

Rediscovering and Creating Value in the Seto Inland Sea

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Summary of Presentation

In the 1960s, due to the establishment of many oil companies and heavy and chemical industries on its borders, the Seto Inland Sea was subjected to an increasingly high-level of use. To put it another way, modern industry, which is a means, became confused with an end, causing the riches of the Seto Inland Sea to become lost in all of the activity around it. One result was the pollution of ocean regions and the destruction of scenic beauty. This can be thought of as being the result of the "inexperience" of not being able to preserve the scenic beauty of these ocean regions while pursuing development.

When the Seto Inland Sea is viewed from a historical perspective, the observations of scenery made by foreigners (once they began coming to this region following the end of Japan's isolation in the latter half of the 19th century,) and other ordinary people and travelers can be thought of as having become an important evaluation of culture and scenic beauty. In this, there was an attitude of actively incorporating the observations not only of those native to the area but of outsiders as well. In actuality, it was difficult for observers with close ties to the region to view the scenic beauty of the Seto Inland Sea in its entirety. It can also be said that the period in which there was a decline in observers, including outsiders, who regarded the Seto Inland Sea as a place of scenic beauty, matches the period in which the environmental destruction of the Seto Inland Sea progressed.

For this reason, faithfully expressing the simple feeling that we have lost something that we once had will lead us to once again question the value of the culture and traditions of the Seto Inland Sea and the scenic beauty that went along with them. In other words, now is the time for the view of the Seto Inland Sea as a cultural environment to be revived.

We must view the Seto Inland Sea not simply as a physical environment but as a climate – in other words, as a cultural environment formed by a tapestry with history and culture woven into the depth of nature.

Our present way of viewing the Seto Inland Sea has been created from the Meiji period (1868 – 1912), in which value was discovered in beautiful scenery with myriad variations, and through the Taisho (1912 – 1926) and Showa (1926 - 1989) periods, in which its advantages as a center for transport and industry were recognized. The worth that we now discover in and desire for the Seto Inland Sea is the result of our values of the present, a single period in the long course of history. We must keep this fact firmly in mind as we continue to communicate the value of the Seto Inland Sea far and wide.