

# A History of the Excluded

## Rethinking the Sugar Industry in the Northern Mariana Islands under Japanese Rule

By Akiko Mori<sup>1</sup>

Translated by Wendy Matsumura

- ‘Saipan, Tinian, Rota. Enjoy a short break at these three islands. How about a three-day weekend in the Mariana Islands’.
- ‘Relax in the Southern Islands ♡ A plan for a three-night, four-day trip to Saipan’.
- ‘Mariana Blue – a Mystical World’

Young Japanese people who go to work early in the morning on crowded rush-hour trains, who go about their business without even taking a proper lunch hour, and who rush back onto the final train of the night after finishing their paperwork and preparing for the next morning’s meeting, might think to themselves, ‘How great it would be to escape this life on my next long weekend, relaxing on some southern island... But Hawai‘i is so expensive...’ Staring at their smartphones, they might be tempted by the above advertisements and images of the transparent, light blue oceans of the Marianas that are found on the website of the Marianas Visitors Authority.

Tourism is the main source of income today for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, which since the ‘Age of Exploration’ was controlled by the multiple empires of Spain, Germany, Japan and the United States, and which continues to seek a path to true autonomy as a US Territory. This industry grew dramatically from the second half of the 1980s through the influx of foreign direct investment, primarily from Japan. The number of tourists who visited the islands annually peaked at 730,000 in 1997. Of that figure, 450,000, or 60 percent, were visitors from Japan.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, however, the attraction of the Northern Marianas faded amongst the Japanese, and, according to figures from 2017, the number of tourists from Japan had fallen by that year to 40,000 people. Though these declines were supplemented by 250,000 visitors from South Korea and another 170,000 from China, the total number of visitors,

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge support from colleagues at Doshisha University (Kyoto), and the hard work of Professor Wendy Matsumura (University of California San Diego), who translated this article from Japanese.

<sup>2</sup> Marianas Visitors Authority, ‘Northern Mariana Islands Tourism Master Plan 2012–2016’, pp. ix and 13. [https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/migrated/oia/reports/upload/CNMI\\_Tourism\\_Master\\_Plan-2012-to-2016.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/migrated/oia/reports/upload/CNMI_Tourism_Master_Plan-2012-to-2016.pdf) (last accessed March 2012)



Figure 1: The Statue of Matsue Haruji at the Sugar King Park, Saipan. Photograph by the author, 2009.

480,000, was far below what the islands saw at its peak.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, The Marianas Visitors Authority recently embarked on a strategy to lure large numbers of Japanese tourists back to the archipelago by drawing attention to its ‘historical connections’, alongside the Authority’s earlier emphasis on its ‘proximity to Japan and [its] affordability’. One of the attractions that the Authority selected as the highlight of its new strategy was Sugar King Park, where the statue of ‘sugar king’ Matsue Haruji (1876–1954), who built the largest sugar plantation in the Northern Marianas during the period of Japanese rule, now stands.

This park was originally built during the period of Japanese rule and called Saipan Park. In addition to the statue of Matsue, which was erected in 1934, the park displays part of a steam-powered railway car that was used to transport sugar cane. Adjacent is a

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3 Marianas Visitors Authority, ‘Tourism in The Marianas’, August 2017, p. 5. <http://www.saipan-chamber.com/resources/files/PPT%20MVA%202017%20Saipan%20Chamber%20of%20Commerce%20FINAL.pdf> (last accessed 29 January 2019)

*torii* (ceremonial gate) for the Saipan Katori Shrine. This shrine gets its name from the ‘Battleship Katori’, which the Japanese Imperial Navy dispatched during World War I to the then German-occupied islands in order to establish control over them. It was destroyed in battle during the latter stages of World War II, in 1944, but was rebuilt in 1985 by Japanese devotees. It plays an important role in bringing out a ‘Japanese feel’ in the areas surrounding the park.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time, there was no explanatory text regarding the ‘historical legacy of imperial Japan’. This changed around 1997 when both the NMI Museum of History and Culture and an Alumni group (*Nankōkai*), the latter formed by former employees of the South Seas Development Company where Matsue Haruji was president, established a cooperative relationship at the behest of one of Matsue’s descendants (who was an executive at a Japanese airline company). On 25 October 2003, a plaque was finally placed next to the statue.<sup>5</sup> Written in English and Japanese, it touted Matsue’s success:

Matsue Haruji (1876–1954)

Born in Aizu Wakamatsu-city, Fukushima-prefecture, Japan. The first president of South Seas Development Company. He was the pioneering Japanese entrepreneur known as ‘Sugar King’ who established the sugar industry in the Northern Mariana Islands and oversaw its highly successful operations from the 1920’s.

October, 2003 CNMI Museum of History & Culture  
Nankō-kai and Japanese volunteers

An additional sign which was built to the left of the statue included further explanations in Chamorro, English and Japanese. It read, ‘This statue, which stands amidst the warmth of Sugar King Park, reminds us of the importance of the pioneering spirit, diligence, prescience and conviction of an entrepreneur who brought economic prosperity to Micronesia in the first half of the twentieth century’.

A perusal of blogs written by Japanese visitors to Saipan island confirms the success of the wishes of Matsue’s descendant and those in charge of the tourism industry – that this statue become a must-visit destination for Japanese travellers. Across the street from the park stands the NMI History and Culture Museum, a conversion of the South Seas Government-run Saipan Hospital which had been built during the period of Japanese rule. The museum displays photographs donated by the Matsue family, as well as belongings from other Japanese people, and introduces the period of Japanese rule as ‘the Prosperous Years’. Japanese people who come to the islands to escape their busy work days probably spend their first day at the beach (their main aim) and travel to the northern part of the island on the second day to see the ruins of the battlefield left by US-Japanese fighting (destroyed tanks, the remains of the Japanese military headquar-

4 Nippon General Trading corp., ‘The Checkered Career of Saipan: Saipan Katori Shrine’. [http://www.countryhouse.co.jp/saipan\\_news/mariana\\_islands/katori.html](http://www.countryhouse.co.jp/saipan_news/mariana_islands/katori.html) (last accessed 29 January 2019,)

5 Shiotani Shichijūrō, *Matsue Haruji Den* [The Biography of Matsue Haruji], Fukushima, 2005, pp. 185–192. In the following footnotes, author names are written in Japanese order (surname, given name) for Japanese-language publications and in Western order (given name, surname) for European-language publications.

ters, a memorial to the Japanese war dead, and so on). On their third day on the islands, they might learn of the existence of the Sugar King Park. Upon visiting, they are likely surprised by the massive, 10.6-metre statue of Matsue Haruji.

Hardly anyone would ask: how did Matsue Haruji obtain the land for sugarcane cultivation? Who actually engaged in the cultivation of sugar cane? And did the production of sugar bring economic prosperity to the indigenous Chamorro people? Instead, visitors might be comforted, reading about his ‘pioneering spirit, diligence, prescience and conviction’, and think to themselves, ‘how great this Japanese person who lived here was’. They might walk away thinking, ‘if only the tragic war with the United States hadn’t been fought’. These are the kinds of travel diary entries we encounter repeatedly on the internet.

One of the reasons why Japanese travellers so rarely critique the aforementioned positive evaluation of Japanese colonial rule could have something to do with the fact that within Japanese academia, there are very few publications which have critically illuminated the realities of Japanese colonial rule in the islands of Micronesia (Northern Mariana Islands, Caroline Islands, Marshall Islands, formerly—and hereafter—called the ‘South Seas Islands’). Historians of Japan working in Japan do examine the colonial history of East Asia, referring particularly to Taiwan (acquired in 1895), southern Sakhalin (1905), the Korean peninsula (annexed in 1910), and Manchuria (invaded in 1931). However, there is very little interest in the South Seas Islands, which came under Japanese imperial rule after 1919 but were situated in the Pacific World.

One reflection of this lack of interest in the history of Japanese rule in the South Seas Islands within Japanese academia is the fact that a 1988 monograph written by a US-based researcher, Mark R. Peattie, entitled *Nan’yo: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia*, remains the gold standard today.<sup>6</sup> In terms of the history of the sugar industry in the Northern Mariana Islands during Japanese rule, Imaizumi Yumiko has published several empirically rich works based on newly discovered archival materials since the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> These works have focused on clarifying colonial policy, such as the policies both of the Japanese Imperial Navy, which established rule over the islands,

6 Mark R. Peattie, *Nan’yo: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia*, Honolulu, 1988.

7 For important Japanese-language contributions to the history of Micronesia under Japanese rule, see: Imaizumi Yumiko, ‘Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha no Okinawajin Seisaku ni kansuru Oboegaki [A Memorandum on the Policies of the South Seas Development Company concerning Okinawan Labourers]’, *Okinawa Bunka Kenkyū* 19, 1992; Imaizumi, ‘Nanyō Guntō Inintōchi Seisaku no Keisei [The Formation of the Japanese Policy for the Micronesia as a Mandated Territory]’, in *Iwanami Kōza Kindai Nihon to Shokuminchi* 4 [The Colonies of the Modern Japan vol. 4], ed. Asada Kyōji, Tokyo, 1993; Imaizumi, ‘Saipantō ni okeru Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha to Shakaidantai [The South Seas Development Company and Social Organization in Saipan]’, in *Kindai Ajia no Nihonjin Keizaidantai* [The Japanese Economic Organization in the Modern Asia], ed. Namikata Shōichi, Tokyo, 1997; Imaizumi, *Nanyō Guntō no Senjika to Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha* [Wartime Micronesia and the South Seas Development Company], in *Senjika Ajia no Nihon Keizaidantai* [The Japanese Economic Organization in Asia during Wartime], ed. Yanagisawa Asobu, Kimura Kenji, Tokyo, 2004. On the position of Micronesia as one of the League of Nations mandated territories, see Tōmatsu Haruo, *Nihonteikoku to Inintōchi: Nanyō Guntō o meguru kokusai Seiji 1914–1947* [The Empire of Japan and the Mandate System: International Politics concerning Micronesia 1914–1947], Nagoya, 2011.

and of the subsequent South Seas Government (Nan'yō-chō); Imaizumi has equally examined the perspective of the South Seas Development Company, which dominated the sugar manufacturing industry in the Northern Mariana Islands. But such studies have devoted less attention to uncovering the lives, experiences, and subjectivities of those peoples upon whom colonial rule was imposed—for example, the lives of the indigenous Chamorro peoples, or the 'Japanese' sugarcane cultivators and factory workers who came as migrant labourers to work in the sugar industry. Their contributions to the formation of colonial society have been minimized, or at most analysed in quantitative terms. (As I explain later, the majority of these labourers came from Okinawa prefecture, an entity that itself was established following the annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom in 1879.)

In contrast to such previous work, this paper takes a social history perspective: first to reconsider the processes by which Matsue Haruji formed his sugar plantation in the Northern Mariana Islands under Japanese rule; then to trace the peripheralization of the indigenous Chamorro people, who were the original inhabitants of the land; and finally to examine the way that migrant workers from Okinawa interacted with the colonial authorities as they worked on these sugar plantations far from home.<sup>8</sup> In these ways, I focus my attention on the formation of colonial society, as characterized by tensions between colonial authorities and the populations they tried to govern, rather than on illuminating the intricacies of the sugar plantation or revealing the structure of the colonial authority that supported it, as previous works have done.

In the following section, I examine earlier Spanish and German colonial policies toward the Chamorro people in order to understand why the latter were forced to clear their lands for the sugar plantations of imperial Japan. In so doing, I clarify the processes through which the Chamorro people were driven off their land during four centuries of rule by multiple empires. The second section then highlights Matsue Haruji's role as what I call a 'trans-planter,' a man whose knowledge, technological acumen, and experience came from visiting multiple sites of sugar production. It examines the relationship between the sugar plantation that he established in this region and his complicated personal biography. It argues that the knowledge he gained about the sugar sciences in Tokyo and the United States and the management skills he obtained at sugar companies in Taiwan made him an expert; and that he then transplanted his vision to the Northern Mariana plantation in a manner that made the experiences of workers from Okinawa, who had been engaged in sugar manufacture for generations, invisible. The fourth and final section, 'The screams of the Okinawan immigrants', examines a key strike organized by workers from Okinawa who had been recruited to work in the Northern Mariana Islands as the plantation's main workforce. It clarifies the ways in which plantation labour relations were transformed through conflict between Mat-

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8 In recent years, Keith L. Camacho has examined the history and memory of the Asia-Pacific War from the viewpoint of the Chamorro. His work was a critical response to earlier scholarship that focused on the history of the war in the Asia-Pacific from a military history perspective and took no account of the lives of Japanese colonists and the Chamorro people, or the relationship between them. His intervention provides new avenues of enquiry for the examination of the history of Japanese colonial rule in Micronesia. See Keith L. Camacho, translated by Akira Nishimura and Taiki Machi, *Senka wo Kinensuru: Guam, Saipan no Rekishi to Kioku* [Cultures of Commemoration: The Politics of War, Memory, and History in the Mariana Islands], Tokyo, 2016 [2011], p. 5.

sue and other company executives on the one hand, and the people of Okinawa on the other.

In these ways, this paper seeks to bring to light the existence of those—especially the Chamorro and Okinawan peoples—who were expelled from the lives they built and from their places of memory.

### 1.1. The Supplanting of the Chamorro people: the Spanish era

According to archaeologists, it was around 1500 BCE that ancestors of the indigenous people of the Mariana Islands, the Chamorro, moved to the islands from the Asian continent.<sup>9</sup> Once they settled in the Mariana Islands, they stopped being seafaring people who travelled the oceans and began a life of self-sufficient agriculture and fishing that lasted for centuries. They consumed taro and yams as staple foods and supplemented their diet with breadfruit, rice, bananas, and sago palm. This peaceful life of harmony with nature ended abruptly as they became embroiled in the contest for the Pacific by the Spanish and the Portuguese that began in the late 1400s. In 1521, supported by the Spanish monarchy, Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) succeeded in becoming the first European to arrive at the Philippines by crossing the Pacific from the western coast of South America. Along the way, he also became the first European to ‘discover’ the Mariana Islands. In 1565, Miguel López de Legazpi (1510–1572), who arrived in the Mariana Islands by following Magellan’s route, declared the Spanish monarchy’s possession of these islands, and within the year discovered a route that allowed him to return from the Philippines to Mexico. In these ways, Magellan and Legazpi opened up a transpacific connection between Mexico and the Philippines. The Mariana Islands, which were positioned between these places, saw the arrival of the ‘Manila Galleon’ each year from around 1568. The Chamorro people eventually learned Spanish and Filipino by conversing with the Spaniards to whom they provided water and food, and also encountered new cultures in the form of foods that they had never tasted or iron tools that they had never had access to in the past.<sup>10</sup>

Drastic changes in the Chamorro peoples’ lifestyle and culture began with the arrival of a Spanish Jesuit missionary, Diego Luis de San Vitores (1627–1672), who is still known by the moniker, the ‘Apostle of the Marianas’.<sup>11</sup> In 1662, when he stopped over in Guam on a Galleon headed to the Philippines, he laid eyes on the Chamorro people and saw it as his mission to ‘transform these carefree and faithless people into Christians so that they may enter the kingdom of heaven’. He subsequently built a settlement on Guam in June 1668, after receiving permission from the Queen Regent of

9 Intō Michiko, *Shima ni sumu Jinrui: Oseania no Rakuen Sōseiki* [The People of the Islands: the Genesis of the Oceania Paradise], Kyoto, 2017, p. 55.

10 Don A. Farrell, *History of the Northern Mariana Islands*, ed. Phyllis Koontz, Saipan, 1991, pp. 115–143.

11 The islands were named ‘the Mariana Islands’ by San Vitores after Queen Regent Maria Anna of Spain, as an expression of gratitude for her permission to do missionary work in these islands. Before that the islands had been named ‘the Ladrones (the Islands of Thieves)’ by Magellan: Farrell, *History*, pp. 150–151.

Spain, Maria Anna; and from there he conducted his missionary work throughout the Mariana Islands.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the missionaries commenced their work, resistance by the Chamorro people broke out in various areas of the islands. The elites of Chamorro society thought that it was a matter of elite ceremony to be baptized, but as the missionaries began baptizing all Chamorro people, they began to turn their backs on the practice. Further, as the missionaries began not just to perform baptisms, but also to force the people to wear clothing, which was not something they were accustomed to, suspicions grew. The final straw that angered Chamorro leaders stemmed from a rumour that was spread by Chinese merchants who were upset that the arrival of San Vitores had diminished the immense influence they previously held over the Chamorro people. They stoked the flames by spreading the rumour that ‘the Spanish are going to kill all of the Chamorro people’. Attacks on missionaries by the Chamorro who were fearful for their own survival in various parts of the islands began in September 1668, following the murder of several Spanish crew members.<sup>13</sup>

Thereafter, the Chamorro people continued to resist for 30 years. However, they were no competition for the Spanish forces sent from the Philippines. The first group that was suppressed were the Chamorro on Guam. Once the Spanish military defeated the people who continued to fight a guerrilla war in the Northern Mariana Islands, they embarked on a project of forced migration of the remaining Chamorro to Guam. The only people who escaped this fate were a group on Rota that had accepted the teachings of the missionaries. The other islands became uninhabited.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the Spanish Chamorro wars, the forced migration to Guam, and the spread of smallpox and Spanish influenza carried on the Galleon ships, the population of the Chamorro people on the Mariana Islands, which had been approximately 40,000 prior to San Vitores’ arrival, fell to under 10 percent of that number—some 3,539 people—by 1710.<sup>15</sup> Their numbers on Guam and Rota continued to fall thereafter as a consequence of suicide, the spread of communicable diseases, as well as the decline of health due to the introduction of an alcohol- and tobacco-consumption culture—all aftereffects of the massacres and forced migrations. The indigenous populations had not recovered by the time that the Spanish, who were defeated in the Spanish-American War of 1898, turned over Guam to the United States and sold the Northern Mariana Islands to Germany.<sup>16</sup> The ‘primitive jungles’ and ‘untouched plains’<sup>17</sup> that Matsue

12 Farrell, *History*, p. 149.

13 Farrell, *History*, pp. 155–167.

14 Farrell, *History*, pp. 168–177.

15 Farrell, *History*, p. 177.

16 The population of the Mariana Islands decreased sharply from 24,000 in 1668 to 9,000 in 1690. After the Chamorro in the Mariana Islands were forced to move to Guam, their population in Guam and Rota was only 3,539 in 1710 and fell to 1,936 in 1722. It increased to no more than 5,349 by 1828. There is no doubt that many Chamorro died through genocide after 1668, although there is some variance in figures indicating the total population of the Mariana Islands before San Vitores arrived (40,000 or 24,000). See Rainer F. Buschmann, Edward R. Slack Jr., and James B. Tuller, *Navigating the Spanish Lake: The Pacific in the Iberian World*, Honolulu, 2014, p. 105.

17 Matsue Haruji, *Nanyō Kaitaku Jūnen shi* [The Ten-Year History of the South Seas Development Company], Tokyo, 1932. Reprinted edition: Okinawa-ken Kyōiku Inkaikai, Okinawa, 2002, pp. 22, 56–61.

Haruji found to be so attractive for the establishment of a sugar plantation were created through the genocide of the Chamorro people by the Spanish empire.

## 1.2. Migration and Land Registration: the German Era

The Mariana Islands, which remained politically united during the Spanish era, were divided into the US territory of Guam and the German possessions of Northern Marianas following the Spanish-American war. Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), who succeeded in unifying Germany in 1871, had tried to respond to the heightening enthusiasm at home for the capture of colonial possessions by gaining control over the northeastern part of New Guinea, the Bismarck Islands and North Solomon Islands in 1884, and then the Marshall Islands in 1885. He began plotting his entrance into the Euro-American competition for colonies in the Pacific that had been intensifying since before the Spanish-American war. In 1899, he completed the ‘German colonial possessions in the Pacific’<sup>18</sup> by purchasing the Northern Mariana Islands and the Caroline Islands from the Spanish, who were experiencing financial difficulties in the wake of the war. Thereafter, the Northern Mariana Islands remained a part of the German empire’s colonial possessions in the Pacific under the jurisdiction of the Vice Governor of the Caroline Islands, which was part of the German New Guinea administration. Saipan, which was the most populated among the islands, was given a district office, but with the reorganization of the administrative structure of German New Guinea in 1907, its status was lowered to that of a station under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Carolines Yap district office.<sup>19</sup> The Northern Mariana Islands were a peripheral part of the empire during the German era, just as they had been during the Spanish era, with Guam at the centre.

Georg Fritz, the first governor of the Saipan district office, was the main architect of the German policy toward the Northern Mariana Islands during the period from 1899 until the administrative reorganization of 1907. Fritz had been born in 1865 in Alzey in Rheinhessen, Germany. He studied forestry, but after realizing that there were few opportunities for advancement in his hometown, he moved to South America and settled as a colonizer in Gran Chaco, which straddles Uruguay and Paraguay. There he learned Spanish and worked as a surveyor, before returning to Germany and studying finance and administration. Thereafter he filled a number of posts as a bureaucrat in the finance department in the Landgraviate of Hesse-Darmstadt but joined the Society for German Colonization in 1896 and began to work on colonization projects. Fritz was appointed Governor of the Saipan district office because he was fluent in Spanish, had experience living abroad, and had fiscal management skills.<sup>20</sup>

The main task Fritz was responsible for upon his arrival in Saipan was to increase

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18 Kurihara Hisayasu, *Doitsu Shokuminchi Kenkyū: Seinan Afurika, Tōgo, Kamerūn, Higashi Afurika, Taiyeiyō, Kōshūwan* [A Study of the German Colonies: Southwest Africa, Togo, Cameroon, East Africa, the Pacific Ocean, and Jiaozhou Bay], Tokyo, 2018, pp. 317–323.

19 Dirk H. R. Spennemann, *Edge of Empire: The German Colonial Period in the Northern Mariana Islands*, Albury, 2007, pp. 23–24.

20 Spennemann, *Edge of Empire*, pp. 28–30.

the population of the Northern Mariana Islands. In order to stabilize the colonial finances of the Saipan district office, the island's economy had to be developed, mainly through the production of copra, whose demand as a global commodity was growing since the 1860s. (Copra was dried coconut milk, which served both as the raw material for palm oil, and could be used to make margarine, soap and candles.) However, due to the effects of the Spanish-era massacres and forced migrations to Guam, the US territory of Guam had 8,698 residents while the German possession of the Northern Mariana Islands had merely 1,938 (1,253 Chamorro, 650 Carolinians, and 35 other).<sup>21</sup> Fritz tried to correct this imbalance by encouraging the migration of the Chamorro and Carolinians on Guam to the Northern Marianas. There were many Chamorro people in Guam who were discontented with the Guam Governor-General, in particular the prohibition of ceremonies and education related to Catholicism (due to American fears of the continued influence of Spanish missionaries); there were also a lot of people on the Caroline Islands who had maintained their own social customs—such as rejecting the wearing of clothes—since the Spanish era and were not fond of the new order that the US was trying to impose.

To encourage those people to move, Fritz sent vessels free of charge from Guam to Saipan and took care to not interfere with Chamorro religious or social lives.<sup>22</sup> In addition to encouraging migration, he also began a system of land registration, which granted land ownership rights to Chamorro who had resided there from the pre-colonial era, and which nationalized other lands as German. Part of this newly nationalized land was leased to new settlers from Guam at the rate of 1 hectare per household, free of charge as part of a homestead programme.<sup>23</sup> As a result of these efforts, when Fritz resigned from his position as Governor of the Saipan district office in 1907, the population of the Northern Mariana Islands had increased to 3,118 people (1,756 Chamorro, 1,260 Carolinians, and 102 other).<sup>24</sup> Further, the coconuts that had previously been consumed as palm alcohol or food on the islands were processed into copra. This was exported at a rate of 400 tons in 1901 and 900 tons in 1903. But once the industry was decimated in 1905 due to a massive hurricane, Germany lost all interest in the Northern Mariana Islands. After the 'talented' Fritz was transferred to the Yap district office following the administrative demotion of Saipan to a station, little effort was invested in the industrial recovery of the Northern Mariana Islands until it was occupied by the Japanese military in 1914.

The people of the Northern Mariana Islands remember the German era as the 'good old days'.<sup>25</sup> This is because in contrast to the Spanish and later the Japanese years of rule, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands did not shed one drop of blood between the beginning of German rule and World War I. Moreover, unlike the Japanese era, when large numbers of Japanese migrants came into the islands, the largest number of Germans who were in the islands at any given time was 17.<sup>26</sup> And most residents

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21 Spennemann, *Edge of Empire*, p. 78.

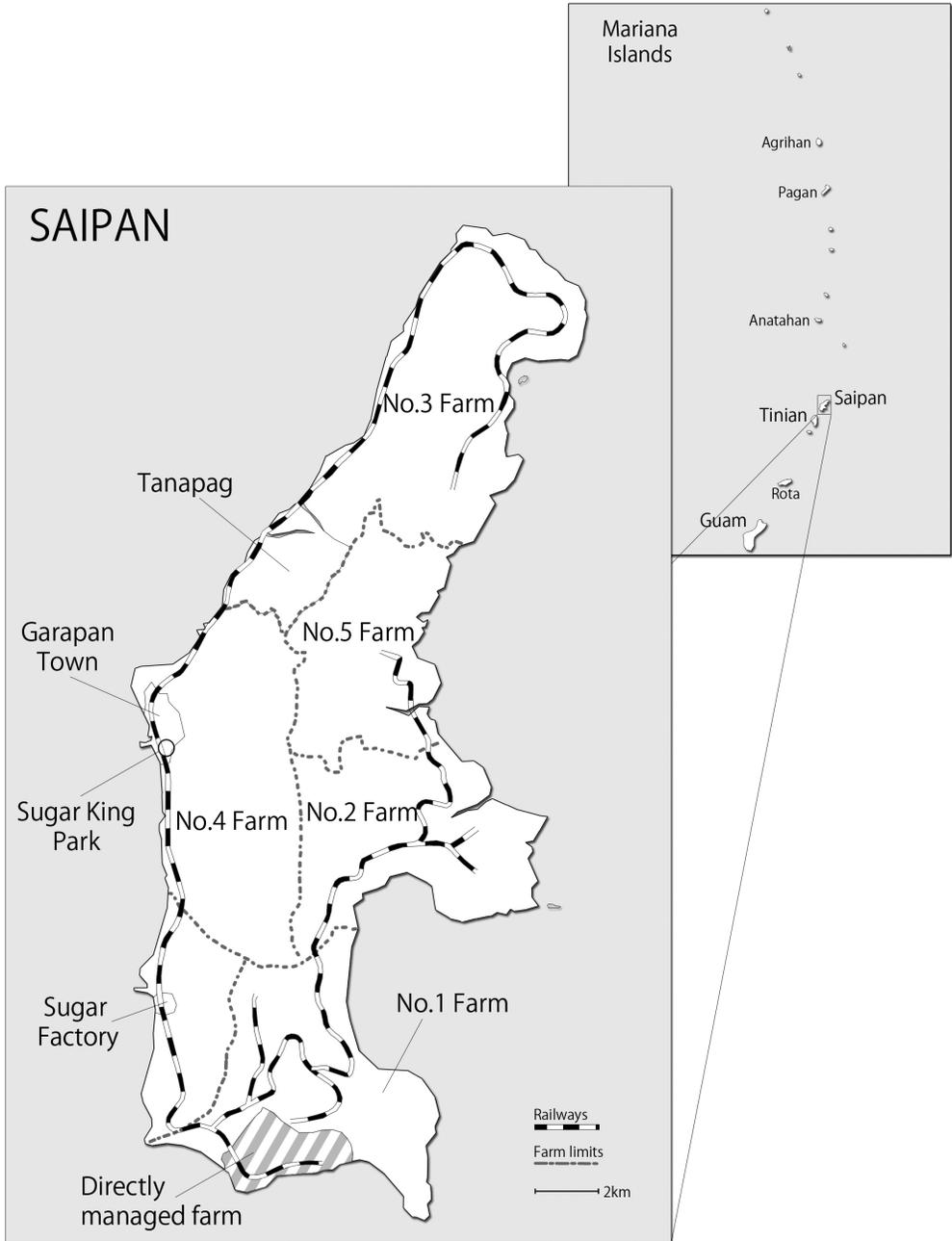
22 Spennemann, *Edge of Empire*, p. 81.

23 Farrell, *History*, p. 273.

24 Spennemann, *Edge of Empire*, p. 83.

25 Farrell, *History*, p. 289.

26 On the German population, see Spennemann, *Edge of Empire*, p. 83.



Map 1: Saipan under Japanese Colonial Rule. Map created by Gonzalo San Emeterio Cabañes.

were granted enough agricultural or pasture land to support themselves. Fritz's land registration policy likely provided the Chamorro people, who had endured massacres and forced migrations, with 'stability at last'.

Ironically, however, it was this land registration that supplied Matsue Haruji with the foundations for his sugar plantation. The lands that were granted by the Germans to the Chamorro and the Carolinians were limited to one part of Saipan island, and the remaining lands were all enclosed as state lands (see Map 1).<sup>27</sup> After 1919, all of these lands were granted to the Japanese, who came to rule the 'South Seas Islands' as a League of Nations mandated territory according to the terms agreed upon at the Treaty of Versailles (the 'South Seas Islands' referring to the former German territories of the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall Islands). Once the South Seas Government (Nan'yō-chō) was established on the Western Caroline island of Palau, in 1922, these lands came under its control as state-owned lands. Matsue was granted a lease of these lands and rapidly expanded his sugar plantation.

## 2. Matsue Haruji as Trans-Planter

In this way, Matsue was able to obtain the lands necessary to build a sugar plantation without sullyng his own hands. The South Seas Government held great hopes for the South Seas Development Company, which Matsue established in 1921 as the driving force of the sugar industry and thereby contributor to the stabilization of colonial finances. The government donated vast amounts of land to the corporation after conducting its own land surveys, which expanded the area of state-owned lands even further than what the Germans had designated under Fritz. According to 1937 figures, the South Seas Government's officially-owned land on the Northern Marianas was 88% of the total area of 30,219 hectares (78% of Saipan, 100% of Tinian, and 88% of Rota), and the majority of this was leased to Matsue's South Seas Development Company.<sup>28</sup> As many scholars have already pointed out, there is no doubt that the South Seas Government and the Oriental Development Company (Tōyō Takushoku Co.,

27 The residential areas for the Chamorro and Carolinians were limited to Garapan Town and Tanapag (see Map 1). According to the 1925 statistics, there were 1,783 Chamorro and 1,144 Carolinians residing in Garapan Town and there were 68 Chamorro and 132 Carolinians residing in Tanapag. There were no Carolinians residing in other areas and only 13 Chamorro: South Seas Government, *Nanyō Guntō Tōsei Chōsasho* [The South Sea Islands Census Investigation], Palau, 1927, pp. 33–34.

28 Fujii Kunitake, *Nanyō Tōgyōron* [The Theory of the Sugar Industry in Micronesia], Tokyo, 1938, pp. 56–57. The total area that the South Seas Development Company held in land and farmland in Saipan (6,295 hectares) was 53 percent of the total area of Saipan (11,824 hectares). The South Seas Development Company leased 80 percent of the land from the South Seas Government and only 20 percent of the land from the Chamorro and Carolinian peoples. Iitaka points out that the Chamorro and Carolinian peoples in Saipan lost their opportunity to clear new lands because of the enclosure by the South Sea Government and the South Sea Development Company. They were alienated from economic development due to the South Seas Development Company's monopolization of the sugar industry and chose to earn cash income eventually by leasing their land to the South Seas Development Company and to Japanese immigrants. They were partially embedded in the money-based economy in this way: Iitaka Shingo, 'Nihon tōchika Mariana shotō ni okeru seitōgyō no tenkai [The Development of the Sugar Industry in the Northern Mariana Islands]', *Shigaku*, 69: 1, 1999, pp. 129–133.

Ltd.)<sup>29</sup> supported the development of the South Seas Development Company's sugar industry on the islands through such preferential treatment.<sup>30</sup> In 1924, the company's total production was 58,379 piculs, but by 1927, when the colonization of Saipan had progressed, it had grown to 210,572 piculs. In 1931, when the colonization of Tinian, which was 100% state-owned, was completed, the combined sugar production had reached 642,789 piculs, or eleven times the volume of 1924.<sup>31</sup> In this year, Matsue's South Seas Development Company-produced sugar comprised approximately 70% of the value of export commodities from the South Seas Islands to the Japanese mainland.<sup>32</sup> Due to the increase in the clearance tax levied on sugar that was exported to the Japanese mainland, the South Seas Government could declare its autonomy from the national state treasury. This kind of 'success' of the colonial sugar industry was impossible without the preferential treatment provided to the South Seas Development Company by the South Seas Government and the massive capital invested by the Oriental Development Company.

That said, I would like to turn now to Matsue's position as what I call a 'trans-planter' by the time he arrived in the South Seas Islands. Before the 1920s, Matsue had visited sugar-producing sites in various parts of the world and absorbed the knowledge and expertise of these places: it was the transnational and transcultural experiences that he acquired in these years that justify his labelling as 'trans-planter'. In what follows, I reconstruct the biography of Matsue by examining his experiences in Tokyo and the United States, Taiwan, and in the South Seas Islands during the founding years of the South Seas Development Company.

Matsue Haruji was born in 1876 as the second son of a former feudal lord in present-day Fukushima prefecture, located in Japan's Tohoku region. After graduating from Aizu Middle School, which the former feudal lord had established, he enrolled in the applied chemistry course of the Tokyo Higher Technical School (Tokyo Kōtō Kogyō Gakkō) in 1896.<sup>33</sup> It was there that he took his first steps toward surviving in the sugar industry. Established in 1881, not long after the Meiji Restoration, and modelled after English equivalents in order to implement the Meiji government's policy of 'rich nation, strong army' and 'develop industries and promote enterprises', this was the first school in Japan to provide higher education in industry.<sup>34</sup> Upon entering the school,

29 This was a semi-official company established in 1908 in Seoul in order to enact Japan's agricultural colonization project in Korea. In addition to becoming colonial Korea's largest landowner and engaging in agricultural and forestry management, it also extended Japanese imperialist policies by investing in companies in Manchuria, the South Seas islands, the Philippines and South America. The Oriental Development Company held 42,000 of the 60,000 stocks issued at the time of the founding of the South Seas Development Company. Kurose Yūji, *Tōyō Takushoku Kabushikigaisha: Nihonteikokushugi to Ajia Taiheiyō* [The Oriental Development Company: Japanese Imperialism and the Asia Pacific], Tokyo, 2003, p. 216.

30 See Imaizumi, 'Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha no Okinawajin Seisaku ni kansuru Oboegaki', 'Saipantō ni okeru Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha to Shakaidantai'.

31 Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha, *Eigyō Hōkokusho* [Business Report], 1923.10–1924.9 (the fifth term), 1926.10–1927.9 (the eighth term), 1930.11–1931.4 (the thirteenth term), 1931.6–1931.10 (the fourteenth term).

32 Nanyōchō, *Nanyōchō Shisei jūnenshi* [The Ten-Year Chronicle of the South Seas Government], 1932, p. 88.

33 Nonaka Fumio, *Nanyō to Matsue Haruji* [Matsue Haruji and Micronesia], Tokyo, 1941, p. 55.

34 This School was founded for the following three purposes, with a particular focus on the latter

Matsue decided to study the sugar industry in his effort to contribute to the growth of sugar production, and thereby reduce Japan's heavy dependence on imports from abroad. To this end, he gained a technical education as a chemist and factory operator. He also met the people who would have a great influence upon his life. One such person was the first principal of the school and one of its founders, Teshima Seiichi (1850–1918), who came to be known as the ‘father of Japanese industrial education’.<sup>35</sup> In addition to keeping watch over Matsue in his role as principal, Teshima also arranged for his daughter Fumi to get married to him, thereby becoming his father-in-law.<sup>36</sup> Another person Matsue met at the school was a more advanced student, Sōma Hanji (1869–1946), who subsequently worked as a teacher for the school. Influenced by Nitobe Inazō's 1901 publication, *Tōgyō Kairyō Ikensho* (‘Opinion Paper on Improving the Sugar Industry’, see also Mariko Iijima and Miki Tsubota-Nakanishi's essays in this issue), Sōma quit his position as an instructor at the Tokyo Higher Technical School after surveying Taiwan's sugar industry and began working at the Taiwan Governor General's Sugar Bureau as a technician. In 1906, he became one of the founders of Meiji Seitō, a prominent sugar company in Taiwan.<sup>37</sup> He and Matsue quickly became friends, and, as I detail later, the two of them later founded the Toroku Seitō company in Taiwan.

If these educational experiences and personal encounters were the first step in Matsue's development, the second was his experience abroad in the United States. Following his graduation, Matsue began working for the Osaka factory of the Nihon Seitō sugar company from 1899.<sup>38</sup> However, in order to realize his long-held dream of transitioning Japan to domestic sugar production, he used the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce's overseas trainee system and enrolled in Louisiana State University's Audubon Sugar School in 1903. In 1905, he graduated with a Master of Science degree. The state of Louisiana, whose sugar production developed into the largest in the United States thanks to the planters and sugar experts who had fled the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), had from the late 1880s been committed to transitioning from small-scale sugar factory production to large-scale factory production through rationalization and unification.<sup>39</sup> The Audubon Sugar School at LSU had been established in 1897 in conjunction with this expansion of scale, with the intention of providing modern scientific knowledge and facilities to support this transition. Since around 1900, when the state

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two: (i) to train workmen to run machines; (ii) to develop plant supervisors; and (iii) to cultivate talented men to teach industrial technology, operate large-scale plants or construct railways. It was later granted university status and remains in operation in Tokyo. See Tōkyō Kōgyō Daigaku, *Tōkyō Kōgyō Daigaku Hyakunenshi Tsūshi* [An Overview of the History of the Tokyo Institute of Technology], Tokyo, 1985, pp. 41–47.

35 Adachi Ryūsaku, *Teshima Seiichi Den: Kōgyō Kyōiku no Jifu* [A Biography of Teshima Seiichi: The Father of Technical Education], Tokyo, 1962, pp. 251–253.

36 Nonaka, *Nanyō to Matsue Haruji*, p. 82.

37 Meiji Seitō Co., Ltd., *Jūgonenshi* [The Fifteen-Year History of Meiji Seitō], Tokyo, 1921, pp. 1–2.

38 This was a sugar refining company established in 1896. In 1906 it became Japan's largest sugar refinery by merging with Nihon Seiseitō Company and changing its name to Dai-Nihon Seitō Company. It later established sugar factories in Taiwan, beet sugar factories in Korea and expanded into sugar production in Okinawa following its purchase of Tōyō Seitō Company. Nishihara Yūjirō, *Nittō Saikin Nijūgonenshi* [The Twenty Five-Year History of Nihon Seitō], Tokyo, 1934.

39 Abbott Elizabeth, *Satō no Rekishi* [Sugar: A Bitter History], trans. Higuchi Yukiko, Tokyo, 2011, p. 339.

sugar industry was in a downswing, the school had further begun a push toward training experts who would be able to develop the global sugar industry (in particular, the large factories of Cuba).<sup>40</sup> Matsue's two years there from 1903 happened to coincide with this moment. Following his graduation, Matsue went to work as a factory worker for California's large sugar refining company, Spreckels, for approximately one year (see Martin Dusingberre's essay in this issue). Following his return to the Nihon Seitō company in 1907, he brought with him the technologies that he had seen there and succeeded in manufacturing the first sugar cubes in Japan.<sup>41</sup> In this way, Matsue acquired advanced education and experience in the sugar industries of both Japan and the United States.

Let us now turn to the time Matsue spent in Taiwan. For three years after returning from the United States, Matsue worked as the Osaka factory head of Nihon Seitō. After resigning, he moved to the colony of Taiwan in order to help implement an import substitution policy for raw sugar. In 1910 he founded the Toroku Seitō company with the aforementioned Soma Hanji. Soon after Toroku Seitō's growth into a mid-sized company, it was purchased by Tōyō Seitō sugar company. Feeling dissatisfied with that outcome, Matsue moved to Niitaka Seitō sugar company in 1915. In 1917, he was placed in charge of all of Niitaka's Taiwan operations as its managing director. It is not difficult to imagine that his experience in this position came in handy following his later establishment of the South Seas Development Company in the Northern Mariana Islands. At the same time, his experience in Taiwan was an extremely frustrating time for him, as he came face to face with realities that he could not overcome, despite all his knowledge and training. The ten years that Matsue spent in Taiwan working for the Toroku Seitō and Niitaka Seitō companies coincided with the period in which the southwestern part of Taiwan (south of the Dakusui [Zhuoshui] River) was completely enclosed by large sugar companies such as Taiwan Sugar, Ensuiko, Meiji Seitō and Dai Nihon Seitō—all companies that were supported by the Governor General's office as sugarcane-purchasing conglomerates. This was the area of the colony most suited for sugarcane cultivation due to its large plains and tropical climate. Consequently, smaller, latecomer companies such as Toroku Seitō and Niitaka Seitō were only able to establish cane cultivating regions north of the Dakusui river, which was the centre of rice cultivation and had a subtropical climate.<sup>42</sup> In addition, this period, which coincided with World War I, saw the intensification of rice shortages in Japan, and the concomitant rise in rice prices. As a result, Taiwanese cultivators who had been growing cane began switching over to rice, and the smaller companies that operated in the rice-producing regions north of the Dakusui River found themselves in even more

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40 John Alfred Heitman, *The Modernization of the Louisiana Sugar Industry 1830–1910*, Baton Rouge and London, 1987, pp. 218–230.

41 Nonaka, *Nanyō to Matsue Haruji*, pp. 71–74, 80–82.

42 Nishihara Yujiro (ed.), *Shashi de miru Nihonkeizaishi Shokuminchi-hen Dai-16 kan: Niitaka Ryakushi, Shōwa Seiō Co., Ltd., Jūnenshi* [Economic History through Company History, Volume 16 (Japan's Colonies): A Brief History of Niitaka Sugar Company; The Ten-Year History of the Showa Sugar Co., Ltd.], Tokyo, 2003, pp. 3–5, 48.

challenging circumstances (see Miki Tsubota-Nakanishi's essay in this special issue).<sup>43</sup> Matsue recalled these years, which coincided with his time at Niitaka Seitō, as follows:

During the cane planting season every year, I took the lead and went to the farm households with my straw sandals on. I would get home every night past midnight after negotiating with them about planting. The time I spent running Niitaka was full of uncertainty. I would start thinking about being pushed into operational difficulties after losing out to nearby companies, so I would agonize day and night over how we might avoid this.<sup>44</sup>

Matsue soon determined that 'there was a fundamental impossibility in Niitaka's Taiwan operations'. After failing to convince the president of Niitaka Seitō that they should expand to the South Seas Islands, which were occupied by the Japanese military during World War I, he resigned and decided to take on the task of colonizing the South Seas Islands himself.

As we have seen, Matsue's success in establishing a large plantation in the Northern Mariana Islands was neither exclusively a result of the 'pioneering spirit, diligence, prescience and conviction' that the explanatory statement accompanying his statue claims, nor was it only a result of the South Seas Government and Oriental Development Company's material support. It was due to the supplanting of the Chamorro peoples undertaken by the Spanish and the Germans that Matsue was able to obtain a vast quantity of lands, and it was due to his advanced education in the sugar industry that he obtained in Tokyo, Louisiana and California, and to his experience in colonial Taiwan, that he was able to establish himself as a successful entrepreneur.

### 3. Okinawan immigrants and the Saipan sugar plantation

Newly established in the Northern Mariana Islands, the only thing that Matsue still needed to secure was labour power. He found ample supplies in Okinawa, an archipelago in the South China Sea that was annexed in 1879 as a way for the imperializing Japanese state, which had already incorporated Hokkaido in the north (1869) and the Ogasawara islands in the southeast (1875), to secure its southwestern borders. Until the early modern period, Okinawa had comprised its own independent polity that was an important tributary state within the Sinocentric East Asian order. However, from 1872 to 1879, the kingdom that had been in place for 450 years since its formation in 1429 was destroyed through a process known as the 'Ryūkyū Shobun' ('disposal of Ryūkyū'). Thereafter, it was incorporated into the Japanese nation-state as 'Okinawa prefecture'.

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<sup>43</sup> For the above reasons, Hirai Kensuke pointed out that after World War I, the sugar industry in Taiwan began to grow, not by expanding arable land but by increasing land productivity: Hirai Kensuke, *Satō no Teikoku: Nihon Shokuminchi to Ajia Shijō* [Empire of Sugar: External Forces of Change in the Economy of Japanese Colonies], Tokyo, 2017, pp. 61–62.

<sup>44</sup> Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 50.

According to Matsue himself, there were four reasons why he recruited migrant workers from Okinawa:<sup>45</sup>

1. The prefecture faced the greatest problems within Japan regarding its surplus population. Its people had ventured abroad since prior to its annexation, and some of them were already residing in Saipan, so Matsue thought he would be able to recruit a substantial number of migrant workers in a relatively short period of time.
2. Since Okinawa itself had a long history as a sugar-producing region, he thought that the labourers' familiarity with the commodity would promote productivity.
3. Because of Okinawa's sub-tropical climate, the people would be able to withstand the tropical climate of the Northern Marianas.
4. Due to a rapid fall in sugar prices after World War I, the prefecture's main export industry, brown sugar production, had been dealt a heavy blow. Consequently, the people of Okinawa were suffering from an economic recession popularly called the 'Sago Palm Hell'.<sup>46</sup> Transplanting people from this region to one with greater prosperity would be advantageous from the standpoint of Japan's national policy.

As we can see from the first and second points, Matsue's thoughts were primarily linked to his pursuit of business rationalization. As we see from the third point, his stereotypical views of the relationship between local populations and tropical climate impacted his hiring strategies. For him, the Chamorro and Caroline people of the Northern Marianas were small in number, but because they lived in blessed natural conditions, 'dancing and singing' and 'completely inactive', they were not suited for modern wage labour.<sup>47</sup> He believed that it would be more economically rational to utilize the labour of Okinawan people rather than relying upon that of local residents, because in addition to having the ability to withstand the tropical climate, the former were already accustomed to wage labour.<sup>48</sup> Further, as would become glaringly obvious during the strike (section 4) and as we see in Matsue's fourth reason, it was cheaper to hire workers from Okinawa who suffered under harsh economic conditions than from other parts of the Japanese mainland that had higher wages and living standards.

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45 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 82.

46 This phrase referred to the dire conditions that Okinawan people faced after the local economy fell into a chronic depression, lasting from the end of World War I to the Great Depression. The people suffered from hunger to the extent that they couldn't eat any sweet potato and had to devour wild sago palms. The phrase 'Sago Palm Hell' was invoked frequently by journalists from Okinawa and the Japanese mainland. Okinawa Times Company, *Okinawa Daihyakka Jiten Jō* [Encyclopedia of Okinawa], Okinawa, 1983, p. 630.

47 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, pp. 12–13.

48 According to Nonaka, who authored Matsue's biography by interviewing him, from the time that Matsue was a student in the United States he had an interest in research on tropical sciences that analyzed the ability of different races to adapt to the tropics. It is not known specifically what courses he took in the US but it is clear that Matsue studied at least some colonial science, which was itself based on racial prejudices against indigenous populations. See Nonaka, *Nanyō to Matsue Haruji*, pp. 297–307.

For the people of Okinawa, the opening up of a new migration destination in the Northern Marianas was economically significant. As Matsue suggested in his fourth point, Okinawans were living under extremely difficult conditions as a result of the post-World War I recession. Since the establishment of Okinawa prefecture, the Meiji government had not reformed many of the sugar-production systems of the Ryūkyū kingdom period, advancing instead a policy called the ‘Preservation of Old Customs’. On top of that, Tokyo politicians did not implement modern industrial promotion policies as they did in the rest of the country. By contrast, in nearby Taiwan, annexed in 1895, the Japanese government encouraged as part of its colonial management strategy the establishment of large-scale sugar refining factories (exemplified by Taiwan Sugar Company), and further enacted an aggressive industrial promotion policy. Because Taiwan now replaced Okinawa as the southernmost boundary of the empire and took its position as the empire’s foremost sugar-producing region, Okinawa was forsaken by the Meiji government from the perspective of economic development.<sup>49</sup> Conditions in Okinawa only worsened with the global collapse in sugar prices at the end of World War I.

These circumstances transformed Okinawa into one of Japan’s foremost ‘emigration prefectures’, as people from the archipelago emigrated first to Hawai‘i (from 1899) and then to Brazil, Peru, and the Philippines, as well as to the Kansai area of mainland Japan and to Taiwan.<sup>50</sup> When Micronesia became a Japanese mandated territory in 1922, it also became an important destination for Okinawan immigrants—due not only to Matsue’s efforts to lure Okinawan migrant workers to the Northern Marianas but to anti-immigration fever in the United States, epitomized by the 1924 Immigration Act, which closed off further immigration to Hawai‘i.<sup>51</sup> Micronesia-bound emigration also occurred because of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s intermittent prohibition of Okinawan migration to Brazil, itself the consequence of relatively high rates of ‘plantation desertion’ and ‘fake families’ from the prefecture.<sup>52</sup>

The Northern Mariana Islands were initially seen as a place to which impoverished people could travel. This was because their status as League of Nations mandates meant that there was no need to acquire a passport, and because Matsue’s South Seas Development Company, which was recruiting ‘proletarian immigrants’, provided them with advances on their travel costs. As long as they were physically healthy, anyone could migrate, regardless of their socioeconomic status.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, Matsue was

49 See Mukai Kiyoshi, *Okinawa Kindai Keizaishi* [The Economic History of Modern Okinawa], Tokyo, 1988, p. 5.

50 According to 1925 statistics, the number of emigrants (429) per 10,000 people in Okinawa gave the prefecture top ranking nationwide. This was a much higher proportion than Wakayama prefecture (second-place, 110 emigrants) or Hiroshima prefecture (third-place, 69 emigrants): Ishikawa Tomonori, ‘Dai-issshō Sōsetsu [Chapter 1 Review]’, in *Okinawa Kenshi 7-kan kakuron-6 Imin* [History of Okinawa Prefecture vol. 7 (6): Emigration], Okinawa, 1974, p. 12.

51 Ishikawa, ‘Dai-issshō Sōsetsu’, p. 45.

52 On the prejudice faced by Okinawan emigrants from Japanese Foreign Ministry officials, including the perception that Okinawans particularly registered ‘fake families’ in order to emigrate, see Kobayashi Shigeko, *Kokumin Kokka Nihon to Imin no Kiseki: Okinawa to Philippine no Kyōikushi* [Nation-State Japan and the Traces of its Emigrants: An Education History of Okinawa and the Philippines], Tokyo, 2010, pp. 52–53.

53 In those days in Okinawa, it was said that people who had enough capital emigrated to Hawai‘i

able to obtain 1,200 recruits from Okinawa prefecture in 1922, the first year that he sent the factory head of Saipan Seitō company to find new workers. News spread through newspaper advertisements and word of mouth, and the population of Okinawans in the Northern Mariana Islands rose to 3,688 people in 1925 (greater than the 3,439 Chamorro who comprised the indigenous population). By 1942, Okinawan immigrant numbers had grown tenfold to 32,589, or approximately 70 percent of the total number of Japanese in the islands.<sup>54</sup>

It should be noted that one reason the immigrant population from Okinawa rose so quickly was the South Seas Development Company's encouragement of family migration. When the corporation was building its first plantation on Saipan, it leased 5–6 hectares of land to each household and utilized a policy of tenant farmer-type cane cultivation. Initially, then, the company did not implement direct management of employees but preferred to conclude tenant farmer contracts for family migrants. By utilizing this method of tenant farmer-type cultivation, Matsue sought to avoid repeating the failure that he experienced in colonial Taiwan, where he was unable to construct a directly managed farm-type sugar production system and had to rely upon Han Chinese farm households for raw cane purchases. He noted that the main reason for the failure of the Nishimura Takushoku Company, which had also attempted to develop a sugar industry in Saipan prior to the start of operations by the South Seas Development Company, was its use of the directly managed farm system.<sup>55</sup>

The tenant farmers working for the South Seas Development Company were not tenant farmers in the usual sense, however, but constituted a class of agricultural labourers that had a strong resemblance to wage labourers. They would engage in sugarcane planting and cultivation during the wet season (July – December) and would sell their cane to the company once a year. In this sense, they were farmers—and yet during the dry season (January – June), which was the period of harvesting, they became wage workers for the Company, cutting cane and transporting it to the railway in return for a daily wage. Yanaihara Tadao, who was a professor of colonial studies at Tokyo Imperial University and who visited the South Seas Islands after his time in Taiwan, pointed out that this relationship between company and tenant farmer made the sugar industry in the Northern Marianas 'even more clearly capitalistic than the sugar industry in Taiwan'.<sup>56</sup>

Through these methods, Matsue transformed himself from a descendant of a fallen feudal lord into one of the empire's biggest capitalists. But concealing this capitalist side of his nature, he assumed the role of patriarch of the South Seas Development Company, a man who looked after his workers and tenant farmers as his children. They

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or North and South America, while those who were penniless emigrated to Micronesia: Nakamoto Kōsei, 'Nanyō no Omoidebanashi' [Reminiscences of the South Seas Islands], *Yūhi*, 26, Okinawa, June 1965, pp. 10–11.

54 Nanyōchō, *Nanyōchō tōkei nenkan 2, 1934* [Statistical Yearbook of the South Seas Government vol.2, 1934], *Nanyōchō tōkei nenkan 4, 1934* [Statistical Yearbook of the South Seas Government vol.4, 1941] (reprinted version, Tokyo, 1993).

55 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, pp. 84–85.

56 Yanaihara Tadao, *Nanyō Guntō no Kenkyū* [A Study of Micronesia under Japanese Rule], Tokyo, 1935, p. 109.

were, he claimed, closely linked through a ‘familial unity’.<sup>57</sup> However, the Okinawan immigrants were well aware that this was just another name for exploitation.

#### 4. The Screams of the Okinawan Immigrants, 1927

For two months beginning in January 1927, Okinawan immigrants in Saipan organized a large strike against Matsue’s South Seas Development Company. On 9 February, the Osaka *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper published updated news of the strike for its readers in Okinawa with an article entitled ‘4,000 Okinawan workers strike against the South Seas Development Company over Wages’. According to the article, wage workers at the company’s only directly managed farm (see Map 1), which provided training for new arrivals from Japan, were the first to raise their voices in protest. They had come to Saipan on contracts that paid 1 yen 20 *sen* (1.20 yen) per day through the recruitment process. However, once they had begun working at the farm, the Company said it would pay them 44 *sen* (0.44 yen) for every 1,000 *kin* (c. 600 g rams) of cane that they cut. Even skilled workers could manage only 2,000 *kin* per day, so this meant that at best, workers would receive a third less than the 1.20 yen they had been promised. Angered by these conditions, the workers gathered at the Katori Shrine in Garapan, in the city centre of Saipan, on 11 January, and decided that they would enter into a strike demanding that their wages be raised to 56 *sen* per 1,000 *kin* of cut cane. This was lower than what they had been promised, but would get them closer to 1.20 yen.<sup>58</sup>

According to reports written by people who followed the strike participants, the man most instrumental in formulating the demands against the South Seas Development Company was Higa Tetsuei, a young worker aged 22 or 23, who hailed from the Ishikawa district in Misato village in the central region of Okinawa’s main island—an area that had been an important sender of migrant workers to the South Seas Islands.<sup>59</sup> An Okinawan acquaintance recalled, ‘He said that workers cannot remain silent on this issue. He said that we have to do something about it’. It was not only the contract violation that he and the other workers were upset about, however. There were many other issues concerning the discriminatory treatment of workers from Okinawa that were commonplace at the directly-managed farm. For example, the wages of workers from Okinawa were set at a rate that was lower than workers from other prefectures, and the South Seas Development Company workers credited them with less cane than they actually harvested during the weighing process. They had called for changes in the past, but these were never fulfilled.<sup>60</sup> In 1927, the anger at these indignities finally boiled over.

The timing of the strike, in January when the sugar harvest was to begin, was important. Matsue Haruji had described this time of year, when the South Seas Development

57 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 158.

58 *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, 9 February 1927, Kyūshū Asahi Supplement.

59 Suzuki Hitoshi, *Saipan Muzan: Gyokusai ni tsubureta Minami no Mantetsu* [Tragic Saipan: The Death of the South Manchuria Railway Company in the South], Tokyo, 1993, p. 107.

60 Nomura Susumu, *Umi no hate no sokoku* [Homeland far across the Seas], Tokyo, 1987, 170.

Company farms all began their cane cutting, to be 'as busy as war every single day' at the farms and in the factories.<sup>61</sup> This was because during harvesting time, the cane had to be cut quickly and compressed so as to not lose its sugar content and thus hurt the volume and quality of the refined sugar. Workers embarked on their strike at the exact moment of the company's peak labour demands, thus hitting them at the most difficult period.

The strike was not confined to the wage workers at the directly managed farm but also spread amongst tenant farmers from Okinawa who engaged in sugarcane cultivation on the four tenant-operated farms that existed throughout the island (see Map 1; the No. 5 Farm was built in the middle of 1930s). As stated earlier, the tenant farmers who worked for the South Seas Development Company were also waged workers. Thus, the issue of the payment for cane cutting was not something that only affected the workers at the directly managed farm; rather, it was a problem that the tenant farmers at their farms also held in common. Moreover, the issue of unfair measuring of the weight of sugar cane meant that the income for selling raw cane, which the tenant farmers looked forward to each year, was also assessed lower than it should have been. The tenant farmers who commiserated with the calls made by the waged workers at the directly managed farms conducted a strike on the tenant farms for twenty days. A worker from Yamagata prefecture who worked as a tenant farmer at the No. 1 Farm recalled the striking tenant farmers from Okinawa: 'It was decided that no one from Okinawa prefecture would go to work, and their union even came here to check the picket line. The cane was ripe for cutting at the time, so it just grew taller and taller. The cutting did not take place until the rainy season, and this was extremely troublesome'.<sup>62</sup> From this statement, we can assume that the tenant farmers participated in a strike for twenty days in contrast to the workers, who struck for two months, because if the cutting did not take place until the rainy season, then the sugar content would fall and it would hurt the raw cane income that the tenant farmers could obtain in the end. Further, because it was customary for the cutting to take place as a collective task by the group (*kumi*), they probably did not want the income of tenant farmers from other prefectures who were part of their group to also fall as a result. Twenty days was probably the limit of what the tenant farmers from Okinawa could manage, considering the impact that their actions would have upon the income of the group as a whole.

There are many things that we are not able to know about the two month-long strike because archival materials do not exist. What we do know is that Matsue's South Seas Development Company ultimately agreed to most of the workers' and tenant farmers' demands. Further, in May 1929, the tenant farmers of the South Seas Development Company submitted a petition to the South Seas Government calling for the complete abolition of rents. The South Seas Government negotiated with the South Seas Development Company and settled upon a reduction in rents from 25 to 20 percent.<sup>63</sup> We may conclude that this was the result of the confidence that the tenant farmers gained from their successful experience in 1927. This is because we can imagine that for the

61 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 200.

62 Nomura, *Umi no hate*, p. 170.

63 Nanyōchō, *Nanyō Guntō Keisatsu Gaiyō* [An Outline of the Police in the Micronesia under Japanese Rule], Tokyo, 1935, p. 56.

people of Okinawa, the experience of going through the 1927 strike had a meaning well beyond the actual acceptance of demands or the reduction in rents that followed. In particular, the 1927 struggle was the first time that these people, who had dealt with the discriminatory treatment on their own, came together and cooperated under the banner of 'Okinawa', and understood the power of that name.

At the same time, the 1927 strike transformed the South Seas Development Company's labour control policies in a decisive way. In Tinian, where reclamation began in 1928, Matsue implemented three labour control policies in order to prevent similar struggles from occurring. First, the company selected new sites from which to recruit migrant workers.<sup>64</sup> Rather than focusing on Okinawa, they utilized the Home Ministry's statistics to see which parts of the Japanese mainland had low occurrences of tenant disputes. They then turned to places such as Kagoshima prefecture in Kyushu, or Fukushima and Yamagata prefectures in the Tohoku region, for new recruits. Matsue was hesitant about recruiting workers from the Tohoku region, which lay in an extremely cold area in the northern part of the Japanese archipelago, but he had heard of the successes that workers from Fukushima prefecture had obtained in Davao in the Philippines. He also arrived at this decision because he believed that if he wanted to develop the South Seas Islands in a sustainable manner as a Japanese territory, he would have to expand his recruiting beyond the single region of Okinawa prefecture and draw in people from the Japanese mainland.<sup>65</sup> As the 1936 figures tell us, the proportion of workers from Okinawa on South Seas Development Company farms in Saipan was 74.3 percent, but in Tinian, it fell to 50 percent. In contrast, the proportion of workers and tenant farmers from Kagoshima prefecture in Saipan and Tinian increased from 0.7 to 9.1 percent, Fukushima prefecture from 3.6 to 16.1 percent, and Yamagata prefecture from 5.7 to 8.6 percent. These changes were the result of growth in Tinian.<sup>66</sup>

Second, an organization called the Kyōeikai (Mutual Prosperity Association) was formed to facilitate dialogue between company members and the tenant farmers/workers.<sup>67</sup> The interests of the tenant farmers/workers were thereafter to be decided through Kyōeikai meetings. According to a newspaper article that reported on the 1927 strike,<sup>68</sup> the Kyōeikai was initially organized by leaders of the strike to deal with the company, but after it was settled, Matsue refashioned it into an organization that was supervised by the company. Led by a company employee, with tenant farmer and worker representatives coming from the refining factory's employees, Matsue envisioned it as an organization that could placate tenant farmers/workers.<sup>69</sup>

Third, Matsue also adjusted the structure of the tenant farmer-managed farm.<sup>70</sup> From 1931, a new rank was created between worker and tenant farmer called 'semi-tenant farmer', which had the following functions. First, the semi-tenant farmer posi-

64 The following paragraph is based on Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 179–182.

65 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 181.

66 Uehara Tetsuzaburō, *Shokuminchi toshite mitaru Nanyō Guntō* [Micronesia as a Japanese Colony], Palau, 1940. Reprinted edition, Tokyo, 2004, pp. 62–66.

67 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, p. 158.

68 *Ōsaka Asahi Shinbun*, 9 February 1927.

69 Imaizumi, 'Nanyō Kōhatsu Kabushikigaisha', p. 166.

70 Matsue, *Nanyō Kaitaku*, pp. 199–202.

tion was designed to fill the labour supply-and-demand gap that opened up between the cane harvest season and the off-season. They were only allocated 1.5 hectares of land, meaning that they always had extra labour capacity, which they were to use to assist on the fully-fledged tenant farmers' fields during the sugar harvesting season. Next, Matsue created a training process that was designed to have the migrant workers from the Tohoku region gradually adjust to the rigours of cane cultivation. Finally, he designed it so that the high performing workers would be selected as semi-tenant farmers, and once they gained more skill, they were elevated again into full-fledged tenant farmers. From the perspective of preventing strikes, this appointment process weeded out those who went against the company and promoted those who were obedient.

Through the aforementioned process, a hierarchy developed within the South Seas Development Company's farms, from Matsue Haruji at the top, to South Seas Development Company employees, fully-fledged farmers, semi-tenant farmers, and finally to workers. As for the settlers from Okinawa, following the 1927 strike and the 1929 call to abolish rents, they invited both Imperial Diet and Okinawan Prefectural Assembly members to Saipan during 1932–1933 to draw attention to inaccuracies in the cane measuring process, and tried to have them negotiate with the South Seas Government and the Company.<sup>71</sup> However, at this time, the Company's new labour strategies had already begun to show their effect, resulting in the labourers' actions being less effective than in 1927.

Let us now return to Matsue's statue, with which I began this paper. That it was built in 1934 by employees of the South Seas Development Company shows that the company had been successful in quelling the earlier forms of resistance. Indeed, it was erected the year after Okinawan workers voiced their final official dissent. Further, if we pay attention to the location of the statue, we see that it was built at the site of the strike carried out by the Okinawan workers and tenant farmers in 1927, right next to Katori Shrine and across from Saipan park. Seen in this light, we realize that the statue honouring Matsue was not simply built to extol his successes but was a show of force to those Okinawan labourers who repeatedly protested the conditions of his plantation management system. It was likely meant to silence their voices of resistance.

The top strata of the colonial society's pyramid, with Matsue at the apex, was comprised of men with high levels of education from the Japanese mainland; people from Okinawa were relegated to its lower tiers. According to Peattie, a social order of the South Seas Islands had crystallized by the 1930s with the Japanese mainlanders at the top, followed by the Okinawan people, Korean people, and finally, the indigenous population. The establishment of that order was inextricably linked to the aforementioned intensification of labour controls by the South Seas Development Company.<sup>72</sup> The migrant workers from Okinawa were legally part of the Japanese nation, but from the perspective of company managers and the bureaucrats of the South Seas Government, they were inferior to the Japanese mainlanders and were likely seen as not much different from the migrant workers from colonial Korea.

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71 Imaizumi Yumiko, 'Nanyō Guntō' [Micronesia], in *Gushikawa Shishi* [The History of Gushikawa City], vol.4, ed. Gushikawa-shi Kyōiku Inkai, Gushikawa, 2002, pp. 725–734.

72 Peattie, *Nan'yō*, p. 220.



Figure 2: Okinawan immigrants to Tinian in front of the foundation stone of a house said to have been occupied by Taga, former chief of the island, circa mid-1930s. Author's collection.

### 5. Reading the Frayed Edges of the Pyramid

As the Northern Mariana Islands became a battleground for Japanese and US troops during the latter stages of World War II, the sugar manufacturing industry of the South Seas Development Company was destroyed, never to be rebuilt; and surrender also marked the end of Japanese rule over the South Seas Islands. And yet, the sugar manufacturing industry of the Northern Mariana Islands under Japanese rule continues to be known today to tourists through the NMI Museum of History and Culture and the statue of Matsue Haruji. As I have argued, the industry's 'success' cannot be explained by his 'pioneering spirit, diligence, prescience and conviction', nor was it something established exclusively through the support of imperial Japanese institutions like the South Seas Government and the Oriental Development Company, as many earlier works have emphasized. These were important factors; but if we examine the longer-term process by which sugar plantations were established on the Northern Mariana Islands, then we must acknowledge first the Spanish and German empires, which secured land from the indigenous Chamorro peoples through expulsion, followed later by Matsue's knowledge and techniques, which he obtained by travelling around the world in search of the most advanced forms of knowledge about the industry. That is, the history of the development of the sugar manufacturing industry in the Northern Marianas—a history of the ruling classes—was multi-layered, encapsulated multiple empires, and thus goes beyond the traditional historiographical

boundaries of the Japanese empire. This is a history which must be told in relation to the global history of sugar and encompass Louisiana, Hawai'i and Taiwan. At the same time, if we include the perspective of Okinawan people who were mobilized as workers in the Northern Marianas' sugar manufacturing industry—the history of those who were ruled—we see that this story, too, has to be reconsidered. In 1927, the pyramid that Matsue Haruji built was shaken to its foundations by the people of Okinawa who comprised the base; thereafter, it also continued to be destabilized in often undetectable ways. However, the efforts of the people of Okinawa were cut short due to the outbreak of World War II. Alongside other Japanese immigrants, Korean workers, and the indigenous population, many Okinawans lost their lives after being caught up in the fighting between Japanese and US troops, and those who did manage to survive were forcibly removed from the Northern Mariana Islands by US troops and repatriated to Okinawa. The traces of these people have been buried by historical writing and from the memories of Japanese society.

We can only hear their voices if we listen closely. Here, I will introduce a couple of episodes that made this clear to me. There is a photograph that was taken in the middle of the 1930s in Tinian (see Figure 2). When an 80-year-old woman, the young girl pictured in the middle of the photograph, showed it to me, I immediately thought that I had seen a manifestation of the Japanese/Okinawan – Korean/islander hierarchy: that is, that this young girl from Okinawa, who was raised to become a 'Japanese leader of the colony', had successfully abandoned her Ryūkyū-Okinawan culture and stood atop the indigenous population.

However, after speaking with her and thinking about the image of her parents that she relayed, and as I researched the history of the Northern Marianas prior to Japanese rule, I came to learn that things were not as simple as I had imagined. This young girl's dream when this photograph was taken was to live in Tokyo, where her aunt and female cousins lived, and *not* to continue to live in the colony. Her parents' *awamori* shop in Tinian would have been unviable without the 'inferior culture' of the *awamori*-drinking tenant farmers and workers who worked for the South Seas Development Company's farms (*awamori* is a strong Okinawan liquor distilled from rice). Okinawa's cane tenant farmers and workers were exchanging *awamori* for breadfruit and coconuts with the Caroline people (the people in the photograph), considered to be the most inferior on the islands. The stone pillar that hovers above the young girl in the photograph is said to have been the foundation of a massive house that was occupied by the former chief of the island, Taga, thought to be the ancestor of the Chamorro. It shows off the cultural grandeur of these peoples. What did the young Carolinians, made to pose for a commemorative photo in front of a Chamorro artefact that had nothing to do with their ancestors, actually feel? Perhaps the young Caroline man with an intrepid smile on his face as a young girl from Okinawa places her right hand on his shoulder actually performed the role of 'islander' for whomever in the metropole was the recipient of the photograph. This captured moment contains many stories.

It is easy to read this photograph as evidence of the rigid pyramidal structure of colonial rule. However, wouldn't doing so reproduce the perspective of those who ruled the islands—for example, the image of the strong empire that people like Matsue Haruji, the South Seas Development Company and the South Seas Government sought to

project? To write history is not simply to trace the outlines of the pyramid, but to pay attention also to its frayed edges.

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### **Abstract**

The establishment of the South Seas Development Company in 1921 quickly transformed the Northern Mariana Islands, ruled by a Japanese League of Nations mandate after World War I, into the Japanese empire's next 'sugar islands' (following on from the colonization of Taiwan). In previous research, connections between the Company and various Japanese colonial authorities, including the South Seas Government and the government-sponsored Oriental Development Company, have been the focus of analyses of the development of the sugar industry under Japanese rule. However, little attention has been paid to the indigenous Chamorro people who were forced out from their homes, or to the Okinawan people who constituted the primary labour force of the sugar plantations and who resisted the Company. Instead of seeing the Company-led development of the sugar industry as an example of Japan's expanding colonial powers, this article argues that the tensions and conflicts between the Company and the Chamorro and Okinawan peoples were part of the process by which the industry developed. By providing the perspective of 'the excluded', this paper aims for a more impartial and comprehensive description of the history of the sugar industry in Japan's Northern Mariana Islands.

*Akiko Mori*, Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University, Karasumahigashi-iru, Imadegawa-dori, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto, 602-8580, JAPAN, akikom80@hotmail.co.jp