

Unique Strategies Relating to the History and Heritage of Pirates in the Seto Inland Sea

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The Seto Inland Sea is the biggest enclosed coastal sea in Japan. It could be described as a living system of 30 million residents in the coastal areas and as an active arena of fishing, shipping, shipbuilding and developing industries etc.. It lures also many tourists and recreation seekers. They have their own historical backgrounds and cultural heritages of many thousand years. These are the reasons why ordinary citizens should be invited to the circle of scientists, administrators and technical experts to tackle problems and issues of environment in the area.

“The Shimanami Kaido (Route)” works as bridges and highways connecting islands lying between Honshu (main island) and Shikoku. It is my pleasure to introduce the 4000 residents of Miyakubo-cho, a fishing town, on Iyo-Oshima Island along the route and their strenuous efforts to keep sustainable fishery and ecosystem clean. They are very active sea people. Their ancestors are said to have been the Murakami Suigun, a powerful pirates, dominating the sea lanes in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Today people would like to be called off springs of rather “talented sea people” than “pirates” because their forefathers really excelled in many ways such as fishing, trading, shipping, navigating through narrow straits with rapid sea currents, besides pirating. They sailed as far as the East and South China Sea. On an isle before under their control, are recently excavated lots of valuable China and Korean porcelain brought in by them.

Mr. Hideo Nishihara, a stone sculptor and his group of twelve citizens have successfully started a popular event of rowing regatta in memory of the pirates. Every summer, about 80 crews in and out of town would participate in with thousands of audience.

“Noshima”, another isle lying off the coast of Miyakubo-cho, was before a strong fortress of the Murakami Suigun, now one of the national historic sites. In this relation, Nishihara and others undertake another project of excavation of “Miyakubo Main Castle” remains buried in the town, for the purpose of rebuilding a pirate-castle-town as a tourist attraction.

Their third project is a unique strategy to plant the Middle Ages species of vegetables in abandoned rice terraces under the name of “Pirate Era Vegetable”, whose seeds are to be obtained from the stock of the Agricultural Testing Station of the prefecture. A retired university professor of agriculture voluntarily assists them in plan making. They not only expect to harvest non-polluted vegetables, but to provide

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active seniors with a place to work again and children to learn values of sweating. In the sea, a group of fishermen sweeps wastes from the fishing area, while another studies how to switch over poisonous paints on their fishing boats and nets to more gentle ones for fauna and flora in the sea. They would learn from their own history.