



Mikio Morishita (right), president of Morishita Suisan, with Chinese trainees preparing fried fish at the factory of Morishita Suisan

The waters off Iwate Prefecture are regarded as one of the world's three largest fishing grounds, and the marine product processing business has been the main pillar of local industry in the area, alongside the fishery business. The marine product processing business started to actively accept Chinese trainees more than twenty years ago, and they have now become essential partners for the marine product processing business. After the Great East Japan Earthquake hit Iwate Prefecture, almost all of the Chinese trainees returned to China by chartered plane, but the number of the trainees coming back to the prefecture has been rising. Both Morishita Suisan (Ofunato City) and Ono Foods (Kamaishi City) suffered devastating damage from the earthquake. But the

Return of the Chinese Trainees

Many Chinese trainees are learning about Japan's advanced processing technologies in marine product and food processing plants in Iwate Prefecture. Although a majority of the trainees returned to China after the Great East Japan Earthquake, as the reconstruction of the disaster afflicted areas progresses, so they have been returning. Toshio Matsubara reports on the Chinese trainees working hard alongside their Japanese colleagues.

two companies strove to reconstruct their businesses in stages. Having achieved an early resumption of their operations, the two companies invited the Chinese trainees back to their plants. This development has attracted a great deal of public attention.

Jing Xiao Mei, the leader of nine trainees who came back to Morishita Suisan last August, said, "My family told me that I should not go back to Japan as it is not yet safe to live there. The families of other trainees said the same thing. But I wanted to work with my Japanese colleagues to help the company recover from the disaster. That is why I came back. People at the plant are kind and I enjoy working there. I am making my best effort to help the company return to the same status as before the earthquake. At present, I am very motivated and looking forward to the future."

Yang Zu Yan and Wang Sheng Jie, who came back

to Ono Foods last December expressed the same sentiments. All eleven of the women trainees at Ono Foods are from Shandong Province, China.

All say that one of the main reasons they came back was the family atmosphere the companies have. Mikio Morishita, president of Morishita Suisan, lived in an evacuation center together with the nineteen female trainees after the earthquake, despite the fact that his house was not affected by the disaster. He wanted to support them as much as possible when they were facing an uncertain situation in a foreign land.

Akio Ono, president of Ono Foods, was in Tokyo to attend a wedding ceremony when the disaster took place. After a desperate effort, he was able to confirm that his twelve trainees were safe and their flats were not damaged either. However, he found that, because electricity or gas services were out and the trainees could not get any food, all they had to eat was snacks and instant noodles made with cold water. Once he learned of that, Ono rushed to buy a large quantity of food, and set out for his hometown. After changing planes and a number of cars as the transport system was not fully functioning, he reached the town, and immediately went to the flats of the trainees. When Ono finally saw them, they hugged with joy.

Ono said, "Two trainees came back to the company last December. So I immediately went to Shandong Province to convey my gratitude and appreciation. Three trainees who had returned and stayed home since last March also came to see me. I thanked

them for their kindness. In return, the staff of a trainee dispatching company and the ex-trainees assured me that they would make the utmost effort to make the families and parents of trainees understand the situation in Japan as soon as possible to allow more trainees to return to Japan."

While repairing and reconstructing plants that were damaged by the disaster, Morishita Suisan and Ono Foods have been steadily gearing up to start new businesses. Morishita Suisan plans to distribute *sashimi*, or raw fish, in Japan after freezing it. Ono Foods aims to expand its mail-order business of frozen boiled and grilled fish, and start operations in Asia in a few years time. Ono said in his blog that a huge number of e-mails from the users of the mail-order services of his company reached him immediately after the earthquake, expressing their support for his operations. He said that this support made him determined to rebuild the business of his company and

served as the main motivation to achieve an early resumption of operations.

Morishita said, "Every member of staff is important. No matter what their nationality, language, or culture, as long as we try to understand each other, we can make it through together. The heart is the most important thing." True to these words, the workplaces of the two companies were full of life and energy as trainees and Japanese staff were working together closely.



BOTH PHOTOS: YOSHIFUSA HASHIZUME

Akio Ono (left) and Chinese trainees and Japanese workers cut salmon at the factory of Ono Foods.

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