VII. Japanese Mandate

The relatively brief period of German administration in the Marianas came to a close with World War I. In October, 1914, the Japanese navy took possession of Saipan and the other German islands in the Marianas. The remainder of German Micronesia was likewise seized by the Japanese. A naval administration was established, with headquarters at Truk and with a number of subordinate administrative districts, of which the former German Marianas was one, with Saipan as the local headquarters.

After the end of the war, Japan, firmly established in Micronesia, was awarded a League of Nations mandate over the former German Pacific possessions north of the equator on terms advantageous for the extension of her empire. In accordance with the mandate agreement, Japanese armed forces were withdrawn from the islands and in 1922 a civil administration, the South Seas Government, replaced the navy as the administering authority. With the inauguration of a civilian administration, the economic development of the limited resources of the Micronesian islands received increased impetus that steadily intensified until World War II. Under the South Seas Government, the headquarters were shifted from Truk to Koror. The Marianas remained a district, administered from Saipan.

I do not propose to document in detail the history of the Japanese mandate, but rather to sketch the major events of the period as they affected Saipan. For further information the reader is referred to sources listed in the bibliography.

During the period of Japanese naval administration on Saipan, the outward appearance of the island did not change radically. Crampton (1921), who visited the island in 1920, found that Garapan was inhabited by less than 3,000 people, of whom a few score were Japanese officials and traders and the remainder Chamorros and Carolinians. The latter still wore their traditional dress. The town extended along the shores for a mile or so; the houses for the most part were built of wood and thatch with a few stone buildings. In
the countryside were to be found some Japanese plantations, as well as the small farms of the Chamorros and Carolinians. The introduced coconut beetle was raising havoc with the coconut palms. However, Saipan's agriculture resources were not yet heavily exploited.

The Japanese early realized the suitability of Saipan for the growing of sugar cane. Their first ventures were not particularly successful, but, with the formation in 1922 of the Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushiki Kaisha (South Seas Development Company, or more popularly “NKK”), plans for large-scale sugar production crystallized. From this date until the coming of World War II, Saipan became more and more intensively developed as a large-scale producer of sugar. By 1940 the exports of sugar from Saipan were valued at 6,644,000 yen (Oliver, 1951, p. 34). The growing and processing of sugar cane dominated the lives and activities of Saipan's population.

An important role in the development of the sugar industry was played by the Japanese government, who leased public domain to the South Seas Development Company. For the first years this land was leased rent free; later, as operations expanded, a charge was made. The sugar company built a large mill and town for the mill workers at Chalan Kanoa and installed a narrow gauge railroad around the island to haul the cane from the fields to the mill. Eventually, virtually all arable land was cleared for fields. The coconut palms were by this time in very bad condition due to the depredation of pests and were largely removed. Most of the land leased by the sugar company was in turn rented out to tenant farmers, who produced cane under contract and under the supervision of the company. Saipan was the first island to be developed as a sugar producer, but the industry was soon extended to Tinian, whose production exceeded that of Saipan by 1940. A mill was also built on Rota shortly before the war, and that island was in process of development when the war terminated further activity.

On Saipan, Japanese enterprise extended into other fields of agriculture. Coffee, cassava, and pineapples were all cultivated, though on a minor scale compared to sugar. During the latter part of the Japanese period, commercial fishing also became important, the principal catch being bonito. Commercial fishing was entirely in the hands of Japanese nationals, primarily Okinawans.

In the economic development of Saipan, the Japanese followed a policy radically different from that of the Germans. The latter
had attempted to develop a copra industry based on Chamorro and Carolinian labor, organized essentially on the basis of a household economy. The Japanese by-passed the Chamorros and Carolinians completely and brought thousands of Japanese nationals to the island. The Japanese policy involved none of the difficulties in changing the work habits and values of a subject population that the Germans had experienced. In addition to simplifying labor problems, the migration of Japanese nationals provided an outlet, albeit a minor one, for Japan's surplus population. The growth of the Japanese population was remarkable. In the Marianas north of Guam there were 1,758 Japanese in 1920; 15,656 in 1930; and 42,547 in 1937. The Japanese population on Saipan increased from a mere handful at the beginning of the Japanese regime to 20,696 in 1937 (U. S. Navy Department, Handbook, 1944, pp. 34-35). This increase continued until the outbreak of World War II, though statistics are not available. The bulk of the immigration came from Okinawa, which supplied most of the farmers and fishermen. The Japanese from the home islands were principally government officials, sugar company officials, and tradespeople.

As a result of the economic development of Saipan and the immigration of Japanese to the islands, the Chamorros and Carolinians became a small ethnic isolate in what was essentially a part of Japan (or perhaps more accurately, of Okinawa). They were of minor importance in the economic productive organization of the island, though their presence caused legal complications. The Japanese respected their obligations under the mandate agreement and provided medical facilities and an education program for Chamorros and Carolinians. They also subsidized the Catholic mission. To the Japanese, however, the island existed as a resource to be developed to the utmost as an integral part of the empire; the Chamorro and Carolinian population was incidental and entirely secondary to this major effort.

As Bowers (1950) has pointed out, the economic development of Saipan was accompanied by a radical change in landscape. The road system started by the Germans was extended and developed. A narrow gauge railroad was built. Extensive harbor improvements were undertaken. Garapan changed from a predominantly Chamorro and Carolinian village to a predominantly Japanese town and port of some 13,000 people, with numerous stores and shops. Motor transport and many bicycles were imported. Small Japanese villages grew up in other parts of the island. The countryside was
dotted with farm houses. Virtually all the land was laid out to sugar cane, which was interspersed with small plots of subsistence food plants. Local areas were devoted to special crops, such as rice in the low-lying regions around Lake Susupe and coffee and pineapples on certain of the slopes of Mount Tapochau. The cultural landscape was completely altered.

How did this change affect the Chamorros and Carolinians? The contact milieu was of course completely different from that of the preceding German regime. Then there was only a handful of German contact agents. Under the Japanese, there was only a handful of Chamorros and Carolinians among the thousands of contact agents, the Japanese newcomers. The numerical relationship of contact agents and the population being acted upon was reversed.

The relationship between the Japanese and the Chamorros and Carolinians can be examined with respect to a number of features basic to the social organization and culture of the latter two groups. One of these was the relationship of the Chamorros and Carolinians to their land resources. During the German period, there was more than enough public domain of good quality for homesteading. With the development of the sugar industry and the influx of Japanese nationals, homesteading was not allowed and public domain was allocated to Japanese agricultural development, while in addition an intense demand developed for the leasing of Chamorro and Carolinian land to small Japanese farmers and the sugar company. The result was that both Chamorros and Carolinians leased most of their land and lived on the proceeds, retaining enough farm land for a farm house, with a garden and possibly a bit of pasturage. Bowers (1950, p. 114) states that at least 75 per cent of the Chamorros and Carolinians rented the greater part of their land. I would estimate an even higher percentage. Also, as it was no longer possible to increase land holdings through homesteading, the amounts of land individually owned tended to become frozen. As rents steadily rose, those with large land holdings tended to prosper; those with little or no land could not easily increase their holdings and had to be content with what they had. Land became valuable in the eyes of Chamorros and Carolinians for the rent that could be obtained, not as a resource to be developed by their own efforts.

The Japanese validated the ownership titles recorded during the German regime and respected Chamorro and Carolinian rights in real property. The principal exception to this statement is the taking of land for military installations just before and after the
outbreak of war. The Japanese conducted a careful cadastral survey of the island, clearly establishing boundaries and settling disputed titles. At first, although no restrictions were placed on the sale and transfer of land among Chamorros and Carolinians, no alien other than the government could enter into a contract for sale, purchase, or mortgage of land owned by an islander. In 1931, this provision was changed to permit Japanese individuals or corporations to purchase or mortgage private land with government permission. Although adequate figures are lacking, at the end of the Japanese period a process of land alienation had commenced that affected small land-holders particularly. One informed Chamorro estimated that approximately one-third of the Chamorro and Carolinian families had no farm land at the time of the invasion during World War II. Undoubtedly, under the pressure of Japanese industry, the process of land alienation would have been accelerated had not the war intervened.

In addition to living on their rents, both Chamorros and Carolinians obtained income from employment. The latter worked largely as stevedores, whereas Chamorros learned a variety of skills. They became hospital technicians, nurses, school teachers, policemen, and mechanics, and they also practised their traditional crafts such as blacksmithing and carpentry. Bowers (1950, p. 114) is entirely correct in noting that the majority, particularly among the Chamorros, came to regard employment rather than agriculture as the principal path to material advancement, despite the fact that the Japanese reserved office jobs for their nationals.

In political affairs, the Japanese continued the German system of appointing prominent men to act as representatives of the islanders. There were one *alcalde* and five subordinate district *concierges*, the latter chosen from four districts in Garapan and from Tanapag village. At the outbreak of the war, one *concierge* was a Carolinian and another was part Carolinian, though he considered himself a Chamorro. The Japanese officials issued instructions to the *alcalde*, who in turn relayed the instructions to the district leaders. Communication was primarily one way—from the Japanese officials to the Chamorros and Carolinians. Land problems were referred directly to the Japanese land office. Local laws and ordinances were enforced by the Japanese police, who employed some Chamorros as policemen. After 1936, the Japanese instituted a change in that the Chamorro and Carolinian *alcalde* and *concierges* were elected rather than appointed.
In connection with the system of administration, it should be noted that the Japanese classed both Chamorros and Carolinians as *santo kokomi* or "people of the third class," ranking below both Okinawans and Koreans, not to mention the Japanese from the home islands. In reference, Chamorros and Carolinians were called "*toming" (the equivalent of "native"), though the Japanese also used the term "*kanaka*" to distinguish the Carolinians. All three terms had distinct connotations of inferiority, and the first two were bitterly resented by many Chamorros. The term "native" continues to be used by American personnel. "*Kanaka*" is recognized as an invidious term and is seldom heard today. This point is mentioned because sensitivity to status is particularly a feature of Chamorro culture. Presumably this sensitivity was sharpened under the Japanese. The Chamorros were very conscious of the fact that they were segregated into *toming* schools and that vocational instruction that might lead to competition with Japanese was not given.

After the Japanese assumed control of Saipan in 1914, they interned and removed the German Capuchins. Until 1921, the island was without priests, but by an agreement between the Japanese government and the Vatican Spanish Jesuits were sent as missionaries to the Marianas. Five Spanish nuns were also sent to Saipan in 1928, to aid in teaching Chamorro and Carolinian children. The form of Catholicism taught by the Spanish Jesuits was extremely austere. Dancing, in the form originally brought by the Spanish, was discouraged and in many cases prohibited. Relations between the sexes, particularly the unmarried, were believed sinful under circumstances that in most countries would be considered quite innocent. The priests themselves remained aloof from convivial occasions among their parishioners. It is interesting to note that after 1932 the Japanese government subsidized both Catholic and Protestant missions in the mandated islands. In the latter thirties, however, relations between the church and Japanese officials on Saipan began to deteriorate. Exercises required for children at the Shinto temple were set at the same time as mass; in the Chamorro and Carolinian school the Japanese teachers expressed attitudes hostile to the church; and missionary replacements of priests were discouraged or prohibited.

The specific cultural changes in the Chamorro and Carolinian communities are not easy to reconstruct, but certain points are relatively clear. The social cleavage between Chamorros and Carolinians continued; intermarriage between the two groups occurred,
particularly at the mixed Chamorro-Carolinian village of Tanapag, but on the whole it was not frequent. The Carolinian group exhibited a number of important changes in social organization. At the beginning of the Japanese period, the Carolinians maintained four men's houses on the beach at Garapan and one at Tanapag. As an institution, the men's houses gradually disintegrated, as did the organization of chiefs and elders associated with it. Clan and lineage likewise weakened. Outrigger-canoe building and navigational knowledge largely disappeared. Additional features of change are more fully discussed in that part of the report concerned with Carolinian social organization.

Among the Chamorros, increasing differentials in wealth developed, and a few of the families with large holdings of real property became well-to-do, with large and well-furnished houses. Living standards generally rose among the Chamorro group, and the increasing range of wants was matched against the influx of trade goods from Japan. Some Chamorros sent their sons to Japan for schooling. Many other Chamorros, as well as numerous Carolinians, took advantage of government-sponsored special rates to visit the Japanese home islands.

Apart from items of material culture content, such as adopted foods, bicycles, Japanese tools, and footgear, it is difficult to determine deeper-lying levels of change in both Chamorro and Carolinian life during the Japanese period, as the documentation is not adequate. Chamorro sensitivity to status probably was affected by Japanese concepts. The following is a post-war example:

A Chamorro hospital technician had his wages reduced ten dollars a month because a previous hospital administrator had allowed him an unreasonably large salary increase. The hospital budget was reduced and it was necessary to bring the technician's salary into line with those of other technicians and the nurses. The technician resigned, although the matter had been explained to him, for he felt that the cut was an affront to his status and position. His interpretation was based on pre-war Japanese conditions, where government positions were often high in prestige but low in pay and cuts in the latter were rare.

Probably most of the changes in Chamorro and Carolinian life were effected more through the numerous friendly relationships established with individual Japanese than through the more formalized aspects of political, economic, and educational organization. A number of Chamorro-Japanese marriages took place, though the

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1 I am particularly indebted to Mr. Kan Akatani for his assistance on this point.
children were more often assimilated to Chamorro culture than to Japanese, partly no doubt because of the strength of the church, which retained its place at the core of Chamorro culture.

Virtually all Chamorros except the aged learned to speak Japanese, though the reading knowledge of most was very limited. Respect for Japan and her culture was emphasized in the schools, as respect for Germany and her culture had been emphasized during the preceding regime. Yet if we are to judge by the Chamorros today in religion, in familial organization, and in many other ways they retained a set of usages, a body of custom, and a framework of social organization that remained distinctively Chamorro. The language they spoke among themselves was still Chamorro. As a group they in no way lost their identity.

With the outbreak of World War II, the military construction that had already commenced on Saipan was expanded. As the war proceeded, consumer goods declined in abundance and quality. The tempo of military activity increased. Chamorros and Carolinians were conscripted for construction work. The church was commandeered as a military storehouse, and the priests had a difficult time with the ever-suspicious police. In February, 1944, the Marshalls fell to American forces. The Marianas now lay directly in the path of war. They were as vital to Japanese defense as to the American offensive across the Pacific. At this time the Chamorros and Carolinians were ordered to their farms, and their houses in Garapan were used for troop billets. Military defenses on Saipan were rushed. Two airfields had been built and a third was under construction. More than 20,000 troops were now on the island. In June, 1944, the expected American blow fell on the unfortunate island, bringing to a close the Japanese regime on Saipan.