

## **The History of Westerners in Ogasawara**

The Ogasawara Islands were first settled by five Westerners and about 20 Hawaiians. They grew their own food and traded with whaling ships. Over time, the community grew as Americans, Europeans, and Pacific Islanders came to the islands. Although there were competing claims to the islands by Great Britain and America, in 1876 the islands officially became part of Japan. That same year, the Japanese government sent 37 people to settle the islands. Six years later, in 1882, all the island residents became Japanese citizens, but descendants of the original non-Japanese settlers were seen as different from the Japanese residents.

In 1944, all the civilian residents of the islands were sent to the Japanese mainland, and after World War II, Ogasawara became a US naval base. The Navy allowed 129 of the descendants of the original non-Japanese settlers to return to the islands. These people are called *ōbei-kei tōmin*, which means “Western islander.” The residents of Japanese descent were not allowed to return to Ogasawara until 1968, when the United States returned control of the islands to Japan.

The culture of Ogasawara reflects the islands’ multinational history and incorporates a blend of languages and traditions from America, Europe, Hawaii, Polynesia, and Japan. Older residents still speak a creole that includes vocabulary and grammatical elements from English, Japanese, and a smattering of other languages. However, increasing connectivity with the rest of Japan and national schooling in Japanese has resulted in many younger people speaking only standard Japanese.