



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The development of small islands in Japan: An historical perspective

Sueo Kuwahara

Kagoshima University, 1-21-30 Korimoto, Kagoshima-shi, Kagoshima 890-0065, Japan

Received 2 April 2012; accepted 5 April 2012

Available online 27 June 2012

## KEYWORDS

Remote island;  
Remote island development  
act;  
Amami islands;  
Okinawa islands

**Abstract** Japan is an island country which has nearly 7000 islands, of which only 421 islands are inhabited. Many of the remote (or small) islands had been left underdeveloped since prewar periods. In consequence, the disparity between the remote islands and mainland Japan widened, and thus, Japanese government undertook a development policy of remote islands based of the enactment of Remote Islands Development Act. The aim of the act was to eliminate “backwardness”, and full-fledged development of remote islands was launched by pouring a lot of national budget. The paper gives a brief history of remote islands development in Japan, and explains about the two types of remote islands development acts, and then, takes up the cases of Amami and Okinawa, and discusses about the changing role and meanings that these acts have brought.

© 2012 Institution for Marine and Island Cultures, Mokpo National University. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Japan, which extends roughly 4000 km from northeast to southwest along the northeastern coast of the Eurasia mainland, comprises five main islands, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and Okinawa, with countless “rito” – remote (or small) islands.<sup>1</sup> There is no clear definition of the word “rito”, however, according to the report *The Present State of Maritime Security*, published by the Japan Coast Guard in 1987, the threshold for

inclusion in this category is of having a coast of more than 100 m in circumference. According to this definition, the Japanese archipelago consists of 6852 islands, including the northern territories (the islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai), of which 421 are inhabited and more than 90% uninhabited (Nihon Rito-center, 1996: 1–2).

In 1952, 7 years after the end of the war, the Japanese government implemented a development policy for remote islands. Most of the remote islands, which are located predominantly in the western part of Japan, had been left underdeveloped in prewar periods. In consequence, the gap between the remote islands and mainland Japan widened, and thus, the Remote Islands Development Act was enacted. The aim of this act was to “eliminate backwardness” in remote islands, and the act launched a fully-fledged development policy backed by a substantial national budget (ibid.: 3). However, this act was not applied to the Amami, Okinawa and Ogasawara islands because these islands remained under US military control at this time. Instead, due to the delayed reversion of these islands

<sup>1</sup> The equivalent word of small islands in Japanese is “shoutou” or “kojima”. However, the word “rito” which means “remote island” is a commonly-used word.

E-mail address: [kuwahara@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp](mailto:kuwahara@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp)

Peer review under responsibility of Mokpo National University.



Production and hosting by Elsevier

to Japan, the Special Development Acts were enacted to these islands to reduce the gap in income level between the mainland and these islands.

Thus there have been two types of development act in Japan with regard to its remote islands, reflecting different development policies. The difference of the two acts is in the rate of treasury's share or subsidy, i.e., the rate of subsidy for Amami, Ogasawara, and Okinawa is much higher than that of the other remote islands.

There are many studies on the promotion and development of Japanese remote islands. However, many of the studies on remote or small islands have been conducted by Nihon Rito Center<sup>2</sup> (Japan Remote Islands Center) which was established in 1966 as a foundation under the jurisdiction of Economic Planning Agency of Japan (current Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transportation and Tourism). The center has published its public relations magazine called *Shima* which started in December 1953. It contains articles on introducing islands, commentary of remote islands act and projects, reports of group activities, events, and so on.<sup>3</sup> The center has also published *Annual Report of Remote Islands Statistics* since 1970. Since the Remote Islands Development Act has been extended every 10 years, many studies tends to focus on analyzing the current situation of remote islands and forecasting the future (Yamaguchi, 2009; Suzuki, 2006; Yokoyama, 2002; Uemura, 2001; Chii, 1996; Ooshiro, 1995; Yamashina, 1992; Uenae, 1985; Kon'no, 1985).

The paper gives a brief history of the development of remote islands in Japan, and discusses on the changing roles that the Remote Islands Development Act has played in Japanese postwar history.

### Brief description on Japanese remote islands

The area of Japan is located between the lines of 120° and 150° east longitude and between 20° and 45° north latitude. The northernmost region of Japan is Etorofu Island, which has been held by Russia and there live no Japanese. Minami-torishima island and Okino-torishima island, which are the easternmost and the southernmost regions of Japan respectively, are off limits of the public. The westernmost region of Japan is Yonagunijima island of Okinawa, which is an inhabited island. The northernmost and the easternmost regions where Japanese are living are both in Hokkaido, Cape Souya the northernmost and Cape Nossapu the easternmost. The southernmost region of Japan is Haterumajima island of Okinawa where about 500 islanders are living (Map 1).

The distance between north and south (from the southernmost Okino-torishima to northernmost Etorofu island) is

2,787 km, whereas the distance between east and west (from the easternmost Minami-torishima to the westernmost Yonagunijima) is 3146 km. Thus Japan is located within the area of about 3,000 km long toward the north, south, east and west.

One of the most noticeable roles of the outer islands is the securement of territory. All of the international borders of Japan are on the sea. With these islands being scattered on the outer edge of Japanese territory, the territorial waters and 50% of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ: a sea area extending up to 200 nautical miles or 370 km) are secured. Thus, despite ranking only 61st in the world in terms of territory (380,000 square kilometers), Japan's territorial waters and EEZ combined are 12 times as large (4,470,000 square kilometers) as its territorial area, placing it 6th in the world.<sup>4</sup> Surrounded on all sides by wide expanses of sea, Japan is a maritime nation that enjoys the extensive right on the ocean water and the benefits of the sea in the form of maritime trade and fishing. However, those waters are also plagued by various problems including marine crime such as smuggling and trafficking, and international disputes over the sovereignty of territorial possessions and maritime resources (Map 2).

The total population of the remote islands (excluding Amami, Okinawa and Ogasawara islands) was 920,000 in 1960, while it decreased to 470,000 in 2000, and the decrease ratio is higher than the nationwide ratio (Nihon Rito-center, 1996: 2–4). Thus it has long been a challenge for Japan to sustain the residential population in the remote islands.

While remote islands are under tough natural conditions, due to being surrounded and isolated by the sea, the natural environment is well preserved and offering distinguished scenery. Thus most of the remote islands are designated as national parks, quasi-national parks or prefectural natural parks. The ratio of natural parks against the total land area is 14% in the nation, whereas that of remote islands is 38%, thus remote islands have rich environmental resources. The great nature of remote islands, which form the peripheral borders in the island nation of Japan, are designated as 13 national parks, 13 quasi-national parks, 14 prefectural natural parks and 35 marine parks (Rito-shinko 30nen-shi Hensan linkai, 1999: 300–301). Also, 15 islands are active volcanic islands in these national parks.<sup>5</sup> Thus, these remote islands could be viewed as a national asset that has to be well preserved for the future generations.

As mentioned above, out of the 421 inhabited islands in Japan, the area which are the measure for remote island development based on Remote Island Development Act is 261 islands, and the total area (in comparison to the total of whole Japan) is about 5000 square kilometers (14%), and the total population 470,000 (0.8%).

<sup>2</sup> Its main role is to conduct a research and study on the promotion and development of remote islands as well as to make policy proposals to the national government and ruling party. Its main projects are to conduct researches, to organize workshops, to collect data, and to make publicity and publication. The Center also plays a role on providing advice to remote islanders, administrators and researchers on remote islands, as well as to become a vehicle for promoting exchange and mutual understanding among the islanders and between the people of mainland and remote islands.

<sup>3</sup> To give a few, see Tanaka, 2008, Chii, 1996, Suzuki, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> The first is the US, the second Australia, the third Indonesia, the fourth New Zealand, the fifth Canada (Japan Institute of Construction Engineering: [http://www.jice.or.jp/quiz/kaisetsu\\_04.html#022012.2.22](http://www.jice.or.jp/quiz/kaisetsu_04.html#022012.2.22)).

<sup>5</sup> They are Rishiritou of Hokkaido, Izu-Oshima, Miyakejima, Hachijojima of Izu Islands of Tokyo-to, Oki Island of Shimane Prefecture, Ojikajima and Fukuejima of Nagasaki Prefecture, Kuchierabujima, Ioujima, Kuchinoshima, Nakanoshima, Suwanosejima, Akusekijima of Kagoshima Prefecture, and Agunijima of Okinawa Prefecture.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1107106>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1107106>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)