

The Formation of Sacred Places as a Factor of the Environmental Preservation: The Case of Setonaikai (Inland Sea) in Japan

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Many islands in Setonaikai, the inland sea of Japan, have been inhabited and cultivated from ancient times. Most of the islands have been developed and exploited during the years of the post-war economic growth. Most recently the development of resorts in Setonaikai is deteriorating the physical environment. However, there are some islands, to which entries have not been allowed because the people regard them as sacred islands. As a result the environmental preservation of these islands has been achieved. This paper aims to analyze the relationship between religious thoughts and environmental preservation, with special reference to the case of a specific island in Setonaikai.

Setonaikai has been a national park since 1950. The archipelago of this area is well known throughout the world. Islands of this area have been inhabited from the ancient times. The available plains on the islands are thoroughly cultivated, and further the slopes are cultivated as terraced fields or orchards. The appearance of these terraces is unique to this area. On some islands, the people who live there depend on rain water or water carried from mainland by ships. On other islands, people commute from the nearest community in order to cultivate. Thus, except for very small islands, most of the islands are inhabited or cultivated.

However, there are exceptions: some islands are uninhabited or uncultivated in spite of the availability of enough land and water. Trees on most of the islands are cut down in order to clear land, or to use the wood for the salt and ceramic industries. But trees on these exceptional islands are left alone. This is because these islands have been regarded as 'sacred', therefore people have held a certain awe for these islands. Trees on these islands remained untouched because of this feeling of awe, which resulted in the trees being protected on these islands.

This paper is mainly about one of such islands, Ikishima Island, which has been regarded as 'sacred'. The grove on Ikishima was authorized as a national natural monument in 1924 by the government, and is known as one of the few examples of a grove of the laurel forest.

Ikishima Island is in the bay of Sakoshi. The island functions as a tabisho (a place where a portable shrine is temporarily kept during the festival) of the Oosake Shrine in Hyogo Prefecture. The island is described in a book entitled, *Illustrated Guidebook of Touristic Places in Bانشuu Area*, as follows;

A noted place Ikishima Island; it is also known as Inamijima Island. It is a thickly-wooded island, but the trees are never cut down. There are various kinds of fruit trees. There are also trees with colourful flowers. It is a tabisho of the Oosake Shirine.

The Torii (Shrine gate) is on the shore. From the main land, it is at least a few hundred meters. Since this island is located in a bay, there is not much wind, and the sea is quiet. These conditions attract people.

Sakoshi was originally a center for the Sakoshi Manor which belonged to the Konoe family, which was one of the royal families. There is no historical record of Sakoshi before then. However, several historical mounds, including Mikan-no-heta-yama (literally means "a navel of the orange"), are found on Sakoshi. These mounds are assumed to have been built from late A.D. 5C to early 6C. They indicate that there were powerful leaders around the area. Sakoshi seems to have developed from a fishing village. In 1445 there were five ships that were registered to Sakoshi in a historical document. In 1565, a party of Luis Frois traveled from Sakoshi to Sakai on a ship. These records indicate that there were shipping agents in Sakoshi. During the Edo period, ships stopped there on the way to other destinations, so that Sakoshi flourished as a port. Around the time when Bezaisen (a type of Japanese sailing vessel) was popular, Sakoshi was known as one of the best ports around this area. In 1770's, more than eleven groups of shipping agents existed. For example, these agents carried up to 2200 bags of rice (approximately 130 tons), which were annual taxes collected in Hizen-Tashiro by the feudal lord of Tsushima. Today, Sakoshi has become a very quiet place, but the mansion of the Okudo family and a sake brewery remind people of the time when it was flourishing. These buildings are kept so as to preserve the environment of Sakoshi by the local people.

The Oosake Shrine is called 'Takatoku san' by the local people. This is named after Kojima Takanori, a warrior who died there. His grave is located behind the shrine. The main deity that is worshipped in the Oosake Shrine is Hatano Kawakatu, who opened this area in the ancient times. A festival is held in autumn to pray for his soul. According to the historical documents of the shrine this autumn festival was started more than 350 years ago. It used to be held on the 12th of September on the lunar calendar. The 12th of September was the date when Hatano Kawakatu drifted to Ikishima Island. When the lunar calendar was changed to the solar calendar in Japan, the date of this festival was changed to the 12th of October. Recently, the date was again changed to the second weekend of October for the convenience of the participants to the festival. The chief priest of the shrine arrives at Ikishima Island on Saturday in order to visit the grave of Hatano Kawakatu. Then, on the following day, the festival is held on the sea.

One of the most famous stories attached to Sakoshi is that concerning Hatano Kawakatsu and described as follows;

Hatano Kawakatu was the person who built the Koryuuji Temple in Kyoto. He also contributed to found Kyuchuukagura (a type of Japanese orchestra played at the palace), and to establish the financial system of the government. Prince Shotoku thought much of him, but after Prince Shotoku passed away in 622, he was prosecuted by the Soga family, a powerful rival family. Then, in 644, he escaped by a ship and drifted to the Sakoshi Bay. The place he arrived was around tabisho in Ikishima Island. Later, he cultivated around the Chikusa River. While he was at Sakoshi, people warmly served him, and in return, he promised the local people a big haul of fish. People prayed for his soul after his death, and from that time were successful in catching many fish, which led them to a better life. Then people built the Oosake Shrine in Sakoshi in order to pray for his soul. Ikishima Island, where his grave is located, has been regarded as the sacred island. Therefore entry to the island is strictly prohibited because of sacredness.

The grave of Hatano Kawakatu plays an important role in enforcing the respect accorded to Ikishima Island: the combination of the grave and the legend makes the island 'sacred'. There are three graves in Ikishima Island, and one of them is

said to be Hatano Kawakatsu's. It has not been thoroughly investigated yet. From its appearance, it is assumed that it was constructed around late A.D.5C to early 6C. In a picture of this grave, which was drawn in the Edo period, there is a stone wall on the bottom of the grave. However this stone wall does not exist today. According to a local old man, who has been collecting the history of the graves, other graves have lost their shape, but the stone walls remain. A local woman, aged 75 years old, says that there is a legend that a sword is buried under the ground, and the area above it is enclosed with fences. Every year, before the autumn festival, the local people mow the grass of this area.

The local people have regarded this island as 'sacred', and this notion is reflected in the following saying;

"If you cut any tree of Ikishima Island, you will become insane."

There is a fair amount of legends surrounding the island. Around the time of the Kanbun era(1661-1673), sailors from the Bingo area are said to have eaten the bamboo shoot from the island, and as a result they all had stomach ache.

There are other legends, such as people incurring a curse by cutting down the island's trees, or ships running aground because of sailor's having burnt trees as fuel.

From the 12th to the 13th of January, children go to the Island to collect branches in order to make a bonfire. This is the only chance, as an exception, that people are allowed to collect withered trees from Ikishima Island.

Once there was a fire in Ikishima Island, and the trees were burnt. The local people felt very sad, and they made a oath that they would never cut trees on the island. They wrote this oath on pieces of paper, and then burnt the paper. The resulting ash was divided into three, and put in three wells on the island and communities near by. This reinforced the oath in the local people's mind every time they fetched water. It was said that if one did not follow the oath, he would suffer later. The locals constantly planted trees. Even sailors who stopped off at this island planted trees. (The Author assumes that this tradition is based on a story of an incident of a fire at Inagaki, in 1618.)

Mounds and graves in Ikishima Island not only reinforced the feeling of awe toward this island, but also made the feeling of awe more realistic for the local people. Due to their respect for it, the locals, in daily life, have avoided cutting down trees or going to this island. This fact has helped to preserve the natural environment of Ikishima Island. Thus, even today when other islands of Setonaikai are being destroyed in the rapid industrialization and development of resort facilities, Ikishima Island is maintaining its natural environment.

There are a few more islands whose natural environment is being maintained in a similar manner to Ikishima Island. Okinoshima Island in Hyogo Prefecture, which is located at the south of Awajishima Island, is one of them. This island is known as 'the island of dead people', and there is no record of people having inhabited this island in the past. There are about 20 mounds there, which are considered to be mounds of leaders of maritime people. More than half of the mounds were excavated from 1960 to 1961. After this investigation, some members of the researchers died unnaturally. People were afraid that these deaths were related to a curse. After this incident, people avoided landing on Okinoshima Island.

Besides mounds and graves, there are remains of places for praying which are also regarded as sacred. Uoshima Island in Ehime Prefecture is an island whose circumference is 6 kilometers. It was also originally called "Okinoshima" Island.

There are about 200 families living there now.

Apart from historical remains, there are a number of islands where apparitions are said to appear; for example, Kiishima Island and Naoshima Island both in Okayama Prefecture, and Toyoshima Island in Kagawa Prefecture. These islands have natural environments, both plants and animal, suitable for human habitation. However, people have avoided these islands because they have felt there a mysterious power beyond their knowledge. People are in awe of these islands because of this unknown power.

The natural beauty of the environment may be the cause of feelings of awe. Spring water on a uninhabited island, a deep yet clear swamp in a thickly grown bush at the cove, islands which only appear when the tide is on the ebb----these natural phenomenon certainly influence the way in which maritime people see their world.

When one sees a certain place of natural beauty, he perceives these as sacred with the help of religious imagination. He may not feel comfortable about the appearance of the thickly grown trees on the island, or vines hung over the cove; it makes him feel anxious that something might be hidden behind. Such a feeling of anxiety reinforces the awe toward the natural environment, which creates some degree of fear.

The legends concerning a curse and apparitions kept people away from the islands. The result of this was that the natural appearance and environment of these islands were protected. Once these islands are regarded as different and sacred, people pay attention not to desecrate them. This differentiation makes these places noted places and secures a foothold for forming touristic places.