

Period buildings from ancient Ikikoku times have been reproduced at Harunotsuji Archaeological site on Iki Island.



The Frontier Islands of Nagasaki

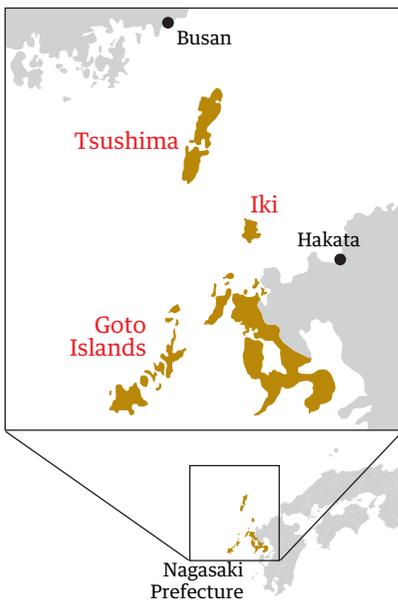
Cultural properties on a number of islands in Nagasaki Prefecture speak of the exchanges which took place between Japan and the Asian continent many moons ago.

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JAPAN is a country made up of about 6,800 islands of various sizes. Nagasaki Prefecture has the largest number of islands of the forty-seven prefectures of Japan, with 971 islands. Among them, Iki and Tsushima islands and the Goto Islands, which are situated between the mainland of Japan and Asia, have been important hubs for marine transportation between Japan and the Continent since the distant past.

“These islands of Nagasaki at the westernmost point of Japan were the first places to see the cultures of the Korean Peninsula and the Continent that entered the country,” says Tomomi Nakao of the Nagasaki Prefecture Culture, Tourism and International Affairs Department. “The remnants of these inflows of cultures still remain in the islands.”

Harunotsuji Archaeological site, which is located on Iki Island and can be reached in about one hour by high-speed boat from Hakata Port in Fukuoka Prefecture, is the site of villages that flourished about 2,200 to 1,650 years ago. The site covers about 100 hectares and was determined to have been the “king’s capital” of Ikikoku as described in the *Gishi Wajinden*, a Chinese history book written in around the third century. The remains of Japan’s oldest boat slips and over 100,000 antiquities have been



The Ofunae rock-pile dock in Izuhara port retains its original Edo-period features.
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka

unearthed from the archaeological site, indicating how the capital flourished as a hub for exchanges with the Continent. Among them, 1,670 articles that were brought over from China and the Korean Peninsula, including coins, earthenware and glass beads (dragonfly beads), have been designated as important cultural properties.

“The landscape of rice fields surrounding Harunotsuji Archaeological site is just as it was in the old days when *Ikikoku* prospered,” says Nakao.

Another one-hour trip by high-speed boat brings one to Izuhara Port on Tsushima Island. Izuhara was the home of the So Clan, which reigned over Tsushima from around the twelfth century until the end of the Edo period (1603-1867). The So Clan stood at the forefront of diplomatic negotiations between Japan and Korea and prospered from trade with Korea. The Chosen Tsushinshi, the diplomatic mission from Korea numbering around 500 people, visited Japan twelve times during the Edo period, landing at Tsushima before heading for Edo (present-day Tokyo). The So Clan constructed wide roads in Izuhara to ease the visitors’ passage and built a large garden at Kaneishi-jo Castle to offer them hospitality.

There are boat slips in Izuhara Port collectively called Ofunae. This was a dock constructed using piles of rocks around the middle of the seventeenth century for harboring vessels owned by the Tsushima Domain. At full tide, Ofunae is wide and deep enough for vessels to enter and leave, while at low tide, it is dry.

At Nagasaki Prefectural Tsushima Museum of



History and Folklore, there are exhibits of materials and cultural properties about the So Clan and the Chosen Tsushinshi which attract some 100,000 visitors a year. The Chosenkoku Shinshi Emaki (replica) is also exhibited at the museum. The picture scroll, which is believed to have been drawn in the Edo period, is about 16 meters long and 27 centimeters wide and depicts the Chosen Tsushinshi and the samurai warriors of the Tsushima Domain who led and guarded the Chosen Tsushinshi.

Tsushima not only possesses these cultural aspects, but is also blessed with a rich natural environment. Lush green mountains with primary forests and the blue sea make for beautiful landscapes. Kamizaka Observatory affords panoramic views of the ria shorelines of Aso Bay.

“There have been times on this island when people have experienced states of tension,” says Nakao. “I hope that many people will learn from the various cultural properties preserved here that irrespective of such times, there has been a long history of deep relationships at the core and of friendly exchange with Asian countries.” 



The Chosenkoku Shinshi Emaki (detail) depicting the Chosen Tsushinshi Korean diplomatic mission in Japan

Photo: Courtesy of Nagasaki Prefectural Tsushima Museum of History and Folklore