

## **The Japanese Administration of Guam, 1941-1944: A Study of Occupation and Integration Policies, with Japanese Oral Histories**

Wakako Higuchi

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Reviewed by Tadashi Hama

Personal recollections from the past help to illuminate contemporary issues, pushing aside established shadows and adding much needed color to ostensibly obscure issues. Of course, recollections should be cross-checked with contemporary documentation or other narratives, as personal memories may be emotionally distorted or by health status. With these caveats in mind, though, personal stories can be highly informative in unexpected ways.

Issues thought to have been settled by international treaties and the passage of time, such as wartime "slave labor" and the Japanese military "comfort women", have reemerged in South Korea. In 2018, South Korean courts, back by the Supreme Court, ordered Japanese companies to pay compensation for wartime "slave labor". In 2019, the Moon Jae-in Administration shuttered the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, which was set-up to distribute 1 billion yen to former Korean comfort women as agreed to in a 2015 treaty between South Korea and Japan.

The current book provides background to current historical issues and will be of interest to those curious about life in occupied Japanese territory. Wakako Higuchi, a Visiting Research Fellow at the Australian National University, reflects on the Japanese occupation of Guam, from its capture by Japanese forces on December 10, 1941 until the American invasion on July 21, 1944. Remembrances from the Japanese who were there are key to the current book.

Japanese administration of Guam rested with the *minseibu* (Civil Administration Department) a division of the Imperial Navy. While "civil administration" suggests civilian leadership, those with ultimate responsibility were naval officers. With respect to "military administration" (*gunsei*) as practiced by the Army and the Navy's "civil administration" (*minsei*), Higuchi suggest that there is "virtually no difference". Higuchi suggests that "to understand the basic nature of the war Japan provoked, it is necessary to observe military administration in small places with a small population... In examination of directly ruled small areas, we have more opportunities to clearly understand Japan's real intentions in the war..." If what Higuchi says is true, then perhaps what occurred in Guam could be generalized to other areas of the Japan's operational areas. Indeed, in line with the conventional wisdom, Higuchi states that the *minseibu* "enforced a reign of terror", implying that Japan's "real intention" during the war was to rule its area of occupation through terrorism.

The conventional wisdom is that Japan enslaved the natives for labor. While Higuchi states that one could understand the "basic nature of the war Japan provoked" through the study of the Japanese administration of Guam, she notes that Guam was "only occupied territory" and that "Guam was not officially a Japanese territory and, therefore, the National Mobilization Laws that enabled the [Japanese] government to use any materials and nationals for the national policy could not be implemented on Guam." Thus, whether generalization, in contrast to what she suggested earlier, could be done to other areas of Japanese control is not at all clear. Putting aside Higuchi's vague generalities, perhaps more illuminating is the current book's focus on a small part of Japan's war against the Allies.

While Guam was not "Japanese territory", readers are told that the *minseibu* applied the Mobilization Laws to Guam anyway—despite "the existing legal system". The explanation given in the book is that, basically, the military could do whatever it wanted. Perhaps at a visceral level this may be true. However, such apparently crass handling of the law and the decision making process by responsible authorities (who thought that Japan would be victorious) requires more careful examination. Based on Higuchi's conclusion, which echoes the conventional wisdom, one would say that, with such taciturn thinking by the leadership, Japan's defeat was all but inevitable. The actual circumstances, however, need further elaboration and are probably more complicated.

Furthermore, whether one can generalize Japan's administration of its occupied territories as a "reign of terror" requires further examination. Certainly, life for the locals, Japanese immigrants as well as the indigenous, was not easy, as Japan's singular goal was national survive in the face of an overwhelming Western coalition; following the Casablanca Conference in 1943, the Allies demanded all or nothing.

Even with the state of war between the US and Japan, on reading the Japanese's recollections in the current book, one is hard pressed to characterize life on Guam as a "reign of terror". The book makes abundantly clear that mobilized Chamorros, the native people of Guam, were employed "under apparent good guidance to avoid unnecessary anti-Japanese feeling." Nan'yo Kohatsu Kabushiki Kaisha ("South Seas Development Co.") employees were instructed to pay "extreme attention" to Chamorro labor treatment... Chamorro workers were employed by recruitment with payment..."

Higuchi states that Chamorros on Guam "were paid lower" than the Japanese for the same work. However, for Nan'yo Kohatsu's Chamorro workers, the "company's wage level" was in fact applied. "Initial wages for a Chamorro person was fixed between 80 sen, and one yen and 25 sen a day, the same as in Japan," states Kenji Shimano, an employee in charge of wages at Nanyo Kohatsu. "Hourly wages of the Chamorros in [a] soap factory were much higher than a Japanese factory chief's monthly salary of 80 yen..." Toraji Tanaka of Nan'yo Kohatsu offered overtime to his Chamorro employees, but "they were

reluctant to work on holidays." While paid in yen, the workers accepted rice, as the "food distribution system had collapsed" by 1943.

While wages paid to Chamorros were the same as that of the Japanese, at the same time, Higuchi states that "small wage differentials between the Japanese and Chamorros were explained by a lack of Japanese language ability, education and skill level." This is in fact a plausible explanation for differentials in wages—at the time as well as in today's workplace. Shimano reported that Chamorros who could operate American mining machines "received higher wages". The book reminds readers several times that Chamorro laborers "lacked industrial skills". As a reflection of low levels of education and skill, in 1943, over half of males Chamorros between 18-60 years old were unemployed.

While initial Japanese assessment of the Chamorros was pessimistic, over time, Chamorro work skills and efficiency "improved to 70 to 90 percent... owing to good supervision..." Nonetheless, the Chamorros "generally hated work" stated Satomi Yamamoto, a civilian employee of the navy. Said Shimano, "For Japanese, working hard was natural, but on Guam, it was said to be an abusive treatment." One needs to remember despite egalitarian pronouncements, some will hate work. Within my own family, I know that there are those who absolutely refuse to find gainful employment.

The previous administrator of Guam since 1899, the US Navy, was "not enthusiastic about industrial development" as well. Despite American efforts to encourage self-sufficiency in Guam, the Japanese suggested that American efforts were unable to raise the level to "expert level". Perhaps disappointed with results, the US "shifted the island economy from agricultural self-sufficiency to cash". Compounding the inhibition of Chamorro technical development was "Guam's prewar economy was "thrown seriously out of gear by the presence of the US naval station work projects."" Importation of rice, "the staple food for the Chamorro people" and "other daily necessities occupied more than 37 percent of imports." Before Japanese occupation, the US owned about one-third of the land in Guam, with only about 3% of the acreage under cultivation. Thus, the Japanese "had to begin development practically from scratch, namely deforestation, soil preparation, irrigation and a "back-to-the-land" campaign." While one can get the sense of a difficult life in prewar Guam, one does not get a sense of Japanese frustration at the Chamorro on reading the recollections of the Japanese. In fact, the Japanese showed tolerance and admiration towards their culture.

With a Japanese military presence, there were comfort women and "four or five" comfort stations were created in Guam. According to Japanese testimony, one was set up in Miharashi Misaki (Adelup), at a "Japanese style restaurant, Akashino", featuring "five to six geisha" brought over from Saipan. This restaurant was limited to officers and high ranking Chamorro and Japanese officials. It was apparently managed by the Nan'yo Kohatsu. Another comfort station was "beside the Agana River" and one "at a zone beyond

a bridge in Agana... there were five small cabins..." (The book mentions that there were "five private houses used as comfort stations for navy sailors near the Agana River.") Other comfort stations were reportedly in Piti and Sumay. Upon their arrival in 1944, the Army demanded their own comfort stations and "several" were created.

A wide range of women worked at the comfort stations. "Japanese, Okinawans, Koreans, Chamorro and Chamorro-Spanish mixed-blood women" staffed these stations and were managed by Japanese and Koreans—there was no talk of enslavement. The Army comfort stations were staffed with "low class Chamorro women". (Chamorro women who did not want to work as comfort women found employment elsewhere—prostitution was not the only occupation open to proper Chamorro women.) As the author notes, the comfort women received "salaries". Also, rather than being treated as mere property, the women were required to undergo sexual disease checkups on Monday every week—hence they were called "Monday ladies". Comfort women provided non-sexual entertainment. Toraji Tanaka of Nanyo Kohatsu reported that Korean comfort women put on a variety show and sang Korean songs, including the Korean nationalist song, *Arirang*. The current book notes that the Japanese were not the only ones to employ "comfort women". Prior to the Japanese occupation, experienced female Chamorros, "public women", served as "girlfriends" of US soldiers.

Both Japanese and Korean "managers" ran the comfort stations, indicating that these establishments were fee-based and not centers of criminal activity. It appears that direct involvement by the *minseibu*, and hence the Navy, was either minimal (in the form of medical checkups) or non-existent. Michio Niino reported that the *minseibu* did not "donate money to the comfort stations". Kanichi Ogawa, Head of the General Affairs Subsection, states that he received secret funds from the paymaster of the Naval Guard Unit to sponsor banquets at the "Japanese-style restaurant" in Miharashi Misaki. Based on Ogawa's report, it appears that the Navy, just like everyone, must pay for services.

There is much more intriguing information in the individual reports of former Japanese residents of Guam. For example, around July 15, 1944, an alleged Japanese "massacre" ("slaughter") at Merizo occurred, involving "dozens", "several tens of dozens" or up to 200 Chamorro victims. This "massacre" was immortalized by the US National Park Service. (Not noted by the US National Park Service is a Chamorro massacre of Japanese civilians, which was all too real to Utoko Ijichi, the wife of a Nan'yo Kohatsu employee.) However, the Japanese at the time reported either never witnessing or hearing of a massacre of Chamorros. The Japanese also reported, through hearsay, of rapes by "army soldiers". The current reviewer invites true historians to review the Higuchi's book for more interesting material about a key period of Japanese history.