



Rice being dried over wood and bamboo racks, a traditional technique known as *hazaboshi*

Noto's Satoyama and Satoumi

The traditional and distinctive farm-village culture and sustainable agriculture, forestry, and fisheries of the Noto area in Ishikawa Prefecture, collectively entitled “Noto's Satoyama and Satoumi,” were registered as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in June 2011.

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THE Noto Peninsula of Ishikawa Prefecture projects out into the Sea of Japan and is surrounded by water on three sides. Most of the peninsula is hill country with an elevation of 200 to 500 meters. This area consisting of four cities and five towns¹ is known as the Noto area. A variety of land use and techniques that make the most of the topography have been passed down to the present day, including terraced rice fields carved into the slopes (notably, those of Shiroyone Senmaida), paddy

fields using the valleys, and more than 1,800 irrigation ponds for agricultural water use. Recognizing the area's heritage of traditional agriculture, forestry, and fisheries and farm-village culture, including traditional technologies and festivals, as well as beautiful scenery, in June 2011 the FAO designated this area as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, the first such designation in Japan.

Shiroyone Senmaida in Wajima City is one of the Noto area's famous sights. It is about four hectares of land with more

than 1,000 rice fields, each field an average of about 18 square meters, all lined up as wave-like folds extending toward the sea. In the fall, another famous Noto scene appears, namely the wood and bamboo racks used to hang and dry harvested sheaves of rice. This traditional sun-drying technique, known as *hazaboshi*, steadily draws out the rice's flavor. Drying rice in the sun like this is labor-intensive and farmers are also getting older, which has led to its ongoing decline across Japan and machine drying is now the norm.

1. Nanao City, Wajima City, Suzu City, Hakui City, Shika Town, Nakanoto Town, Anamizu Town, Noto Town, and Hodatsushimizu Town

2. Satoyama is “an area consisting of farmlands, irrigation ponds, secondary forest, plantation forest, and grasslands around human settlements” (Ministry of the Environment)

3. Satoumi is “a coastal area where biological productivity and biodiversity has increased through human interaction” (Ministry of the Environment)

The Shiroyone Senmaida terraced rice fields



It is not only in the *satoyama*² farming areas of Noto that these old-time sights remain. In fact, the same is true for the sea around Noto. In the coastal areas called “*satoumi*,”³ people have long made use of the sea’s abundant resources in their daily lives. For example, there is a salt-making method called “*agehamashiki*” that has been passed down in Suzu City but nowhere else in Japan. Seawater is drawn by hand and repeatedly thrown over sand, which is then gathered and mixed with seawater to create a solution with a high salt concentration. This solution is then boiled down in cauldrons and filtered to produce salt. Moreover, the *ama* (women divers) fishing of Wajima, which goes back more than 400 years, involves free diving to collect abalone, turban shell, and seaweed. Just like in the olden days, only women born here or married into the area can become *ama*. They have a self-governing organization with strict rules to restrict fishing, continuously protecting their tradition to use the marine resources sustainably, for example by managing the resources without damaging the underwater ecosystem.

The people making a living in the *satoyama* and *satoumi* also value the festivals by which they give thanks for these blessings. Examples include the “Kiriko Festivals,” where people pray

for abundant catches and harvests by walking in procession through the hamlets with sacred lights more than 10 meters high; the “*Aenokoto*” ritual for entertaining the deities of the rice fields (see *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*, November 2020); and the “mountain festivals” to thank the mountains for safety in the collection and processing of timber and firewood. People give thanks for ample blessings and pray for work safety and rich blessings. There are cases of such events and customs being simplified or completely ceasing with the passing of years. However, the Ishikawa Prefecture Government is proceeding with efforts to inherit traditional techniques as well as such traditional culture.

Tada Taketoshi of the Ishikawa Prefecture Satoyama Promotion Office explains, “We’re engaged in a variety of initiatives to pass down Noto’s rich *satoyama* and *satoumi*. For example, there has been an increase in abandoned paddy fields as the owners of the Shiroyone Senmaida become older, so we started an ownership system where people can borrow even just a single field. We’re also training human resources who can utilize natural resources to solve local issues as well as local leaders who can communicate models for sustainable local society, collaborating with local government

and academia.”

The *satoyama* and *satoumi* have been passed on and protected by the abundant nature of the Noto Peninsula and the people who have made use of it. Now, new initiatives are imparting the features of Noto to the next generation. **J**



An *ama* diver collecting shellfish



A farmer performing the *Aenokoto* ritual for entertaining the deities of the rice fields