

[Research Note]

## Introduction of “The Iwo Jima Islands: 130 Years at the Mercy of the State Policy” (CHUOKORON-SHINSHA, INC., 2019)

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Many Japanese and U.S. citizens associate the phrase “Iwo Jima” with “ground war.” According to a survey conducted by Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, approximately 22,000 people died or went missing on the Japanese side during the ground war on Iwo Jima, while there were 6,821 individuals dead on the American side. While more Japanese people died at Iwo Jima, the battlefield is also the place where the most American deaths occurred in a short period of time throughout U.S. military history.

From the perspective of most people in mainland Japan, the sacrifices of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as those from the air raids on mainland cities are more significant than those from land warfare in Okinawa and Iwo Jima. On the other hand, for American military personnel, it is not difficult to imagine that Okinawa and Iwo Jima are more significant than Hiroshima and Nagasaki in their memories of the war. The famous photograph by Joe Rosenthal of five Marines and One Navy Corpsman raising the Stars and Stripes on Mount Suribachi symbolizes this. In both Japan and the U.S.,

the historical consciousness concerning Iwo Jima has been overwhelmed by the image of ground war.

For Japan, there is a troubling problem when it comes to Iwo Jima and ground war. In Japanese society, after the defeat in World War II, it became widely accepted that the Battle of Okinawa was the “only ground war.” Of course, the ground war in Okinawa was devastating and resulted in huge numbers of casualties, so the popular understanding is reasonable. On the other hand, this focus causes people to forget the ground war in Iwo Jima, which was another fierce ground war.

In recent years, the Japanese mass media and administrative authorities have gradually stopped using such careless expressions. However, the following statement has become common: “the Battle of Okinawa is the only ground war involving the civilian people.” This is even more troubling because it erases the existence of a settled society on Iwo Jima, the destruction of the islanders’ livelihoods due to land warfare, and above all, it erases the fact that some islanders were forcibly mobilized for military service.

Iwo Jima and North Iwo Jima had

developed settlements from the end of the 19th century to their forced evacuation in 1944. At that time, the combined population of the two islands was around 1200. The islands had an established society.

The Iwo Jima Islands (the Volcano Islands : 火山列島 / 硫黄列島) are archipelagos in the northwestern Pacific Ocean. They now belong to the administrative district of Ogasawara Village (小笠原村) in Tokyo (東京都), consisting of the North Iwo Jima island (the North Volcano Island : 北硫黄島), the Iwo Jima island (the Volcano Island : 硫黄島), and the South Iwo Jima island (the South Volcano Island : 南硫黄島). These three main islands are located roughly between 24° N and 25° N latitude. In the Iwo Jima Islands, the annual average temperature is around 77° F, the maximum temperature in summer is over 95° F, and it rarely falls below 60° F even in winter.

Located in the center of the Iwo Jima Islands, Iwo Jima is located about 780 miles south of central Tokyo (東京都心). The island has two active volcanos: Mount Moto (元山) in the northeast and Mount Suribachi (摺鉢山) in the southwest. The volcanos are connected by coastal sand dunes. Overall, the island's terrain is flat; even its highest peak (Mount Suribachi) is less than 650 feet above sea level.

Iwo Jima's volcanos have been active since the islands were settled at the end of the 19th century. As of 2019, the land continues to rise. The area of the island is about 9 mi<sup>2</sup> and continues to grow. Iwo Jima

is about 170 miles south-southwest of Chichi-jima Island (父島), which is the center of the Ogasawara Islands (the Bonin Islands : 小笠原群島). Iwo Jima is located about 685 miles north of the Saipan Island, and only about 370 miles north of the Farallon de Pajaros Island, the northernmost island of the Mariana Islands.

North Iwo Jima is located about 45 miles north of the Iwo Jima Island and about 125 miles south-southwest of the Chichi-jima Island. It is a 2 mi<sup>2</sup> island with two mountains. Mount Shimizu-mine (清水峰) has an altitude of about 2100 feet and Mount Sakaki-ga-mine (榎ヶ峰) has an altitude of about 2600 feet. North Iwo Jima, like Iwo Jima, is a volcanic island, but there has been no trace of volcanic activity for a long period of time

South Iwo Jima is located about 37 miles south of Iwo Jima. It is a mountainous island with an area of only 1.4 mi<sup>2</sup> but an altitude of about 3000 feet, surrounded by steep cliffs. There is no evidence of native human life on this island. Therefore, it has many unique species of animals and plants, which are especially valuable even in the Ogasawara and the Iwo Jima Islands. Currently, the Japanese government has designated the island as a natural monument and a natural wilderness conservation area; no intentional landing except for academic research is permitted. The South Iwo Jima is also a volcanic island, but the volcanos are currently dormant.

Amid the heightening of the Japanese southward expansion discourse (南進論) at the end of the 19th century, the Iwo Jima

Islands became part of the South Sea (Nan-yo : 南洋) colonies after Chichi-jima Island and Haha-jima Island of the Ogasawara Islands were incorporated. Around the same time, settlements were formed on Tori-shima Island and the Daitō Islands. During World War I, Japan took Micronesia north of the equator (the Mariana Islands, the Caroline Islands, the Palau Islands and the Marshall Islands) from Germany. After the War, Japan put it under de facto colonial rule as the South Sea Islands (the Nan-yo-gunto : 南洋群島) through the League of Nations mandate. This caused Japan to expand as a maritime empire in the northwest Pacific Ocean, ruling vast areas south of the Iwo Jima Islands.

During the Asian-Pacific War, the Japanese Empire used the South Sea Islands (the Nan-yo-gunto), the Philippine Islands, the Iwo Jima Islands, the Ogasawara Islands, the Daitō Islands, the Yae-yama Islands, the Miyako Islands, the Okinawa Islands, and the Amami Islands as a front line for the defense of the mainland Japan. To defend the Japanese mainland and delay surrender, the Japanese Empire forced the islanders to be evacuated from their homes, be mobilized for military service, or to fight on the ground. The ground wars involving local inhabitants in both Iwo Jima and Okinawa were inevitable events in the defeat and collapse of the Japanese maritime empire.

After Japan's surrender, the United States placed the Iwo Jima Islands under military occupation, along with Amami, Okinawa, Yae-yama, Miyako, Daitō, and the Ogasawara Islands. Under the San Francisco Peace

Treaty, Japan regained its sovereignty and pushed forward with economic reconstruction by offering these southern islands to the United States for their military use. Under these circumstances, the U.S. forces secretly deployed nuclear warheads on Iwo Jima and refused to allow the islanders to return to their homeland. During this same period, the U.S. also deployed nuclear weapons on the Chichi-jima Island and Okinawa.

In 1968, the administration of the Ogasawara Islands and the Iwo Jima Islands were returned to Japan. However, the Japanese government began allowing their Self Defense Forces to use Iwo Jima for military purposes and continued to deny the return of the Iwo Jima Islanders, including the North Iwo Jima islanders. As of 2019, the Iwo Jima Islands are in an unusual situation: their entire population has been displaced from their homes for 75 years due to military use of their homelands.

The Iwo Jima Islanders were typical victims in the Northwest Pacific in the 20th century, a century which saw the creation of both total warfare and cold warfare. The hegemon in the first half of this century was Japan; the hegemon in the second half was the United States.

The inhabitants of the Iwo Jima Islands, however, are not merely objects of history. They have survived the last 130 years at the mercy of landlords, sovereign states, and military forces. Yet Japanese society has forgotten not only the historical experiences of the Iwo Jima Islanders, but also their very

existence.

This book first describes the socio-historical experiences of the people of the small Iwo Jima Islands. Second, it examines how focusing on the experiences of the Iwo Jima islanders has given rise to another historical perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this perspective, historical images that are unilaterally convenient for the people in mainland Japan (for example, the nationalistic image of the Battle on Iwo Jima such as “A well-endured island” and the familiar post-war image of “From ruins of war to reconstruction”) will be reexamined.

Therefore, this book has two primary goals. The first is to free the historical description of the Iwo Jima Islands from the conventional “ground war” discourse, and to rewrite it as a modern history focusing on the islanders and their society. The second is to properly remap the socio-historical experience of the Iwo Jima Islands, which developed as typical South Sea (Nan-yo) colonies of the Japanese Empire, were at the forefront of the total war between Japan and the United States, and were then offered to the U.S. for military use during the Cold War. This must be considered in the modern history of the Asia-Pacific region, not just within Japan’s current borders. This book describes the forgotten modern history of Iwo Jima Islands and reexamines the Japanese and the Asia-Pacific history of total war and postwar from the viewpoint of the Iwo Jima Islanders.

In Chapter 1, we examine the process by which the Japanese government declared its

possession of the Iwo Jima (Volcano) Islands following the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands, inspired by the rise of southward expansion discourse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We will also look at how Iwo Jima and North Iwo Jima were developed as agricultural settlements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter 2 focuses on how tenant farmers of the colonization companies, who made up the majority of the Iwo Jima Islands’ population, survived under severe exploitation since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter 3 describes the situation in which the Iwo Jima Islands were used for military purposes as a candidate site for a ground war, and islanders were forced to evacuate or mobilize for military service in 1944.

In Chapter 4 we rewrite the experience of the ground war on Iwo Jima from the perspective of islanders mobilized for military service in 1945.

Chapter 5 focuses on the situation in which islanders who were prevented from returning to their hometowns lived in poverty for a long period of time as refugees, while Iwo Jima became a secret nuclear base for the U.S. military during the Cold War period.

Chapter 6 describes the current situation in which, even after the reversion of administrative rights from the U.S. to Japan, Iwo Jima Islanders continued to be prevented from returning to their hometowns. This is due to the continued use of the island as a military base for U.S. and Japanese interests.

Understanding the 130 years of upheaval

Introduction of “The Iwo Jima Islands: 130 Years at the Mercy of the State Policy” and suffering experienced by the Iwo Jima Islanders will give the reader perspectives from the frontline of a century of empire, war, and Cold War.

#### **Important Notes**

This paper is the English translation of the “Introduction” of my following book:

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