

***SHIMA* (island) and *Shima* (village community) on Kikaijima**

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The island of Kikaijima has just the right population and area for anthropologists to conduct surveys independently. In other words, it is at a scale where one person can grasp the entire island. However, there is no shortage of research subjects as each *Shima* (village community) on the island has inherited different dialects and events. It is a research site where something new can be discovered with every visit. One aspect of particular interest to me in my research is how traditional events and lifestyles are maintained, changed and passed on to the next generation.

Until the 1930s, there were over 20,000 people living on this island of only 57 square kilometers. One can imagine how people helped each other with sugarcane production and crafting Oshima Tsumugi textiles as sources of income. People made their livelihoods maximizing the limited resources from the land and sea. Currently, the population has decreased to one-third of its original size, since young people are moving off the island. Also it is aging rapidly.

The question of how to maintain lifestyles in rapidly depopulating areas and pass on traditions is not a problem unique to Kikaijima. However, what I found deeply interesting about Kikaijima was that people find it difficult to share what they consider as culture of the *SHIMA* (the island), because each *Shima* (village community) has developed different temperaments, spoken dialects, and customs. On this point, one person said, “There has been an initiative to teach dialects at school in order to keep them alive, but it always run into the roadblock of deciding which *Shima*’s dialect should be taught. There are opinions that it should be the dialect of the main village with the largest population, but then this can no longer be called a local tradition,” and “What should we be protecting and passing on to the next generation?”

Based on an academic argument, “traditions” are often not something passed down from ancient times but rather something “invented” in recent history. Famous examples include how the checkered tartan skirts and bagpipes, which are considered to be “old” Scottish traditions, were actually created by Scottish nationalism after the 19th century to emphasize differences from England. As a similar phenomenon, it would not be so strange to think that the dialect of the main village, Wan, would become the traditional dialect of the whole of Kikaijima. However, it is an accepted view that an enhancement of *SHIMA*ism is necessary, in which a sense of belonging to the *SHIMA* (island) becomes stronger than the sense of belonging to each individual *Shima* (village community).

Interestingly enough, what I have learned from surveys on Kikaijima over the past several years is that dialects and customs differ from one *Shima* to another; this does not necessarily prevent people from creating connections beyond their own *Shima*, or having a

sense of belonging to Kikaijima. Simply put, *SHIMA* and *Shima* need not be a zero-sum game where alignment with one means a weakened relationship with the other. In contrast, it can be said that varieties of *Shima* culture have formed Kikaijima.

I would like to introduce one episode which has helped me to realize this fact. I spoke to one woman over the age of 80 in a small mountain village called Shimanaka, which does not face the sea. Due to its geographic isolation, Shimanaka has faced a significantly declining population. However, there is a strong sense of unity, a high level of participation in the village activities, and also Chinese and Filipino women who were active as members of the local women's association. I imagined that it must be quite difficult for foreign women to live in such a small village, and I asked to the old Shimanaka woman how the village community accepts people with different languages and customs to which she casually responded, "Because we are used to accepting outsiders," as if there was nothing out of the ordinary.

According to her, "For a long time, Shimanaka was not able to survive without accepting outsiders (due to being a small village). This person, that person—they all came by marrying in from other *Shimas*. The same situation applied for the wife of the village head as well. In this way we have accepted people with different languages and customs for such a long time." My presumption that anybody other than so-called "Japanese" people were seen as outsiders, and lumping together all people born in Kikaijima as insiders had collapsed loudly in the face of such reality.

Whether it is possible to create a diverse and open society that includes a variety of differences such as language, culture, disabilities, and sexual orientation, will be an issue of survival and development for all communities in the age of globalization, where people, goods, and information from all over the world move across national borders. On Kikaijima, activities, such as children performing a classical Kyogen drama using the village dialects, and writing the dialect of each village on the sign boards at bus stops using crowdfunding measures, have already begun in order to preserve the different varieties of dialect.

Efforts to disseminate these *Shima* cultures have the effect of connecting people in villages as well as understanding the differences between the villages, sharing them, and growing from them. I cannot forget the shock of being told by that old lady who had never left her *Shima* with her pioneering way of thinking during the globalization era, when she said, "Because we have always accepted outsiders."



Photograph of village landscape from Hyakunodai



Participating in the activities of the August Dance Song Preservation Society