe, however, that today, when one looks back upon what the Japanese mandatory rule over the South Sea Islands meant, one should also recognize the relationships between Japan and the South Sea Islands today. For example, three independent nations and one American dominion came into being in the region. The Emperor was greeted warmly by islanders when he visited some islands 60 or 70 years after the war in order to pacify the souls of the war dead. And the presidents of the three Micronesian countries also joined the ceremony held in Palau to console the spirits of those who died in battle. Furthermore, the day when the Emperor visited Palau was designated as a national holiday. The Japanese should really know about these facts.

Koror public school in Koror Island, the Palau Islands

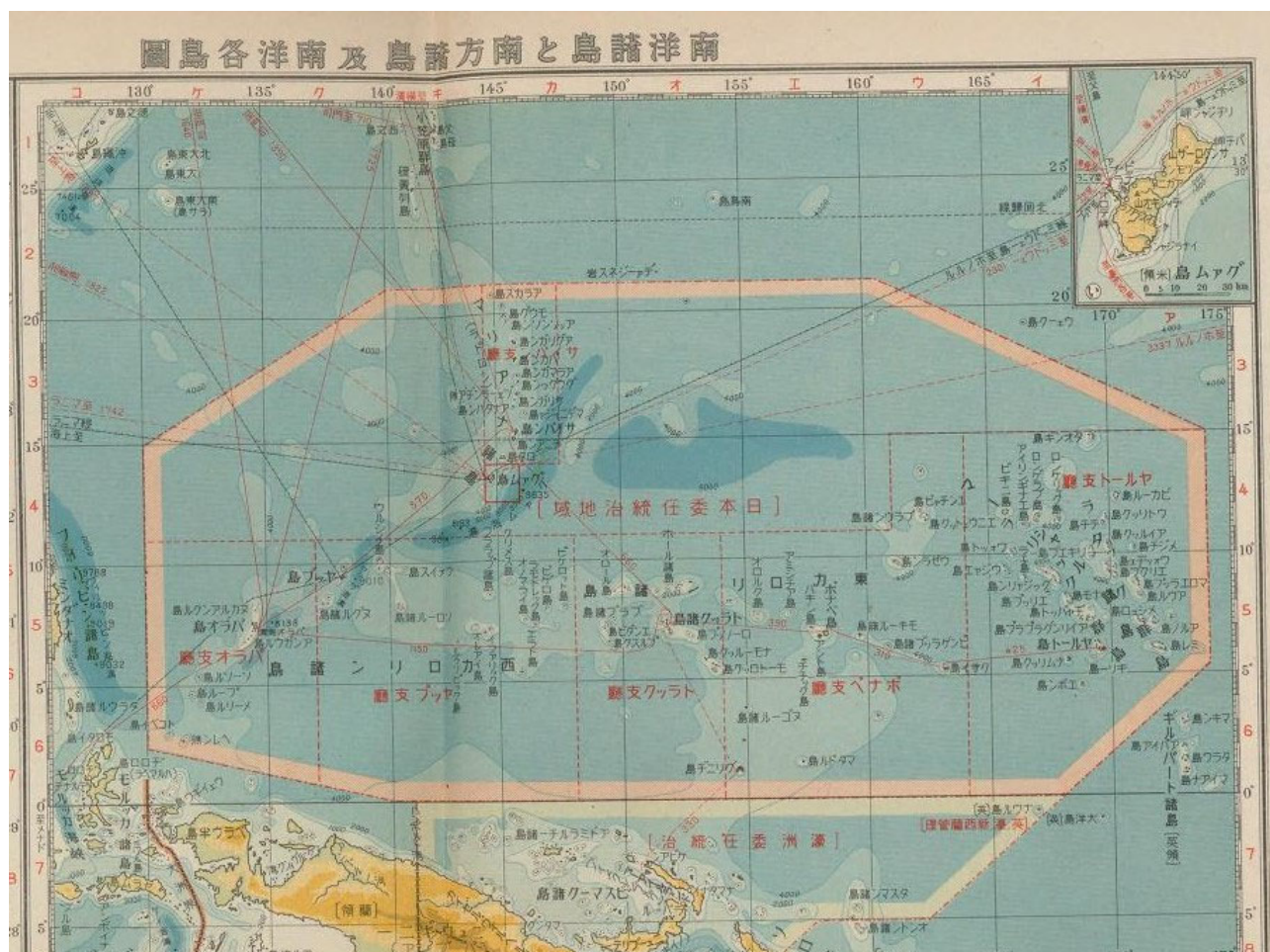


Main Street of Koror Island, the Palau Islands



(Source: Nanyo-Gunto Kaisetu Shashin-Cho (Comments and Photos of the South Sea Island),(Kenbunsha,1931))

Area of the South Sea Islands



(Source: M.Fujita, *Shin Nihon Zucho*, (Toko Shoin,1934), National Diet Library Digital Collection)

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