

The islands of Kagoshima : culture, society,  
industry and nature

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# Preface

Environmental problems such as global warming and species invasion cause global environmental change, which impacts the world's ecosystems. Phenomena such as economic and social problems are rapidly disseminated as seen in the globalization of the world's economies. Portions of the globe, which can be quickly and easily influenced by such phenomena, are islands. The islands of the Pacific demonstrate that rapid impact where rising sea levels lead to country-wide crises.

An island is a small, simple model because islands are closed systems isolated by water in a limited natural and human environment. Because islands are so simple, a study of islands allows us to project the consequences of fluctuating and complicated phenomena onto the larger world. An island, therefore, is a site that can suggest a number of solutions to global problems.

Kagoshima is an island prefecture with the second largest number of islands in Japan. The distance between north and south in Kagoshima is approximately 600 km. The islands in Kagoshima are primarily located in the sub-tropical zone. Kagoshima Prefecture has 605 islands, which include 28 residential islands. The Nansei Islands, which stretch southwest from Kagoshima to Taiwan, were separated from the Eurasian continent due to sea-level rise in the Neogene and then became islands. We could therefore say that these islands have already been influenced by environmental changes, such as sea level changes from global warming.

Islands from Okinawa to Kagoshima were called the Island of the Way, and since ancient times, people and businesses have relocated to these islands. Because the Amami Islands are located in the middle of the Island of the Way, they have been influenced by Yamato culture from the north and Ryukyu culture from the south. These islands have, therefore, experienced another kind of globalization, migrating peoples, which are another important factor impacting the world. Conservation of nature is essential to preserve these beautiful and highly diversified natural environments and to protect the native animal species, such as the Amami black rabbit, which inhabits the Amami Islands. These islands are ideal sites for studying the impact of globalization and environmental problems, and generating discussions of possible solutions.

The Kagoshima University Research Center for the Pacific Islands (KURCPI) published a book in 2001 entitled "Beyond Satsuma," about the islands of Kagoshima (<http://cpi.kagoshima-u.ac.jp/project/projectindex.html>). Ten years have passed since that publication, and the economic and social system on the Kagoshima Islands has changed. New evidence in a number of research fields has been reported. The Project Planning Committee at KURCPI plans to publish this new book in English to generate global awareness about these remarkable islands.

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